



Social Science and Knowledge in a Globalising World

Edited by Zawawi Ibrahim

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In conceptualizing the framework for the introduction to this book of diverse papers linked by the concept of globalization, variously defined, editor Zawawi Ibrahim draws upon Arjun Appadurai's 2005 book *Modernity at Large*, in which he describes the importance of five different flows in understanding the contemporary world: ethnoscaples; technoscaples; financescaples; mediascaples and ideoscaples. Within these different flows, the local and the global stand in a dialectical relationship to each other, through which they constantly interact with and change each other. Insofar as all parts of the world have come under the influence of advanced capitalism –

and here in the Mekong Region it is spreading to those areas previously not fully affected in the process described by Polanyi as the Great Transformation – then all are now part of the global society and economy and are able to contribute to some extent to changing the global scopes. Of course, since the ability of most places to bring about these changes is very limited, as the relationships are usually strongly asymmetric in nature, then the discourse usually concerns the hegemony of globalization. So it is with many of the papers in this book, which focuses on the issues involved with preserving and maintaining traditions and epistemologies under these conditions of globalisation.

Given that a large proportion of the papers concern either Malaysia or the Malay world, then it is not surprising that the relationship between globalisation and post-colonial development is considered in different ways. The approaches vary – the editor is a Professor of Anthropology and that discipline is well-represented, as are the studies of literature and other cultural productions. In a provocative but ultimately unconvincing chapter, Clive S. Kessler attempts to position management studies as a malformed and shrunken version of the great and expansive ideas of Weber. The reality of course is that most if not all social and cultural relations have been dissolved by the spread of capitalism and replaced by the cash nexus. Using a reductionist form of language to describe this process (and to speculate on how to profit from it) may not be ideal but it does not invalidate the understanding. Professor Anthony Reid, meanwhile, in a brief but interesting contribution, speaks of the need to develop some examples of high quality institutions (in the realm of higher education, in this case) within the region as the most appropriate means of withstanding the global hegemon. Goh Beng Lan, writing on the subject of

Southeast Asia perspectives on disciplines in the global age concludes that “Certainly the epistemological and political-theoretical imperatives of rethinking human societies require a great deal more versatility in our analyses than sticking rigidly to our disciplinary and political theoretical boxes (p.98).” Many other contributions approach the underlying dialectical relationship from more or less practical perspectives. Of course, the asymmetries of the relationships involved remain as powerful as ever

This is a very interesting and well-produced compilation of papers and it has been organized coherently and with a helpful underlying scheme. Many prominent scholars of and from Southeast Asia have contributed papers and since such a divergent range of approaches has been employed, readers are very likely to come across something that is new and probably startling.