Editorial

It gives us great pleasure to introduce this special issue of the *International Journal of Social Quality*. This special issue features empirical papers from Australia, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Thailand. The data presented in this special issue originate from a large cross-cultural research project investigating social quality across six Asia-Pacific societies: Australia, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Thailand.

Social Quality is a relatively new area of research that has only become of interest to social researchers in the last two decades. The European Foundation of Social Quality has produced a great deal of theoretical scholarship in Europe which has resulted in the Theory of Social Quality (TSQ) (Beck et al. 2001), which was developed in Europe as a means of responding to increasing social and health inequities. The TSQ is defined by four main domains which comprise fifty sub-domains and ninety-four indicators (van der Maesen and Walker 2005): Socioeconomic security; social cohesion; social inclusion; social empowerment.

The survey employed for the research presented in this special issue was developed and validated by the Asian Consortium for Social Quality and in particular, academics at Seoul National University. The questionnaire was developed from the Social Quality Indicators developed by the European Network for Indicators of Social Quality (ENISQ). The process of development involved members of the ENISQ. All of the questions within the questionnaire relate to the four conditional domains of social quality abovementioned. Although each society used the same instrument, different methods of data collection were used based on those deemed most appropriate in each society. For example, within Australia a postal survey was employed, Hong Kong conducted face to face interviews, and all other countries conducted telephone interviews. All data were collected between 2009 and 2010.

This special issue presents six empirical papers which focus on social cohesion and social inclusion. The first paper, written by Meyer, Ward and colleagues, examines the extent to which Australians (dis)trust (an indicator of social cohesion) individuals and organizations. Their results highlight subpopulations where trust in a number of organizations and institutions is found to be low. Regarding social quality, this paper is of importance because, as they argue, mistrusting relationships may result in "conflict" and poor social quality and subsequently lead to inequalities in health.

The second paper in this issue reports on empirical findings from Hong Kong investigating social capital and civic engagement. The authors present data that reveals discrepancies in the level of civic engagement among urban residents. They argue that inequality of social capital plays a significant role in these discrepancies. They view their data from a socio-political perspective and discuss potential strategies for increasing civic engagement by addressing inequalities in social capital.

This special issue then moves readers to data from Taiwan, where Chen and Shi identify social inclusion amongst atypical workers in Taiwan. Also set in a socio-

political context, they explore the differences in social exclusion between “regular” workers and “atypical” workers, especially as it relates to the low wages and insufficient social protection of the working poor. Their discussion points the reader to potential policy measures needed to effectively tackle the problem of social inclusion in atypical workers.

The fourth paper within this special issue investigates Social Inclusion in Southern Border Provinces of Thailand. The author, Vajirakachorn, appraises the overall situation of social inclusion in the three southern border provinces of Thailand in order to compare the results with the national level. The differentials in social inclusion are discussed in relation to the political situation in Thailand. Recommendations for improving social inclusion in the southern border provinces are discussed.

The penultimate paper in this special issue also reports on data from Thailand. Bureekul and Thananithichot however, focus on trust and social cohesion. This paper argues that current policy approaches to reconciling conflict within Thailand are problematic due to the absence of trust. Explanations regarding difficulties in reconciliation are discussed alongside empirical findings which report low levels of trust.

The final paper for this special issue moves away from the Asia Pacific study and provides a timely discussion of the use of Information and Communications Technology for enhancing social quality in societies. Presenting data from the United Kingdom, Wallace argues that digital communications open up new kinds of community with new kinds of trust, relationships, and forms of mobilization, which all have implications for Social Quality.

The papers within this special issue provide dynamic evidence for the utility of Social Quality Theory in understanding and addressing inequities and inequalities in social quality globally. We hope you enjoy this special issue.

*Guest editors Samantha B Meyer,
Paul R Ward, and Raymond K H Chan*

References

- Beck, W., et al., eds. 2001. *Social Quality: A Vision for Europe*. The Hague: Law International.
- van der Maesen, L.J.G. and A. Walker. 2005. “Indicators of Social Quality: Outcomes of the European Scientific Network.” *European Journal of Social Quality* 5(1–2): 8–24.