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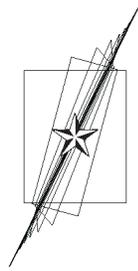
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Romeo B. Lee

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From the Editor

When the Japanese government mandated its national universities to abolish social sciences departments to better respond to society's industrial and employment demands, I felt very sad to say the least. The social sciences and their specialists play a very crucial role in fostering healthier (in its broadest sense) lives in individuals and groups, more particularly so at this time when scores of countries throughout the world, including Japan, are experiencing complex challenges on both the domestic and external fronts. There is definitely a compelling need to enliven the social sciences in universities in Asia Pacific to enable the discipline to gain a stronger foothold in the region and for it to stand a greater chance of eluding any prospective abolition. We need to write more research manuscripts having greater social relevance and appeal to draw the attention of a broader spectrum of readers. The more readers and users there are of our research findings, the better it would be for the future of the social sciences in the region's universities.

The *Asia-Pacific Social Science Review* has endeavored over the years to feature research manuscripts with marked social relevance in its effort to broaden the base of social sciences audiences. In this current edition, the *Review* features seven research articles, four research briefs, and one book review. Let me highlight, in varying ways, the key messages and the relevance of some of these.

Daniel Ricardo Lemus Delgado from Mexico writes about China's international development cooperation (IDC) with Africa (pp. 1-18). Using adequate details, he describes the style of China's IDC with Africa, and on some occasions, contrasts it with the styles of other Western nations' IDCs. In essence, the author is saying that the impetus to China's development cooperation with Africa hinges not only on its interest in the latter's natural resources but also on its own ideational aspirations, which are, in themselves, also linked to the identity of the state. China is redefining the global balance of power—it is the world's second largest economy as well as a chief source of direct investments and foreign aid. Any of its cross-border cooperation as significant as its IDC with Africa would thus draw attention and discourse, including on matters related to underlying motivations. Daniel's article sheds an important light on the impetus to China's IDC with Africa. Whether an IDC is styled by the Chinese (or by the Americans), however, there is a fundamental concern about the timing and extent of its impact on poverty conditions. Do IDCs improve the lot of ordinary citizens? If it does, at what phase of the development cooperation do improvements happen, and how extensive are these impacts?

IDCs are by no means the only common phenomenon in the region. Several conflicts of varying types, intensities and durations have been occurring as well in various parts of Asia Pacific. Edgar Demetrio Tovar-García and Indra Prasetya Adi Nugroho from Russia discuss communal conflicts in Indonesia (pp. 19-32). What makes their work doubly relevant is the fact that they have focused on the uncharted area of communal conflicts and have analyzed the problematique from macro-economic and quantitative angles. Ultimately, the authors are saying that the growth rate of communal conflicts in Indonesia is determined by inflation rate rather than by broad-based development factors, such as gross domestic product, human

development level, poverty, and religion. The finding clearly calls for an economic solution, albeit for communal conflicts which are rooted in ethnic issues. Social negotiations—for example in the form of accommodation—are critical and imperative.

Tanmoyee Banerjee, Malabika Roy, Ajitava Raychaudhuri, and Chandralekha Ghosh from India present an empirical account of loan diversions among borrowers in some rural communities in India (pp. 33-55). Borrowers are said to be “loan diverters” if they use the proceeds of their loans for purposes other than those they state at the time of claiming the loan. The authors relate loan diversions with the social structural and normative forces of India’s rural communities saying, ultimately, that these are “a very complex socio-economic phenomenon”. Though complex, the government has the responsibility to ensure that loans are properly utilized so that these help improve the lot of rural residents and communities. Across the Asia-Pacific region, loans from both the formal and informal sectors are widely available but the proceeds are spent for daily consumption rather than for income-generating activities. Expectedly, many of these small-scale borrowers, due to lack of financial literacy, are carrying heavy debt loads. There is a need for social interventions for them.

Let me briefly cite the other featured articles in this edition:

- Paulus Rudolf Yuniarto of Indonesia provides an eye-opening account of how the symbiotic relationships between migrants and Taiwan culture help shape Indonesian migrant entrepreneurship (pp. 56-74). The information is strategic, considering that the region has very active flows of cross-border migration.
- Kotona Motoyama of Japan discusses the issue of coming out and perceived homophobia among 24 non-heterosexual Japanese men (pp. 75-92). We get a glimpse of how these men negotiate with themselves and with others “in order to live ‘happily’ in Japan’s strongly conformist culture.” We encourage more men to come to terms with their authentic selves, and for this alone, Kotona’s data are very useful.
- Yong Kang Cheah of Malaysia describes some socio-demographic differentials of physical activity participation among a sample of Malays (pp. 93-107). According to the study, income, age, gender, education, house locality and employment status, are significantly related to the levels of physical activity. We heard about obesity as an emerging public health issue in Asia Pacific, which has led to consistent calls for citizens to engage in more physical activities. The present findings can be used by programs as basis for identifying the sub-populations in need of interventions.
- In response to the political crisis in Thailand, we are featuring two research manuscripts written by Thai academics. Wariya Chinwanno and Thitarree Sirisrisornchai write about the ethics of Thai politicians using data from interviews, focused group discussions, and literature review (pp. 133-148). Their research analyzes “the present status and modus operandi of Thai politicians’ ethical behavior and makes recommendations to inhibit such practices so as to develop a political ethos which, in turn, will enhance the body politic of Thailand.” Another Thai academic, Siwach Sripokangkul, tackles a very controversial and complex issue of reconciliation following the 2004 coup d’etat in Thailand (pp. 108-132). It critiques the style and the substance of the reconciliation being implemented by the military government. The discourse of Thailand’s political situation is informative not only for Thailand but also for other countries in the region with comparable domestic political conflicts.

Our other research features cover a spectrum of relatively lighter, though equally socially relevant, topics—romantic love; national identity and social resilience; transmission of tacit skills in science; and taxation policy in the ASEAN. Our Book Review zeroes-in on Biographical Literature Theories by Zhao (2003).

Enjoy reading the December 2015 edition of the APSSR. We aim to further invigorate our discussions of the region's burning issues of the day by featuring more of your highly socially relevant manuscripts.

Thank you.

Romeo B. Lee
Editor

