

Editorial Foreword

First of all, to begin with I would like to say how much I support this initiative to promote social science. This special issue of *IKAT: The Indonesian Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* originated from a symposium held in September, where I delivered my keynote speech electronically on September 4, 2018.

We should highlight that social science is very crucial for understanding the contemporary world, and therefore of core importance to the trajectory of any country today. The social sciences were born out of transformations in the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries (in the West, of course). First was the origin of modern states and politics, then the industrial revolutions, then the origin of economics, and, in the 19th century, they became widespread around the world, creating sociology and anthropology. It is really important to recognize the origins of sociology and social sciences against that backdrop.

The relevance today is that we are starting to live in a totally different world. Transformation is now global. There is a shift in the techno click of geo-politics, with the rise of China and the general rise of Asia, which means there really is a new period of history. It is the business of social scientists to do the same thing for the 21st century that their predecessors did for the 18th and 19th centuries – but against the backdrop of living in the first truly globalized world. I would like to stress that globalization is not, absolutely not, going to be reversed. Globalization does not only mean the economic spread of markets, but above all global interdependence, and this is the most interdependent society that anyone had ever lived in. We can see that from what we're doing here, which can be transmitted instantaneously around the world. Essentially, in a world with instantaneous communication, the level of global integration is accelerated in a gigantic fashion, and

this background drowns the many opportunities we have and many dissatisfactions we face in the world today. We live – I would say – in a world that has moved on the edge of the history, by which I mean we live in an era that is distinctively different from any previous civilization in history, no matter the continuity with it. I call this high opportunity, high risk society. To me, this is a crucial notion. The opportunities are enormous, with the expansion of education and the social sciences being core parts of that. These are becoming so globalized. There are massive opportunities for development. Many people sitting here will know Steven Pinker and his book, *Enlightenment Now*, in which he chances out the extraordinary positive changes there have been in global society.

So, this is a high opportunity world, but at the same time a high risk one, where the risks themselves are global. Again, no one has had to face that kind of risk previously. No one has lived in a world approaching a global population of 10 billion. No one has lived in a world where nuclear weapons existed, at least before the last 2, 3, 4 decades. No one has lived in a world of mass migration such as we are facing today. No one has experienced a revolution like the digital revolution.

This, I have to say, I do not mean to define as technology, as it is much broader to me. The digital revolution is understood appropriately as the greatest transformative force in the world's history to date. The digital revolution is not the internet. It's not robotic. It's not Artificial Intelligence. It is a fusion of those moving at an enormous pace across the globe, one much faster than the original industrial revolution. It is penetrating people, the intimacy of people's daily life. Think of the selfie-sense around the world, in the media, penetrating the economy, penetrating politics (of course). Many of the struggles of democracy and the rise of the authoritarian leaders are connected with this. So, this is one of the great transformations that are moving us to the edge of history.

A crucial thing to understand is that we cannot know the relationship between opportunity and risk in advance because much of

it is new. We cannot do a statistical analysis, which could unfortunately tell you how likely it is to be in an accident, every time someone gets in a car. We cannot do the same for climate change. We cannot do the same for the massive global population or for the possibility of nuclear war. Neither can we do the same for the other side of it, the opportunities, because our economies are becoming transformed. For example, there are fantastic opportunities because we are living in what some people have aptly described as a weightless economy, where information is even partly replacing money. Data is, in a sense, the generative force in the economy at a different level. As such, a novel world is emerging here, but since it is new – if you take for example – the global debate on the future of work, there is often no territory. As we know, work is becoming radically transformed. The economy is becoming radically transformed, including on a global level, but because we do not have data on such things (as they have not evolved before) we cannot do a statistical analysis of the level of risk and opportunities. To me, It is kind of worrying. That is what kind of world the social sciences have to analyze. We have an even bigger task than that faced by the originators of the social sciences in the later part of the 19th century, because of its global nature. We also have the opportunity, in that we have global communication. There is a global community of scientists today. All disciplines tend to be globalized, as well as national (of course). This is the world in which we both express what we do and that we have to analyze.

I do not think that there are any disciplines, other than the social sciences, which can do this, so the task before us is huge. Nevertheless, to me it is gripping. We are talking about the emergence of global civilizations here, and it is our business to explore that, not just on a macroscopic level, but on all different levels – I stress, it goes right down to the intimacy of selves and to everyday life, as well as to large-scale institutions. We still have to deal with problems of corruption, of power, of dislocation, but there is a huge agenda here. I urge everyone here

to make their own contribution to the evolution of our understanding and our practical responses to it, as done by the authors in this special volume of *IKAT*.

The first article addresses the challenge of social science research in Southeast Asia, the second analyzes Thai border school policy program and its implications for the ASEAN framework, and third is on truth tampering through social media in Malaysia. The fourth article critically voices issues of transnational production of knowledge for civic trust and social integration, the fifth is on Quantyphobia in IR research in Malaysia, and last but not least, we may learn about the diplomatic communication of the Javanese and Malays in the 1800s. Those six analytical papers clearly represent the relevance, role, and challenge of social science, not only in Indonesia, Thailand, and Malaysia, or in Southeast Asia, but may in any country today.

London,

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