
ASIA WOMEN LEADERS INTERVIEW

Dr.Tian Belawati's Interview

Q1: Could you please introduce yourself a little?

Right now, I am a professor for the faculty of education and the chief of the university professor association in an open (Terbuka) university. I am also a supervisor for a committee of another Indonesian university formed by the Ministration of Education. I am now on the board of control of the Indonesian Council for Open And Distance Education ICDE. But of course, I am also in charge of other assignments.

Q2: How do you feel about all the roles that you play?

I am not the kind who knows what I want to do after I grow up when I was young. I just went with the flow. I went to university. After I finished my education, I just worked there, which is related to my educational background. Then I did what I had to do and finally became the university president. It's all so sudden. Suppose you do your work patiently and passionately and do your best. In that case, these efforts will take you to the top, possibly to the leadership position.

I was also very active in international corporations, which landed me the president of Sian Association University, ICDE, and open university board of directors, etc. It's just the consequences of what you do and give in. Because you were networking with people in your field, thus people got to know and like you.

I never think about it. But usually, I love what I do. I try to enjoy myself even when I have to do something that is not my favorite. I always try to create little moments with my colleagues to have some fun in my business schedule.

Q3: What have you been treasured for as a female leader?

I am very thankful that I am in Indonesia and in the field I work in. Because in this context, gender is not an issue. If people were not accepting gender equality, they wouldn't elect me as the president of

those organizations and my university. I also believe that in Indonesia, there is no difference in salary and opportunities between genders, so I am fortunate and grateful for the situation.

Although, there are some rare incidents where males dominate the situation. When I enter the room, they think I am the secretary and ask where the president is. But I never take those things seriously and think of them as some kind of pressure. I always think they don't know me, so I introduce myself.

Besides gender equality, I also treasure my self-confidence. Even when I face situations that are not very female-friendly, I am confident enough to expose myself to people and let them see that we are the leader, not them, those males. I always manage to see things from a positive point of view, so I rarely get pessimistic. Doesn't matter what happens; even during COVID, I am still optimistic.

Q4: What are some difficulties that you are facing now?

Now actually is my best time. When I don't have rigid responsibility, I have the freedom of time. When you are in a management position, especially the president, you don't have control of your time. The time has been fully scheduled by other people. My working hours are from five o'clock in the morning until ten o'clock in the evening. I have been doing this for twenty years already. Still, I am only working as a lecturer and no longer have any management responsibility. I get to choose what I want to do, and that's a luxury for me. When I was the president, I didn't get that. I have to meet people no matter if I like them or not.

Sometimes, when you want to go in a certain direction, but the situation doesn't allow it, I feel a little depressed, but it's not long, and I can overcome them.

Q5: What do you think is the education that Asians need now?

I think Asia cannot be generalized to one stereotype. Because in Asia, we have different levels of subsidy in terms of human resources, IT infrastructure, and digital literacy. Countries like Japan, Singapore, and Korea may have different needs. But for Indonesia, Thailand, Cambodia, and maybe some Southeast Asia countries, I think we still need to prepare our youths to be global citizens that are digitally literate and creative. For Indonesia, especially, we need to put a lot of effort into nurturing creativity in youths so that they will become consumers of technology products and producers or creators. I am related to countries with similar development levels as Indonesia, such as Southeast Asia countries except for Singapore and a little bit of Malaysia.

I think the situation in Japan may be different. When you face aging, society may urge more young people to have more children. So, you must educate female students, so they are not anti-marriage and anti-family. There's only a fine line between an extreme feminist and an independent and self-confident female. Education is important, but maybe for different countries, there are different priorities.

But digital literacy also has levels, so maybe you can achieve a higher level of digital literacy from whatever baseline you have now. For example, the ethical issues in the digital world are something we are concerned about. Because some netizens lack communication ethics and cultural ethics. If you look at Twitter or TikTok content, you will find some netizens are not constructive in helping society. For example, the dangerous challenges in Tik Tok I think are concerning to everybody. This is also the impact of the downside of the lack of digital literacy.

Q6: Can you give us some suggestions on how we can collaborate among different countries to further our goals?

I think what the youth needs now is inspiration. Because I think they will do that from technique preparation that is the authority of national countries. However, the Asian Women Leaders' Forum can develop campaigns to inspire the female youth by exposing them to women leaders and sharing their experiences. Inspiration can give them ideas, nurture their self-confidence, and expand their vision of how they can contribute to the betterment of society. Other important aspects of collaboration are timing and budgeting. For example, we can more effectively educate people via online resources and live-streaming talk shows.

Q7: We are planning to launch an online platform where there will be 1,000 professional women leaders to collaborate and ally with one another, for the betterment of Asia. Can you give us some suggestions on how to develop this platform?

That is very tricky because most of us already belong to many forums. People prefer to use pre-existing platforms such as LinkedIn and Facebook. My suggestion is that you can create a group on these platforms. Alternatively, you can create your own website, but I am not sure about this approach. In my experience, if there is no neutral project for people to work together, there will not be a lot of participation. So you should have a project as a guideline, giving participants an incentive to work and cooperate with each other towards a common goal.



< Prof. Ir. Tian Belawati, M.Ed., Ph.D>

Professor Tian Belawati has served lifetime professional contributions to open and distance learning (ODL). She has had extensive experiences in research, teaching, and administration of a large scale open university system, which serves over 400,000 students residing in Indonesia and overseas.

Her work experiences include various positions within an ODL institution that serves diverse groups of students with differing needs and circumstances. She started her career in academic life in 1985 when she joined Universitas Terbuka (UT) as an editor. She then received scholarships to further her study and was awarded the Master of Education degree from Simon Fraser University and Doctor of Philosophy degrees from the University of British of Columbia, Canada. Upon her return to UT, Indonesia in 1996, she was appointed as Head of the Center for Indonesian Studies. As Head of the Center, she was able to significantly increase funding allocation for research, establish accredited academic journal of ODL in Indonesia, and promote research culture within UT. During her term, UT introduced research-based policy making that has paved the way for achievement and future direction of UT as a reputable quality ODL provider. Her leadership experience of the Centre has further taken her to greater responsibilities as Vice Rector for Academic Affairs at UT. As Vice Rector she introduced innovations and good practices in the use of new technology for the delivery of ODL. Her two-terms as Vice Rector, from 2001 up to 2009, have taken UT into a new ODL platform in a developing country context through utilization of new and appropriate technology. Among others, she has introduced innovations through UT Online, such as online tutorials, open educational resources (OERs), online examination, digital library, integrated information system for learning materials development, and other ICT-based initiatives in teaching, learning and academic administration.

Professor Belawati is currently serving her second term of office as the Rector of UT. In the first two years of her first office term as Rector, she has taken decisive actions to mobilize effort in partnerships with stakeholders to improve the quality of ODL, develop greater public confidence in ODL, and establish collaborative effort with international as well as regional ODL institutions and associations. She is extensively involved in various joint initiatives with other ODL players and organizations in her capacity as both ODL researcher and top administrator. Her professional achievements have led her appointments as Secretary General (2007-2009) and then President (2009-2010) of the Asian Association of Open Universities (AAOU). Her leadership was further acknowledged at the global level

through her appointment as a member of the Election Committee (2007-2009), a member of the Executive Committee (2009-now), and currently as the President of the International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE), the leading global membership organization for open, distance, flexible and online education, including e-learning which holds a consultative partner status with UNESCO.

Professor Belawati holds a Doctor of Philosophy in Adult Education (University of British Columbia, Canada, and a Master of Education in Management of Distance Education (Simon Fraser University, Canada.). Her academic reputation in ODL has been recognized through various awards, namely GTP-Bappenas Awards for independent research; World Bank Awards, the Young Academic Program of Indonesian, the Directorate General for Higher Education (YAP-DGHE) for independent research; YAP-DGHE Awards for international publication; IDRC-PanAsia Organization Award for both independent and collaborative research; and Fullbright Award for senior independent research. The latest awards she received were for her life time contributions in the field of education, the AAOU Meritorious Service Award in 2012 and the Distinguished Individual Promoter of the ODL from the African Council for Distance Education (ACDE) in June 2014.



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