Symbolic Power in a Technocratic Regime:*  
The Reign of B.J. Habibie in New Order Indonesia

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This article examines the technocratic and political influence of B.J. Habibie during the New Order era. His ascendance in power is generally attributed to his relationship to Suharto. This assumption is qualified here, and an attempt is made to identify the sources of Habibie’s power using Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic power. Two main aspects are analysed: the symbiotic mutualism between Habibie and Suharto, and Habibie’s ties with Muslim modernists. The objective is to comprehend how different forms of power are transacted within the political structure of the New Order.

Keywords: symbolic power, New Order Indonesia, technocracy, cultural capital.

When Bacharuddin Jusuf Habibie launched his memoir Detik-Detik Yang Menentukan (Decisive Moments) in September 2006, a book based on his daily notes taken during his short-lived presidency, it captured huge public attention in Indonesia. With a relatively expensive price tag of IDR 150,000, the autobiography nevertheless sold 5,000 copies in less than a week, making it the best selling book ever written by an Indonesian politician. It is possible that the short but controversial account included in the book about how Prabowo Subianto, then head of Army Strategic Command (Kostrad), subtly attempted to overthrow Habibie may have boosted its popularity. But how the book became so popular is due less to the result of the controversy than to the fact that Habibie remains popular among many Indonesians, particularly Muslims. Some even...
think that Habibie, now running the non-profit Habibie Center, did a much better job running the country than his democratically elected successors. Whatever the case may be, Habibie did play a pivotal role in moving Indonesia towards democracy after Suharto’s fall.

This article offers a new interpretation of Habibie and examines how he came to dominate the technocratic politics of the New Order, particularly during the 1990s. The structure of New Order authoritarianism upon which Habibie built his whole bureaucratic career allowed him to benefit from certain peculiar relations of power. This article seeks to unpack these power relations and to identify the sources of Habibie’s power. This is important because the whole modality of building high technology that notoriously characterized Habibie’s development strategy for decades was produced and mobilized within these power relations. More interestingly, understanding Habibie is an entry point to comprehending the nature of power under the New Order regime, and sheds light on how different forms of power operate and are transacted between leading elite groups. This article thus delves into the conjunction of authoritarian politics, modern knowledge, and the obsession with modernity that resulted in a network of power between a political leader, a technocratic figure, and a religiously labeled group. It is intended to complement studies on Indonesia’s New Order that put so much emphasis on Suharto (for example, see Liddle 1985 and Vatikiotis 1993) and understates the influence of satellite figures such as Habibie.

It may be true, as many observers say, that Habibie profited largely from the centrality of power that Suharto possessed for over three decades. However, this view fails to capture the significance of Habibie’s scientific background, and how this provided him with his own form of power. To grasp this, the present analysis draws on the concept of symbolic power offered by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1991). Contending Marx’s materialist view of power, Bourdieu emphasizes the notion that cultural capital functions as a valued resource through the production of symbolic power. Cultural capital encompasses a wide variety of resources including verbal facility, cultural awareness, aesthetic preferences, schooling
system, and educational credentials. Studying intellectual groups as the dominating class in modern societies, Bourdieu explains that an effective medium for domination comes into being, which exercises symbolic power “only through the complicity of those who do not want to know that they are subject to it or even that they themselves exercise it” (Bourdieu 1991, p. 164). The political implication of symbolic systems emanates from its capacity to gain legitimacy for the dominant class by encouraging the dominated to accept the hierarchy of social distinctions that maintain the domination (Swartz 1997).

This concept of symbolic power allows us to see the operation of cultural capital in a political structure that revolved around patrimonialism (Crouch 1979) but was hinged to a technocracy (Amir 2004). Ample analyses on the New Order have uncovered the regime’s power structure and shown it to be underpinned by coercive forces and physical violence (for recent examples, see Anderson et al. 2001 and Heryanto 2005). This article seeks to go in a different direction to show how symbolic forms become the principal mode of domination, and to focus on educational and scientific credentials as cultural capital. An array of empirical data drawn from material such as biography, books, mass publication, and personal interviews are studied.

Cultivating the Capital

B.J. Habibie (nicknamed Rudy) was born on 25 June 1936 in Parepare in South Sulawesi. Together with seven brothers and sisters, he spent his childhood there before the family moved to Makassar. When he was thirteen, his father suddenly passed away, and he was sent by his mother to continue his education in Bandung, West Java.

After finishing high school, Habibie attended the prestigious Institut Teknologi Bandung (ITB). In 1955, he set off for Germany to study aeronautical engineering at Technische Hochschule Aachen on the recommendation of Muhammad Yamin, a nationalist figure who was then Minister of Education. Five years later, Habibie obtained an undergraduate degree and then pursued his doctorate at the same university. In 1965, he successfully defended his doctoral thesis on
orthotropic collar flanges. With his degree in hand, Habibie joined Hamburger Flugzeugbau (HFB) and was assigned design projects dealing with Fokker’s F-28 and Dornier’s DO-31. A large portion of his work was thus on basic research on aircraft construction. As such, Habibie spent most of the time in the research laboratory struggling with mathematical formulas, some articles about which he published in respected journals in the field. As recounted in Habibie’s biography, one of these formulas known among his colleagues as the Habibie Factor became a standard for aircraft design in North Atlantic Treaty Organization projects (Makka 1996, p. 87).

The merging of HFB with Messerschmitt-Boelkow-Blohm (MBB) GmbH in 1968 pushed Habibie to a higher position. Now he was responsible for planning and supervising a major manufacturing plant for MBB, which was then participating in the Airbus A-300B programme. While working on this prestigious project, Habibie developed a formula to predict crack propagation behavior in aircraft structure at the atomic level, an achievement that earned Habibie the nickname of “Mr. Crack”. This breakthrough turned out to save both time and in aircraft designing. Given this success, Habibie was named vice president and director for technology application in 1974, the highest position granted a foreigner in the history of MBB. Habibie held this position until Suharto appointed him State Minister for Research and Technology in 1978.

Habibie was directly experiencing the post-war rebuilding of Germany, and what he understood to be the important processes involved would through him come to have an impact on Indonesian modernization. When he arrived in Aachen in 1955, Germany was going through its economic miracle (wirtschaftswunder), a profound change that saw German industrial capability revive itself to new heights after World War II. Through economic reforms and full financial backing from the European Recovery Program, more commonly known as the Marshall Plan, West Germany’s market-based economy expanded quickly. This resurgence affected how Habibie perceived economic development and its social effects. Coming from an undeveloped society, Habibie was highly impressed by the social and
cultural transformations taking place in Germany. He came to believe that the German experience provided a way for Indonesia to achieve modernity and usher in prosperity and welfare for society at large. Drawing largely on his German experiences, Habibie formulated his concept of accelerated social transformation in which technology plays a crucial role in turning traditional societies into modern ones. During his tenure at MBB, Habibie hired a small number of Indonesian engineers, mostly former fellow students, and envisioned a circle of technological experts working with him to realize his dream of modernizing Indonesia by following the track record of post-war Germany. When he finally did return to Indonesia, Habibie placed these engineers as key persons in technological projects and bureaucratic structures under his control.

Habibie’s childhood experience, together with the lessons he learned from studying Germany development, contributed to the cultural capital that he put to work to facilitate his technocratic career in Indonesia. There are two kinds of cultural capital Habibie continuously accumulated. One is that which Habibie inherited from his family milieu. Habibie’s father was a well-paid agricultural expert educated at the school of agriculture in Bogor, while his mother was a Javanese aristocrat. Having parents from the priyayi class, Habibie and his siblings lived comfortably and enjoyed relatively high social status during the colonial era. As Bourdieu pointed noted, cultural capital relating to family origins has a strong correlation to academic success later in life (Swartz 1997, pp. 75–76). The priyayi status of the Habibie family conferred young Rudy with cultural capital without which he would have moved along a totally different path. Such cultural capital permitted Habibie to enjoy educational opportunities given few Indonesians during that time. Furthermore, this cultural capital was the resource that Habibie made use of to attain another type of cultural capital, namely, scientific and professional credentials. The latter was gained during his doctoral study and assignments at large aircraft manufacturing corporations in Germany. Through it, Habibie placed himself in the German elite class within which he managed to establish a network of privileged individuals.
With ample cultural capital, it was not difficult for Habibie to attain a high position in the New Order structure. His acquaintance with Suharto no doubt provided good chances for that to happen. However, the Suharto factor would not have come into play without the cultural capital Habibie gathered throughout his life. What needs to be underlined is that the value of Habibie’s cultural capital was multiplied when placed within the Indonesian context. According to Bourdieu, cultural capital follows economic logic in that it commands an exchange rate and its currency varies according to market conditions as configured by national contexts (Swartz, 1997, p. 78). When Habibie returned home, the New Order elite class was heavily overwhelmed by modernization agendas. Since modernization required access to Western technology, the New Order as such constituted a market that highly valued educational and scientific credentials. Habibie’s capital was going at a high price, and the kind of educational and scientific credentials he possessed were scarce at a time when demand was high. This enabled him to gain tremendous profits from trading his cultural capital for other forms of capital that the regime offered.

A Privileged Protégé

Habibie was known to Suharto long before the New Order regime was born. The friendship of Habibie and Suharto dated back to 1950 when Suharto, then an Army Lieutenant Colonel, was sent to Makassar to suppress the rebellious movement there. Heading the Garuda Mataram Brigade, Suharto and his army happened to headquarter just across the street from the Habibie residence. As Suharto recounted in his autobiography (Suharto 1991, p. 78), he became close to the Habibie family, especially 13-year-old Rudy who greatly admired Suharto and his soldiers. One night, Rudy’s father Jalil suffered a heart attack. The sons rushed to Suharto across the street to seek help. Unfortunately, when they came back with a doctor, their father had breathed his last. It was Suharto himself who closed his eyes. This tragedy lived on as a sentimental memory in
the young Rudy, who now found a father figure in Suharto. From that point onwards, the relationship between Habibie and Suharto grew stronger. During his sojourn in Germany, Habibie maintained sporadic contact with Suharto.

Habibie was planning to return to Indonesia after completing his doctoral degree in 1965. This did not happen. The 1965 political chaos that spawned social rampage towards the communists compelled Habibie to postpone his homecoming. Through his brother-in-law, who was formerly Suharto’s subordinate in the military, he received a message from Suharto advising him to stay in Germany until conditions were more favorable. He only began planning for his return after he met Ibnu Sutowo, one of Suharto’s most trusted patrons, in Dusseldorf in 1973. Sutowo, then head of the state-owned oil company Pertamina delivered a message from Suharto, who was now the president of Indonesia. Suharto suggested that Habibie prepare for repatriation. In January 1974, Habibie landed on home soil at the time when the New Order was bringing about economic development and modernization at an unprecedented scale. With oil prices skyrocketing, the government could afford financing capital-intensive projects.

The reunion of Habibie and Suharto finally took place in Jakarta on 28 January 1974. Being acquainted with Habibie’s technological experiences abroad, Suharto asked his old friend to use his technological knowledge to enhance the country’s development efforts. Suharto had one condition: Habibie’s activities must not result in any social upheaval (Makka 1996, p. 148). Habibie did not consider this a problem since he did not nurture any obvious political ideology. His only passion was technology and development. Yet, being a pragmatist did not mean that Habibie was oblivious of politics. His biography emphasizes his nationalist commitment as the sole factor motivating him to return to Indonesia and to leave prestigious positions and other advantages he had had in Germany. Notwithstanding the potential truth of this claim, Habibie, trained as an engineer, was certainly aware that for a machine to work, power was required. Thus he realized that his desire to build an aircraft
industry required tremendous resources, and only Suharto could supply them. No doubt, Habibie needed to be sure that the president would politically and economically back his plans, but at the same time, he appeared to have made his own judgement about possible losses and gains in giving up lucrative seats at MBB. As history tells us, his decision to join Suharto boosted his career as technical expert, but also as politician in years to come.

An astonishing feature of Habibie’s technocratic career is the unmatchable number of high positions he held in the Suharto government. Already in 1978, Suharto named him State Minister for Research and Technology as well as head of the Agency for Technology Assessment and Application (BPPT), a body formed to rival the National Development Planning Agency (BAPPENAS). Habibie occupied these positions for twenty years, making him the longest serving ministerial level bureaucrat under the New Order. Along with these positions, Habibie simultaneously chaired over ten government agencies, industries, and social and political organizations, such as the National Research Council, the Batam Industrial Development Authority Board, the National Standardization Agency, and the Counseling Board of Indonesian Defense Industry. Habibie was also chairman of the Agency for Strategic Industries (BPIS), a “holding company” that controlled ten state-owned manufacturing industries ranging from transportation, telecommunications, and heavy equipment to weaponry. Three of these including the aircraft industry were under his direct supervision as chief executive officer. This enviable situation enabled Habibie to create a network of engineer bureaucrats effectively shaping the New Order as a technology-oriented regime (Shiraishi 1996).

Being a technological enthusiast, Suharto was also a technological enthusiast, was strongly supportive of Habibie’s plans. With this blatant support, Habibie was able to build capital-intensive research and technological infrastructures. Of Habibie’s pet projects, the Indonesian Aircraft Industry (IPTN now PTDI) was the most controversial, absorbing billions of dollars into its operations. Founded in 1976, it became the icon of technological nationalism and the symbol of
the New Order’s success in delivering modernity to Indonesia (Amir 2004). However, IPTN did generate accusations that it violated proper procedures of public accountability.5

Why did Suharto show so much faith in Habibie? A hasty observation underlining their close relationship from earlier times would not provide a satisfactory explanation. Machiavellian in nature, Suharto had a good instinct for whom to trust or distrust. Having a proximate connection to Suharto did not necessarily secure one’s position in the regime, and many politicians who were once close to Suharto were eventually alienated from the circle of power. Hence, it is not sufficient to suggest that Suharto trusted Habibie because they had known each other a long time. What needs to be considered is that Habibie seemed not to have had any political agenda that challenged Suharto’s authoritarian power in any way. Habibie knew well enough how to sustain Suharto’s trust by showing persistent obeisance. He learned Javanese philosophies, spiritualism, and politics from Suharto for which he once called Suharto “my professor”. In turn, such unabashed loyalty won him positions of power within the regime.

National Stability Disturbed

To understand Suharto’s apparent fondness for Habibie, we need to look at one specific controversial affair that began with a presidential letter dated 3 September 1992 in which Suharto assigned Habibie to purchase thirty-nine used military ships from the German government. Thanks to his acquaintance with high-level German officials, Habibie managed to attain a price considered lower than the going market rate. The project turned awkward when the influential weekly Tempo reported that Habibie had proposed a budget of US$1.1 billion, which was much higher than deemed reasonable. Most of this money would be spent on modification and delivery costs, Habibie explained.6 The case stirred up more controversy when one of the modified ships, KRI Teluk Lampung, was caught in a storm in Biscay Bay off northern Spain on its way to Indonesia. Though the ship survived, the incident caused public anxiety about the reliability of the fleet Habibie had purchased.
Concerned with the Biscay Bay case and the large amount of public money spent for the fleet, *Tempo* in its main report in the 11 June 1994 edition criticized the government for reckless planning. What had happened, wrote *Tempo*, indicated a lack of technical knowledge on the part of government officials.\(^7\) Although not mentioned explicitly, it was obvious that *Tempo* was holding Habibie responsible for the technical risks taken in buying the old fleet. This accusation did not bring disaster to Habibie, but instead to *Tempo* and two other national news media, *Editor* and *Detik*. On 21 June 1994, Minister of Information Harmoko announced that the government was revoking the publishing licenses of *Tempo*, *Editor*, and *Detik*. In response to public uproar, Habibie denied that he had anything to do with this move, which in effect implied that the order came directly from Suharto (Makka 1996, pp. 237–38). The shutdown was nevertheless unanticipated and ruined the atmosphere of openness the New Order had recently started to cultivate.

What was obvious in this train of events was that Suharto was trying to protect his protégé. Yet, it raises the question about why Suharto was willing to go so far to save his research and technology minister. The answer lies in the point Suharto had made that those discrediting Habibie were encouraging distrust in the government, and that in turn threatened national stability.\(^8\) This reasoning showed how much Habibie meant to Suharto in that he juxtaposed Habibie’s reputation with national stability. He protected Habibie not because he was a close friend. Rather, as explained in the following section, this had to do with the fact that Habibie possessed something that Suharto’s regime greatly depended upon.

Symbiotic Mutualism

The privileges granted him and the protection he received from Suharto may suggest that Habibie’s influence were all drawn from Suharto. Looking at the relationship between Habibie and Suharto, however, one is reminded of what Benedict Anderson (1990) argues to be distinctive features of power in Javanese culture. The aura of mysticism in Javanese culture situates power as a natural force
that exists concretely and independently of social relations. Power is manifested in every dimension of the natural realm and flows from generation to generation. Anderson argues that the quantum of power, following the law of thermodynamics, is constant. One corollary is that the concentration of power in one place requires a proportional diminution elsewhere. As such, “the ultimate goal of power relation is not the exercise but the accumulation of power”. Using this definition, one is inclined to believe that the power relation between the two men centered on Suharto, with Habibie a mere satellite receiving energy from the centre. This renders Habibie as powerless for all real power was accumulated in Suharto who would not be inclined to share his power because, since zero-sum principles apply, it would diminish his power. This view ignores the political influence that Habibie enjoyed in his own right, and assumes that if the link to Suharto was eradicated, all of Habibie’s power would abruptly dissolve.

However appealing Anderson’s interpretation of the Javanese conception of power may be, those using this approach to explain the power relationship between Habibie and Suharto may risk problematic simplification. Suharto no doubt resided in the spring of political energy that spilled significant effects to Habibie. Yet, Habibie was by no means passively reflecting Suharto’s power. A careful analysis reveals a two-way power relation in which both Habibie and Suharto drew great advantage from each other. Their power accrued simultaneously so that an increase of one’s power enhanced further that of the other. The acknowledgment of the symbiotic mutualism between the two men allows for the interesting observation that an increase in power for Habibie did not diminish Suharto’s power. Rather, the greater Habibie’s power the greater his master’s, and vice versa. This will become more obvious later when we look at the rise of the Indonesian Muslim Intellectual Association (ICMI), and how it placed Habibie at the centre of political Islam.

This alternative view debunks the widely held assumption that Habibie was a mere dependent of Suharto. In practice, their thoughts and actions formed an interdependent relationship. On the one hand,
Habibie was keen to follow Suharto’s teachings on Javanism while Suharto, on the other, enthusiastically embraced high technology based on Habibie’s ideas of social transformation inspired. To comprehend how such interdependence emerged and acted as a substitute for the centric structure suggested in Anderson, we need to go back to Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital. Swartz notes that one significant contribution Bourdieu makes to the sociological study of power relations is that different forms of capital are interchangeable (Swartz 1997, p. 80). I would like to extend this idea of interchange to suggest a mechanism that permitted the transaction of different forms of capital between Habibie and Suharto. In this transaction, Habibie harnessed his cultural capital effectively in exchange for political capital from Suharto. Suharto was willing to enter into this transaction because he highly appreciated Habibie’s educational and scientific credentials. Growing up in a modest farmer family in a poor Javanese village, Suharto never went to college. He could only complete high school before joining the military. On the contrary, Habibie not only earned a doctoral degree from a university in an industrially advanced country, but also had an outstanding career in a large corporation that dealt with sophisticated technologies, an achievement very few Indonesians, if any, could boast of at the time. The inequality of cultural capital between the two resulted in the respectful manner with which the powerful general treated the brilliant engineer.

Takeshi Shiraishi (1996) argues that Suharto was passionate about high technology because it provided him with a way by which he could elevate his esteem and override the powerful image of his predecessor, Sukarno. Indeed, in his biography, Suharto explicitly emphasizes the significance of science and technology: “We have to make a long-term plan to anticipate the future determined more and more by our own mastery of modern science and high technology” (Suharto 1991, p. 453). This phrase expresses Suharto’s strong conviction about the indispensability of technology to the success of his regime, which made Habibie’s cultural capital even more precious to him. Suharto relied on Habibie to pursue what his New Order regime promised to deliver to Indonesians.
Political Islam

The interdependence between Habibie and Suharto had produced centrifugal effects in Indonesian politics by the 1990s. By then, the New Order had matured into a stable political economy. Habibie's technocratic influence was felt across the technological, economic, and industrial sectors. After years of training with "Professor Suharto", Habibie moved into politics, a terrain he once considered taboo. His political career started in 1992 within the New Order's party Golongan Karya (Golkar) where he served as regular coordinating deputy to the counseling board headed by Suharto. A year later he became the regular coordinator, bypassing military officials dominant in the party since its inception. Habibie's political influence began to grow when he successfully made Information Ministry Harmoko the first non-military chairman of Golkar in 1993, and overcoming tough competition of the military camp in the process.

Of Habibie's many political roles, the most crucial was his connection to the Muslim modernist group. Political Islam stemmed from the long struggle of Muslim modernists to establish an Islam-based state ideology. Under both Sukarno and Suharto, the political aspirations of Muslim modernists were marginalized, and Islam was even treated as an enemy of the state.

Political Islam gained momentum when the Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals Association (ICMI) was founded by Imaduddin Abdurahim, who was once an engineering lecturer at ITB where he founded the pioneering campus-based mosque in Indonesia, Masjid Salman. After returning from graduate studies at Iowa State University in 1986, Abdurahim aspired to unite Indonesian Muslim intellectuals under one umbrella. This coincided with the activities of five students from the University of Brawijaya at Malang who had organized a national symposium on the role of Muslim intellectuals. Since the forming of an Islamic-labeled organization would easily elicit suspicion from the government and cement his reputation as a critic of Suharto, Abdurahim urged the Brawijaya students to gain the patronage of a well-placed regime
official. He proposed Habibie despite the latter’s unpopularity among Muslim activists.

Abdurrahim had actually been impressed by Habibie, and had heard that Habibie was a pious Muslim who consistently conducted five-time prayers and fasted every Monday and Thursday, a tradition inherited from Prophet Muhammad. Additionally, Habibie was best known for his technological credentials. Being an engineer himself and a preacher as well, Abdurrahim was convinced that those two traits would make Habibie a good leader for the Muslim community (Assiddiqie 2002, pp. 51–55). Abdurrahim and the students had already approached Habibie in August 1990, and it took no time for Habibie to detect opportunity in Abdurrahim’s proposal. After Suharto granted him permission, Habibie started to work on the creation of ICMI. In December 1990, the national symposium of Muslim intellectuals was held in Malang, and was officially opened by Suharto. This event gave new momentum to the rise of ICMI, swinging the pendulum of politics towards Islam and at the same time paving the way for Habibie to emerge as a Muslim leader.

The rise of ICMI under the auspice of regime officials sparked controversies and criticisms from other Muslim groups. Alleging that ICMI was a sectarian group, Nahdhatul Ulama leader, Abdurrahman Wahid formed Democracy Forum (Fordem) to challenge the proliferation of ICMI. Having Suharto’s backing, ICMI stood firm, and with money flowing in from the government, it formed the Centre for Information and Development Studies (CIDES), a think-tank to rival the influence of the Christian-founded Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). In addition, ICMI started publishing the daily Republika to compete with the Catholic-owned Kompas. For years, Republika could function as a promotion outlet for Habibie’s technological programs.

The intimate relationship between ICMI and New Order leaders gradually dissolved the image of Islam as a potential threat to the state. Islam now became a new source of social and political energy
for the regime. Such a cultural effect brought about self-confidence among the Muslim community at large. “After ICMI, we are proud to be Muslims,” said Alamsyah Ratu Prawiranegara, former minister of religion affairs. Though presenting itself as a non-political organization, ICMI triggered a *penghijauan* (greening) phenomenon, with a wave of Muslim activists entering parliament after the 1992 election. In March 1993 Suharto announced the formation of Development Cabinet VI. This was filled by several ICMI officials in key ministerial positions.

Considering the prolonged confrontation between Muslim modernists and the state, the unprecedented rise of ICMI in politics has intrigued observers as to why Suharto was suddenly willing to accommodate political Islam. Political observer Adam Schwarz (2000) writes that ICMI was born out of power intrigues in which Suharto sought a new base of support to pre-empt growing opposition from military leaders. While Schwarz might be right in observing anxiety in the military elite, this paper is inclined to follow an alternative explanation offered by anthropologist Robert Hefner (2000) who explains that Suharto had in fact softened towards Islam in the 1980s after seeing that all major Muslim organizations had embraced the state ideology of Pancasila. Since the Islamic resurgence came about with an agenda for cultural renewal, Islam no longer appeared as a threat. At the same time, Suharto became seriously interested in learning about Islam, and Habibie, aware of this change, was Suharto’s counterpart in understanding Islam. Seen from this perspective, the rise of the ICMI was the inevitable consequence of the cultural shift in Muslim community.

As a political venue attracting interested individuals and groups, ICMI gave enormous effective power to Habibie as the leading figure bridging political Islam and the regime. Situated at the centre of renewed New Order politics, Habibie was definitely aware of the potency of ICMI for his own political and technological agendas. In heading an organization representing Islamic interests, Habibie had the chance of cultivating support among the Muslim community in general and Muslim modernists in particular. Moreover, Habibie
and Muslim modernists shared views on industrial modernization and national sovereignty.

Both Schwarz and Hefner observe three different constituents in ICMI, namely bureaucrats, intellectuals, and activists, each of which held different political interests and agendas. Where Habibie was concerned, they agree that he was the figure best placed to voice Muslim interests in politics. More importantly, these groups were convinced that Habibie’s agendas of technological and economic development would greatly benefit the Muslim community. It was this strong conviction that enabled Habibie to mobilize massive support from all factions in ICMI.

**Iptek and Imtaq**

Seen from an anthropological perspective, Habibie’s power was entrenched in a terrain of symbols. For a long time, Indonesian Muslims, vastly superior in numbers to all other groups, had been waiting for a resurgence of Islam. For most of them, the rise of Habibie as Muslim leader was a clear sign of that happening.

Habibie’s symbolic power was reinforced by two juxtaposed concepts put forth to champion Muslim cultural development agendas: iptek and imtaq. Iptek stands for ilmu pengetahuan (science) and teknologi (technology), while imtaq refers to iman (faith) and taqwa (devotion). Habibie first coined these terms and their amalgam in his opening speech at the Istiglal Festival held in Jakarta in February 1990. These terms have since become widely used in the discourse on Islamic modernization in Indonesia.

The blend of iptek and imtaq is grounded on an assumption that the teachings of Islam conform to the spirit of modern knowledge. This is drawn from the first word Prophet Muhammad divinely received from Allah, *Iqra‘*, meaning “to read”. For Muslims, this is interpreted as the summons of Allah for humankind to inquire into knowledge of both natural and scriptural science. Since science is inextricably intertwined with technology, Muslims feel obliged to acquire technology in order to play their role as the Caliph on the earth. Seen from this point of view, iptek and imtaq
are prerequisite elements for eradicating the cultural malaise that has for centuries paralyzed the Islamic world. The obsession with mastering science and technology without neglecting elements of faith and devotion entails an idealized modernity within the Muslim community.

The discourse of *iptek* and *imtaq* in Indonesia at that time lent the Muslims to a forceful ideologization that saw Habibie as the perfect leader who had long been awaited. Such a messianic representation could be found in statements by influential Muslim modernists, most notably the Chicago trio, Nurcholish Madjid, Ahmad Syafii Maarif, and Amien Rais. The late respected modernist Nurcholish Madjid entitled Habibie “the epitome of the advanced development of Indonesia” for having founded a balance between rationality (*iptek*) and spirituality (*imtaq*). In a similar vein, Ahmad Syafii Maarif considered Habibie “a symbol of the emergence of Islam” whose fate is “to stand up at the frontline placing the Indonesian nation at a respected position in the world”. Even Muhammadyah leader Amien Rais, known to be critical of Suharto, showed his respect for Habibie by calling him a miracle maker after Habibie succeeded in creating a locally made airplane.

Madjid, Maarif, and Rais were among many highly educated Muslims who praised Habibie and believed that the ICMI leader benefited not only the Indonesian Muslims. For them, the blending of *iptek* and *imtaq* would bring positive effects to the entire Muslim world. Lukman Harun, a radical Muslim modernist, shared this view. Amazed by the N250 airplane that Habibie and his team built at IPTN, he proudly stated “the success of Indonesia in making an aircraft is not only for us, but also for the whole Muslim world.” In the eyes of modernist Muslims, Habibie’s achievements in high technology proved that Muslims in the world were capable of mastering western science and technology while still keeping faith in Islam. The belief of a possible conjunction between modern science and technology and elements of Islam strengthened Habibie’s symbolic power at a level unmatched by any other figure in the New Order.
Trouncing the Economists

With his symbolic power, Habibie managed to dominate the technocracy that characterized New Order policy-making. However, that dominance by no means went unchallenged. No observer of the politics of policy-making under the New Order could overlook the quarrel between the Habibie-led group of engineers and a group of economists led by Widjojo Nitisastro, a professor of economics at University of Indonesia. Historically, these “modernizer” economists arose as primary actors in New Order policy-making immediately after Suharto took power in 1966. Among Nitisastro’s colleagues were Ali Wardhana, J.B. Sumarlin, Emil Salim, Saleh Afiff, Subroto, and Muhammad Sadli. Some of them, including Nitisastro, Salim, and Wardhana, gained their doctoral degrees from the University of California at Berkeley, thus earning them the notorious sobriquet “The Berkeley Mafia”.19 During the earlier days of the New Order, these economists served in the Suharto cabinet and were economic experts that Suharto relied heavily upon. After Habibie joined the New Order, these economists had consistently opposed his ambitious ideas of developing high technology. As former finance minister Ali Wardhana said, the high technology that Habibie relentlessly promoted was not what the Indonesian people needed. Given Indonesia’s limited capital resources, Wardhana insisted that the government spend money more on public sectors that benefit people at large than on expensive high technology.20

After two decades deciding economic policy-making, the economists began to be challenged by ICMI-affiliated economists who criticized the liberalist approach for causing two major predicaments. First, ever since the economists made use of international financial institutions, most notably the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, Indonesia had suffered from the weight of foreign debt, making Indonesia one of the most indebted countries in the world.21 Second, Nitisastro’s market-based economic programs favoured large corporations excessively. Their policies had only served large conglomerates that had for years enjoyed various benefits from the
government, while hindering small- and medium-scale enterprises from growing.\textsuperscript{22}

As the economists’ technocratic approach began to be questioned widely in public, Habibie and his adherents brought up a new technocratic paradigm wrapped with nationalist appeal that emphasized the use of high technology to add value to industrial products. Economist Kwik Kian Gie called this concept \textit{Habibienomics,} as opposed to \textit{Widjojonomics} — after Nitisastro’s first name. While the former was inclined to utilize competitive advantages (e.g., high technology, well-educated human resources, etc.) to boost the economy, the latter relied more on comparative advantages (e.g., cheap labors, natural resources, etc.).

In the 1990s, Habibie and his entourage of engineering-minded technocrats grew stronger, becoming a powerful group determining the path along which Indonesia would pursue economic development. At that point, they had outdone the economists in gaining Suharto’s attention. The triumph of Habibie’s group over Nitisastro’s reached a climax when Suharto announced the composition of the Sixth Development Cabinet in March 1993. A number of ministerial positions held for years by Widjojo’s protégés were now taken over by the engineers. In the new cabinet, the economists grabbed only three portfolios: the Coordinating Ministry for Economy, Finance, and Development Supervision, Governor of Bank Indonesia, and the Ministry of Finance. Habibie, on the other hand, succeeded in placing his loyalists in various positions while securing a fourth term for himself as the State Minister of Research and Technology. Three ministers were directly linked to him: Satrio Budihardjo Joedono (Trade), Haryanto Dhanutirto (Transportation), and Wardiman Djojonegoro (Education and Culture).\textsuperscript{24} Joedono, Dhanutirto and Djojonegoro were among top ICMI officials whose careers grew through their association with Habibie at BPPT. Perhaps the hardest pill for the economists to swallow was the loss of the office of National Development Planning, a post held by them for many years. This portfolio now went to Ginandjar Kartasasmita, an engineering-trained bureaucrat who sympathized with Habibie’s ideas. Heading
the powerful National Development Planning Agency (BAPPENAS), Kartasasmita seized full authority in underwriting every government-funded development project, which in many ways benefited Habibie’s technological agenda.

The proliferation of Habibie men in the Sixth Development Cabinet marked a shift in technocratic approach from the market-oriented neoclassical to the quasi-Schumpeterian. Umar Juoro, one of Habibie’s strongest defenders, explained that such a turn towards the engineer camp was inevitable considering the speed of development needed for proper utilization of technology.\(^{25}\) Juoro’s claim is more justification than explanation. Given the fact that the direction of development of the New Order was more politically driven than rationally formulated, it was more Habibie’s accumulated power that enabled the engineers to trounce the economists.

**Concluding Remarks**

The economic turmoil and political uncertainty of March 1998 gave Habibie’s political career a further boost. Suharto named him vice-president amid strong challenges from other leaders, most notably economist Emil Salim, who had nominated himself for the position. Two months later, social riots burst out in Jakarta and other big cities following a brutal police attack on Trisakti University students. In the face of massive student protests around the country, Suharto stepped down on 21 May 1998. Consequently, in accordance with the Constitution, Habibie became the third president of Indonesia, a scenario many anti-Suharto activists could not have foreseen. For over one and a half years, Habibie led a transitional administration that had to deal with multi-dimensional crises left behind by the Suharto regime. Despite his commitment to democracy and his success in stabilizing exchange rates for the Indonesian rupiah, Habibie failed to defend his presidency after newly elected members of the People’s Consultative Assembly (MPR) rejected the accountability speech he made in October 1999. Moreover, many politicians also blamed Habibie for holding a referendum for East Timorese independence, which, as many had predicted, later led to the separation of this small
region from Indonesia, an event that actually relieved Jakarta from years of international pressures.

Albeit he is no longer in power, the image of Habibie as the symbol of Islamic modernity and technological nationalism remains strong among many Muslims. It is undoubtedly true that in many ways Habibie took advantage of his personal relationship with the New Order leader. Yet, subordinating Habibie’s position to the wide spectrum of Suharto’s authority ignores the intricacies of power relations. The rise of Habibie in politics and his dominance in technocracy were facilitated by his symbolic power. According to Pierre Bourdieu, symbolic power is gained from cultural capital that enables individuals to maintain and enhance their position in society. Similar to economic capital, the value of culture depends on the social circumstances in which it is transacted (Swartz 1997, p. 75–78). As shown above, Habibie’s cultural capital was drawn from the educational and scientific credentials that he attained during his successful career as an engineer in a technological advanced country. What transformed Habibie’s substantial cultural capital into effective symbolic power was a post-colonial Indonesia obsessed with modernity.

As this article has explicated, two intertwined power relations provided Habibie with opportunities for utilizing his cultural capital. One was his relationship with Suharto, a traditional leader no doubt, but one who was obsessed with Western modernity. For a long time, Suharto had strongly wished to make use of high technology in national development, and thus found in Habibie’s educational and scientific credentials the qualities his regime needed. In such a reciprocal power relation, Habibie’s cultural capital was exchanged for Suharto’s political capital. Another power relation was Habibie’s association with Muslim modernists. Here, his cultural capital was interpreted through their symbolic system as resources that they needed in order to deal with the gloomy reality of their social, political, and cultural life. In their obsession with an idealized modernity that combined western technological superiority and pristine Islamic spirituality, they saw in Habibie an ideal leader able to unite the fragmented Muslim community. In the end, this created
a powerful image through which Habibie drew massive support that allowed him to dominate technocratic practice and political Islam in Indonesia.

NOTES

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1. See p. 82 in Habibie’s *Detik-Detik Yang Menentukan*.
2. Interview with B.J. Habibie, 6 July 2005.
3. Interview with S. Paramajuda, 2 July 2004.
4. Priyayi was a native elite class in the Dutch Indies (now Indonesia) created to support colonial bureaucratic and industrial interests.
5. Two controversial cases related to the funding of IPTN were open to public view. First, in 1994 Habibie diverted US$200 million from the forest replanting fund to support the prototype production of N250, allegedly made entirely by Indonesian engineers. Second, after the first N250 flight tests in August 1995, Habibie announced a new jet airplane project worth US$2 billion to be led by his son. Calling it *gotongroyong*, a traditional concept of mutual cooperation, Suharto urged every Indonesian citizen to contribute to the project by purchasing stocks of financial company DSTP, which exclusively created to fund the project.
9. In an interview with the author, Habibie said that long before he returned to Indonesia Suharto had been admiring his scientific credentials. When Habibie first met Suharto, Suharto showed him a pile of documents about Habibie’s achievements that he had collected over the years. Interview with Habibie, 20 September 2006.
10. For a good account of Muslim modernism in Indonesia, see Deliar Noer, *The Modernist Muslim Movement in Indonesia, 1900–1942*.
11. In one of his speech, Abdurrahim compared Suharto to Egyptian Pharaohs for building his tomb long before he died. As a result, Abdurrahim was jailed and fired from his teaching job at ITB.
12. See Hefner, Ch. 6 and Schwarz, Ch. 7.
13. This conviction was revealed in interviews with ICMI activist Adi Sasono on 11 July 2004 and ICMI intellectual Dawam Rahardjo on 25 July 2003.
14. The late Nurcholish Madjid, Ahmad Syafii Maarif, and Amien Rais studied at the University of Chicago where they received Ph.D. degrees.
19. This label was popularized by David Ransom in his piece “The Berkeley Mafia and the Indonesian Massacre”.
24. The appointments of Haryanto Dhanuitirto and Wardiman Djojonegoro were controversial. Dhanuitirto was a pharmacy professor at ITB who had no experience in the transportation sector. He was often blamed for many transportation disasters occurring in Indonesia during his service. Likewise, Djojonegoro who obtained a Ph.D. in transportation engineering, and was more suitable for Dhanuitirto’s position, was instead given the task of tackling education and culture although he had never held a teaching position anywhere.

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