

Preface

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I am inextricably tied to islands. When I was young, I studied in New Zealand from 1988 to 1991. I have also lived and worked in Hainan for nearly three decades. As part of my job, I have visited many island countries and jurisdictions and have facilitated the twinning between Hainan and many foreign island provinces and states. My experience with so many islands sets me thinking: are there commonalities in island development? Are there any patterns to follow? Can development experiences be replicated? Can Hainan learn from other islands? When I tried to find answers to these questions, it turned out that the domestic literature was too scarce to offer a clue. Without “stones from other hills,” how can I “polish the jade”? I couldn’t help asking myself: as one of the most representative islands in China, is it possible for Hainan to be a “pioneer” in island studies? The answer is “yes.”

In autumn of 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping put forward the initiative of building the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. To share development opportunities of the Belt and Road Initiative, enhance exchange and co-operation with island states and jurisdictions along the routes, and encourage those along the Maritime Silk Road and beyond to be part of the Initiative, the People’s Government of Hainan Province started to host the “21st Century Maritime Silk Road Islands Economic Cooperation Forum” in 2016 as an important part of the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference. Here, prominent representatives from island governments, businesses, and academia around the world gathered to discuss key issues on island economic development. At the 2nd Annual Forum in 2017, the Foreign and Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of Hainan Province released the first Annual Report on Global Island Economic Dynamics 2016, making it a major first step for the province in island studies. This policy-based and forward-looking research on global island economies was well-received by those present at the Forum. Heartened by its success, we decided to turn the Annual Report into an authoritative document on island studies to inform decision-making by island governments and enhance policy co-ordination between and among islands.

As laymen in island studies, we knew that such a large project as the Annual Report would require the knowledge and expertise of a professional international team. It was at the 2017 Forum that we invited Prof. James Randall as a representative of academia. As a leading scholar on global island studies, Prof. Randall

currently serves as Chair of the Executive Committee of the Institute of Island Studies at the University of Prince Edward Island and co-holder of the UNESCO Chair in Island Studies and Sustainability. If he agreed to steer the writing and editing of the Report, the project would definitely adopt a more global vision and acquire more expertise and credibility. We were delighted that Prof. Randall agreed to co-operate with us on our island studies initiatives. Why not seize this “olive branch” and kick off our journey of international co-operation with the Report?

After over half a year of hard work, Prof. Randall’s team published this Annual Report on Global Islands 2017. With major innovations in format and content, the 2017 Annual Report not only reviews and updates economic development of island states and jurisdictions over the past year, but also includes dedicated chapters on economic models, economic resilience and competitiveness, economic openness, agricultural development, and other important topics, offering a comprehensive and in-depth interpretation of development and changes in global island economies. The report will be a must-read for those interested in global island development. Of course, islands face multiple development challenges and the situation varies from island to island. Not everything can be covered in the limited space of a single report and much remains to be dealt with in the future. It is our hope that this Report will serve as a modest first step to attract more attention to island development.

This year is the first year to comprehensively implement the spirit of the 19th CPC National Congress. It also marks the 40th anniversary of China’s reform and opening up and the 30th anniversary of Hainan as a province and a special economic zone. As China’s largest special economic zone and one of the most representative island economies, Hainan is fully aware of the value of island studies. Globally, island studies has reached a considerable scale and is increasingly drawing international attention. Domestically, a few research institutes have conducted island studies, but their focus is mainly on eco-protection of islands rather than on economic and cultural issues. Island studies in Hainan is still in its infancy. We would like to take this opportunity to call for greater attention and efforts for island studies in Hainan. This includes formulating an integrated and open approach to development that puts islands in the broader context of land and sea development. We will translate the results of the studies into a robust catalyst for a new round of reform and openness that will embrace another three decades of prosperity and success in Hainan.

That brings me to write this preface.

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