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Steven Drakeley

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Document

Islam, Local Culture, and Japan-Indonesian Relations

Muhammad Nida' Fadlan & Dadi Darmadi

ocal culture is undoubtedly a very important aspect to every nation. Having an awareness of local culture, especially among the youth, plays a great role in shaping a society and a state. For one to have an appreciation of another country's culture, however, can be an important starting point in breaking down barriers of misperceptions or misunderstandings, and in helping to build global relationships. In support of this idea, the Japanese Embassy in Jakarta this year offered a special program called the Japan-East Asia Network of Exchange for Students and Youth (JENESYS) to strengthen the awareness of Japanese local culture among Muslim youth in Indonesia. In early 2014, the Japanese government, working in cooperation with PPIM (Center for the Study of Islam and Society) at UIN Syarif Hidayatullah in Jakarta, invited a number of university students to visit Japan.

Through the JENESYS 2.0 program, 96 university students went to Japan to conduct a cultural exchange program. PPIM UIN Jakarta was chosen to host this program for its extended networks and for its reputation in conducting research and consultancy on Islamic education

in Indonesia. During the past 10 years, PPIM has successfully taken more than 100 *kyai* and *pesantren* leaders of various backgrounds to Japan. Most notably, these have been leaders with strong traditions in nurturing education for Muslim students in traditional and modern Islamic boarding schools.

When Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visited Indonesia in early January 2013, his administration used the opportunity to introduce the JENESYS program, aimed at strengthening Japan's friendships and partnerships with Asia-Oceania countries, especially Indonesia. Japan targets Indonesian students to promote a better mutual understanding between the two countries. The Japanese government also aims at revitalizing bilateral economic cooperation. During the past few years, the Japanese government has also promoted its tourism sector in Asian countries.

During their time in Japan from 24 February to 4 March this year, the students visited several Japanese companies to see directly the cutting edge of Japan's high technology in different fields. The students learned how these products became 'Made in Japan'. To provide a cross-cultural understanding, the Indonesian participants also visited several Japanese provinces to learn about their various cultures, attractions and local values. By visiting a variety of historic architectural locations, religious buildings and a World Heritage site, the Indonesian youths were introduced to the importance of local culture in Japanese society. Also, each participant stayed for a few days with a Japanese family as part of a homestay program.

The Japanese government fully funded these activities, while the Japan International Cooperation Center (JICE) and the Embassy of Japan in Jakarta were charged with implementing them. Staff of PPIM UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta were asked to lead a selection team to recruit candidates and coordinators for the program.

The enthusiasm among Indonesian students to participate in this program was very high. About 3,500 applications were received for the program during the registration period from 20-27 January. All researchers at PPIM UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta were asked to help in the selection process. They developed a set of criteria in order to recruit highly qualified candidates. The selection process was undertaken in two stages. In the first stage, an administrative selection process narrowed down the remaining number of candidates to 150.

For the second stage, each candidate was interviewed and assessed on their performance. This allowed for the final number of successful candidates to be reduced to 96.

The selection process considered several important aspects and principles of proportionality, especially in terms of gender distribution, representation of geographic regions, as well as the typology of the student category. Ensuring diversity of students' backgrounds with students originating from the Islamic University, public higher education and Islamic educational institutions such as boarding schools and madrasahs—was an important factor in creating the diversity of quality and quantity of program participants.

PPIM UIN Jakarta then performed administration tasks, such as managing the applicants' visa application process with the Embassy of Japan. Once this process was complete, the Embassy of Japan in Indonesia invited the successful participants for a brief orientation before their departure to Japan. In representing the ambassador, the adviser on political affairs, Mr Naoyuki Shintani, said that the Japanese government had high hopes for all of the JENESYS 2.0 participants to become 'ambassadors' for the people of Indonesia and, on their return to Indonesia, introduce Japanese culture. In addition, the executive director of PPIM UIN Jakarta, Dr. Ali Munhanif, also stressed the importance of Indonesian students absorbing the noble values developed by the Japanese community to strengthen the Indonesian nation's character. The orientation event above was a special moment for the participants, as it was held on the day prior to being dispatched to Japan. As an organizer, PPIM UIN Jakarta commissioned Dr. Saiful Umam as the coordinator of the group. He was accompanied by fellow coordinators Muhammad Rifqi Fatkhi, MA, Elvi Fetrina, MIT, and Ida Rasyidah, MA.

Upon their arrival in Tokyo, a JICE orientation program encouraged the students pay careful attention to Japanese cultural practices and values during their field visits—especially those contained at the various cultural sites that were scheduled.

Because most Japanese adhere to Buddhism and Shintoism faiths, there was no specific Islamic place to visit. However, the students were able to witness how some values inherent in their own Islamic doctrines, such as respect for parents and for nature, and the importance of cleanliness, of hard-work and of self-discipline, also continued to be nurtured in Japanese society. The success story that is Japan—as a country that has time and again successfully rebuilt its society from vicious wars and various natural disasters—comes from the agility of Japanese people to preserve their values: discipline, hard work, innovation, creativity and friendliness.

For the field trips, the students were divided into four groups. They visited three different areas: Chiba Prefecture, Osaka Prefecture and Okayama Prefecture. In addition to being led by a group coordinator from PPIM UIN Jakarta, each group was also accompanied by two facilitators from JICE who worked as guides and translators to the students. Each student got to experience a taste of 'real' Japanese life through their placements with local families as part of the homestay program.

In Chiba Prefecture, the students visited some of the most important cultural places in the region. These included the Edo-Tokyo Museum and the Meiji Jingu Shinto Shrine. The students also made a courtesy visit to the City of Kamogawa, Harajuku Culture Market, the Maiwai site to witness the dyeing practice, Kamogawa Seaworld and the Festival of Puppet Princess (Big Katsuura Hinamatsuri). They also observed local industry—an ice factory and fishing port in Kamogawa—and religious practices at the Seichoji Buddhist temples. They also paid an academic visit to the Faculty of Tourism at the Josai International University.

The group which visited Osaka Prefecture went to the Osaka Castle and the Sumiyoshi Grand Shrine Shinto, and witnessed a tea ceremony. They attended the Sakai City Museum and the Ancient Tomb of the Emperor Nintoku. They made an academic visit to the Hagoromo University of International Studies, while also taking in lessons at Osaka Gas (Gas Science Museum). The students also paid a courtesy visit to the City of Sakai.

The third group enjoyed their time in Okayama Prefecture, where they conducted a courtesy visit to the Governor of Okayama's office, took in the sights and sounds of Kurashiki and also visited Aeon Mall Kurashiki, Bizen Sword Museum Osafune, Korekuen Park and Fort Okayama. They also got a first-hand glimpse of Sekisuiheim's cuttingedge technology and observed the development of local industries in the Takada Orimono. The participants made an academic visit to Shujitsu University.

Students were successfully able to identify many characteristics of the local culture— even if a group did not go to the other areas, that group was still able to identify cultural aspects of those other areas. On March 3, all participants reconvened at the Tokyo Ekimae Conference Center in order to present the results of their visits and share them with other participants. This event was also attended by representatives of the Indonesian Embassy in Tokyo.

Dr. Saiful Umam, in his closing speech, said that this activity had a positive impact. In addition to strengthening the friendship between the two nations, JENESYS 2.0 provided an opportunity for each student to develop an awareness of the importance of caring for their ancestral culture. The students were also challenged to be creative in adopting innovation to their culture without necessarily changing the values contained therein. Dr. Saiful Umam said there were many interesting experiences that students had learned, but especially in how to respect punctuality, discipline and a hard work ethic—as most Japanese do.

As a token of appreciation, and as follow-up activity, PPIM UIN Jakarta has tasked each participant to write about his or her experience in Japan. The writings, in an essay format, are planned to be published as a book. This book will promote the values of Japanese culture, as witnessed through the eyes of these Indonesian students in the JENESYS 2.0 program.

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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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- 2. Booth, Anne. 1988. "Living Standards and the Distribution of Income in Colonial Indonesia: A Review of the Evidence." *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 19(2): 310–34.
- 3. Feener, Michael R., and Mark E. Cammack, eds. 2007. *Islamic Law in Contemporary Indonesia: Ideas and Institutions*. Cambridge: Islamic Legal Studies Program.
- 4. Wahid, Din, 2014. Nurturing Salafi Manhaj: A Study of Salafi Pesantrens in Contemporary Indonesia. PhD dissertation. Utrecht University.
- 5. Utriza, Ayang, 2008. "Mencari Model Kerukunan Antaragama." *Kompas*. March 19: 59.
- 6. Ms. *Undhang-Undhang Banten*, L.Or.5598, Leiden University.
- 7. Interview with K.H. Sahal Mahfudz, Kajen, Pati, June 11th, 2007.

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