

RSOG Seminar :

“Paradigms of Non-Western Public Administration and Governance”

With

Professor Dr. Wolfgang Drechsler
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When : 3 March 2014
Where : Razak School of Government
Speakers : Professor Dr. Wolfgang Drechsler

About The Seminar

This seminar presented and discussed the different paradigms of governance with specific focus on public administration (PA), including the Chinese and Islamic paradigms in contrast to Western ones. In this context, there is not one global best model of PA, but that what is known as a global PA is in fact Western PA – to a large extent Anglo-American PA. The speaker included a discussion of the specific case of Islamic administration, in particular the legacy of Ottoman Empire. The seminar’s guiding question is if we arrive more easily at good PA if we realize that there are different contexts or even legitimately different goals, and thus either different ways thereto.

Summary

Introduction

In this seminar, Dr. Wolfgang discussed the different paradigms of public administration and governance, which encompasses different fields of social sciences such as political science and economics. He explained that there is no perfect model of Public Administration. This is in contrast to the general assumption that the western or Anglo-American model of Public Administration (PA) is the ideal, modern,

democratic model of governance. The western PA is widely used in many countries and remains the preferred model of governance. The Islamic and Chinese models of public administration are alternatives to western public administration. Each model has its unique characteristics and has influenced modern day governments throughout the world. The western PA was conceptualized by international organizations such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF). However, the track record of these organizations in many poor and war-torn countries has proven that it is not necessarily the best model. The speaker also mentioned the term good governance coined by IMF and World Bank. He said, that realistically, there is no good governance and instead just good enough governance. There are no perfect solutions, but there are always solutions to problems. The speaker then quoted the philosopher Aristotle who stated that civil servants have a duty to be ethical, they should possess competence that is in line with their work and understand the concept of justice because it denotes different ways of doing things the right way. He added that public management is relative rather than absolute.

Chinese Public Administration

The Chinese public administration is influenced by the teachings of Confucius. Some of the main characteristics of this model include an examination system for the civil servants, centralized bureaucracy, ethics and accountability and results-orientation. In addition, the track record of the Chinese model of public administration is better than the Islamic model because it is successfully implemented in countries such as Singapore and Taiwan. The speaker added that the Confucian system is easily acceptable to the West because of its success and immense contribution towards the field of public administration and governance. Countries practising the Chinese model of public administration include Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam, and Singapore. The rise of the Chinese public administration can be attributed to 3 main factors. Firstly, the global financial crisis (which has undermined the credibility of the West). Secondly, in recent years, the western model of public administration has seen a decline period and even the New Public Management has failed, except in Australia, Canada and New Zealand. Lastly, the phenomenon of the decline of the West and the rise of Asia has occurred in parallel and hence the contrasting fortunes of both civilizations. In addition, the re-emergence of China as a dominating world power has reaffirmed the influence and contribution of the Chinese model of public administration and governance.

Islamic Public Administration

In contrast, the Islamic model which was the foundation of successful governments such as the Ottoman Empire for 600 years has seen a decline over the years. Today, Turkey remains a progressive Muslim nation that practices Islamic public administration. The Islamic model of Public Administration is diverse and heterogeneous and was present in different civilizations. However, the element of Islam remains strong throughout the years. Although the legacy and origin of Islam is

still embedded in the system of governance, the approach to public administration varies from one government to another. This model places more emphasis on economic and political performance compared to the Confucian system. One of the key features of this model is decentralization of bureaucracy which enables each entity within a government to have their own system of governance.

The speaker concluded the seminar by emphasising the importance and influence of the Islamic and Chinese PA. Both are alternatives to the western model and characteristics from both are still relevant to the system of governance in many countries around the world.

Issues Raised :

- 1) The 3 main paradigms of public administration which is the Western, Chinese and Islamic model is often used to discuss public administration and governance because it is relevant and reliable compared to other models of public administration.
- 2) The perfect example of a comprehensive public administration is the Asian Model as it collectively represents an amalgamation of competent civil servants, good bureaucracies and effective and efficient systems of governance.
- 3) Malaysia has the potential to develop a Malaysian model of public administration. The diversity of the population is an asset that should be capitalized to develop a model of administration. However, there is the possibility of one group dominating the others and this could create further polarisation. There are several complex race-based issues that should be resolved before the country can develop such a model of governance.
- 4) The Ottoman Empire (1301-1922) which covered a large section of the Middle East and Eastern Europe, is governed by the Islamic model of public administration. It is an example of a successful government that Malaysia can emulate in the context of administrative structures, the education system and creating alliances and partnerships with groups comprising of different races and ideologies.

About The Speaker

Professor Dr. Wolfgang Drechsler is Professor and Chair of Governance at the Ragnar Nurkse School of Innovation and Governance (RNS) at Tallinn University of Technology (TUT), Estonia, co-director of its graduate Technology Governance program, and Vice Dean for International Relations of its Faculty of Social Sciences. His areas of scholarly interest include Public Administration, Technology, and Innovation; Non-Western,

especially Chinese and Islamic Public Administration; e-Governance; Municipal Autonomy; Academic Administration; and Public Management Re-form generally

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Contact

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