

Disaster Relief and Social Capital

– An Asian Perspective –

박재창

대형 재난이 빈발하는 아시아는 재난구호에서도 무력하다. 이는 사회자본의 축적이 부족한 데에서 오는 원인이 적지 않다. 사회자본은 흔히 심리적 차원의 정서적 습관과 구조적 차원의 응집성(bonding), 연결성(bridging) 연계성(linking)에 의해 구성되는 것으로 이해된다. 그런데 아시아의 경우는 빈곤으로 인해 박애주의나 자원봉사 같은 공동체 지향적인 심리적 관습을 축적하기 어려웠고, 사회공동체 구성원간의 응집성을 담보하기 어려웠다. 경제사회문화적인 이질성과 다양성으로 인해 연결성 정도가 낮고, 정치적 자유의 부족으로 연계성 정도도 낮다. 이렇게 사회자본의 축적 정도가 낮다는 사실은 재난구호와의 관계에서 악순환을 이루는 주요요인이 되어 있다. 이를 극복하기 위해서는 성찰적 시민을 필요로 하지만 이는 사회자본이 축적되어 있어야 하고, 사회자본을 신속히 축적하기 위해서는 민주시민교육을 필요로 한다. 그런데 민주시민교육은 참여를 통한 실천이 가장 효과적이다. 이런 참여가 제대로 이루어지려면 사회자본이 축적되어 있어야 한다. 이런 모순의 극복을 위해서는 지그제그 식 접근전략이 요청된다. 이를 비추어 보면 아시아에 대한 재난구호 지원은 맥락적 접근을 필요로 한다.

주제어: 재난구호, 사회자본, 빈곤

I. Introduction

Occurrences of disasters are unequally distributed around the world. Natural disasters are threatening our lives more frequently in Asia. For the last couple of years alone, serious floods swept eastern part of Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand, Pakistan, central part of Vietnam, and North Korea. When it goes to earthquake, situation is further more serious. For the year of 2011 alone, for the last six months only, Java Island and Sumatra of Indonesia, Hunchun and Yunnan provinces of China, Myanmar and Dofuku of Japan were hit by strong earthquakes and history record tsunami.

In addition, man-made disasters also take place more frequently in Asia. For China alone for the last couple of years, bridges have collapsed in Fenghuan city of Hunan province, Xijiang river of Foshen city, Nanjing city of Jiangsu province, Hastings river of Sichuan province, Kunming

city of Xian province, Foshan city of Guangdong province, etc. Buildings and apartments have collapsed in New Delhi of India, Hong Kong, Guiyang city of China. And the Fukushima nuclear power plant accident stands as a culminating symbol of combination of such man-made disasters and natural disasters in Asia. Disasters of this region are expected to keep continue to rise owing much to global warming and relative lack of social safety checking system.

In the midst of such a vortex of various disasters in Asia, it has been reported that 9 out of 10 adults in Korea feel anxiety that such large scale disasters may happen in Korea. One of the online portal sites in Korea asked 1,198 adults whether they feel anxiety that large scale natural disasters might take place in Korea and 89% of the respondents replied positively. Among them, 59.4% felt a little bit while 29.4% very much so. And in addition, 82.5% of them replied their anxiety and uneasiness had been escalated after the recent earthquake in Japan. They indicated that factors contributing to such feeling of uneasiness come primarily from the very fact that they cannot predict when and with what scale such disaster might take place. Second one was that their life safety would not be guaranteed in such disasters. They also were concerned about the insufficient preparedness and incomplete disaster alarm and response systems in Korea(Saramin, 2011).

It seems to be very natural, in such circumstances where Asian countries in general and Korea in particular are relatively more vulnerable to large scale disasters and not sufficiently prepared yet to respond to them, that

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The people of these countries are concerned about protection of people and properties more than any other part of the world. But the contemporary situation shows us that such concerns and aspirations of the people are not well taken. The damage occurred by disasters is very serious in Asia. Asia accounts for 38.95% of the whole natural disasters occurred in the world for the last 30 years, but casualties mount up to 89.85%(Kim, 2010). Recognizing such a situation in Asia, many ideas and assistances have been extended from the outside especially from the West to meet the challenge. It is not clear, however, to what extent such ideas and services regarding to disaster relief transfer to either cross-cultural or international settings. This lack of attention to such cross-cultural settings may have resulted from a view of disasters as random, isolated acts

of God, so that the disproportionately high risk of Asian countries and their societal differences have been ignored. It is very natural in such a situation to be interested in learning about major reasons of bringing in such incapability of responding to large scale disasters in Asia.

II. Quintessence of Disaster Scene and Epistemological Dilemma

Large scale disasters are so unpredictable by their own nature that any relevant preparation to respond could not easily be made in advance and it is difficult to develop any a priori responding models or strategies. There is a very low level of predictability ratio available to any serious observers of disaster occurrence. There is no other way, therefore, but to respond to each occurrence in the consideration of individual case and requests arising from the scene and be very much flexible in responding and developing strategies to cope with disasters. Success of such contextual and contingent approach is highly dependent on how much live and concrete information from the scene could be debriefed and gained. Closer to the disaster scene, in this context, the better for the success of disaster relief response.

Disasters take a various forms, sizes and characteristics, arise in different environmental settings and bring in different level of impacts to the social, economic, and political templates. Individual disaster relief target people, therefore, encounters with different need from one and another. Such divers and heterogeneous needs for disaster relief service make any disaster responding systems or organizations difficult to meet and encompass all the expectations and aspirations arising from the scene with one fits for all services or policies. Such a need for individual customer oriented responding service asks the service delivery systems and voluntary organizations be decentralized and be spread across the nation as much as possible. Role of local government is requested more than that of central government in this context.

Occurrence of disaster disrupts almost all of normal ways of living system all of a sudden. Disaster stricken area becomes isolated from the outer world and helpless. One disaster tends to bring in another one since whole social system is interconnected and intertwined. Damage will be serious and aggravated further when there is no prompt response to disaster in such circumstances. Prompt response cannot be exerted, however, by being distanced geographically and politically from the disaster scene. That is why we need community based response to disaster for more effective relief works. Being located physically near to the disaster scene, community could mobilize resources required for recovery and political pressure to government decision

makers for certain policy directions required by disaster victims with much ease.

On the other hand, multidimensional nature of disaster leads to complexity of disaster response works. It is inevitable to interconnect and coordinate disaster relief organizations of different levels and sorts as well in order to meet this multi-dimensionality of disaster scene. It becomes important to promote coordination of the network among these organizations during a disaster as well as the mitigation process of destructive competition among systems and organizations committed for relief. More effective coordination is a focal point for improvements in disaster response. Coordination promises to make services accessible for vulnerable populations, as well as link services together to provide for improved continuity of care for victims of disaster(Zakour & Harrell, 2003).

Though the disaster response required from the scene may be extraordinary and lead to radically changed behaviors to meet the crisis, disasters may usefully be viewed as an extension of everyday events(Streeter, 1991). When we take a close observation, it is not difficult to learn that the natural and built in environments interact with societal variables and it may lead to disasters. Environment and society mutually affect one other all through the process of instigating disasters and perceiving subsequent crisis of the scene. That is why any disaster response needs or permits a long-term developmental orientation to be more efficient.

As such, there is a built in dilemma in responding to disasters with more effectiveness. On the one hand, disaster relief response should be approached from a narrower perspective as we see from the requests to be closer to the individual disaster scene, decentralized, and community based as much as possible. On the other hand a wider perspective to coordinate diverse relief organizations and take long term developmental orientation. To use a camera analogy, it is a request to zoom more in the disaster scene and to take more a panoramic view at the same time. Any disaster relief works encounter with such dilemma. Theoretically speaking we can overcome this dilemma of responding to bi-focal requests when we alternate them very swiftly. Such a dynamism or mobility, however, can only be assured when the related share holders trust each other, respect reciprocal norms and interact around nodes of established network. In other words, social capital as of trust, norm and network is a critical prerequisite for overcoming the dilemma.

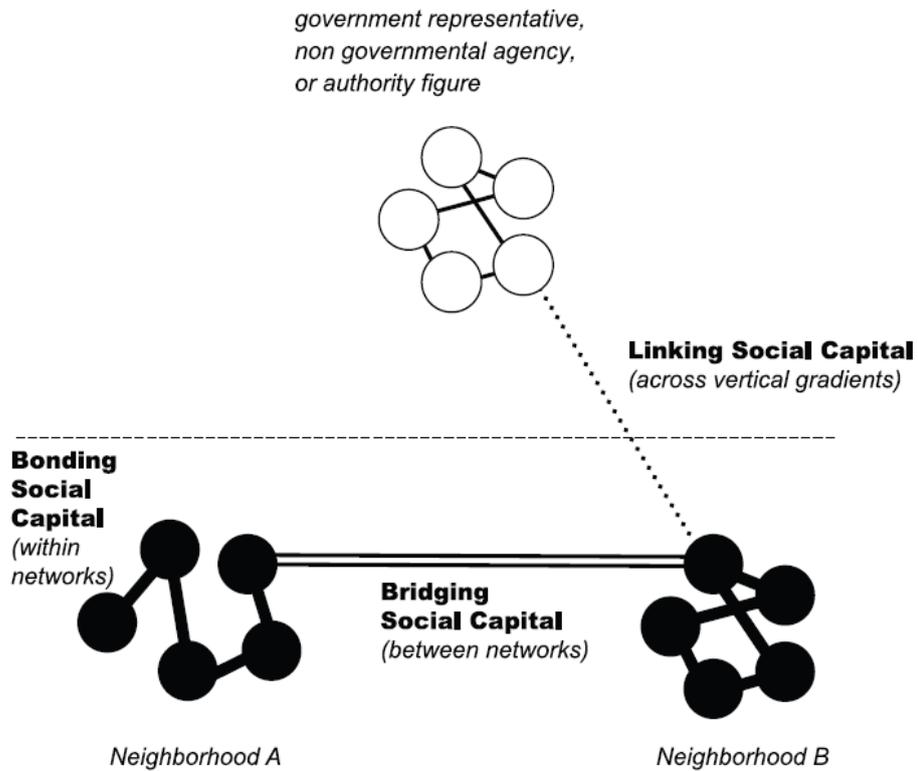
III. Social Capital and Response to Disaster

According to Bellah, *et. al.*,(2007), there are two dimensions in the concept of social capital;

cognitive and structural. Cognitive social capital refers to connections at the psychological level. This is a "habit of heart," which cuts across the different notions possessed by men, the various opinions current among them, and the sum of ideas that shape mental habits. It is the way the people think about themselves and their society and how their ideas relate to their actions. Structural social capital is a connection at the substantial level. It indicates networks, rules, organizational structures, and social systems. And when it goes to structural dimension of social capital, there are three different types of networking. Putnam(2000) presented two different types of social networking: bonding and bridging. Bonding is more inward-looking with a tendency to reinforce exclusive identities and homogeneous groups while bridging is more outward-looking and encompass people across different social divides.

The former operates within and between community members- where they can bypass social niceties and operate as if they were members of the same family(Erikson, 1976: 187-188). It has been described as pre-modern in that they assume high level of familiarity and involve a willingness to forgo some degree of privacy as like relations between family members, close friends, and neighbors. The latter connects members of the group or network to extra-local networks, crossing ethnic, racial, religious cleavages. It links to external assets and generates broader identities by bringing individuals from different locations, identities, and language groups(Field, Schuller, and Baron, 2000).

Woolcock(1998), however, added a third type, linking social capital from the perspective of developmental assistance. It is made up of "networks of trusting relationships between people who are interacting across explicit, formal or institutional power or authority gradients in society"(Szreter & Woolcock, 2004: 655). Whereas bonding and bridging social capital primarily connect individuals of the same status- whether neighbors and kin with bonding social capital, or out-of-town acquaintances from another ethnic group with bridging social capital- this form takes into account vertical distance as well(Aldrich, 2011: 148). DaCosta and Turner(2007: 195) point out that for developing or underdeveloped communities, linking networks are particularly important for economic development as they provide resources and information to otherwise off-the-grid cities and towns. Figure 1 below illustrates these 3 types of social capital models.



<Figure 1> Bonding, Bridging, and Linking Social Capital

※ Note: Figure adopted from Aldrich(2011: 148).

This social capital, however, does not always lead to positive relation with disaster response and compose single dimensional relation neither. We can categorize four dimensional groups of the relations as we see at the below <Table 1> by crossing over two poles: one is whether to account social capital as an independent variable or a dependent variable in its relationship to disaster response and the other is whether to see the outcome as positive or negative.

<Table 1> Relationship between Social Capital and Disaster Response

Relationship \ Impact	Positive	Negative
	Independent Variable	I
Dependent Variable	III	IV

Among the four dimensions categorized above at <Table 1>, dimension I denotes social capital as an independent variable to disaster response bringing in positive effects. Its analogy is that the

more we accumulate social capital, the more we become capable in responding to disasters. This is a very much general understanding about the role of social capital in regard to disaster relief. However, it is not a panacea and encompasses negative effects too, which is shown at dimension II. Portes(1998) points out the downside of social capital as exclusion of outsiders while excessively claiming on group members, restrictions on individual freedom and privacy, and downward leveling of norms. Moreover, social capital is not equally distributed universally due to its cumulative characteristics. It is very evident in such situation that any disaster relief response would not be successfully accomplished and its societal integration impact neither.

In dimension III, the process of overcoming a crisis requiring disaster relief and recovery produces new social capital within and outside of the community. Norms of reciprocity become rooted in the affected area. And also a sense of solidarity could be fostered among citizens in the community. Networks of local government and disaster relief voluntary organizations could be consolidated. The disaster relief process consolidates social capital. And dimension IV implies that the way people experience disaster response affects social capital and influences disaster victims negatively. When many people fail to have their needs met through disaster response process, it will make a highly stressful situation to the society(Barton, 1969). When government fails to coordinate the inflow of goods and services from outside of the stricken area, competition at crisis scene will be escalated and people will begin to feel as like they are isolated from neighbors, kin and formal organizations and become distrustful and traumatic. Such situation leads to increased suspicion, disconnection and downward of societal norms among people. The disaster responding process results in undermining of established social capital. These four dimensions are neither separate from each other nor predetermined. They are interrelated and interact each other. Any actual scene is composed by these dimensional features. How much percentage of these dimensions, however, will actually compose the relationship between social capital and disaster response depends upon societal context in which such relation takes place. In other words, only when time and place are given, the actual composition would be determined. Actual relationship between social capital and disaster relief is dependent upon the structure of social environment in which such relationship takes place.

IV. Vulnerability of Asian Countries in Responding to Disasters

When we review contemporary communities in Asian countries in general, many of them are

experiencing difficulties in their efforts to respond to large scale disasters. In most of the cases, it owes much to the relative lack of social capital accumulation. For the cognitive dimension of social capital, for instance, most of the Asian countries are relatively lacking emotional connections among themselves expressed by volunteerism and philanthropic value, which seem to be essential components of any individuals or communities in their responding efforts to large scale disasters. It has been reported very difficult for community members to access relief service organizations during and after disaster when there are only few voluntary organizations and their programs available. Disaster response and mitigation programs are prone to be lacking in such communities where volunteerism and philanthropic value are lacking or poor. There is, thus, a high possibility that the populations most vulnerable to disaster due to relative lack of volunteerism are protected by fewer mitigation projects and served by fewer disaster relief organizations with relatively low service capacities(Zakour & Harrell, 2003). The relative lack of volunteerism and volunteer resources account for the reduced access to disaster response especially for the marginalized. Municipalities with more marginalized residents were reported to have the lowest level of volunteer resources during and after disasters.

Maslow(1970) introduced 5 different levels of individual needs: physiological needs, security needs, social needs, self-esteem, and self-actualization. He asserted that aspirations of individual human beings move from the lowest level of needs like physiological and security needs up to higher ones like social needs and self-esteem when the lower ones are satisfied. Likewise we can assume communities or countries follow same path of moving from aspirations for the lower ones to those for higher ones since they are composed by such individuals. Volunteerism and philanthropic values are related rather with higher aspirations of social needs, self-esteem and self-actualization by their own nature. Meanwhile they can be looked for only when they are satisfied with physiological and security needs, most of the Asian countries are located still at the level of striving for satisfying physiological and security needs. That is why many countries in Asia could not produce much volunteerism and philanthropic value yet.

When we look into the bonding network of structural dimension of social capital in many Asian communities, it can easily be detected that they have not accumulated enough social capital yet and poverty is one of the most telling variables leading to such low level of accumulation. Poverty is negatively associated with inward interrelatedness and thus to community survival and recovery during and after major and long term disasters(Sherraden & Fox, 1997). Furthermore, economically vulnerable individuals and households tend to reside in communities whose other residents have similar social and demographic characteristics. Partly because of such low-income

communities tend to have a poor tax base; the degree of vulnerability of communities usually coincides with the vulnerability of populations (Zakour & Harrell, 2003) in their capacity to integrate each other and to upgrade their capacity to challenge and overcome disasters. Poverty does not mean simply unable to eat and be provided with proper nutrition. Poor people are easily exposed to disease and suffer from not receiving adequate medical care. Educational opportunities are limited. Poverty brings in a vicious circle and puts people in traps of losing hope, falling in deeper despair, and being prone to nurture hatred and distrust among themselves. Due to these reasons when the poor people are hit by disaster, damage becomes fatal and penetrating to the whole process of their lives.

It should be reminded, in this context, that we cannot speak about the world poverty without mentioning Asia. In Asia where more than 55% of world's population live, there are many poor people. And most of the peoples living in these poor countries belong to the poorest level. According to the World Bank report, the world's poorest people living at the cost of lower than one dollar a day comprise 1,174 billion. Among them, 790 million people live in Asia (Dorling & Ballas, 2008). It reminds us that there are more poor people in Asia than in Africa where we have thought of as the poorest region of the world. Globalization brings in further aggrandizement of such regional economic disparity. Poverty is one of the many reasons for Asian countries to put themselves in the situation for striving for bonding.

When it goes with bridging, it is known that the more homogeneous a society is, the easier it is for bridging and outward looking action and the more profoundly people trust each other (Alesina & La Ferrara, 2002). Ethnic and economic fragmentations are reported to have detrimental effects on damage arising from disasters, leading to increases in fatalities (Kahn, 2005). The same logic is applicable to Asia as a region. Asian countries, unfortunately, have long been identified as being indifferent each other and maintained even an attitude of looking down to each other owing much to the lack of communication and thus information and understanding among themselves. It is not an unusual phenomenon that English is taught as a primary or secondary language in most of the Asian countries but not the modern language of neighborhood, which is quite different from that of the Western part of the world. Relative self alienation among the Asians themselves hasn't been alleviated even after the advent of information society.

Intensification of global economic system has brought a polarizing gap not only between the Asian and the Western countries but also among the Asian countries. Almost all of the Asian countries are encountered with serious polarizing gap in their income distribution. Economic dependency and manipulation inside of and among the Asian countries are getting worse and

becoming a major source of political instability, social unrest, and even religious confrontation. In fact, Asia has long been identified as the most religious continent of the world. Almost all of the major religions of the world have their origins in Asia. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam came out from Western Asia. Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism were born in Eastern Asia. Such a historical fact may not be the major factor but strong explanatory variable at least for the formation of contemporary multi-religious society inside of and among the Asian countries. These multiple religions have fortified religious fundamentalism, fanaticism, and even terrorism of this region. In such a fragmented and split region of the world, it is not realistic to expect close, efficient, and long term based collaborations among the Asian countries being encountered with disaster.

When it goes with linking network, according to the previous studies, it is found also that linking the governmental and nongovernmental sectors and establishing inter organizational network is very much advantageous (Zakour & Gillespie, 1999) for efficiently responding to disasters. One of these advantages is the integration of the significant resources of governmental agencies with the greater knowledge of community needs of local voluntary organizations. Other advantages include increasing the capacity of voluntary organizations active in serving geographically isolated neighborhoods, and making the service delivery governmental organizations more accessible to community organizations and their constituents during and after disaster. It is also found that the total number of different types of organizations which a given disaster organization is linked to is significantly and positively associated with an organization's preparedness for disaster. They suggest that each type of organization, including smaller, informal organizations, have fundamentally different resources in a disaster, so that linkage to a larger range of different organizations translates into an organization's access to different types of disaster resources.

In most of the Asian countries, however, government is not relatively ready to open their policy making and service delivery system to people and people also is not prepared yet enough to actively collaborate with government. For the formation of collaborative governance between government and people, the government should accept that they are not capable enough anymore, could not manage the public sphere alone and in the needs of assistance from outside of the government. They have to take a lower profile than before. For the voluntary organizations, internal democracy should be established and maintained. Otherwise, standing staffers and relatively small number of leaders of the organizations are apt to domineer decision making process and choke out communication funnel. Inputs from the boundary of voluntary organizations

would not go through the collaborative governance process and reach to the decision makers of the government. Without real participation of the people to the voluntary organizations, collaborative governance could not reflect needs and demands of the people on the disaster scene and such real participation could not be affirmed when there is no complete political freedom of the people. Political freedom is an indispensable even though not sufficient condition for successful collaboration between government and the people. Without political right, no one can associate with others freely and equally without discrimination and thus could develop trust, norms and networks among themselves and thus social capital.

Unfortunately, Asia as a region could not be evaluated as a place of fully bloomed political freedom. According to the Freedom House report(2011), among 38 Asian countries 41% were rated free, 38% partly free and 21% not free. Roughly speaking only half of them are rated politically free. In case of Europe which was rated as the freest region of the world, 96% were rated free, 4% partly free and no one as not free. Meanwhile in Africa which was rated as the least free place, 6% free, 19% partly free and 78% not free. Global status shows 45% free, 31% partly free and 24% not free. In other words, Asia as a region is rated almost tantamount to the average of global status. Such a data shows us that most of the Asian countries are still in the process of striving for political democracy and accumulating social capital further. They are weak in their bonding, bridging and linking as well. And such low level of social capital has been perceived as one of the major sources of weakness in their response to disasters.

V. Conclusion

When we approach the relationship between social capital and disaster response from a dynamic perspective, dimension I is linked to dimension III and constitute a virtuous circle. Meanwhile, dimension II leads to dimension IV and form a vicious circle too. Asia is placed in a vicious circle, in which poor social capital leads to poor response to disaster and poor response to disaster under minds social capital. Relative lack of volunteerism and philanthropic value, widespread poverty, heterogeneity of the social components, and comparatively lower level of political freedom were identified as major cognitive and structural sources of detrimental performance contributing to the formation of the vicious circle.

Such findings imply us that in order to break a vicious circle, we need not only physical infrastructure but also more importantly social infrastructure like "habit of hearts", increased

communication, and political freedom, which require a long term perspective for the development. And such social infrastructure can not be nurtured overnight and neither on the scene of disasters. And it cannot be nurtured by approaching from a narrower perspective of responding to disasters only but from a wider perspective of societal reform and reconstruction.

Lifelong and school educations as well are important strategies for the promotion of such societal reform since without self reflection power of individual people we cannot open a new perspective and value system in approaching to societal structure. And such reflexive citizen can only be nurtured when we provide them opportunities to review society from a critical perspective. Such critically reviewing power does not grow naturally or automatically from one's own selves but needs to be brought up by intended educational programs. One of the best ways of nurturing such power is to practice on the very scene of social needs. Participatory education is a prime source of learning such power. For real participation, however, we need political freedom and social capital as well. In other words, there is no royal road to overcome such dilemma that exists between accumulation of social capital and social reconstruction but to follow trial and error strategy in a zigzag manner until we reach to the point where we can collaborate with government with more ease and efficiency.

Any inter-regional collaborations in their response to disasters, therefore, should focus not only on physical needs of disaster scene but more also on social infrastructure of the whole communities being stricken by large scale disasters. The former requires a relatively shorter term perspective but the latter longer term. It also should be reminded that there is a contextual difference between Asian communities and those of the outer world in their ways of responding to disasters and even collaboration with other countries of the world. Contextual approach is required not only at the scene of disasters but also in their efforts to collaborate with other countries of the world in general and at the regional level in particular.

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– An Asian Perspective –

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Asia is very much weak in its capacity to respond to large scale disasters, which take place more frequently in Asia. Such incapacity owes much to the lack of social capital accumulation in this region. Social capital is known to be composed by two dimensions: psychological and structural. The former is habit of hearts. The latter is consisted with, bonding, bridging and linking. Asia has not been able to build philanthropy and volunteerism as habit of heart and bonding neither owing much to poverty. For bridging, to heterogeneity of the society. And for linking, to the relative lack of political freedom. This lack of social capital accumulation has put Asia in vicious circle in its relationship with disaster relief. In order to overcome this vicious circle, it is requested to cultivate reflexive citizen which require pre-existence of social capital. Social capital could be accumulated by civic education which can best be achieved by citizen's participation. And for successful citizen's participation, accumulation of social capital is a prerequisite. Zigzag approach seems to be the only alternative in such a dilemma. Understanding such a quintessence of Asia, it is inevitable to adopt contextual approach in extending any sort of disaster relief assistance from outside.

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