

The Humanities and Development

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I would like to begin by expressing my appreciation to the Indonesian Council of Sciences for including me in the programme of this Congress. It is a privilege and a pleasure for me to have this opportunity to discuss with so many colleagues here the subjects that occupy our minds so much in private reflections. My subject today-- the relationship between the humanities and development-- is a delicate and subtle one. I can do no more than introduce it with some personal views, but I hope that that will stimulate further discussions.

The academic underpinnings of development are usually considered to be the "hard" sciences with technological applications as well as the social sciences that have direct policy implications such as economics, political science and sociology. In contrast, history, philosophy, ethics, literature and languages are often placed in the category of luxuries: good to have but not really central to the basic needs of a society. In my own mind, no conception could be farther from reality.

In this paper, I will argue that the study of the humanities is central to the development process, that many of the distortions that we see now in development arise from the neglect of the humanities, and that the study of the humanities is becoming more, not less important in this technological age. In this, my remarks reflect my observations of the development experiences of the various Third World countries that it has been my privilege to visit. I believe that they generally apply also to the circumstances and needs of contemporary Indonesia.

History, philosophy, ethics, literature and language are the core disciplines of the humanities. Other fields of study such as comparative religion, law, archaeology and art history and criticism are also usually considered to be within this realm. Collectively these fields provide a framework and a vocabulary for the study of human values, needs, aspirations, capacities and flaws as expressed in human culture. The study of the humanities helps us to make sense of our experience and provides us with ways of understanding the activities and purposes of our own communities and others. As one Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities in the United States said, the humanities help us in "developing a moral and imaginative framework for action".

Obviously, to learn about the qualities of human beings requires going beyond the experimental and analytical methods of the natural and social sciences. Human needs, ambitions, frustrations and so forth cannot be empirically observed; they cannot be reduced to equations. They can only

be grasped by an effort of imaginative projection-- and this is the capacity which is fostered by the study of the humanities.

The process of reading fiction or history automatically takes us outside of our own immediate time and place. The fiction and poetry that we dignify with the name "literature" are those works that are successful in making us empathize with the characters they create, that make us understand their travails, their triumphs and their tragic flaws. We recognize ourselves in others. Through the novel, the biography, or the play we experience vicariously the joys and sufferings of others. In the process, our universe is expanded beyond its mundane boundaries.

What does this have to do with development? The projection of our own imagination into the experience of others breeds an awareness of the commonality of human experience and aspirations. This is the beginning of empathy and tolerance. Empathy is the power of fully identifying with and thereby comprehending another being. It is the quality that binds parent to child, brother to brother, neighbor to neighbor, and citizen to citizen. It is the raw material of nation-building. Tolerance is the recognition of the validity of difference, and as such it is the foundation of peaceful relations within and among nations.

I do not think that anyone would deny that the humanities are and have been under pressure in our educational systems, marginalized by the supposed imperative to forge ahead with science and technology first, and with the more instrumental social sciences as a poor second. The usual defense of the humanities is two-pronged. It argues that the humanities are useful and that, in any case, learning should not be judged only according to its instrumental value. With the second of these arguments I can only agree, and yet it seems to cast the humanities in the role of a luxury-- an enrichment to the spiritual and aesthetic and communal aspects of life which many might see as the reward of a successful development experience rather than an essential component of it. I believe the greater emphasis should be placed on the first argument: that the humanities perform functions in the education of the citizenry that go far beyond the personal enrichment of the individual mind.

I have already mentioned a key role played by the humanities: the development of the capacity for empathy and tolerance. A further and related function is to foster the habit and the intellectual tools for independent analysis, judgment, and criticism. This is particularly important when it comes to questions of public or private morality. The humanities have a civic function which has long been acknowledged. It is to educate citizens for intelligent and responsible participation in civic life. Education for participation is usually understood as a process of equipping citizens to participate, but it is equally important that it equips them to accept the participation of others.

The humanities are the realm, along with the arts, of the most human aspects of human life: love, honour and envy; courage, guilt, and revenge;

liberty, justice and rectitude. These are central to human motivation and achievement-- and therefore central to development-- but they are beyond the reach of the sciences, natural and social. Yet how can we understand the processes of social change that are sweeping our societies if we cannot approach these fundamental forces that move people to behave as they do? The humanities are a window into the human heart.

At long last, development experts have begun to talk about the "cultural factors" in development. This will undoubtedly be the topic of a major new round of international conferences, and it will provide an overdue recognition of the importance of the humanities in development. In the humanities, along with the arts, we find embodied our cultural memory: the record not only of what we as a people did, but of what we became, and how and why. In determining the development potential of a society, what we are is as important as what we can do. What we are and what we want to be determines what we actually do with the capabilities that science and technology put into our hands.

To know their own history is fundamental to a people's sense of identity, as is a familiarity with their own literature and philosophy, and an articulation of their own aspirations. The study of the humanities within a specific cultural context is meant to endow people with a sense of historical perspective, of cultural identity, of the world views and values distinct to themselves. This is especially important for Indonesia, because of its great internal diversity. Indonesian culture is a mixture of the modern national culture and the various regional cultures of our archipelago. The national culture is still evolving. The regional cultures are changing under powerful internal and external influences. The relationship between the two is constantly shifting as both respond to opportunities and pressures.

Indonesia is a rich amalgamation of many cultures. Not only is the relationship among them a dynamic one, but they all operate in a rapidly changing international context. The instabilities of the international economic system, great-power politics, the impact of modern communications and rapid developments in science and technology assure that the challenges facing our cultures will proliferate rather than diminish. Indonesia's greatest resource in facing these challenges is precisely the diversity of its cultural resources. We must learn to see our diversity as a resource, the cultural equivalent of nature's vast biological gene bank, rather than as an obstacle to national development.

One of the conditions for using our enormous wealth of cultural resources to our collective advantage is that all Indonesians must come to regard the whole panoply of cultures within our nation as the collective heritage of all. I need hardly add that it is through the humanities, taking as their subject this diverse heritage, that we may come to do so. The cultural treasures imbedded in our various regional cultures must be made available to the whole nation. This implies the translation of regional classics into Indonesian as well as other regional languages. It also requires the systematic study and preservation of regional languages and literatures as well

as arts, and serious research into regional histories. For Indonesia, cultural cohesion will come through the nationalization of regional cultures rather than through homogenization of all into a bland and generalized unity.

In young developing nations there is a constant temptation to attempt to impose from above a common culture on the nation. Sometimes this impulse is rooted in a particular perception of the need for national unity; sometimes simply in a lack of sensitivity to the inherently pluralistic nature of the society. The humanities are then expected to reinforce the values and goals considered appropriate for the whole nation. Rather than promoting the participatory civic virtues of judgment, criticism, tolerance and empathy, the humanities are encouraged to celebrate and perpetuate the acceptable version of national culture. If they reduce themselves to this role, the humanities abdicate their positive role in developing a real and vibrant, pluralistic culture.

The stress on pluralism does not negate the importance of a vigorous, over-arching national culture which draws its strength from its inclusiveness. Our national culture should never be seen as a threat to or an opponent of our regional cultures. Rather, it is our collective response to the changing world around us, and our interface with modernity. Most importantly, it is the manifestation of our shared values and our willingness to live together and take our place in the community of nations.

The humanities play their role in national development by addressing the larger questions that surround the processes of social change. Who are we? What are the values that we hold most dear? From where do our values and aspirations come? What are the sources of our creativity and resilience? Ultimately, is the development path that we are treading consistent with our collective vision of a desirable society? These are the questions that the humanities should help us to answer. They should help us to relate our past to our future, to evaluate our present, and to reinterpret our experience continually in the light of the new influences and challenges of modern life.

The study of our culture through the humanities should also make us more aware of our weaknesses. What, for example, are the roots of the patron-client relationship that is so pervasive throughout Indonesian institutions and society? What were the weaknesses in our culture that made colonization so easy? The close examination of the past should not be pursued as an exercise in nostalgia or recrimination, but as a platform for anticipatory learning.

The sources of social change in our time are so many and complex, and the pace of change is so rapid, that no government, no group, no individual is fully in control. Many of the forces for change are global forces, external to any one culture or national boundary, but their impact is nonetheless inescapable. Rapid social change often gives rise to confusion, to alienation and, in some instances, to reaction. The crucial question for Indonesia, as for other emerging nations, is: how can we learn to live with rapid and accelerating change without losing our sense of self? The answer will never

be a single, fixed answer, but rather lies in a process of continuous reflection and dialogue on the meaning and direction of our experience.

The scholarly pursuit of history, philosophy, literature, ethics and the other branches of the humanities is a crucial part of this process of maintaining the integrity of our culture. However, cultural integrity must co-exist with openness to external stimulus. Otherwise stagnation and retardation set in. The defense of this balance requires determination and self-confidence, but also inventiveness and creative imagination, pervading the whole society-- not just confined to the intelligentsia.

In the post-war period, all new nations have embarked upon a course of development, with varying degrees of success. But even where economic success has been achieved, the human dimension of development has been neglected, with sometimes very destructive effects on the people's quality of life, sense of identity and clarity of purpose. The resulting resentment, confusion and uncertainty have often promoted a tendency in people to fall back, uncritically, on narrow loyalties to family, region or ethnic group, forsaking the broader ideal of the nation as a whole. The reversion to primary loyalties is not a bad thing in-itself, but it is an inadequate response to the complexity of the inter-related problems that we face.

The development theories that tended to hold sway in the past portrayed development as a mainly linear process. It was up to the policy-makers to decide where to go and the experts to furnish the means of getting there. We now know, however, that a top-down, linear development effort often leads to major errors, and proceeds at the expense of the values and well-being of the poor, of minority groups and so forth. The task of nation-building in a pluralistic society is a much more delicate and complex task than the old notions of development would suggest. The learned habits of empathy, tolerance and ethical judgment fostered by the humanities are an asset that should not be underestimated.

Development has created its own problems of value change and value choice. Some of these arise from the discontinuities in lifestyles that are almost inevitable companions of development. Others are the product of increased disparities among different segments of the community, as some groups move ahead more rapidly than others. There is a strong and widespread feeling that development has brought out the worst in people, emphasizing material affluence and consumerism out of all proportion, encouraging greed, envy and corruption as a consequence.

Can development be humanized, and can the humanities help to bring this about? The contribution that they have made so far does not match their potential. This is partly because they have become too fragmented into separate disciplines, so that the wider perspective on the whole culture has been difficult to achieve. Then too, the humanities as taught in our educational system at all levels have been too quick to give precedence to the classics of cultures other than our own. While it is extremely important to know and understand other cultures, it is essential to do so on the firm basis

of one's own. Without this, it is difficult to achieve the self-confidence and pride that are the sources of creativity. Indeed, cultural impoverishment has been the result in the extreme cases where indigenous songs, stories, verbal skills and so forth are neglected for a menu of standardized imports.

A third problem with the humanities in the educational system is that they have allowed themselves to become too remote from the burning social and political issues of the day, feeding the "ivory tower" image that leads many people to question their relevance to development. The study of literature, for example, is not just a matter of aesthetics, but a matter of understanding the message embodied in the writer's portrayal of a particular human dilemma or social setting. Works of fiction are commonly far more effective in elucidating moral issues than are journalistic reports or social science analyses. Similarly, we have seen the value of the new social history, which concentrates on the daily actions of the common people, or on suppressed groups such as women, indigenous people or slaves, whose lives were largely missing from the history books. The new social history has not only illuminated the past in general, but has restored to suppressed people their voice, their past and their sense of identity by recognizing the significance of their experience.

At almost exactly this time last year, in Bali, I spoke to the Association of Asian Social Science Research Councils about the social sciences in this region. One of the points I made on that occasion I would like to reiterate here: that is for the need for a closer relationship between the social sciences and the humanities. There, I urged the social sciences to pay more attention to the indigenous conceptual systems of Asia-- ranging from formal religious or philosophical creeds, to unconscious linguistic structures. Ways of perceiving the meaning of life are imbedded in our myths, our epic poems and dramas, the structure of our languages and our traditional legal systems. These levels of meaning must be understood and articulated by the humanists, and shared with the social scientists, the technologists and the planners if development is to unfold in a way that is compatible with the values of their societies.

In order to fill this role, the humanities must enhance their capacity to address contemporary issues, especially the moral issues posed by social, economic and technological change. The choices that have to be made are often agonizingly difficult. Technology itself does not provide the answers, though the choice of a particular technology may well place limits on policy choices. The humanities should challenge the experts to face moral and ethical questions rather than treating such issues as accidental by-products of development.

It is of the utmost importance to give a place to the humanities in the professional schools, in order to sensitize professionals to human values both during their training and, later, in the application of their professional expertise. The integration of the humanities with professional training will help to develop social and cultural imagination, as well as critical judgment, and thus could be an important step toward the humanization of development.

The more the human environment is shaped by technology, the more important it is for the humanities to relate to science, technology and policy-making. Each new technology brings with it new questions of ethics and values, new dilemmas which every society must answer for itself according to its own spirit. Without the application of indigenous moral reasoning, it is likely that the evolution of our societies will be shaped more by external forces than by internal impulses and aspirations, leaving us spiritual strangers in our own land.

The humanities help instill the understanding that allows the human being to be the master of the machine rather than its dependent. Professor Elting Morison of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology wrote that "if you are concerned to understand almost any modern situation-- one that may start from a dialyzer or a robot-- you must know something about the machinery but you must also bring to bear in your investigation things you have learned about economics, politics, social organization and the needs, capacities and qualities of human beings".² His point highlights the importance of a closer integration of science, social science and the humanities.

Though the stated purpose of development is to strengthen the nation and develop its human potential, experience has shown how easy it is for development to be dehumanized by an excessive preoccupation with economic factors, the application of narrow expertise to complex problems, and a disregard for the critical judgments of the non-specialists. Development depends on the liberation of the creative energies of a people. Over-reliance on technique, or at least on technique that is uninformed by the spirit and values of a culture, is bound to stifle popular initiative and creativity.

If one accepts, as I have argued, that the humanities do indeed have an important role in development, then one must proceed to a close examination of the way they are taught in particular settings. Therefore I would like to spend a little time considering the state of the humanities in Indonesia, concentrating mostly on the university level. As I see it, the goals of education in the humanities can be roughly summarized as follows³.

- 1) a thorough familiarity with Indonesian culture, including the national culture, the culture of one's own region, and the culture of several other regions within the country
- 2) knowledge of Indonesian history and its relation to world history
- 3) an effective command of written and spoken Indonesian and at least one of the regional languages
- 4) an understanding of at least one foreign language and the culture in which it is used
- 5) enjoyment and informed judgment of the arts
- 6) ability to analyze and assess ethical problems, public-policy issues and questions of values (especially those relating to science and technology)
- 7) the capacity for responsible criticism and debate

The humanities at the university level in Indonesia have made significant though uneven strides. In the field of history, considerable progress has been made in establishing the basic paradigms for the building of a national, regional and maritime history that genuinely is based on the view from our own country and culture. A beginning has also been made with the study of the historical roots of contemporary problems and public issues. But more needs to be done. We urgently need, for example, to develop the study of the history of science and technology-- Chinese and Islamic as well as Western science. A broader and more systematic effort in historical research would provide a deeper understanding of the contemporary situation, and would also contribute to the stock of relevant teaching materials. Ideally, both teachers and students, as well as independent scholars, will be involved in research, in the development of teaching materials, the publication of results and the design of curricula.

A vigorous language policy should help to speed up the evolution of the Indonesian language, not only as a language of wider common usage but also as a language of scientific communication. The establishment of a major scientific translation capacity will be essential for the latter purpose.

Improvement of writing skills in the Indonesian language should not be limited to formal writing classes, but should be an integral responsibility of all faculties. Frequent paper writing should be routine, as it encourages clarity of thought and hones the skills of analysis and presentation of argument. The stimulation of debating skills is another essential requirement, especially in a culture that places a high value on conflict-avoidance but has to stand its ground among more verbally assertive cultures.

The nurturing of regional languages, literatures and historical studies is an important element in the maintenance of the diversity that is such an asset to Indonesia. Regional languages ideally should be studied not only by people from the region to which they are indigenous, but by Indonesians from other regions as well. The same holds true for the other branches of the humanities and for the arts. I would hope to see the eventual establishment of centers for the study of regional culture, which would advance these cultures while avoiding the trap of parochialism. Both faculty and student body at such centers should be multi-cultural, drawn from throughout the nation. Balinese studies are not just for the Balinese, nor Achenese studies just for the Achenese. It should become commonplace for each to study-- and eventually, to teach-- the literature, history and arts of the other: for an Ambonese to become our foremost expert on Javanese philosophy, and a person from Sulawesi a master of the West Sumatran pantun. In this way, the diverse cultures of this nation should become the property of all Indonesians, and a source of strength and pride for all.

It is also important that we develop a greater familiarity with the languages and cultures of those countries which are bound to have a major impact on the future of our nation. As a matter of urgency, the range of languages and literatures taught in Indonesian universities should expand so as to include Asian languages and others along with the western languages that are already being taught. At present, even the command of western

languages is inadequate. We may pay a high price for this inadequacy, both in terms of our international competitiveness and our cultural enrichment.

The scholarly study of philosophy has a short history in Indonesia. At the universities where philosophy is taught, it is often limited to Western philosophy, overlooking the philosophical traditions of several of our own cultures and religions. Other worldviews are imbedded in the language, customs and rituals of our people. These are important resources for collective self-reflection and for the further evolution of Indonesian culture. They should be brought into the mainstream of study of Indonesian humanities through a systematic effort, for their variety is an asset which increases our repertory of adaptive responses to change.

The humanities, by developing an understanding of what we are as a nation and how we became what we are, contribute to an informed awareness of our national identity. That identity continues to evolve in response to changing conditions and new challenges. Free inquiry, critical self-examination, and lively debate are the means through which the humanities help us to know ourselves and live cooperatively with others. Orthodoxy and bureaucratization in the humanities are capable of crippling this contribution to the development of a mature nation. Learning by directive and learning by rote are incapable of fostering the innovative, flexible attitudes of mind that are essential for modernization.

For the culture of Indonesia to survive and ensure our nation its rightful place in the world, we, as a nation and individually, must learn to live in a situation of pervasive, accelerating change. We are moving into an unpredictable future, and we must do so without becoming disoriented or alienated, without losing our civility, our rationality, or our sources of inspiration. It is in this sense that we will now have to understand the meaning of modernization.

In the past, modernization was often seen as a process of catching up with the West, especially in material and technological terms. It was important then to emphasize that there are non-western options for modernization. Now, all nations, industrial as well as developing nations, powerful as well as weak nations, find themselves essentially unprepared for our common, unpredictable future. All societies are vulnerable. All are thrown back upon their inner resources.

This new state of affairs reinforces a realization that began to dawn some time ago: that modernization should not be seen opposed to tradition. It has become increasingly obvious in the experience of many developing countries that authentic modernization-- which does not lead to a loss of identity, self-respect and creativity-- is possible only if tradition is recognized as a resource of great significance and power. Cultural continuity, in combination with rigorous self-criticism and constant reinterpretation, is therefore an essential requisite for the creative adjustment that modernization demands. Modernization that is fueled by outside forces or models is possible, at least for a time, but it leads to dependence rather than to autonomy, to instability rather than social resilience.

Here lies the central significance of a strong capability in the humanities for developing countries. It is not a luxury, but an essential faculty for ensuring that a nation moves toward becoming the kind of society that it wants to be.

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Notes

1. William Bennet, quoted in Helene Moglen, "Erosion in the Humanities", in Change, Vol. 16, No. 7 (October, 1984)
2. Elting E. Morison, "The New Liberal Arts: Creating Novel Combinations out of Diverse Learning" in Change, Vol. 18, No. 3 (March-April, 1986)
3. A similar list appears in The Humanities in American Life: The Report of the Commission on the Humanities, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1980.