NURTURING CREATIVITY IN 21st CENTURY UNIVERSITIES

Daniel Mohammad Rosyid

1. INTRODUCTION

As we left the first decade of the the 21st century, the world is entering a different kind of crisis that will shape a new global landscape. Zakaria called it a post-American world. It would be a post-European world as well as. The US and Europe fell into a state financial crisis and suffer a significant contraction in economic growth. While Friedman said that this is merely a crisis of globalization, other global thinkers like Stiglitz said that this is a crisis of capitalism. In the mean time, China took a new role as the locomotive of global economic growth, together with the other BRICS (Brasil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) states.

The global environment looks no better. The fight to reduce global warming is not an easy one. Major agreement on the mechanism to control environemt deterioration are still to be established and then implemented. We have seen its impacts in extreme weather, major floods in different places. This has put global food production into difficult situation since expected global harvests of food failed to achieve the target. Food scarcity may happen in countries not prepared to adapt with this climate changes. The CEO of unilever said that if we are to live at European standard, we need 3 earths, and if to live at US standard, we will need 5 earths. This means that both Europe and US economcs model are things of the past.

In the face of these global landscape, Indonesia has been reforming itself since 1998, espesially in politics, and economy immediately after the fell of the New Order. Direct election democrazy and decentralization are two most distinct features of the era "reformasi". However, we observed that both democrazy and decentralization have failed to bring their promises : prosperity, and justice for all. Corruption is rampant, and many political figures and beurocrats have become criminals and put to jail. Although in the short-run Indonesia seems to be politically unstable, in the long run this democracy investment may prove to be positive for a stable investment climate.

In an increasingly gloomy look of present Indonesia, universities may have become the last resort to provide new, but tested ideas to solve those problems. The role of universities in any nation cannot be overemphasized. Universities are to provide healthy streams of young talents and future leaders. However, universities have found themselves in an increasingly delicate position : to stay away from politics, and to be neutral in some way, or to become a kind of whistle blower, or early warning system. The first choice is clearly pragmatic, while the second will put universities, espescialy state universities, into an akward relationship with the government.

---

*Daniel Mohammad Rosyid, Ph.D is a professor of Operations Research and Optimization at the Department of Ocean Engineering of ITS Surabaya, and Chairman of PII Surabaya. He is also an advisor to the East Java Education Council.

2. REGIONAL CREATIVITY

To take a significant role in the new world where Asia is the centre, Indonesia has to transform itself into a new powerhouse. However, states and regions compete to attract investments and skilled workforces. They compete for the best talents available for them. Countries cannot compete only on the basis of their endowment factors like un-renewable natural resouces that will deplete quickly. At least they have to rely on renewable natural resources. Even better and highly preferred, they shall compete on the basis of human capital : their knowledge, attitude and creativity.

Florida has stipulated that regional creativity depends much on three T factors : 1) technology infrastructures, especially information technology, 2) talents, and 3) tolerance. In this case, universities play major role in nurturing young talent not only technologically, but also culturally. A culture of tolerance has to be promoted in education, and more importantly, in universities. Tolerance is not only good in an education context, ie. to promote inclusiveness, but also important for creativity growth. People working in a multi-cultural context will find more opportunities to find and develop new ideas. Different cultures expose different ideas, perspectives and approaches. Innovation usually starts with combination or mating of exisiting ideas leading to new ideas and perspectives.

The USA has been the most creative place in the world during the last 100 years, esspecially in the 20 century. However, since the attack on the World Trade Centre, known as the 9/11 event, the USA is loosing its creativity and competitiveness by becoming less tolerant. Indeed, in the first decade of this 21st century, we are living in an increasingly less tolerant world, demonstrated primarily by the USA. The invasion of the US and its allies without the UN endorsement on Afghanistan, then Iraq, is well documented.

Quality higher education in the USA has been one major factor of its global dominance. Many students from different countries have been admitted into universities in the US making them to be the most plural universities in the world. This also explains why the US has been the most creative place on earth. However, since 9/11, the US has become less and less tolerant to immigrants. During the last 10 years, Europe has benefitted from this trend and admitted more non-european students into Europe.

3. INDONESIAN UNIVERSITIES INTERNAL PROBLEMS

In an increasingly global setting, Indonesian universities are also to compete to attract the best students, even internationally. However, universities in Indonesia suffer from at least 5 internal problems : 1) they employ an old, 20 century business model, 2) poor university governance, 3) poor link to industry, 4) too obsessed with hard-skills neglecting generic, soft skills, 5) no clear research focus. The most serious problem is the old business model. This old business model is the root of the other 4 problems.

Indonesian universities tend to become an isolate industry in itself. Their interaction to the surrounding community, espescially the industry is minimal. They recruit their students almost independently. Joint recruitment involving industry or regional government is almost out of question. The teaching does not reach the life beyond campuses. Universities often alienates their students from the local potentials surrounding the campus. A paradox can be easily observed : a longer study in schools and campuses lead to less independence, and even less employable !

In addition to poor commitment of the government to research and innovation, the universities are busy in teaching, but pay less attention to focused research. The quality of post-graduate program is therefore lacking since no research focus is integrated into this program. Only a limited few number of Indonesian universities can be assigned as research universities. This is very dissapointing since Indonesia is a fertile ground for unique, world-class, research themes.

University governance is still a problem in many indonesian universities, especially private ones. Conflicts often arise between the rectorate and the private foundation that founded the university from the first place. In state universities, the role of university senate is questionable. Leadership is poorly developed. Government intervention in state university leadership has proved to be problematic. University is endowed to be an independent, non-partisant entity that is worthy by the name.
Universities in Indonesia has also failed to promote soft-skills and deep learning amongst their students. This problem starts from the students earlier education. Reading habit is lacking that leads to poor writing skills. Learning evaluation is often limited to cognitive and academic aspects of learning, discouraging students from developing their soft skills like team building, self-management, and communication.
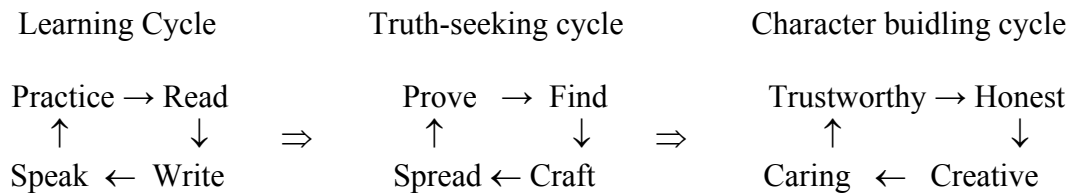
4. INNOVATING UNIVERSITIES

In order to take part significantly in the 21st century of Asia, Indonesian universities must employ a new business model to attract the best talents increasingly from international sources. The new model does not depends much on the number of admission, but more on long-term sustainable creative capacity. The university must position itself effectively in the region it serves. Close and workable links to local industry and regional government has to be intergrated in the learning and research process.

The universities have to leave their tendency to be inward-looking, and move to be friendly partners with the local business, industry and regional government. The learning and research processes have to be local wisdom and resource-based. In an archipelago country like Indonesia, the marine and maritime sectors have to be embedded in the teaching and research processes in Indonesian universities. This does not mean that universities will become locally or regionally thinking. Universities have to understand global problems and issues, adopt best practices available globally, but have to act locally to provide the best learning experiences to their students.

Universities must break the trap of being an industry in itself. Academic formalism has to be minimized if not eliminated. Universities may set up business entities where their students may work part-timely. The university life of a students shall not be separated from their working life. Theory and practice must come hand in hand more frequently. The best learning can only be benefitted from working students. They can relate almost directly from what they learn to what they do for work. Learning is meant to improve their work quality and profession. Through close relationship between learning and working experiences, entrepreneurship can therefore be nurtured during the students university years.

University education is to promote and nurture culture of innovation through new experience, experimentation and practices. Teachers and lecturers are to expect original, but honest answers raher than true-or-false answers. Learning cycles of practice-reading-writing-speaking is to be consistently promoted. This will then promote a truth-seeking culture. A truth cycle of prove-find-craft-spread of truth is to

be observed. Eventually, these learning and truth cycles will promote a character building cycle of trustworthiness-honesty-creative-caring. See the following figure :

Learning Cycle   Truth-seeking cycle   Character buidling cycle

$$\text{Practice} \rightarrow \text{Read}$$
$$\uparrow \qquad \downarrow \quad \Rightarrow$$
$$\text{Speak} \leftarrow \text{Write}$$

$$\text{Prove} \rightarrow \text{Find}$$
$$\uparrow \qquad \downarrow \quad \Rightarrow$$
$$\text{Spread} \leftarrow \text{Craft}$$

$$\text{Trustworthy} \rightarrow \text{Honest}$$
$$\uparrow \qquad \downarrow$$
$$\text{Caring} \leftarrow \text{Creative}$$

Figure 1. Cycles of learning, truth seeking, and character building

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Indonesian universities shall play a major role in the new global landscape where Asia is the centre of world economic and social growth. A new business model of higher education in Indonesia is to be contemplated. However, they must learn from the mistakes of the Europe and US model of development that proved detrimental to our global environment and international realtion. Local wisdom and resource based education and research are the way forward.

Creativity in the 21 st century shall be embedded more in the social sphere rather than mere in the economic-sphere. The growth that we shall talk about in the 21st century is no longer mono-disciplinary economic, but is multi-disciplinary social. The universities are obliged to educate future leaders who are well-versed in a multi-cultural world where they can mine creativity in a much more tolerant world.

6. REFERENCES

Florida, R. " The rise of the Creative Class". Basic Books. 2002

Friedman, Thomas L. "The World is Flat : A Brief History of the Twenty First Century". Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 2005

Fukuyama, Francis, Y." The End of History and the Last Man". Penguin. 1992

Rosyid, Daniel M. "Nasionalisme tanpa Kemaritiman ?". Majalah Sang Guru. Forum Intelektual Indonesia. vol 1. 2011

Rosyid, Daniel M. "Paradigma Kepulauan Pembangunan Indonesia Abad 21". Orasi Guru Besar, Oktober 2010.

Stiglitz, Joseph E. "Freefall : America, Free Markets, and the Sinking of the World Economy". Norton, 2010

Zakaria, Fareed R. "The Post-American World". W.W.Norton and Company. 2008