Editors' Introduction: Learning, Adaptation, and Fragile Social Orders across Asian and Adjacent Worlds

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Some issues invite us to think about society through grand events. This one invites us to begin somewhere quieter: a first-year student negotiating risk, a teacher trying to sustain learning through a screen, a local community turning honey cultivation into social initiative, a religious group preserving meaning through layered histories, and a small state working to restore democratic life under regional pressure. These are not minor scenes. They are the places where social change becomes real.

Journal of Asian Social Science Research, Volume 4, Number 2, 2022, brings together five articles that ask how people and institutions respond when familiar arrangements become unsettled. The issue moves across South Africa, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Lombok, and the Maldives. Its geographical range extends beyond Asia in the opening article, but its intellectual concern remains consistent with the journal's broader mission: to understand social life comparatively, carefully, and with attention to human experience.

The word that best captures this issue is not crisis, though crisis is present. It is adaptation. Students adapt to new freedoms and risks. Educational institutions adapt to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Communities adapt local resources into new forms of collective action. Religious traditions adapt through historical encounter and social negotiation. Democratic institutions adapt, or fail to adapt, under domestic instability and regional influence. In each case, adaptation is not automatic. It is shaped by infrastructure, personality, gender, history, leadership, belief, community networks, and power.

This concern remains timely. The UNESCO *Global Education Monitoring Report 2023* argues that technology in education must be assessed not only through its promise, but also through system-wide conditions such as access to technology, governance regulation, and teacher preparation. This directly resonates with the article on online classrooms in Bangladesh, where educational continuity depended on more than the existence of digital tools. The UNDP *Human Development*

Report 2023/2024 identifies uneven development progress, intensifying inequality, and escalating political polarization as sources of dangerous gridlock, a useful backdrop for this issue's attention to unequal capacity, institutional strain, and social vulnerability. V-Dem's *Democracy Report 2026* adds another relevant context by noting the erosion of liberal democratic characteristics such as checks and balances, civil liberties, and rule of law in established democracies, which gives added significance to the issue's discussion of democratic restoration in the Maldives.

The issue opens with Choja Oduaran, Samson Agberotimi, and Samuel Moetji's "The Interaction Effect of Personality Traits and Gender Differences on Risky Behaviours among First-Year University Students in South Africa." Although the case is geographically outside Asia, the article speaks to a problem widely relevant to higher education: the vulnerability of young people as they enter university life. The first year of university is not only an academic transition. It is also a social and emotional transition, marked by new freedoms, peer pressure, identity formation, and exposure to risk.

The article examines how personality traits and gender differences interact in shaping risky behaviours among first-year university students. Its contribution lies in treating risk not simply as moral failure or individual irresponsibility, but as something shaped by psychological disposition, social context, and institutional environment. Such an approach helps us understand why universities cannot respond to student risk only through discipline. They must also think about support, counselling, social belonging, and the cultures of transition that shape young adulthood.

For readers concerned with Asian social science, the article offers a comparative reminder. Youth vulnerability is not confined to one country or region. Universities everywhere are asked to educate students while also helping them manage autonomy, pressure, social expectation, and uncertainty. The article therefore encourages us to understand higher education not merely as a site of instruction, but as a formative social world where young people learn how to become adults.

The second article, Md. Abu Sadath, Jyothy Mondal, Abdullah-Al-Faisal, Sanjana Afrin Disha, and Sarmin Fatema's "The Usage of Online Classrooms during the COVID-19 in Bangladesh: Some Issues and Influences," brings the issue directly into the educational disruptions of the pandemic. During COVID-19, online learning was often presented as the obvious solution to school and university closures. Yet this article shows that the shift to online classrooms was never only a technical adjustment. It was also a social, institutional, and pedagogical challenge.

The Bangladesh case is important because it captures a globally shared disruption that was unevenly experienced. Online learning depended on connectivity, devices, teacher preparation, institutional support, household conditions, and students' capacity to participate meaningfully. A class could be moved online, but that did not automatically mean that learning remained equal, interactive, or effective. The article therefore asks us to distinguish between formal continuity and meaningful participation.

This distinction matters beyond the pandemic. Education systems across Asia continue to experiment with digital platforms, blended learning, and technology-mediated instruction. Yet the article reminds us that technology cannot compensate for weak infrastructure, limited support, or unequal access. Its contribution is not simply that online education has problems. Rather, it shows that digital education must be understood as a social arrangement. It works well only when institutions, teachers, students, and material conditions are prepared to sustain it.

The third article, Riswanda, M. Dian Hikmawan, Bayu Nurrohman, Ika Arinia Indriyany, and Yeby Ma'asan Mayrudin's "Food Innovation and Local Social Movement: The Case of Juang Community of Lebak, Indonesia," shifts the issue from formal education to local empowerment. The article examines honey bee cultivation as a form of food innovation and community mobilization among the Juang Community of Lebak. At its center is a simple but powerful question: how can local resources become the basis for collective initiative?

The article's strength lies in its refusal to romanticize local action. It recognizes the creative power of community-based innovation, but it also acknowledges the difficulties of building collaboration and institutional support. Local movements can generate energy, trust, and aspiration, but they also need networks, training, markets, and partnerships. Empowerment is not produced by enthusiasm alone. It requires organization, continuity, and the ability to connect local initiative with wider structures of support.

The Juang Community case contributes to our understanding of development in Indonesia and beyond. It shows that food innovation is not merely a matter of production or entrepreneurship. It can also be a vehicle for community identity, social mobilization, and local capacity-building. Honey bee cultivation becomes meaningful not only because it may produce income, but because it organizes people around a shared project. The article therefore invites readers to see local development not as a top-down intervention, but as a negotiated process in which communities actively interpret and use their own resources.

The fourth article, Retno Sirnopati, Abdul Rasyad, and Ahmad Tohri's "Islamic Variant of Sasak: Transition and Dialectics in the Wetu Telu Community in Lombok, Indonesia," turns to religious-cultural transformation. The article examines Wetu Telu as a historically layered religious formation shaped by the encounter between local belief systems and major religious traditions. It does not treat Wetu Telu as a deviation to be corrected or as a relic to be preserved unchanged. Instead, it approaches the community phenomenologically and historically, attending to transition, dialectics, and lived meaning.

This article is valuable because it resists reductive categories. Religious life is often forced into binaries: orthodox or deviant, local or universal, traditional or modern, pure or syncretic. The Wetu Telu case shows that such binaries are insufficient. Religious communities often live through layered histories. They inherit practices, reinterpret them, negotiate new pressures, and maintain social meaning in ways that cannot be fully captured by formal doctrinal labels.

The article contributes to Asian studies by reminding us that Islam in Indonesia is not a single, uniform social form. It is lived through local histories, regional cultures, ritual practices, and changing political circumstances. Lombok's Wetu Telu community shows how religious identity can be both continuous and changing, rooted and adaptive. This matters because debates about religion in public life often become polarized. Sirnopati, Rasyad, and Tohri offer a more patient account of religious transformation as a social process.

The final article, Hemanta Kumar Biswas's "India's Role in the Restoration of Democracy in Maldives: Challenges and Options," moves from community and culture to regional politics. The article examines India's role in Maldivian democratic restoration, situating the issue within domestic instability, institutional weakness, political leadership, judicial credibility, external influence, and strategic competition. It expands the issue's scope while remaining connected to its central concern with fragile social and political orders.

The article's main contribution is to remind us that democracy is not secured by constitutional form alone. Institutions must be credible. Courts must be trusted. Political leadership must operate within limits. Regional actors must navigate the delicate boundary between support and interference. For a small state such as the Maldives, democratic restoration cannot be understood only through domestic politics. It must also be read through regional alignments and geopolitical pressures.

This point is particularly important in light of wider debates about democratic fragility. V-Dem's recent reporting on the erosion of liberal democratic features underscores the need to examine democracy beyond elections. Biswas's article contributes to this wider conversation by showing how democratic restoration involves both institutional repair and regional negotiation. The Maldives case reminds us that democracy is not only a national project. It can also be shaped by external relationships, strategic geography, and the balance between sovereignty and support.

Read together, the five articles offer a textured account of transition. A student entering university, a teacher adapting to online instruction, a community cultivating honey bees, a religious group negotiating inherited traditions, and a state restoring democratic order may appear to belong to very different social worlds. Yet each case shows people and institutions responding to uncertainty. Each case also shows that response is shaped by conditions that are not equally distributed: access, gender, infrastructure, local resources, historical memory, institutional capacity, and political power.

The issue also demonstrates the value of moving between structure and agency. Structures matter deeply. Personality, gender norms, educational infrastructure, development systems, religious histories, legal institutions, and regional power relations shape what people can do. But agency matters as well. Students make choices, teachers adapt, communities organize, religious actors interpret, and political leaders negotiate. The articles do not portray people as passive recipients of change. They show them acting within constraints.

This is where the issue makes a broader contribution to social science. It reminds us that transformation is not always spectacular. Sometimes it appears in small adjustments, improvised practices, and local experiments. It appears when a student navigates peer pressure, when an online classroom struggles to remain meaningful, when a community builds a livelihood initiative, when a religious tradition survives through reinterpretation, or when a fragile democracy seeks support without losing autonomy. These moments are easy to overlook, but they are among the everyday ways societies endure and change.

The methodological range of the issue also deserves attention. The articles draw from psychology, education studies, community development, religious studies, anthropology, political science, and international relations. This range is not merely a sign of disciplinary diversity. It reflects the complexity of the realities being studied. Youth risk, digital education,

local innovation, religious transition, and democratic restoration cannot be understood through one method or vocabulary alone. Each requires attention to context, experience, institution, and history.

As editors, we are pleased to present this issue as a contribution to the study of transition, vulnerability, and social response across Asian and adjacent worlds. We thank the authors for their careful scholarship and the reviewers for their thoughtful engagement. We hope readers will find in these articles not only empirical findings, but also a patient and humane way of thinking about how people and institutions respond to disruption, preserve meaning, and create possibilities under pressure.

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