

Bringing Indonesian Social Sciences to the Global Academic Community

As we all know: there is a lack of Indonesia scholars represented in the international scholarly literature.

Of the five original ASEAN countries, data suggests that Indonesian scholars are least represented. English can't be the only reason: the Thais. The reasons for this are actually multi-faceted, some are historical while others have to do with the institutional arrangement of scholarly activity in Indonesia. I will not dwell on these in details as they have been well rehearsed,

But I welcome the initiative undertaken by the institution organising this event to help ameliorate the situation.

In recent years I have been involved in workshops at UI and UGM re: writing in international journals - these have always been well attended showing a great interest among especially younger Indonesian scholars to go beyond the usual fare of writing reports for funding agencies, or newspaper articles.

One problem is that there are no role models: the previous generation, which mostly emerged in the new order, didn't publish much internationally. There are of course notable exceptions, across different disciplines, but they are relatively rare. The irony is that we have a lot more Indonesians who have PhDs than in the past - and we will have even more - with such schemes as that undertaken by Dikti.

It is well known that a major problem is what happens to people when they return from their studies - they get stuck with 20 hours of teaching a week and loads of administration. I have for a long time thought that one way of attempting to break this cycle would be to develop some sort of scheme whereby the best of the new PhDs who study abroad actually do not immediately return home. They should be encouraged or supported to take up postdoctoral fellowships or visiting fellowship that would force them to turn their PhDs into books and/or a number of international journal articles. When they come home they will bring that extra layer of experience, other than that of studying, and hopefully help to develop a culture of active participation in international scholarly activity and not be content with report writing - penelitian pesanan.

My own experience at the Asia Research Centre of Murdoch University: one of the most productive and internationally prominent research centres on contemporary Asia in the world, actually located in a medium size university in a medium size Australian city - Perth. I had the great fortune of taking up both postdoctoral and visiting

fellowship positions upon completion of my PhD – a period in which I published 2 books – including one based on my PhD – and journal articles and book chapters. I got into the habit of writing and learned the skills necessary to get your stuff out there in the world. I learned the culture of refereeing, for instance – which includes dealing with rejection – something that is still not very well accepted in Indonesia.

But there were role models galore: Dick Robison, Garry Rodan, Kevin Hewison, Kanishka Jayasuriya – all top political economists of Asia -- these people would just constantly write and publish. I thought that was normal for an academic until I went to NUS where they were just starting in 2000 to push their academics to be ‘world class’ in that typically Singaporean sense. Especially if we are writing about Indonesia, we do have an advantage that can be utilised – we don’t have to spend years learning the language, culture, history and how things work. But in reality Indonesians do not compete with their colleagues in the West in ‘telling the story of Indonesia’. Yet people spend their time writing ‘penelitian pesanan’ the data for which is often quite good – and can be sometimes used by foreign scholars but never is developed as anything more by the Indonesian researcher – never given a framework, never used to engage with the theoretical and comparative literature, and therefore never published. These reports just pile up in people’s filing cabinets, hardly ever seen by anybody.

My hope is that the recipients of the Arryman Award will do much to change this situation that has gone on for too long. Please do go forth and venture into the world and not be content with being ‘jago kandang’.

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