

The Risks of Evaluating Social Sciences in Asian Countries

"Be the change that you wish to see in the world," said
Mahatma Gandhi

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This profound call to action urges us to transcend passive observation and become active participants in societal transformation. In the context of evaluating social sciences in South Asia, it challenges us to embrace a dynamic, grassroots approach that values diverse perspectives.

The evaluation of social sciences in South Asian countries such as India, Nepal, Afghanistan, Bhutan, and Bangladesh presents distinct challenges shaped by their complex socio-political and cultural contexts. My extensive experience in these nations has revealed that political interference can

often skew evaluation outcomes, limiting the scope of research to align with governmental priorities rather than genuine social issues. Additionally, funding constraints frequently hinder innovative projects, while an overreliance on Western evaluation frameworks can marginalise local knowledge systems and diminish academic freedom. During my work, I have observed that rigid evaluation criteria often prioritise quantitative metrics, overlooking the qualitative richness essential for understanding societal nuances. This tendency risks stifling intellectual diversity and innovation, particularly within under-resourced institutions. To address these issues, it is crucial to adopt a more context-sensitive and inclusive evaluation approach, fostering meaningful and impactful social science research that truly reflects the diverse realities of these countries.

The evaluation of social sciences in Asian countries presents a multifaceted challenge, intersecting with cultural, political, and developmental contexts. As the social sciences play a pivotal role in shaping policies, understanding societal changes, and addressing regional and global challenges, their assessment becomes crucial. However, the process of evaluating these disciplines can be fraught with risks that, if unaddressed, could stifle intellectual progress, misdirect resource allocation, and further entrench systemic inequalities.

One significant risk lies in the **cultural diversity and contextual variations** across Asian countries. Asia is not a monolith; it encompasses vast cultural, political, and socio-economic landscapes. Attempting to evaluate social sciences through a singular or Western lens could marginalize indigenous knowledge systems, local traditions, and culturally rooted practices. In my experience, particularly while working on projects in conflict-affected regions, such as Afghanistan, I have witnessed the disconnect that arises when evaluation frameworks fail to account for local contexts. Western methodologies often do not resonate with community realities, leading to misguided conclusions. This risk calls for context-sensitive evaluation mechanisms that honor local knowledge while maintaining global standards.

Another critical issue is the **political influence on research and academic freedom**. Many Asian countries experience political pressures that can limit the independence of social science research. Evaluations that are conducted in politically charged environments may suffer from bias or censorship, where scholars are either forced to align their research with state agendas or face repercussions. In countries like Cambodia and others where governance structures are fragile, I've observed how state control can skew research outputs, suppress dissenting views, and even undermine the legitimacy of entire fields of study. This stifling of intellectual freedom not only hampers academic rigour but also risks perpetuating policies that do not serve the public interest. Linked to this is the **funding and resource allocation challenge**. The evaluation of social sciences often dictates how resources are distributed. In regions where economic growth is prioritized over social research, funding for social sciences can be seen as secondary. Moreover, evaluations may disproportionately favor disciplines perceived as more economically productive, such as STEM fields. During my work in developing funding strategies, I observed that when evaluation frameworks are not equitable, social sciences are deprived of the support needed to explore critical issues, such as gender inequality, migration, and environmental justice. This deprioritisation risks diminishing the role of social sciences in addressing long-standing social challenges.

Furthermore, the rise of **quantitative metrics and performance indicators** in evaluating social sciences poses another significant risk. The global academic environment increasingly values measurable outcomes—impact factors, citations, and publication numbers—as benchmarks of success. However, social sciences often produce qualitative insights that cannot be easily quantified. In Asian countries, where social sciences may already face marginalization, applying rigid quantitative evaluations could undermine disciplines that thrive on interpretive, qualitative analysis. In my previous roles, particularly when evaluating programmes focused on social development, I found that numbers

often fail to capture the depth of social impact. There is a risk that valuable, contextually rich research could be overlooked simply because it doesn't fit into a predefined metric-driven framework.

The **risk of homogenization** also looms large. International benchmarks and evaluation standards often aim for comparability, but this can result in a homogenization of social science research across diverse countries. The push for global rankings, common evaluation frameworks, and standardized approaches may ignore the unique social, political, and cultural landscapes of Asian nations. In my work on regional capacity building, I have witnessed how international frameworks, while providing a common structure, can inadvertently strip away the nuances of local research. This risks flattening intellectual diversity and forcing Asian scholars to conform to global standards that do not reflect their unique challenges.

Lastly, there is the **issue of capacity-building and institutional readiness**. Many universities and research institutions in Asia lack the infrastructure to compete with their Western counterparts. Evaluations based on global standards may inadvertently penalize these institutions, pushing them further into the periphery of global academia. In the projects I've managed across diverse countries, I've seen the effects of this imbalance first-hand. Institutions in lower-income countries are often excluded from major research funding simply because they cannot meet the stringent evaluation criteria, regardless of the relevance or potential impact of their work. This disparity risks perpetuating a cycle where only the most resource-rich institutions receive the attention and resources needed for innovation.

In conclusion, while the evaluation of social sciences is vital for ensuring academic excellence and relevance, it poses considerable risks in the context of Asian countries. These risks include cultural misrepresentation, political bias, skewed funding allocation, the imposition of quantitative metrics, intellectual homogenization, and institutional disparities. To mitigate these risks, it is crucial to adopt evaluation frameworks that are inclusive, context-sensitive, and flexible enough to accommodate the rich diversity and unique challenges of the region. From my experience working on capacity-building initiatives across Asia, it is evident that successful evaluations must balance global standards with local realities, fostering an environment where social sciences can thrive and contribute meaningfully to national and regional development goals.

As we reflect on the complexities of evaluating social sciences in South Asia, the words of Mahatma Gandhi resonate profoundly: *"Be the change that you wish to see in the world."* This quote encapsulates the essence of transformative action in the face of challenges. Gandhi's philosophy emphasizes the importance of personal responsibility and active participation in fostering societal change. By embodying the change we seek, we inspire others to join the journey toward a more equitable and just society. In the context of social science evaluation, this perspective encourages researchers, policymakers, and practitioners to engage authentically with communities, prioritizing local knowledge and inclusive practices. Ultimately, it is through our collective commitment to meaningful engagement and innovation that we can navigate the risks and challenges inherent in this field, paving the way for a brighter future in South Asia.

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