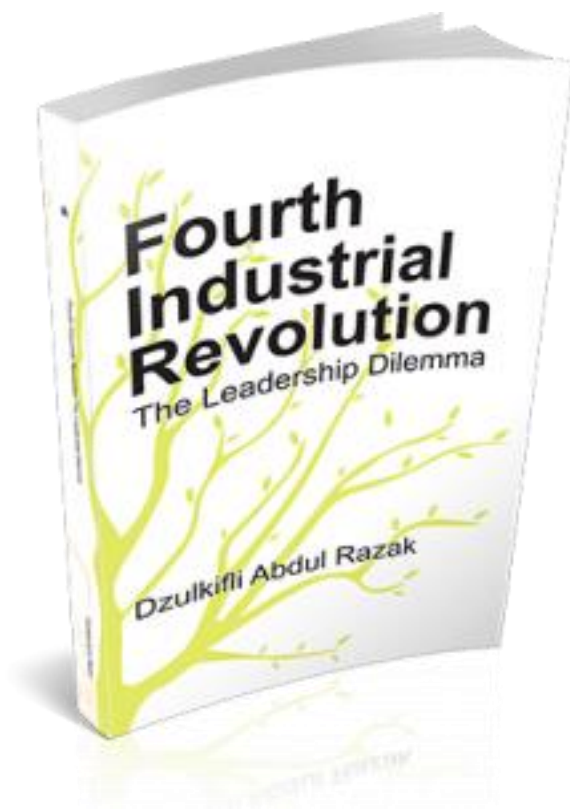


Dzulkifli Abdul Razak, *Fourth Industrial Revolution: The Leadership Dilemma*. Negri Sembilan: USIM Press, 2018. 56+x pp. ISBN 978-967-440-492-5.



This book is about the Fourth Industrial Revolution and the dilemma it creates, or should create, in leaders – social, political or academic – especially in a country like Malaysia. But let me first take a leap across time and space and quote from a poem by the American sage, Ralph Waldo Emerson – one that reinforces the core message of this book. The poem is titled “Ode, Inscribed to William H. Channing,” written some 170 years ago, during the time of the First Industrial Revolution, when the American society and landscape was first “invaded” by the steam engine. Here is what Emerson wrote:

Things are in the saddle,
And ride mankind.

There are two laws discrete,
Not reconciled, –
Law for man, and law for thing;
The last builds town and fleet,
But it runs wild,
And doth the man unking.

Fourth Industrial Revolution expresses a similar sentiment of how technology, if unchecked, can “thingify” and “unking” mankind, and does so more expressly, if not more ardently, than Emerson’s poem, as technology’s intrusion into human life has been far more obtrusive and aggressive – almost like a pandemic – and concomitantly more dehumanising, despiritualising and depersonalising since Emerson’s time. Dzulkifli’s message is simple but poignant, we must not get overzealous about technology, be obsessed with it or allow it to subjugate our beings, because whereas the outer life is important, the visible must be recognised, the material and the law of things constitute part of our lives, we must not sacrifice our values, ethics, soul, spirituality, conscience, consciousness and “primordial intelligence,” which are central to our identity as human beings, and which separate us from our animal state. Thus, in his “Preface,” Dzulkifli observes:

Ultimately, we must be courageously ‘human’ enough to assert our humanity over a piece of technology that tends to dehumanise the human race as predicted.... Otherwise we are back to the dehumanising set pattern of one-size-fits-all overlapping into the domain of machines known for their ‘efficiency’ in taking over pattern-based functions which we are to refrain from in the first place. (ix)

Dzulkifli does not reject technology as such but wants us to harness and harmonise the opposite forces of matter and mind, body and soul, head and heart, phenomenal and noumenal, visible and invisible, inner and outer, technology and values, primordial intelligence and artificial intelligence so that “means” does not exceed the “end,” “ruler” doesn’t become the “ruled” and there is no ultimate “technology takeover.” If we allow the madness of technology to take over our “saddle,” then we’ll be nothing but zombies, like T.S. Eliot’s “hollow men”: “the stuffed men.... Headpiece filled with straw.” “Is technology becoming a, or the ultimate purpose, rather than a means?” (37), Dzulkifli asks pointedly. If that is so, then it will not only unleash a series of socio-economic-environmental disasters but also lead to a total loss of our agency and even potentially the extinction of the human race, metaphysically, but perhaps also physically. Therefore, to reinforce his argument, he quotes Stephen Hawkins’ famous comment on the fatal consequences of the unrestrained advancement of Artificial Intelligence: “The development of full artificial intelligence could spell the end of

the human race” (11). Perhaps it would not be out of place to quote Einstein’s equally compelling statement in this regard: “I fear the day that technology will surpass our human interaction. The world will have a generation of idiots” (ctd. in Antonella Dahlstrom-Afcha).

Fourth Industrial Revolution is a rather short but intense, incisive and intriguing book that deals with a new and contemporary phenomenon first mooted at the 2016 World Economic Forum at Davos, Switzerland, by the forum’s Founder and Executive Chairman, Dr. Klaus Schwab, and developed more fully in his book, *The Fourth Industrial Revolution* (2016). Writing on a topic that is so immediate and still evolving is not an easy task, as there would be scarcity of material and the necessary intellectual distance that is required to develop a clear, coherent and candid argument on the topic. The author deserves to be lauded for taking this risk and yet giving us a balanced and informed discussion in the book, looking at it from a local, regional as well as a global perspective.

The book has three main chapters dealing with three potential leadership dilemmas envisioned by the writer, largely in the Malaysian context but having the larger human community in the backdrop. In addition to this, the book has a “Preface” and an “Introduction” before the three main chapters and a “Summary” at the end. This is followed by two appendices and a list of References. However, the book has no index, which perhaps is not so essential given its length.

The first dilemma enunciated by the author is the gap between the wish and the readiness of the Malaysian government to implement the ideas and technologies associated with the Fourth Industrial Revolution or 4 IR. 4 IR does not exist in isolation but in a continuum of events, starting with the First Industrial Revolution, or 1 IR, about 250 years ago. Unless we go through the historical stages of the industrial revolutions that preceded 4 IR, any attempt to suddenly embrace and implement the concept of 4 IR would be seriously misguided. It would be like putting the cart before the horse, or machine before humanity. Western society is ready for 4 IR because they have passed through the previous stages, but Malaysia has not. Besides, Malaysia perhaps doesn’t need to be automated like the way West does. They need automation because of the shortage as well as the high cost of labour. But Malaysia has no such problem. On the contrary, the country suffers from a high unemployment rate and the cost of labour here is also not so high. Besides, unnecessary automation will affect the climate and the ecosystem and bring calamities for people who are already weathering hardships in many ways.

The second dilemma is that the rise of anthropocentrism in the West during the Renaissance period and the Enlightenment age has brought about the Anthropocene era of human intervention in nature and the environment, beginning with the First Industrial Revolution, which has resulted in the human being replaced by the machine. Now human beings are seen largely as economic

creatures, focused merely on GDP and economic progress, rather than as holistic creatures having social, moral and spiritual dimensions in them. This narrow approach to life and society has caused havoc in many spheres, including the extinction of many animals, huge class disparities and serious mental health problems among youth, even in a place like Sabah, which is far removed from Malaysia's technocratic heartland in Kuala Lumpur. Having said this, the author argues that whereas in Malaysia there is push by the leadership to jump onto the bandwagon of 4 IR, in some of the develop countries, surprisingly, the focus of education has shifted to the whole person of the human being, "inclusive of humanity, creativity, imagination and ethics" (25). In this regard, the author gives the example of Canada, where, he argues, the focus is not on "Fourth Industrial Revolution... but on values" (31).

The third dilemma is how to counterbalance the negative effects of 4 IR. We humans have an inherent intelligence in us; should we sacrifice that altogether to accommodate and even champion the Artificial Intelligence (AI) brought about by 4 IR. The consequence looks dire if AI becomes autonomous and self-multiplying, and eventually takes a destructive turn. Technology also creates an addictive effect, making us so dependent on it that we forget about our social and spiritual selves, and eventually sacrifice our moral centre or the "primordial intelligence" that is there in us. The author's advice is to take measures, like the way Japan has, so that Malaysia doesn't drown in technology by embracing 4 IR but manages to keep afloat and even ride the wave of technology by advancing the inner sphere of life.

The book recommends the cultivation of a "double consciousness," so that we do not have to either reject technology or be swept by it utterly. It recommends the bold vision of moderation and middle ground. It also cautions us of the dangers of following something blindly. If Malaysia seeks to implement the vision of 4 IR, it will only spell doom and gloom for the country in multiple ways. First of all, the country is not ready for adopting 4 IR, as its industrial infrastructure is still quite basic, in many places not even at par with 2 IR. Secondly, the circumstances which have led to 4 IR in Europe and other developed countries is not the same as in Malaysia, which has a different history and culture. Thirdly, whereas the developed countries are creating buffers to soften the effect of technology on their people, Malaysia seems to have no such awareness as it is merely mimicking the West without a full and proper investigation of the adverse consequences that 4 IR might bring with it. Finally, and perhaps more importantly, if Malaysia continues to imitate the West without having its own roadmap, the country will remain dependent on the West and continue to live under the shadow of imperialism.

Fourth Industrial Revolution discusses a profound and complex topic in a simple but lucid language. I would recommend the book to readers everywhere, as it deals with a subject-matter that has a distinct Malaysian focus and yet a universal

relevance. It deals with the destiny of Malaysia and the entire human race synchronously.

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