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Al Makin

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Cross Cultural Educational Exchanges
between Indonesia and Japan
Current, Japan has become a country which has a big influence especially in South East Asia. They actively build bilateral and multilateral cooperation with other countries like establishing the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) in August 1974. The cooperation has involved many sectors such as technology, politics, economy, social affairs and culture.

On the ASEAN stage, Japan is actively promoting its culture to ASEAN countries, including Indonesia. One major program is “Pesantren Leaders’ Visit to Japan”. The program is a cooperation between the Japanese Embassy and the Center for the Study of Islam and Society (PPIM), UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, which has run from 2004 until now.

In the program, the Japanese Government every year invites several religious education leaders in Indonesia to observe the social and culture dynamics of the Japanese. Not only that, they are also invited to visit some schools, government offices, small and medium enterprises in Japan to see the latest productivity developments, including the
problems and challenges they have in many sectors. As a result of its ongoing work, this bilateral program has produced a cross-cultural network and inter-faith dialogue among Islamic schools in Indonesia and Japan.

Through 2016, the alumni of “Pesantren Leaders’ Visit to Japan” have reached 130 people in total. The positive response from Japanese Government and enthusiasm from the participants are indicators of the success of the program. Because of that, based on the program’s triumphs, at the end of 2016, the Center for the Study of Islam and Society (PPIM) UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta proudly held a workshop titled “The Jakarta Workshop on Promoting Cross-Cultural Educational Exchanges in ASEAN” on November 28-29 2016. This workshop was a cooperation of PPIM supported by the Japanese mission to ASEAN through its Japan ASEAN Integrated Fund (JAIF) and the Ministry of Education and Culture of Indonesia.

The workshop took the form of a dialogue forum for two days in Sari Pan Pacific Hotel, Jakarta. The attendance was approximately 225 people, consisting of the alumni of Islamic Pesantren Leaders’ Visit to Japan, representatives of 120 Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia, five Islamic religious teachers in Jakarta, representatives of public schools in Indonesia and representatives of government officials and experts from ASEAN countries like Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam.

The aim of the program was to spread peace and understanding specifically in ASEAN through inter-faith education and cultural exchange programs in South East Asia. Jamhari Makruf, a member of the advisory board of PPIM, said that the purpose of the program was to contribute to increasing cooperation to build peace and mutual understanding in the context of cultural diversity in South East Asian countries and Japan.

In addition, this cooperation was expected to be the seed of good relations, not only between Indonesia and Japan but also with other ASEAN Countries. Recalling that in two decades, according to Azyumardi Azra CBE, the image of Islam as a respectful religion had already been seriously damaged in the wake of several global conflicts, especially after the 9/11 tragedy and terrorism in the Middle East and West that hurt the image of Islam. As a result, on this issue Indonesia and Japan are strategic partners that can be accepted by all sides in
the middle of the conflict, actively encouraging the world to prevent Islamophobia.

On the first day, the event was opened by Prof. Dr. Jamhari Makruf, as a member of the advisory board of PPIM. In his speech, Jamhari said that the workshop would discuss how religious teachers could have a role in planting universal values of humanity that could bring peace and welfare to the ASEAN Community. He also told about the Japan visit program started from the cooperation between PPIM and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan by inviting 10 kiyais/teachers from Islamic boarding schools and madrasahs in Indonesia to visit Japan. In Japan, the kiyais/teachers learned about the education system in Japan, had a dialogue with monks to exchange ideas about universal religious values. Additionally, they had a chance to experience “home-stay” in Japanese houses. This became a forum for learning from each other about religion and culture.

Meanwhile Kazuo Sunaga, Ambassador of Japanese Mission to ASEAN in his speech gave the highest appreciation to PPIM for the workshop. He hoped the Japan visit program would not only be filled by Islamic boarding school leaders from Indonesia, but also be open widely to the other ASEAN countries, so that they could have a dialogue about the importance of an Islam that is diverse, tolerant and respectful of one another. The last speech was by Hilman Farid, representing Prof. Dr. Muhadjir Effendy, MAP. He gave the highest appreciation and hoped the workshop could provide a lot of opportunity to share ideas and experiences about cross-cultural activities among ASEAN countries. In his opinion, cultural and religious diversity should not be a chasm of separation between countries. In closing, he hoped that in the future Indonesia could still be an envoy to create friendship and peace, not only between Indonesia and Japan, but also among other nations around the world.

Next, the workshop continued with plenary session themed “Exchange of Information Concerning the Situation of Religious Education in the Respective AMS to Share Universal Values of Humanity”. In the plenary there were six speaker’s representatives of several ASEAN countries, namely Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Cambodia, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam.

Azyumardi Azra as the first speaker addressed the important of the exchanges to provide examples on how Islamic education in Indonesia
may be improved. According to him, “Indonesia is the largest system of Islamic education in the world”. Islamic boarding schools and madrasahs form crucial heritage of Indonesia that contribute to political stability and social capital in this nation. Furthermore, the educational world in Indonesia is quite unique because it uses “two parallel systems of education”, which fall under the authority of two ministries: The Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Education and Culture, ranging from basic and intermediate education to higher education.

Specifically regarding Islamic boarding schools, he said that Islamic boarding schools nowadays have been transformed. It used to be that “Islamic boarding schools were rural based”, where they were identical with underdevelopment and regression, with the students’ condition which often appeared unclean. But, Azra continued, in the last 20 years Islamic boarding schools have changed into modern institutions. This transformation is the result of the majority of alumni graduating from PTKIN, the bringing ideas of the compatibility between Islam and modernity. Right now, Islamic boarding schools have become “holding institutions”, which not only teach about Islamic education such as fiqh, theology, the Qur’an, hadith and the history of Islamic civilization based on the traditional classical texts (kitab kuning), but they also integrate general studies like mathematics, physics, sociology, etc. This indicates that Islamic boarding schools have experienced developments in a positive direction, especially in the diversification of subjects. One more interesting thing from Islamic boarding schools is their comparative superiority, wherein Islamic boarding schools can provide calm and peace to their students because of all day supervision. Thus, according to Azyumardi Azra, it is not excessive to say that Islamic boarding schools are a part of the world’s major Islamic heritage that must be protected.

Next came comments from Thich Giac Hiep, as the representative of Vietnam. He spoke about religious education in Vietnam. According to him, all this time the Vietnamese government has given freedom to its people to choose their religion, and the number of recognized religions is about 40. Religious education in Vietnam is always directed to give contribution in resolving environmental damage, combatting poverty and providing positive outcomes. Besides these goals, religious education aims to uphold equality and justice. In this context, the
students are taught to make religious values a living spirit. Even though there are different kinds of religions, still all of them teach their followers to appreciate living beings. Dissimilar with Vietnam, in Thailand according to Isama-Ae Narasantikum, religious education is more directed to resolve modern era challenges and contemporary issues like morality among youth. Thailand has a Buddhist majority while Islam is the minority, and religious education institutions are always supervised by the government.

Not much different from Thailand, in Cambodia Islam is a minority religion. The main religion is Buddhism with 95% of the population. After the prolonged war, Cambodia tried to focus their religious education to improve behavior. There are four types of religious schools: Buddhist, Christian, traditional local spiritualism and Islamic. Luckily, the government schools are free of charge and the teachers paid by the government. Meanwhile in Malaysia with its Muslim majority, religious education is given so students know the value of peace and fight extremism in the globalized world. In Malaysia, the role of the Ministry of Education in education itself is strengthening the curriculum both for community religious schools (pondok) curriculum and for formal Islamic education.

The last presentation was from Brunei Darussalam, by Julianawati Binti H. Hamdan. She said that Islamic education in Brunei is a compulsory lesson for the students and the citizens of Brunei, starting from the lowest education to the highest levels. Even for non-Muslims, Islamic education is required by the state. This is the rule of the Brunei government.

The conclusion of the plenary was presented by Saiful Umam, saying that regardless of the specific religion, the state has already been present in religious education across South East Asian countries, for example in providing funding and grants. All states in South East Asia give support to religious education. “We must be lucky, because of this cross-cultural program, we could learn about the development of religious education in South East Asian countries”. The closing of the first day of the workshop was by visiting MAN Insan Cendekia Serpong.

In the second plenary session, themed “History and outcomes of the bilateral exchange program between Indonesian Islamic schools and Japan”, Shingo Miyamoto, the director of International Cooperation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, discussed the impact of the
cultural visit on Japanese people. He said that Japanese people have learned about moderate and tolerant understandings of Islam. He would support extending such a program to other AMS. He also said there are several characteristics of Japanese society that resulted from Japan’s educational system: high level of average performance; good planning and execution; high level of adherence to norms and rules; and good at working in groups.

In the same session, Prof. Jamhari also talked about why Japan has been chosen as a bilateral partner, because Japan is the only country that successfully achieved modernization without losing its identity. The essence of Japanese culture is considered capable of strengthening the application of Islamic values as they have been understood for a long time by Islamic boarding schools. Therefore, the big expectation from this workshop is to become the starting point for the development of the possibility to expand the exchange program to the other ASEAN members.

The next session was parallel discussions, which separated into five groups with various themes. The purpose of this parallel discussion was for each group to recommend follow-up programs that will be included in the final report.

The first group discussed the challenge of the experience of cultural visit on education exchanges, with recommendations to strengthen networking among alumni of cultural visits. The second group talked about Japanese culture, and offered recommendations about the need for regular workshops for cultural visit alumni and conducting a visit program to Islamic boarding schools which have successfully implemented the benefits of this exchange program to Japan.

The third group discussed the experience of the cultural visit to Hiroshima, with recommendations on the need to create a network between alumni of Islamic boarding schools Leaders’ Visit to Japan and on developing joint action on a regional basis in accordance with the appropriate characteristics and problems of the local community. The fourth group discussed the experience of cultural visits on home-stay in Japan, with recommendations that the duration of the exchange program should be extended, the homestay should be conducted in villages in Japan (not in towns) so the participants can get deeper understanding about the daily life of an authentic Japanese society, the program should create a directory of alumni of Islamic boarding schools Leaders’ Visit to Japan in order to enlarge networking and cooperation.
among educators, and participants of the exchange program should be equipped with a guide book or a map of the Japanese people’s lives, together with Japanese daily vocabulary. The last group discussed the experience of cultural visit on inter-faith dialogue, and offered the recommendations that this cross-cultural educational exchange program should be expanded to other ASEAN member countries and not only should Islamic boarding school’s leaders be given the opportunity to join the exchange program but also religion teachers from public schools.

Finally, the two-day workshop received a positive response from all participants. They felt that there were many valuable lessons that could be learned from Japanese characteristics to be applied in Indonesia, especially in Islamic boarding schools, such as the culture of hygiene, honesty, modesty, teamwork, independence, responsibility, discipline and reading culture. Some kyais/teachers from Islamic boarding schools revealed their gratitude for this program. Ketut Jamal from Bina Insani Islamic boarding school in Tabanan, Bali, for example said:

“My experience when I visited Japan was so beneficial to our Islamic boarding school. Religious values were internalized in Japanese people. I felt the diversity was something that cannot be avoided. As a form of cooperation, I hope to some Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia could provide space to describe religious education in ASEAN countries, and there would be teachers or ustaz exchange programs between ASEAN countries.”

Besides that, Japan as a modern country in fact can defend its culture very well, as Rasyidin Bina from Ar-Raudlatul Hasanah Islamic boarding school Medan, North Sumatra, noted:

“The Japanese people managed to defend their culture in a very good way, but uniquely it is still modern. Japanese people are very hygienic, very different from Indonesians. I think this program can be applied in Islamic boarding school in Indonesia.”

Zaenal, a representative of Muhammadiyah in Tanah Toraja, also noticed similar things:

“Japan is unique in culture. Religion does not seem important in Japan, but religious values are practiced well. Japan prioritizes harmony in relations among humans.”

Zamri, a representative of Malaysia, spoke of his expectations from this program,
“In my opinion, this program should be targeted toward countries in conflict, especially Islamic conflict, and this program should be continued at the level of ASEAN.”

Finally, the workshop was closed with some recommendations, such as, first, participants agree that cultural visit programs are very important; second, participants agree that the Japanese government should support the expansion of this program; third, all participants agree to expand this kind of program to other ASEAN member countries.

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Submission of Articles

Studia Islamika, published three times a year since 1994, is a bilingual (English and Arabic), peer-reviewed journal, and specializes in Indonesian Islamic studies in particular and Southeast Asian Islamic studies in general. The aim is to provide readers with a better understanding of Indonesia and Southeast Asia’s Muslim history and present developments through the publication of articles, research reports, and book reviews.

The journal invites scholars and experts working in all disciplines in the humanities and social sciences pertaining to Islam or Muslim societies. Articles should be original, research-based, unpublished and not under review for possible publication in other journals. All submitted papers are subject to review of the editors, editorial board, and blind reviewers. Submissions that violate our guidelines on formatting or length will be rejected without review.

Articles should be written in American English between approximately 10,000-15,000 words including text, all tables and figures, notes, references, and appendices intended for publication. All submission must include 150 words abstract and 5 keywords. Quotations, passages, and words in local or foreign languages should
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