

2014

Foreword to the International Edition

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Recommended Citation

Faust, D., & Puncochar, J. (2014). Foreword to the international edition. In A. C. Alwasilah, Islam, culture, and education: Essays on contemporary Indonesia (1st edition, pp. xi-xiv). Bandung, Indonesia: PT Remaja Rosdakarya

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Foreword to the International Edition

By Don Faust, Ph.D., and Judith Puncochar, Ph.D.

In: **Islam, Culture, and Education: Essays on Contemporary Indonesia** by A. Chaedar Alwasilah
2014

Published by PT Remaja Rosdakarya, Bandung, Indonesia

This book is an important collection of essays on the rich mosaic of contemporary challenges faced by Indonesia. A. Chaedar Alwasilah, Ph.D., is a professor of education at Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (Indonesian University of Education) and a *social philosopher* in the tradition of such as Josef Popper-Lynkeus (1838-1921) of Austria. Both the Indonesian and non-Indonesian reader will find amply witnessed in these essays the importance of his work and will relish and benefit from a resulting essential interaction of *close observation, local wisdom, and help for Indonesia*. Professor Alwasilah's embeddedness, as an Indonesian himself, shines through in each essay because he is an astute and culturally sensitive *observer, critic, and mentor of preferred futures* for Indonesia. He is deeply concerned about and carefully observant of the social milieu in which he walks daily, ardently seeking suggestions and directions for progress. One finds in this book a wide-ranging variety of deeply penetrating analyses of *Islam, cultural, and academics*. After perceptively characterizing the present situation, Professor Alwasilah boldly, discerningly, and yearningly offers penetrating ideas in enough detail to make his counsel helpful and practical. He proposes doable, collaborative, and courageous counsel to construct paths to preferred futures, which he suggests are both desirable and reachable.

The wondrous scope of these essays substantially adds value to the readers' comprehension of both the evolving nature of Indonesian society *and* the rich panoply of everyday Indonesian life. Dr. Alwasilah's *embeddedness* in his beloved culture and his deeply *religious perspectives* infused throughout his essays allow readers an opportunity to grasp the evolving nature of both the author himself and a progressive Indonesian society within a rich cultural heritage. Even non-religious readers who assert systems of morality should be separated from and stand rationally independent of systems of belief will find much insight to be gained by reading these essays. Dr. Alwasilah's observations and critiques allow readers to become figuratively *embedded observers* in the current reality of Indonesia, a country whose total population is fourth largest in the world and whose Muslim subpopulation is the largest in the world. Professor Alwasilah humbly entreats both the readers and the observed to move forward constructively toward shared and preferred futures.

Professor Alwasilah's breadth and depth of observation, critique, and suggestions offer readers practical examples to guide an understanding of the many possibilities for Indonesia's future. In "Preaching is Not Enough to Stop Radicalism", he discerns that the many subcultures of Indonesia have a moral wisdom distinct from Indonesia's religions, and he posits this moral wisdom should be used to enrich the schools' efforts to instruct all students in a morality to equip all students to understand the futility of violent radicalism. In "Redefining Religion at School", he excellently argues that schools should be 'surveying' the world's religions and discussing the virtuous moral systems found therein, rather than focusing on the rituals and metaphysics of each. In the tradition of such as Harvard University's Gordon Allport (1897-1967), Professor Alwasilah examines the immediate effects of present social contexts of learning. He argues against narrowing the experience of learning by, for example, having students attend only classes in their determined religion, which is a widely practiced current custom. In "Redefining Moral Education a Must", he laments ritualistic and dogmatic inculcation of moral stances in students. Instead, he argues clearly for an emphasis on critical thinking and logical argumentation to prepare students with better tools to *reason* their way to a rational morality, which ultimately will guide the development of an Indonesian citizenry to become productive problem solvers and effective decision makers and will guard against monopolistic thinking. In "Trimming Primary School Subjects toward Character Building", he argues for greater integration of content across the curriculum to help students understand better the breadth and connectedness of human knowledge and appreciate better the beauty of diversity and the need for respect of 'the other'. In "Language Education Builds Critical Thinking", he emphasizes teaching rationality in language education. He discusses how improved rationality would lead to a liberation of thinking in students in profound ways as they become constructive contributing Indonesian citizens throughout their lives. In "Presidential Debate a Form of Education", he points to an improvement in critical thinking by encouraging students to engage with their national political culture and public discourse.

This collection of essays shines with the strength and authenticity of Dr. Alwasilah's efforts to be helpful to his country and its people. The union of these essays offers readers inside and outside of Indonesia a valuable understanding of the vast realm of possible futures of the world's fourth largest nation. This book with its focus, critique, and suggestions will serve readers well indeed to grasp the possibilities of *preferred futures* for Indonesia through the foresight of Professor Alwasilah.

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