

THE IMAGE OF CONTEMPORARY JAPAN FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF INDONESIAN VISITOR

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ABSTRACT

Before the outbreak of the Pandemic Covid-19, together with a better economic and political relationship between Indonesia and Japan, the number of Indonesian visitors to Japan for several different purposes has significantly increased and vice versa. It has opened a bigger opportunity for the development of cultural understanding to each other through more intensive direct encounters and people-to-people direct communication, both in Japan and Indonesia. The article focuses on describing the image of contemporary Japan from the point of view of the Indonesian visiting Japan. Employing a qualitative approach through serial fieldwork in Hokkaido and Tokyo, research findings show that witnessing the daily behaviour of the Japanese in their home country and directly interacting with the host community through tourism grounds have shaped a new better image of contemporary Japan and the Japanese. It proves the role of tourism in increasing the better cultural understanding between two different cultural groups, including those inheriting a bitter memory from a particular conflict in the past.

Keywords: Image; Japan; Interaction; Cultural; Tourism

ABSTRAK

Sebelum merebaknya Pandemi Covid-19, seiring dengan hubungan politik serta ekonomi yang lebih baik antara Indonesia dengan Jepang, jumlah kunjungan dari Indonesia ke Jepang untuk berbagai tujuan meningkat secara signifikan, begitu pula sebaliknya, dari Jepang ke Indonesia. Hal ini telah membuka kesempatan untuk terbentuknya suatu pemahaman budaya yang lebih baik diantara satu sama lain sebagai hasil dari interaksi langsung yang terjadi, baik di Jepang maupun di Indonesia. Artikel ini berfokus untuk menggambarkan bagaimana citra Jepang kontemporer dari orang Indonesia yang berkunjung ke Jepang. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif melalui penelitian lapangan di Hokkaido dan Tokyo, temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa melihat perilaku sehari-hari orang Jepang di negara asalnya serta berinteraksi langsung khususnya melalui berbagai kegiatan yang terkait pariwisata dengan tuan rumah telah membentuk citra yang lebih baik tentang Jepang dan orang Jepang di masa kini. Hal ini membuktikan bagaimana peran penting pariwisata dalam meningkatkan pemahaman budaya yang lebih baik antara dua kelompok budaya yang berbeda, termasuk mereka yang mewarisi konflik di masa lalu.

Kata Kunci: Citra; Jepang; Interaksi; Budaya; Pariwisata

INTRODUCTION

The establishment of the Fukuda Doctrine in 1977 which was based on a speech by former Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda has been considered an important turning point for the relationship between Japan and ASEAN countries, including Indonesia from inheriting a bitter memory of the colonization period to a closer and open economic relationship (Koga, 2017). Fukuda offered three principles to promote a positive “heart-to-heart” relationship between Japan and Southeast Asian countries; sociocultural and economic dimensions to entail political and security dimensions as well (2017). Therefore, in the last few decades Japan-Indonesia’s relationship has gone not only beyond economic and political dimensions, but also entering the socio-cultural dimensions. In this development, tourism is considered one of the important sectors promoting closer cultural relations between the people of

these two countries. This article focuses on how the interaction between “people to people” through tourism grounds acts as an effective way to enhance a better understanding of Indonesian to Japan in line with the increasing numbers of Indonesian visiting Japan for different purposes; working, studying and including tourism. Anggarani in Widiyanto et. al (2023) emphasizes that the increasing numbers of foreign students in Japan in the last few years have significantly transformed Japan into a more multicultural society from a bit closed community. Moreover, the current trend of depopulation in Japan also brings Japan as a popular country for foreign workers to come, including those who are from Indonesia. Hoang (2022) estimates that depopulation will bring Japan’s labour shortage in 2030 reaches 420.000 which directly brings a bigger opportunity for foreign workers to come.



Figure 1. Indonesian visitors to Japan, January 2023
(Source: Japan National Tourism, 2023)

The better transportation technology, more advanced information and communication technology (ICT) and the wealthier middle-class society in

Indonesia contribute to the influx of Indonesian visitors to Japan. According to the official data from the Japan National Tourism Organization, before

the outbreak of Covid-19, Japan was visited by 31.882.049 international tourists in 2019 meanwhile, the Japanese overseas travellers reached 21.532.988 million people. Among them were 308.850 Indonesian who visited several different tourist areas, especially Hokkaido and Kanto regions. Hokkaido is famous for its snow-based tourist attractions for the Indonesians who have no snow in their home country, while Kanto region with its urban tourism and Mount Fuji as the icon is considered as new magnet for the middle class of Indonesian. In a similar year, among 6,27 million foreign visitors visiting Bali in 2019, around 257.959 were Japanese which was the third largest for the Asian countries after China and India (Bali Province Central Statistical Bureau, 2020). It shows that Bali is still considered the most popular tourist destination for the Japanese, meanwhile the capital area of Japan; Kanto is the most one for Indonesians.

The increased number of Indonesian visiting Japan has resulted in direct encounters between two communities inheriting the memory of the colonialization period in the past. In fact, the Japanese occupation period during 1942-1945 brought unbearable suffering for the people of Indonesia, although it mobilized as well as motivated movements to gain freedom (Surajaya, 2017). However, the legacy of horror rooted in the Japanese occupation era is being continuously reproduced in various ways in Indonesia; the history subject at the elementary schools and the establishment of several war monuments representing Japanese cruelty. It then

shapes the common people in Indonesia to perceive the Japanese as the antagonist figure while consuming various Japan's products; electronic devices, automotive, *anime* and Japanese foods. Considering direct encounters between different cultural groups as the vehicle of cultural competence's development, it also raises a question to answer whether an intensive encounter and interaction between Indonesian visitors in Japan could produce a better image of the Japanese.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the past few decades, tourism has been considered as one of the instruments of globalization that is marked by the elimination of many barriers and paves the way for the flow of people, goods, capital, information, communication and lifestyle on a worldwide scale (Cohen, 2013). The development of better transportation infrastructure and technology has directly placed tourism as an important sector of the global economy and expected as a key driver for various socioeconomic progress. Moreover, the more urbanized society has shaped a new culture of urban tourism based on the dynamic characteristic of urban society (Gravari-Barbass et, al, 2019). It encourages the movement of people for recreational purposes to similar grounds and brings tourism destinations as the arena of encountering people from different cultural backgrounds. In this case, tourism as one instrument of globalization is potentially shaping the hybridization culture (Pieterse, 1994). In a similar vein, the involvement of the local community in

the tourism industry is considered not only motivated by the economic benefit of the industry but also as a ground for cultural expression (Widiyanto et, al, 2023). Therefore, Li et, al (2021) pay attention to the “cultural corridor” to preserve natural and cultural authenticity from the external influences in China. Moreover, direct interaction between the different cultures also could enhance the need for cultural preservation and motivate the collectivism of the host community (Shahzalal, 2016). Therefore, this study also expects that the intensive interaction of Indonesian visitors with the host community in Japan could enhance a better understanding of each other.

In the case of Japan and Southeast Asian countries in the post-Fukuda Doctrine, cultural diplomacy is the popular strategy to re-image the perspective of the Japanese. Nugraha (2017) pays attention to the role of the Japan Foundation in introducing Japanese culture, art and education paving the way for the increase of Japanese language learners and the Japanese subject in Indonesian tertiary education. The cultural way also relies on the virtual ground through the internet and television has placed Japanese popular culture as a tool of public diplomacy of the Japanese to complete political and economic diplomacy with limited direct people-people interaction which is an important strategy to enhance cultural competence. Cultural competence is commonly defined as the ability to deal with cultural differences and conflict in the past as a bridge between your own culture and the culture of the other party you are dealing with

Van Nispen (2015). In the case of the Indonesian-Japanese, the legacy of the Japanese occupation in Southeast Asia has been continuously reproduced in several ways. Widiyanto and Atiqah as cited in Widiyanto et, al (2023; 12) have identified three instruments to reproduce the legacy of Japanese colonization in Malaysia; (a) history subjects in the national educational system, (b) folklore inherited across generations and (c) the existence of Penang War Museum displaying the horror during the Japanese occupation period. However, the influx of Japanese visitors to Penang and direct encounters with the host community have shaped the development of a better image of the Japanese.

The importance of the tourism sector as a part of Japan’s economic sectors has been marked by the establishment of the Japan Tourism Agency in 2008 (Adeja, 2018). It has been commonly aimed at enhancing the capacity and quality of the tourism industry in Japan within the global tourism market. Moreover, in the last few years, Japan also tries to engage with the global Muslim tourism market by intensively delivering halal tourism in Japan as one of its tourism brands (Amalia and Wibisono, 2021). In a similar vein, Wahidati and Sarinastiti (2018) emphasize although Japan is considered a halal tourism destination for Indonesian visitors, however, non-halal foods are found to be combined with the promoted-halal product in many restaurants. However, Tristofa and Tham (2022) have identified that language obstacle is one of the biggest barriers for foreign visitors, including those from

Indonesia to intensively interact with their local Japanese host.

METHOD

The qualitative method is employed to study the impact of people-to-people interaction through tourism ground between Indonesian visitors and the Japanese host in Japan. According to Cresswell (2014), a qualitative method is expected to understand the individual's and group's meaning connected to a particular social problem. Primary data collection relied on participant observation, in-depth interviews and visual documentation completed by the secondary data analysis through the archival study to reveal the impact of the interaction between the Indonesian visitors and the host community in Japan. 9 visitors from Indonesia have been interviewed during their travel to Sapporo, Hakodate and Tokyo area. Gaining the Japanese point of view, interviews also were conducted with the 7 Japanese in Hokkaido and Tokyo.

The fieldwork was conducted in two different areas in Japan; Hokkaido and also Tokyo area in Japan. Tokyo is added to address the limited number of Indonesian visitors to Hokkaido during the winter fieldwork. The study is giving attention to the motive of visiting Japan as the starting point and the types of destinations visited also have been given during the fieldwork. The primary data from this fieldwork were completed with secondary data to reveal the different images of the Japanese as the impact of direct encounters through tourism.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Understanding the image of Indonesian visitors to Japan and the Japanese should be started by identifying the motives of the Indonesian to visit Japan. In this situation, a certain motive will influence the communication patterns that are built and the impact as well. Bringing direct interaction as the vehicle to develop better cultural competence, two ways direct encounters are required to understand by gaining perspective of the Indonesian visiting Japan and encountering the Japanese host. Therefore, observing Indonesian visitors' activity in Sapporo and Hakodate in Hokkaido, and also the Tokyo area has revealed several things. Considering the fact there is no natural snow-based tourism in Indonesia, in the last few years, Hokkaido is placed as a magnet for Indonesian who want to directly witness snow during winter in Japan. I met Rita and Dani, a couple from Jakarta visiting Hokkaido at the shopping area nearby Sapporo Station. Not only impressed by the snowfall and land covered by white snow since the first day in Hokkaido, but this couple was also really happy witnessing the totality of helpfulness of the Japanese they met in Hokkaido. Without understanding the language, how the Japanese helped them to choose the halal product in the store. Moreover, Dani mentioned that he was guided by the Japanese to find the right bus path to take them back to the hotel after visiting *onsen* in the hilly area outside of downtown Sapporo. Someone in Sapporo Station also assisted him to use a vending machine to get a train ticket to Hakodate. Moreover, this couple also

emphasizes that they felt so secure from any type of crime when walking at Sapporo Station area at night.

Rini, the other Indonesian visitor who spent a week in Sapporo added the other example of how the Japanese that she just met at Sapporo TV Tower spent almost 30 minutes explaining the

alternative ways to reach Hakodate and what she could do there. Moreover, as a Muslim wearing veil, Rini and Rita emphasized there were no disrespectful actions coming from the Japanese during their stay in Hokkaido, including after moving to Tokyo for 4 days.



Figure 2. An Indonesian Family at Shibuya, Tokyo
(Source: Personal Documentation, 2023)

According to the official data from Japan's government, Tokyo is considered as the most visited for Indonesian tourists. Not only attracted by the different cultural authenticity of East Asian culture, modern urban lifestyle and the most iconic one, Mount Fuji, Tokyo is also considered the destination to establish a middle-class status symbol for many Indonesians. It is related to the recent development of tourism in Southeast Asia regions showing the influx of Indonesian visiting their neighbouring countries, particularly Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand. It directly places Kualalumpur, Bangkok and Singapore to be the "common area" for the Indonesians, added by the huge numbers of Indonesian workers in those countries. In this situation, many middle-class Indonesians need a new place to visit to symbolize their social class, and,

Tokyo meets this requirement; a modern city and one of the most expensive cities in the world that is not easy to reach by the "common" Indonesian. Rinto, an architect from Bandung that I at the famous Shibuya emphasized this issue by confidently stating that Kualalumpur, Bangkok or Singapore are no longer "special" destinations for him. He mentioned Japan, South Korea and Dubai as the new symbols of the middle-class of Indonesian. Japan and South Korea, during we met in Taiwan for a short transit. Rinto was a part of around 21 Indonesian visiting Tokyo in March, 2023 to witness the advanced development of Japan's architectural achievement.

Diah and Amelia were friends of Rinto's group who visited Shibuya Cross after their business trip was done. Taking a hotel at Asakusa area, they need a

subway to visit Shibuya. Visiting Japan for the first time, they admitted the Japanese discipline in their everyday life; making their table after getting lunch at the restaurant, standing at the left side when using the elevator and did not eat something or talked to each other during sitting on the train. Amelia added that the Japanese he asked in Tokyo always tried hard to give the answer for every help or question she delivered although they could not speak English well. In a similar vein, all Indonesian visitors both in Hokkaido and Tokyo also admitted that they did not have any ability in understanding and speaking the Japanese language. Umi and Atiqah whom I met at the Asakusa Temple also posed that they only understood one single Japanese word; *arigato*. However, for them language obstacle between the Indonesian visitors and the Japanese host was not considered as important barrier to witnessing the Japanese kindness. All informants emphasize that it is not really hard and difficult to visit Japan although they did not understand the Japanese language. Moreover, the daily attitude of the Japanese they met in Japan shows that the Japanese are very helpful, therefore they will feel secure in Japan. These informants also emphasize that they will revisit Japan when they have an opportunity to do it, although they will consider the different areas.

Eko, the other Indonesian visitors who come to Japan for the Tokyo Marathon 2023 admits a similar thing; the good attitude of the Japanese which is compatible with the Japan's achievements both in technology, economics and also sports. Eko pays

attention, beside of generous, helpful and disciplined, the Japanese also have a totality in doing all things. "They do not stop after everything is done well", Eko emphasizes when talking at a cafe nearby Shibuya Cross. In a similar vein, both Eko and the other Indonesian visitors in Hokkaido and Tokyo admit that what they have directly witnessed in Japan are different from what they have gotten from history subject about the Japanese during elementary and junior high school; cruel. Moreover, Rita agrees that the bitter memory of war is not considered important and needed to be taught in the Indonesian educational system.

The newly transformed image of the Japanese as mentioned by the Indonesian visitors above clearly describes how the cultural code of the majority of the Japanese directly shapes the better image from the Indonesian perspective. Moreover, the previous Focus Group Discussion (FGD) which was conducted in Yogyakarta before departing to Japan involved 5 Indonesian students who took an internship program in Hokkaido in 2021 also revealed a similar image of the Japanese; before visiting Japan the image of Japan is still between a modern country with the advanced technology with the antagonistic figure as the colonizer in the past. However, after almost 6 months of living in Japan and conducting daily interaction with Japanese colleagues, they witnessed people with high-level discipline, hard work, generosity and totality in doing everything. According to the informant's interview, a better image of the Japanese is emerged as a result of witnessing the basic cultural code of the

Japanese and the direct interaction related to the tourism activities in Japan. In this context, two ways the interaction between the Japanese host and the Indonesian visitors completed by a short observation influence the transformation of the image before and after visiting Japan. It shows the important role of directly witnessing the different cultural practices and also directly interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds, and practices to enhance the better of cultural competence as it has appeared in Indonesian visitors visiting Japan. According to Lin, et, al (2021), in this case, the positive image of Japanese behaviour as it has been witnessed by Indonesian visitors in Japan is not also shapes a new image of the Japanese, but also possible to stimulate the positive behaviour of the Indonesian coming to Japan.

KESIMPULAN

The article focuses on the development of a new image of the Japanese from the perspective of Indonesian visitors in Japan connected to the previous image which is influenced by the reproduction of the Japanese colonization period in the past. According to the fact that the Indonesian visitors did not directly experience the bitter situation of the colonization, the memory of the conflict was mainly inherited from the history subject during the elementary and junior high schools. In this situation, before departing to Japan, the sense of Japan as a part of antagonistic figure connected to the war period still existed although the political and economic

relationship between two countries had transformed to the better level in the last few decades. However, after visiting Japan, directly witness the daily behaviour of the Japanese and also intensively interact with their Japanese host in their home country, a different and better image of the Japanese strongly appeared. It shows the role tourism to enhance the better cultural competence between people coming from different cultural background, including those who are inheriting a bitter conflict from the past like Indonesian and the Japanese.

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