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KSInsights stands as a testament to KSI's enduring dedication to fostering an informed society, where knowledge serves as the cornerstone of strategic decision-making and visionary leadership. With each article and research piece, KSInsights aims to empower professionals, academics, policymakers, and the curious mind, providing them with a compass to navigate the intricate landscapes of education, economics, politics, and business, not just in Malaysia but across the ASEAN and Asia Pacific regions.

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Get out of your Ego Chambers: Drawing Community Lessons from ASEAN

Zaim Mohzani | Senior Director of External Affairs

In today's digital age, where online platforms have transformed the way we communicate, there's a trend that's becoming more apparent. Amid the endless stream of opinions online, people often find themselves drawn to voices that echo their own thoughts, rather than exploring a range of different views. This tendency isn't just about the algorithms used by big tech companies; it reflects a deeper, personal choice. It's crucial to talk about this – the way we often end up in 'echo chambers,' where our own views are echoed back to us, unchallenged and unchanged.

The idea of echo chambers is a common critique when talking about how we interact online. But calling them 'ego chambers' highlights an important point: it's on us to decide to step outside and engage with people who think differently. It's easy to blame technology for creating isolated bubbles. However, this situation is something we've created ourselves, and it takes a deliberate effort to break free. The comfort of the familiar is tempting, but it leads us away from the rich diversity of thoughts and into a space where our views go unchallenged.

Now, more than ever, it's important to take part in community and civic life. Democracy relies on its citizens to be active participants, not just during elections but as engaged community members. The true power of democracy is in the hands of its people, trusted temporarily to leaders to make decisions for us. But this doesn't mean we should step back from talking, debating, and ensuring our democratic system works as it should. Democracy thrives on the collective action and discussion of its people.

To find ways to connect more deeply with others and leave our ego chambers, we can draw inspiration from the traditions of the ASEAN region. For example, the concept of gotong-royong in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei is about mutual help and working together. It means sharing the weight of challenges with those we trust. In the Philippines, bayanihan is about the community coming together to help move a house, showing unity. Singapore's 'kampung spirit' and Laos' 'Soukhouane' highlight the importance of neighborliness and collective well-being. These traditions remind us that our strength comes from our ability to collaborate, support each other, and work together for the common good.

The message is clear: we need to step out of our comfort zones and talk to people with different perspectives. A vibrant democracy is built on diverse conversations, debates, and discussions. By engaging with the unfamiliar, we grow, learn, and strengthen our society. Let's value different opinions, celebrate our cultural diversity, and act together. This way, our democracy becomes a living reflection of its diverse people.

In short, while staying in spaces where our views are always agreed with might feel safe, it ultimately weakens the foundation of our society. The rich traditions of communal support in the ASEAN region offer us a way forward. By embracing these principles and stepping out of our ego chambers, we can create a more inclusive, active, and strong community. The future of our society relies on all of us being engaged. It's time to leave the echo chambers behind and start connecting with one another.

More Market, Less Human

Luqman Al-Hakim | Research & Communications Executive

In the wake of Prof Angus Deaton's piece on the current state and future direction of economics, I find myself compelled to join the conversation, not as an expert in the field but as an observer of its impact on society. Deaton's critique, which outlines the shortcomings of economics in addressing the real issues faced by humanity, resonates deeply with a pattern I observed, the divergence of academic knowledge from its potential to benefit mankind.

My lack of expertise in economics does not preclude me from recognizing a disturbing trend within academia at large, a trend that Deaton eloquently dissects in his analysis. It is the alienation of academic pursuit from the humane, the point at which the acquisition and application of knowledge veer off from the noble goal of alleviating human suffering. This deviation is not subtle; it manifests in the very language we use to discuss and implement ideas purportedly aimed at fostering social justice, reducing poverty, and improving the quality of life for all.

Deaton's insights illuminate a fundamental flaw in the academic and economic systems: the prioritization of efficiency and profit over human well-being and social equity. His observations echo a broader issue within academia, where the impact of research and policy on real lives is often overshadowed by considerations of profitability and brand enhancement. The question, "Are we profitable enough to do this?" or "How much goodwill can we gain if we do this?" frequently takes precedence over, "How many lives can we improve?" or "Can we truly make a difference in alleviating suffering?"

This profit-driven mindset has led to a palpable disconnect between academic knowledge and its application for the greater good. While we speak of social justice, feed the poor in theory, and laud the virtues of aligning academic pursuits with the goal of ending human suffering, the reality often falls short. The noble intentions heralded in academic discourse often lose their way in the maze of marketability and financial viability. As Deaton suggests, the overemphasis on efficiency and the market's invisible hand has not only marginalized social justice but also reduced it to an afterthought in the grand scheme of economic policymaking.

The inherent alienation of academia from the humane is a critical issue that requires immediate attention. If knowledge and research are to serve humanity truly, they must transcend the narrow confines of profitability and return to their foundational purpose: to enrich, empower, and elevate the human condition. As Deaton's article urges, there must be a reorientation of economic thought and academic pursuit towards more inclusive, equitable, and compassionate goals.

In embracing this challenge, academics, economists, and policymakers alike must question not only the utility of their work in abstract economic terms but also its tangible impact on human lives. The true measure of academic and economic success should not be the wealth it

generates for the few but the well-being it ensures for the many. Until we realign our academic and economic priorities with the humane, the gap between knowledge and its potential to alleviate human suffering will only widen.

Commodity Fetishism in Academia

We delve deeper into the root causes of this detachment, identifying the pervasive influence of commodity fetishism within academic circles. This concept describes the tendency to value goods not for their utility or the labor that produced them, but for their market value and ability to generate profit. Unfortunately, this ideological framework has seeped into the academic realm, leading to a scenario where research and knowledge production are increasingly driven by market demands rather than societal needs.

This subtle yet profound shift towards commodification within academia manifests most clearly in the valuation of academic institutions and research. The notion that a study, a discipline, or even a university's worth is measured by its marketability, orientation towards market needs, and potential commercial value signifies a grave departure from the foundational ethos of academia. Knowledge for the sake of understanding, enlightenment, and the betterment of society is overshadowed by the imperative to generate income, attract investment, and align with corporate interests.

The implications of this trend are far-reaching and deeply troubling. By prioritizing market values over human values, academia contributes to the erosion of the very fabric it seeks to study and improve: human society. The focus on profitability and commercial viability means that research that could significantly impact social issues, environmental challenges, and human welfare is often sidelined if it lacks immediate commercial application. This not only limits the scope of academic inquiry but also stifles innovation in areas that could benefit the most from intellectual exploration and discovery.

Moreover, the transformation of academic institutions into entities that primarily serve corporate interests reinforces societal inequities. It legitimizes a system where the dissemination of knowledge and the direction of research are controlled by economic elites, further entrenching their power and influence. As Deaton underscores, such a system invariably leads to policies and practices that favor the wealthy, enabling a form of legalized plunder where corporations and private interests exploit academic outputs to their advantage, often at the expense of the public good.

The metamorphosis of academia into a "factory" that justifies and facilitates corporate theft and plunder marks a critical juncture. It calls for a concerted effort to reclaim the essence of academic pursuit: the quest for knowledge that elevates human understanding, promotes social justice, and contributes to the collective well-being. To reverse this trend, it is imperative that academia reasserts its independence from market forces and reaffirms its commitment to serving humanity first and foremost.

The Contradiction, Highlighted

We encounter a critical contradiction that exacerbates the detachment of academia from its humane roots. This contradiction lies in the nature and accessibility of the academic output itself—where the drive for commercial viability and market orientation leads to a proliferation of research that, paradoxically, becomes impractically dense and inaccessible to those it could most benefit: the goodwilled, non-specialist public.

This contradiction manifests in several troubling ways. Firstly, the push towards generating commercially viable articles and market-oriented research often results in work that is hyper-specialized, laden with jargon, and ensconced in the minutiae of specific theoretical frameworks or methodologies. The language and concepts used become so esoteric that they alienate even the educated layperson, let alone the general public. The irony is stark: the quest for relevance in the market renders much of academic research irrelevant to the broader societal discourse.

Furthermore, the pressure to produce quantifiable outcomes that appeal to commercial interests encourages a focus on quantity over quality. Academics are incentivized to publish frequently, sometimes at the expense of thoroughness and depth. This "publish or perish" culture not only dilutes the overall quality of research but also contributes to an overwhelming volume of publications that no one has the time or capacity to fully digest. The result is a vast sea of academic literature that, despite its potential value, remains largely unread and unused by those outside narrow specialist circles.

This situation creates a significant barrier to the dissemination and application of academic knowledge for the public good. Research that could inform policy decisions, drive social innovation, or educate the broader populace is instead locked away in academic journals, accessible only to those within the academy or those willing to pay exorbitant fees for access. The contradiction here is profound: academia, in its pursuit of market validation, ends up isolating itself from the society it purports to serve.

The detrimental impact of this contradiction on the social utility of academic research cannot be overstated. When the fruits of academic labor become inaccessible and indecipherable to the public, academia fails in one of its fundamental roles: to advance public understanding and contribute to societal progress. This failure not only undermines the credibility and relevance of academic institutions but also widens the gap between academic knowledge and societal needs.

Resolve

In addressing the contradiction within academia, where commercial viability often trumps societal benefit, we are reminded of the fundamental purpose of knowledge: to make the unknown known, to illuminate the void with the light of exploration and inquiry. This guiding principle, which should be at the heart of academic endeavor, calls for a return to the essence of scholarly pursuit—engaging in the process of discovery without the constraints imposed by market demands.

The commodification of academia, as it stands, skews efforts and research towards the realm of the known, the market-proven, and the commercially viable. This focus not only limits the scope of academic inquiry but also stifles innovation and creativity. By prioritizing research that aligns with commercial interests, academia narrows its vision, overlooking the vast landscapes of uncharted intellectual territory that could yield transformative insights and breakthroughs. This approach fundamentally contradicts the exploratory spirit of academia, where the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake and the exploration of the unknown should prevail.

To extricate academia from this conundrum, a deliberate de-emphasis on producing research and recommendations that align with the process of commercialization is necessary. This shift requires a reevaluation of the metrics by which academic success is measured and a recommitment to the values of intellectual curiosity and societal contribution. Instead of valuing research primarily for its potential market impact, academia should celebrate and reward inquiries that advance understanding, challenge prevailing assumptions, and address societal needs, even if they do not promise immediate financial returns.

This reorientation towards the intrinsic value of knowledge requires systemic changes within academic institutions and funding bodies. It calls for the creation of supportive environments that encourage interdisciplinary research, long-term studies, and projects that may not have immediate commercial applications but hold the potential for significant societal impact. Funding models need to be adjusted to support this broader vision of academic research, providing resources for exploratory studies that venture into the unknown and seek to expand the horizons of human understanding.

Moreover, academics themselves play a crucial role in this transformation. By engaging more actively in public discourse, translating complex research findings into accessible language, and participating in community-based projects, scholars can bridge the gap between academia and society. Such engagement not only demystifies the academic process but also underscores the relevance of scholarly work to everyday life and societal advancement.

Ultimately, freeing academia from the shackles of commodification and reorienting it towards the exploration of the unknown represents a collective challenge that requires the commitment of all stakeholders. By reaffirming the main purpose of knowledge—to make the unknown known—academia can reclaim its role as a beacon of enlightenment, guiding society through the darkness of ignorance and into the light of understanding and progress.

China's Opaque Lens with Prof Dr Wong

Prof. Dr. Wong Chin Yoong is currently a professor of economics at Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR).

1. Could you please introduce yourself and briefly share your academic interests and what sparked your passion for economics, particularly in the areas related to international macroeconomics, monetary policy, and economic development?

The very first economics book I read was The Principle of Microeconomics written in English when I was carrying out my duty as a librarian. As I was a science stream student then, I have no idea at all what it was about. However, I was fascinated by the diagrams, figures, and equations that discuss topics I can relate to, like individual behavior. That's really an "a-ha" moment for me, someone who like abstract-while-being-practically-oriented thinking. I was 17 years old at that time.

Then came the Asian financial crisis. News about ringgit depreciation, a crashing stock market, and banks in trouble occupied headlines every day. That probably sowed the seeds in my mind that economics would be my forever love. After attending a public talk in Melaka my hometown given by Prof. Dr. Jomo K.S, who was then affiliated with Universiti Malaya, and Lim Kit Siang of DAP, I knew UM is where I would want to go after completing my STPM, and Jomo would be the thesis supervisor I'll seek for.

I was, and still am, grateful that things happened as planned. I wrote my undergraduate thesis in the year 2000 on the topic of the Malaysian financial crisis through the lens of Hyman Minsky (the Minsky moment was not even popularised yet, not until the global financial crisis) under Jomo's supervision. I continued to work on the issue of exchange rate regime and capital flow for my master's study, and global macroeconomic interdependence underpinned by global value chains and China's economy for my doctoral study.

Thanks to the rise of the internet in the late nineties, I was able to read the blog writings, as well as their research articles, of many top-notched economists from the West, Paul Krugman, Stanley Fischer, Oliver Blanchard, Nouriel Roubini, Larry Summers, you name it, without a delay. That was really critical in my professional career, not only as a source of self-learning the up-to-date technical knowledge but also as a constant reminder of what good economics is supposed to be like: to make an informed policy for the betterment of society.

My academic interest is extended later to prudential capital control, Mudarabah finance, China's and Malaysian economies, financial technology and monetary policy, and the labour market effect of automation. Recently, I've been working on using the economic approach to understand "power": great power competitions and the de-carbonization of the power sector.

2. With China setting a growth target of 5% for this year, what mechanisms might be most effective for achieving this, particularly through fostering investment and bond issuance? What challenges could arise in this context?

What's perplexing about the growth target announcement made during the Two Sessions by China Premier Li Qiang is not so much about the 5%, although many would have doubted if 5% is too optimistic, but, the lack of policy initiatives that support the economy towards the goal. The underlying factor to the economic slowdown in China right now is apparently the insufficient aggregate demand: households are reluctant to spend as their wealth is largely tight to the plummeting housing prices and unfinished houses; businesses are reluctant to invest when the external environment is unfavorable to Chinese exports when there is abundant of property overhang while resolutions remain obscured, and when there is a lack of aggregate final demand to deliver profits; and local government is trapped in a giant pile of debt to push fore more public spending on infrastructure.

Dampened market confidence and mounting debt burden are key problems to be resolved in short.

And yet, we do not see any particular policies working towards that direction. While the 1 trillion yuan worth of ultra-long bonds issued by central authorities resembles the conventional fiscal pump priming during the economic downturn, I'm afraid that for an economy of 126 trillion yuan, 1 trillion yuan is simply too little even, let alone the fact that fiscal multiplier in China is generally less than one. And because it is a bond-finance spending for special functions, i.e., projects that foster economic resilience and security, where the interested parties may have to go through a prolonged bidding process, the time lag can be substantial.

3. How could China's targeted growth and investment strategies potentially impact global trade dynamics and production structures, especially considering the current economic climate?

Another strategy mentioned in the recently concluded Two Session was the "New Quality Productivity". No one knows the substance yet. But this is likely to be another supply-side reform that emphasizes manufacturing capabilities and green transition with national and economic security as the priorities. This means a couple of things for the global economy. While America and Europe de-risk by reshoring and friend-shoring the supply chains, China is also decoupling dependence on the Western economies by internalizing the supply chains. This implies the hyperglobalisation of trade and production we used to live in is really in the rearview mirror.

Secondly, the supply-side reform could have a mixed impact on the global inflation. On the one hand, the expansion of the manufacturing sector already in overcapacity would insert downward pressure on the final goods prices in the world market, but on the other hand, greater demand for primary commodities could send the commodity prices higher, complicating the world's current effort in bringing down inflation.

4. Considering global inflationary trends, how might China's strategies for economic growth influence both domestic and global inflation rates? What balance should be struck to mitigate potential adverse effects?

Like I mentioned earlier, China's growth strategies could bring about two opposing effects on the global inflation: the deflationary pressure on final goods due to expanding supply versus the inflationary pressure on the commodity prices. But because China is inclined to supply-side reform ever since the "reform and opening" in 1979 instead of demand-enhancing strategy, and this time has no different, an expanding production capacity coupled with weakening demand is more likely to insert downward pressure on both China's and global inflation. While this seems to be giving the world a hand in curbing inflation, it could push the Chinese economy further down the road of deflation.

5. What approaches might China's central bank take to support the country's growth ambitions while also keeping inflation in check, especially in today's volatile global economy?

People's Bank of China lowered its one-year loan prime rate twice last year, followed by a cut in the reserve requirement ratio and five-year loan prime rate this February. It remains to be seen how the economy will react. But it is not unreasonable to cast doubt on the effectiveness of the monetary policy so far for an obvious reason: the deficient aggregate demand facing China now is not the outcome of liquidity shortage, but the result of dampened market confidence, seemingly reluctant fiscal intervention, and the likely debt-deflation effect. Liquidity constraint is not binding, and people are simply not willing to spend like before. Money is not rolling.

So, cutting interest rates and injecting liquidity per se won't be helpful in this circumstance. This is the classic liquidity trap. And we've learned a great deal from Japan. Pulling the economy out of the trap requires bold fiscal and unconventional monetary initiatives. How far PBoC is willing to go when it comes to interest rate cuts, as they would also worry about capital outflows and yuan depreciation, remains to be seen. But the fact that "it remains to be seen" by itself shows the lack of commitment, the currency the market needs the most right now. It is hard to imagine, however, that PBoC can "credibly promise to be irresponsible", in Paul Krugman's famous term, to prevent the Chinese economy from falling into a liquidity trap.

6. In the context of China's economic goals, how critical could exchange rate adjustments and expenditure-switching effects be in supporting domestic growth and external trade balance?

China's internal and external balances apparently require different yuan positions. Efforts to upgrade local supply chains and to re-inflate the economy require real yuan depreciation that redirects expenditure towards domestic goods and services. However, trade surplus and initiatives to internationalize the renminbi need a stronger yuan to switch expenditure towards foreign goods and incentivize foreign demand for renminbi.

They used to be more aligned in 2000s when China was catalyzing the industrial upgrading via global economic integration and internationalizing renminbi as reserve currency into the global economy while the economy was still growing rapidly. Real yuan appreciation served both internal and external balances coherently.

But in recent years, from “Made in China 2025” to “dual circulations”, national and economic security become the priority in the development strategy. On top of a weakening economy, a weaker renminbi serves internal balance better, although it will be incompatible with China’s goal to make renminbi’s mark as a global dominant currency.

China’s attitude towards a weaker or stronger yuan therefore depends very much on its developmental preference.

7. Given China's growth ambitions, what implications might there be for international monetary cooperation, particularly in terms of stabilizing trade and currency values?

Being the largest (or the second largest depending on how you measure it) economy and trading nation in the world that accounts for about 18% of the world GDP and exports, it is unsurprising to observe China seeking greater influence in the global monetary system. China, for instance, established an offshore renminbi bond market in Hong Kong in 2007, pushing for cross-border trade settlement in the renminbi since then and joining the SDR basket in 2016. And Belt-and-Road Initiative (BRI) launched in 2013 is probably the most discussed China’s effort in reshaping the international monetary system.

The outcome is mixed so far, however. On the one hand, China has become the largest official creditor in the world, accounting for a quarter of total bank lending to emerging markets. And Chinese FDI is now everywhere all over the world. Both commercial investments and development-related lending have spurred growth in developing countries. PBoC has also built a global network of central bank swap lines with foreign central banks, laying out the foundation for the renminbi to serve as the reserve currency.

On the other hand, despite decades of internationalization, renminbi accounts for no more than 3% of global reserve currencies, still less than the Japanese yen’s 5% and the UK pound’s 6%, let alone the 80% share contributed by the U.S dollar and the Euro combined. The BRI also has encountered numerous roadblocks: overseas investments via BRI have been dramatically declining since 2016, thanks to the rising concern about debt-trap diplomacy as well as the questionable ROI on the infrastructure projects, even when the projects were deemed as strategically vital a priori.

Whether China can graduate from the periphery of the system to occupy the dominant position hinges on the Chinese authority’s willingness to be fully committed to capital account convertibility and reputation in providing safe assets to the world. That of course requires a development paradigm substantially different from the current practices.

8. How might Southeast Asia and Malaysia, in particular, be positioned economically in light of China's growth projections? What influences might increased Chinese investment have on these regions?

Southeast Asia is probably the only region in the world right now that can live peacefully with China and the United States, and bridge both worlds, given the long history of ASEAN in engaging with and hedging against the great powers.

Those businesses from the West that reconsider their supply chains in accordance with the China-plus-one strategy would find Southeast Asia indispensable – closer still to Chinese market while being accessible to all other major markets in the world. At the same time, Chinese businesses seeking opportunities abroad either due to the U.S prohibition on high-tech chips and equipment or the slowing-down domestic economy would also find Southeast Asia the best place to go – largely friendly to them, being a growing and dynamic economic region with stable political environment, offering them a good base to reach out to the greater market.

From the Cold War period, when the U.S chip manufacturers started to outsource the assembly in the 1960s to Asia and since the early 1970s to Malaysia for cost advantage, to the end of the Cold War, where trade and financial globalization took off since the early 1990s following the fragmentation of supply chains worldwide; from the Plaza Accord in mid-1980s, where Malaysia was beneficiaries of Japanese manufacturing relocations, and the end of the generalized system of preferences for Taiwan and South Korea in early 1990s that incentivized their manufacturing relocations to Malaysia, to China's WTO accession in 2001 that diminished Malaysia's competitive advantage and triggered Malaysia's premature de-industrialization since then; from the Chimera in 2000s to the currently on-going China-US decoupling, the evolution of geopolitics and geoeconomics throughout these years has presented risks and opportunities to the Malaysian economy. Pedaling the evolution to revitalize our industrial upgrading is probably one of the most important catalysts for achieving the goal of NIMP 2030.

9. In pursuing economic growth, what precautions should be considered to mitigate risks such as asset price bubbles and expansions of the underground economy, both within China and in its trading partners?

I don't see asset price bubbles as a concern at this moment or soon for both China and regional economies. But a weakening economy is always an important reason why people go informal, especially those who have lost their formal jobs and found it difficult to get another one. Likewise, firms with financial and market difficulties would tend to cut back the size of formal employment for hourly or daily workers. Underemployment thus contributes to the expansion of the informal economy.

And I don't fully subscribe to the negative view about the informal economy. While it is reasonable to argue that the informal economy causes a loss in tax revenue and restrains labor productivity, its presence also mirrors the failure of the formal economy and provides the unfortunate a cushion to mitigate the adverse impact of job loss on their livelihoods.

So, the key to solving the issue of the informal economy lies in the formal economy: minimal barriers to entering and exiting the formal market, comprehensive welfare protection, a regulated yet agile labor market, and so on.

10. Given the economic strategies being pursued by China, what policy recommendations might you have for neighboring economies, including Malaysia, to ensure sustainable growth and stability?

For Malaysia, be prepared and proactive in attracting and hosting the FDIs from China and other

major advanced economies; be more strategic in nurturing domestic lead firms that can integrate into a hybrid of global, Chinese-oriented, and West-oriented supply chains; and be more ambitious in pushing local firms to treat Southeast Asia as a domestic base to invest abroad for their local markets, including China. After all, China is still a growing economy with exceptional market potential.

But the challenges facing the growth and stability of the neighboring economies are beyond what China has brought to us: AI-enabled automation revolution, green transition, the restructuring of global supply chains, rising debt, income inequality, and many others. Each requires different but most of the time coordinated policy responses.

For instance, supply chain restructuring as I mentioned above usually takes place in high-tech manufacturing sector that demands green energy. This means other strategies related to developing domestic AI capabilities and accelerating renewable energy transition are equally important to woo the FDIs. Meanwhile, since the good-paying jobs that can be created in automation-enabled industries must be relatively scarce to benefit the majority, as many others are participating in the services sector, rising wage inequality could become the unintended consequence of the development mentioned above. Then, policies related to developing non-strategic sectors, fostering the availability of transitional adjustment assistances for those affected, and so on shall also be put on the table for consideration simultaneously.

In short, the authority should keep an "general equilibrium" perspective when it comes to the design and implementation of policies in the face of a changing world.

11. What are some emerging areas of economic research that might be particularly relevant for understanding and navigating the effects of China's growth strategy on the global economic landscape?

Given the huge influence of China's economy and geoeconomics on Malaysia, Southeast Asia and the world, the institutions that carry out the relevant academic research we have so far in Malaysia are just too few. Even with the existing institutions, the scope of research is too limited. We simply don't have sufficient experts on China on issues ranging from Chinese domestic economy, geoeconomic relationship with the global south and major industrial economies, industrial policies on EV and green technology, trade policy and preference, which can have impact on our economy. We need to step up our effort.

The Intersectional Breakdown

Elisha Patmon | Youth Lead KSI

Intersectionality is not a new phenomenon, although it can be coined as a new perspective in this part of the world. The theory and definition have existed for a number of years, we just have not put a name to when systems influence and are present in our own individual ideologies and lives, intersecting to create adverse effects and dynamics. In plain, intersectionality is defined as "the ways in which systems of inequality based on gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, class and other forms of discrimination "intersect" to create unique dynamics and effects." This means that a person may experience several forms of discrimination that connect with each other.

The ramifications of undoing years of history that have involved sexism against women is difficult. With the added nuance of skin color, ethnicity, religion, educational background, class and status - they are now all factors to understanding intersectionality and realizing that it is not as straightforward as what once was thought.

As the caste system in India demonstrates, change is not easy. Even though the caste system has been outlawed for 68 years, it was in existence for 3,000. That has a profound effect as then certain women from different groups still face discrimination based on the caste they have had before. It is not that men from those "unwanted" bottom hierarchies do not face discrimination, they do, but the discrimination faced by the women are more severe because they are also discriminated against by gender.

Those ideals are still very well versed in the society where being born in the lowest hierarchy has physical and often violent ramifications. Much of the women still within those hierarchies are discriminated against from a young age - not being allowed in homes of people with an upper crust, being singled out in classrooms and having unfair treatment in court. A deep rooted part of the culture cannot just be outlawed and things will have a semblance of peace and comprehension. There will be destruction and brutality as people are ripped away from something they have always known; those scars run deep into the roots that many still practice today, even if they do not mention it. That is the struggle that is being faced today; the ghosts of the past still having a say because things were done once was, and not how things are. With the world modernizing and more people speaking up, there is a disconnect present, and we can see how the caste system demonstrates that certain thinking still perseveres because it has been normalized for so long, without context, without nuance and without and understanding needed, that involves intersectionality of all types, having a say.

Malaysian women face the same problem; they are women. That means that certain things are not afforded to them because of their gender, and with the added layer of race, ethnicity, class and other social and cultural variables - that have an effect on the diverse nature of women's human rights - the conversation does become more complicated, but is beneficial to understanding how to further approach nuanced situations. Some may find it hard to agree, but

those same dynamics - maybe not in extremity but definitely in principle, exist here. A woman that is of darker skin and within one religion is not in reverence as the same woman with lighter skin and part of another. A woman that experiences a different socio-economic battle fought in Ipoh, does not compare to one who does not have to think when they swipe their card in Bangsar.

A good example of intersectionality being displayed in Malaysia is through the organization Sisters in Islam (SIS). SIS is a women's non governmental organization that intersects the use of islam with the trials faced by muslim women. According to SIS, this group came together in the beginning to address the injustices that women face under the shariah (islamic law) system. This is already a use of intersectionality; examining religion overlapping with gender, rather than a separate category - this enables the use of an acute outlook to make decisions and contrasting perspectives that would go towards more rounded strategies. This organization uses a variable, religion in this case, to explain complexities that are a reality for muslim women and how those two things are critical to identity and cannot be separated.

Another example would be socio-economic class. Poverty that girls face because of their class means going to school becomes a point of contention. With stereotyping and gender, they are less likely then to go to schools that are already hard to access, and stay at home to help or become homemakers. Girls do have full enrolment in preschool and primary school, but fail to have full attendance in secondary or further education levels, where attendance is not compulsory. Societal factors then become clear here that intersect with gender; the socio-economic status of the girls. It is not just because they are women and sexist myths exist, but that they are also not taken into account in comparison to their male counterparts. Understanding this point of intersectionality is important because it gives an insight that gender is not the only underlying problem, it is also concluded that their class plays into the structure.

There are also strides that employ training about women's rights and gender equality at organizations such as Women's Aids Organisation that outlines topics on Women's realities, the law and legal system, the tools for change and addressing violence against women as a human rights violation and SIS that consistently talks about intertwining religion and feminism. Organizations like these are pertinent to understanding the challenges faced, when much emphasis is put towards social categories that end up also defining us. Whether that be an NGO that focuses on intersecting religion and gender, social class and gender, ethnicity and gender - it is vital to understand these systems that are weaved with our society and how those factors influence decisions that have effects on our lives.

Targeted action where organizations employ and utilize NGO programmes to train and uphold standards of equality, is a step in a positive direction. Having these programmes in place then to uphold certain licensing for these companies to make sure they are hitting diversity quotas is a must. Encouraging women to apply, not just from richer backgrounds but poorer ones and giving them equal opportunity to succeed is one of the ways forward.

A key fact to understanding issues like this, is knowing that even though something is a normalized part of society, it does not mean it is right or contributes to a better situation. Whilst that can justify moments of past misunderstandings because of simple interaction that we do

not have with other groups, it does not prevent us from taking the time to look up, speak, connect and listen with others that go through different experiences.There is encouragement is education, community in participation and merit in questioning the systems around you. To wonder what is fair and really equal, and to wonder what is normalized to have harmful consequences in the end, are two things that are often parallel to each other, but are worth intersecting.

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