

Summary of Prof. Wan Mohd Nor's Professorial Inaugural Lecture Series

26th June 2013

Dewan Utama, Menara Razak, UTM KL

The 26th of June, 2013 marked the first time that the Professorial Inaugural Lecture Series was held in the Kuala Lumpur campus of Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) and the turnout was spectacular indeed. Prof. Dr. Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud delivered his Professorial Inaugural Lecture Series before an audience of approximately 500 people, including several dignitaries, government officials, UTM professors and students as well as representatives from various institutions of higher learning. Prof. Dr. Wan Mohd. Nor Wan Daud, a scholar of high-calibre, is the Director of the Centre for Advanced Studies in Islam, Science and Civilisation (CASIS) at UTM.

For the 44th lecture in this series, Prof. Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud entitled his monograph "Islamization of Contemporary Knowledge and the Role of the University in the Context of De-Westernization and Decolonization". The event was moderated by Prof Dato' Dr. Aziuddin Ahmad who was a former rector of Kolej Universiti Islam Selangor (KUIS), and a member of the Board of Governors for Putra Business School. Prof. Dato' Aziuddin introduced the lecture by describing the man of *adab* in three words: "subliminal, seminal and sufistic." Prior to Prof Wan Mohd. Nor's speech, he was introduced by Prof Dr. Rose Alinda Alias, Deputy Vice Chancellor of UTM's Academic and International Division.

In his lecture, Prof. Wan Mohd. Nor highlighted the strategic importance of higher education for personal and societal well-being and development. Aside from being an effective vehicle for progress, higher education has also played a role in the "struggle for world supremacy" as evidenced from the hegemony of Western powers. Prof. Wan, as he is

warmly referred to by students, noted that Arab countries for the most part are extremely receptive to Western universities setting up sister campuses in their countries despite their oppositions to the foreign policies of the US and other states. Citing authors that represent the cases in China and Africa, Prof Wan warned about the colonizing impact of higher education where Western cultural and intellectual dependency is perpetuated.

Prof Wan stressed the importance of Islamization and de-Westernization in order to break the dependency on Western present-day knowledge. He cited Turkey and Malaysia as two model Muslim nations that project a “moderate form of religious modernity” stemming from their reliance on their “own system of thought”, quoting Fethullah Gulen. Islamization is not a reactionary idea; in fact, “the actual practice of Islamizing knowledge began with the first Revelation and this effort is continuously implemented by various Muslim scholars centuries after the Prophet Muhammad.” Prof Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud quoted Tan Sri Prof. Muhammad Naquib al-Attas’s definition of Islamization as “the liberation of man first from magical, mythological, animistic, national-cultural tradition, and then from secular control over his reason and his language.”

Prof Wan Mohd Nor defined the de-Westernization and Islamization of present-day knowledge as the “dual process of isolating and removing these un-Islamic, Western elements and concepts, and simultaneously infuse them with key Islamic elements and concepts projecting the worldview, ethical framework and legal principles of Islam.” This process applies to the human sciences as well as natural, physical and applied sciences. Islamization is a process that Prof Wan Mohd Nor calls “dynamic stabilism”, which prevents it from being liberal in assimilating un-Islamic concepts, yet it is not so conservative so as to deprive Muslims from “benefitting from contemporary scientific, intellectual and cultural developments.”

To implement Islamization and to uphold “dynamic stabilism” requires consistent and ambitious endeavors that extend beyond the writing of textbooks, reforming academic disciplines, and creating or reforming social-cultural and economic institutions. The engine of Islamization should be in perpetual motion in the institutions which articulate the concept of the university in Islam. Here, human beings should be trained to acquire and transmit knowledge that enabled them to return to “Man’s original purpose and nature.”

It is impossible to enumerate all the significant ideas that were shared by Prof. Wan Mohd Nor in this summary. However, a copy of his address can be obtained from the Center for Advanced Studies in Islam, Science and Civilisation (CASIS) at UTM, Kuala Lumpur.

Before reaching the conclusion of the event, the audience was presented with a commentary on Prof. Wan Mohd. Nor’s address by a well-known professor from Istanbul, Turkey, Prof. Dr. Alparslan Açıkgenç who is the Director of graduate studies at Yildiz Technical University. Prof. Açıkgenç illustrated how Prof. Wan managed to shift our focus from a global perspective of this education problem to the micro perspective that focused on the Muslim world. According to Prof. Açıkgenç, the Muslim world is in need of a “sophisticated Islamic philosophy of education that can resolve six main issues, namely individual cultural identity, specifically that of a Muslim individual; collective cultural identity, specifically that of the Muslims who belong to the current Islamic civilization; the role of knowledge in human identity; islamization of the present-day knowledge and finally, the role and strategic significance of the university in dealing with these issues.

Prof. Açıkgenç conveyed the epistemological context behind the education system that “reflect the worldview of the society and culture”. What transpired was an elaboration of systematic concepts that describe the learning process. The challenge for the university is to fathom the concepts that will aid in their realizing the true purpose of education. An

education pursuit that aims to produce a man of adab (*insan adabi*) is not without insurmountable challenges. Yet, the trait of overcoming challenges is part and parcel of every man of *adab* who has been trained by the university to not only digest and reproduce both information and knowledge, but to exude the scientific attitude that will enable them to succeed as a “universal man”, the experts in various fields. Such graduates of universities would be worthy of bearing the responsibility to steer the Islamic civilization to greater heights, by the will of Allah.

by

Khalina Khalili (24/7/2013)