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## **THE SOCIOCULTURAL FACTORS INFLUENCING THE STUDY OF KOREAN HISTORY IN INDONESIA**

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**Abstract:** The historic event of the Korean Youth Independent Movement during the Japanese colonial period in Indonesia, which involved soldiers from Korea, has become a point of interest for Indonesian people, especially Indonesian millennials and historians. Since Indonesia's independence from the Japanese colonial rule in 1945, Indonesia has gone through various difficulties and faced political crises, just as Korea has. This article discusses the social and cultural factors, particularly Indonesian millennials' activities and interests which influence the study of Korean history in Indonesia. At several points, this research shows that the millennials' mastery of the Korean language is important for the development of Korean historical studies in

Indonesia. Applying the desk review method, this research finds a great interest among Indonesian millennials to study Korean history. One of the encouraging factors is the role of Korean history reviewers who bring Korean historical sources closer to Indonesian audiences through seminars that are intended for not only scholars, but also other millennials and the general public. The growth of Korean language users should be an important instrument to further develop not only the study of Korean history, but also diplomatic relations between Korea and Indonesia.

**Keywords:** sociocultural factor; Korean history; Indonesia millennial generation; Korean studies; Korean language.

### 사회 및 문화 중심으로 인도네시아에서 한국사 연구

**초록:** 인도네시아에 2010 년 이후에야 널리 알려지게 된 일제강점기 한국 청년독립운동의 역사적 이야기가 한국과 인도네시아의 더욱 긴밀한 외교관계를 촉진시켰다. 한국에서 온 일본군 병사의 참여는 이 시기 인도네시아 국민들, 특히 인도네시아 역사학자들을 포함한 밀레니얼 세대들의 매력으로 자리 잡았다. 1945 년 일제로부터 독립한 이후 인도네시아와 한국은 양국 정부체제의 근간을 이루는 민주주의가 제대로 시행되지 못했기 때문에 여러 가지 어려움을 겪었고 정치적 위기에 직면했다. 이에 한국과 인도네시아의 수교 수십 년 동안 인도네시아인들이 한국의 문화와 역사에 대해 더 많이 알고자 마음을 연 것은 1990 년대 후반부터였다. 본 기사는 인도네시아 밀레니얼 세대의 관심과 활동의 맥락에서 한국사 연구에 대한 사회적 단의 문화적 차원을 논하고 있다. 이는 인도네시아에서 한국 역사학이 발전하기 위해서는 한국어 숙달의 중요성을 밀레니얼 세대들에게 인식시킬 필요가 있음을 보여주는 대목이다. 탁상공론 방식으로 분석한 결과는 전반적으로 인도네시아 밀레니얼 세대의 한국사 연구에 대한 관심이 상당히 크다는 결론을 내리고 있다. 캠퍼스 거주자뿐만 아니라 인도네시아의 밀레니얼 세대와 일반 대중을 대상으로 폭넓게 열리는 한국사 세미나를 개최하여 한국사 자료를 보다 가까이 가져가는 한국사 평론가들의 역할이 고무적인 요소 중 하나이다. 이러한 발견을 바탕으로 한국어 사용자들의 성장은 한국의 역사 연구 및 외교 관계를 더욱 발전시키는 중요한 수단이 되어야 할 것이다.

**핵심어:** 사회와 문화적 차원; 한국사; 인도네시아 밀레니엄 세대; 한국학; 한국어.

## **FAKTOR SOSIAL-BUDAYA DALAM KAJIAN SEJARAH KOREA DI INDONESIA**

**Abstract:** Kisah sejarah Gerakan Kemerdekaan Pemuda Korea masa penjajahan Jepang di Indonesia, yang baru dikenal luas setelah tahun 2010, memupuk hubungan diplomatik lebih era antara Korea dan Indonesia. Keterlibatan tentara Jepang dari Korea menjadi daya tarik masyarakat Indonesia, khususnya kaum millennial, termasuk para sejarawan Indonesia. Sejak merdeka dari penjajahan Jepang tahun 1945, Indonesia dan Korea melalui berbagai kesulitan dan krisis. Oleh karena itu, sejak akhir tahun 1990-an masyarakat Indonesia membuka wawasannya untuk lebih mengenal budaya dan sejarah Korea. Artikel ini membahas tentang faktor sosial-budaya pada kajian sejarah Korea dalam konteks minat dan aktivitas kaum millennial di Indonesia. Dengan menggunakan metode desk-review, hasil analisis menyimpulkan bahwa secara umum minat kaum millennial Indonesia untuk mempelajari sejarah Korea cukup besar. Salah satu faktor pendorongnya adalah peran para pengulas sejarah Korea yang mendekatkan sumber-sumber sejarah Korea dengan mengadakan seminar sejarah Korea yang tidak hanya diadakan untuk warga kampus, tetapi juga terbuka lebar bagi millennial dan masyarakat umum Indonesia. Pengguna bahasa Korea seharusnya menjadi instrumen penting untuk lebih mengembangkan studi sejarah Korea, dan juga hubungan diplomatik.

**Key words:** dimensi sosial-budaya; sejarah Korea; kaum milenial Indonesia; program studi Korea; bahasa Korea.

## **CZYNNIKI SOCJOKULTUROWE WPLYWAJĄCE NA NAUKĘ HISTORII KOREI W INDONEZJI**

**Abstrakt:** Wydarzenia dotyczące Koreańskiego Niepodległościowego Ruchu Młodzieżowego, które miały miejsce podczas okupacji japońskiej w Indonezji i dotyczyły koreańskich żołnierzy, stały się obszarem zainteresowań Indonezyjczyków, a zwłaszcza historyków i pokolenia milenijnego. Od czasu wyzwolenia się spod okupacji japońskiej przez Indonezję w roku 1945, , Indonezja, tak, jak Korea, doświadczyła wielu trudności i kryzysów politycznych. Niniejszy artykuł skupia się na czynnikach społecznych i kulturowych, szczególnie na działaniach indonezyjskiego pokolenia milenijnego oraz ich zainteresowaniach, które wpływają na indonezyjską edukację w zakresie koreańskiej historii. Pod wieloma względami tekst ten ukazuje, jak ważne dla rozwoju koreanistycznych studiów historycznych w Indonezji jest pogłębienie umiejętności językowych w zakresie języka koreańskiego. Artykuł bazując na metodzie przeglądowej, wskazuje na duże zainteresowanie edukacją w zakresie koreańskiej historii wykazywane przez indonezyjskie pokolenie

milenijne. Jednym z czynników zachęcających do tego jest rola krytyków historii Korei, którzy przybliżają koreańskie źródła historyczne odbiorcy indonezyjskiemu w drodze seminariów nie tylko skierowanych do naukowców, ale i innych millenialsów i ogółu. Zwiększenie się liczby użytkowników języka koreańskiego stanowić będzie ważny element do dalszego rozwoju nie tylko edukacji historii koreańskiej, ale i relacji dyplomatycznych między Koreą a Indonezją.

**Słowa kluczowe:** czynnik socjokulturowy; historia Korei; indonezyjskie pokolenie milenijne; studia koreanistyczne; język koreański.

## 1. Background

This paper focuses on the social and cultural dimensions which influence the development of the study of Korean history in Indonesia. By applying the desk-review method, this paper focuses more on the influence of external factors on the study of Korean history in Indonesia, especially how these factors are generated by Indonesian people. Studies on Korean history that have been conducted in Indonesia have tended to focus on theoretical perspectives. However, how Indonesians perceive the study of Korean history still needs to be discussed more objectively using certain indicators.

As stated by Kartikasari (2018: 24), diplomatic relationships are tangled with cultural development. She mentioned that cultural development, especially information and communication technology affect the world of diplomacy in delivering the message. In relation to this case, the author views that it is important for diplomatic relations to not only synergize with the nation's foreign policy, but also include an agent (or some agents) who contributes to the dynamics of the diplomatic relationship. Applying a historical point of view on diplomatic relations, the work of 최광진 Choi Kwang-Jin (2019: 5-53) focuses on Korea's soft diplomacy, which is said to have been initiated since 1948.

## 2. Korea in the History of Indonesia

Despite being a country in the East Asian region, South Korea (hereinafter ‘Korea’) has never appeared in the history of Indonesia. Instead, the two prominent countries frequently mentioned in the history of Indonesia are the Netherlands and Japan. Both countries have made a very important impact on Indonesian people’s lives. Spanning over hundreds of years, the influence of Dutch colonization in Indonesia can be found in the world of automation, law, education, plantations, and trade (Kartodirdjo 2016; Iqbal 2012). Compared to the Dutch occupation, the Japanese colonization of Indonesia occurred only for a relatively short period of time (3.5 years, from 1942 to 1945). However, the aftermath of the Japanese colonization can be found in several aspects. For example, the use of Bahasa Indonesia in formal and informal settings started during the Japanese occupation (Rohman 2018; Permadi 2015). Meanwhile, during the Dutch colonial period, Bahasa Indonesia speakers were quite limited to the upper-middle class.

Different from the two countries above, the influence of Korea in the lives of Indonesian people can be found more recently, along with the worldwide popularity of Korean popular culture, otherwise known as *Hallyu* or the Korean wave. Even so, as third-world countries at the end of World War II, Indonesia and Korea shared the same experience, as both countries were colonized by Japan. More specifically, Korea was colonized for 35 years, while Indonesia was colonized for 3.5 years. Historical research that has been done in Korea shows that behind the similarities of experience as a country that was colonized by Japan, these two countries apparently had an encounter with each other during the independence movement from 1944 to the 1950s. The two countries’ first encounter occurred in early 1945, when *군속 gunsok* (army assistants) from Korea became *포로감시원 phorokamsiwon* (guardians of prisoners of war) in Indonesia. This encounter proved to have united them together to fight against the Japanese colonials. Although the two countries had separate post World War II political development, the two countries were able to establish diplomatic relations in 1966. However, the Korean language was not known by Indonesian people. Korean has only started to become a foreign language that is formally and not

formally studied since the first establishment of Korean studies in Indonesia in early 2000.

While addressing various issues related to the study of Korean history in Indonesia, this article focuses on the social and cultural factors and emphasizes the function of language in historical studies. The author intends to argue that the need to master a foreign language, in particular Korean, is important not only to produce a more comprehensive perspective on Korean historiography, but also to make a significant contribution toward the diplomatic relation between these two countries. In relation to the study of Korean history in Indonesia, the mastery of the Korean language, which is becoming popular among the Indonesian people (especially among millennials), will certainly support the growing intimacy in the relationship between Indonesia and Korea.

### **3. Discussion**

#### **3.1 An overview of Korean Studies in Indonesian Universities**

An encounter between nations is always accompanied by historical stories which start the establishment of international relations. With the experience of being a Dutch colony for hundreds of years since the 17th century (Sudirman 2014; Kartodirdjo 1973), Indonesia recognized the Dutch in its education system. The department of Dutch Language and Literature, which was established on February 1, 1949 at *Universiteit* (emergency university) – *Universitas va Indonesie*, was the first foreign language department at the university level in Indonesia. Along with the political developments occurring between 1950 and 1954, Dutch officially became a foreign language department at the University of Indonesia, along with other foreign languages, such as English, Chinese, and French. In the early 1950s, the number of foreign language teachers in Indonesia was still very limited, so a few foreign language departments were established.

After the Dutch colonization, the Japanese colonization of Indonesia started in 1942. Japanese language education in Indonesia began in the 1960s, and Japanese Studies has been around since the

1980s. Based on historical records, Indonesian people spoke Japanese during the Japanese colonization. Despite the troubled past between Japan and Indonesia, the relationship between the two countries has been improving, especially in the field of education, thanks to the services of Prof. Dr. I Ketut Surajaya, a former Professor at the Faculty of Humanities, University of Indonesia. Prof. Dr. I Ketut Surajaya was awarded The Order of the Rising Sun, Gold Rays with Neck Ribbon by the Japanese Embassy for Indonesia in 2016 (Dewi 2016).

Different from the historical traces of the establishment of foreign languages in Indonesia, the establishment of the Korean Studies Program in 2006 in Indonesia was prompted by the popularity of Korean popular culture, which has been growing since the late 1990s. However, the millennial generation's interest in becoming students of the Korean Studies Program at universities is prompted by not only the popularity of Korean culture in Indonesia, but also the presence of Korean companies, which have made their presence in Indonesia since the 1960s.

At the university level, Korean Studies in Indonesia focuses on Korean language, culture, literature, and history. As the Korean study program was founded in Indonesia in the early 2000s, its first students belong to the millennial generation. The term millennial generation has become popular since the American historian William Strauss and American writer Neil Howe (2000) introduced the term Millennials in their writings. Although experts have not reached a consensus on the millennial generation's birth period, the author understands that the millennials were born in the period between the 1980s and the early 2000s.

The term *millennials* is closely related to the concept of generational grouping initiated by Mannheim (1952), which was later developed by Ryder (1965). Both authors marked the millennial generation based on the same age and historical experience (Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection 2018: 13). Some reference sources mention that the millennials are a digital generation born between 1976 and 2000 (Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection 2018: 15; Putra 2016:125). As for the millennial generation in this paper, students of Korean Studies in Indonesia are classified as millennials due to not only their year of birth, but also the development of diplomatic relations between Korea and Indonesia.

With the establishment of the Korean language and culture study program in Indonesia, the cooperative relationship between Indonesia and Korea improves as the Korean language and culture study program expands Indonesian people's understanding of Korean language and culture. However, in each university, the Korean Studies Program in Indonesia has a notably distinct character and purpose. For instance, the Korean Studies Program at Universitas Indonesia (UI) uses the name 'Korean Language and Culture Study Program', which affects how the curriculum engenders courses with an orientation to Korean language and culture. In this regard, the courses offered by the Korean Language and Culture Study Program at Universitas Indonesia can be divided into 4 fields, namely language, literature, culture, and history. The department's courses would be different from that of other universities, such as Universitas Gadjah Mada's Korean Language and Literature Study Program. As the field of history is integral in external courses, it is very possible that Korean Studies Program students at Universitas Gadjah Mada, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (UPI), and Universitas Nasional Indonesia (UNAS) do not receive specific Korean history materials. The names of the study program described above constitute a very important database for this research, especially when examining the relationship between the department names and the Korean Studies students' interests and motivations at Universitas Indonesia, Universitas Gadjah Mada, UPI, and UNAS.

After conducting a study tracer and interviews with the heads of Korean study programs at the aforementioned universities, it was found that the students had different motivations for studying Korean. The head of UNAS' Korean Studies Program stated that their students tend to focus on Korean language proficiency aimed at practical needs, namely getting a job in a Korean company. Meanwhile, 20-30% of Korean Studies Program alumni who graduated from UI and UGM continued their studies to master's degrees (either overseas or domestically). Their databases suggest that 20% of their alumni work in Korean companies, 30% work in non-Korean companies, and the remaining 10% choose to be self-employed. The similarity between all Korean Study Programs in each university is that there is far less interest in the field of history than literature and culture, with a ratio of about 2 to 10. This condition more or less reflects the conditions at UI and UNAS. In UGM, where historical studies are integral to other



subjects, writing in the field of Korean history is also said to be non-existent.

### 3.2 Indonesian Student's Interest in Korean Studies

The establishment of Korean study programs in Indonesia described above illustrates the existence of a cluster in Korean studies in Indonesia, where each university has a different educational focus. At Universitas Indonesia, the study of Korean history looks more comprehensive when compared to the study of Korean history at UPI, UGM, and also UNAS. In terms of publication, Korean Studies departments of Indonesian universities have produced academic writing with several topics, including *준군위안부 jungun wianbu* and problems during the Japanese colonization, the Korean War, Women and Confucianism in the Joseon period, Korean diplomatic relations, Christianity in Korea, and the student democracy movement in Korea. Japanese colonization is the most popular topic among students of Korean Studies, due to the shared feeling of being a nation that was once colonized by Japan. Among various specific issues prompted by the Japanese colonization in Korea, issues related to the life and fate of Japanese women, *Jungun wianbu*, has been a topic that sparked the research interest of many students.

The students of Korean Studies are interested in the historical life of Korean women in not only the Japanese colonization period, but also the Joseon era. Kisaeng's life and the feudal education system implemented in this era, for instance, are considered research-worthy by Indonesian students. Students are also interested in the lives of Korean women in more recent historical periods. The role of Korean women in the Korean War, *간소북 정책 gansobok jeongchaek* – the Gansobook Policy of Park Chung-Hee's era, and the lives of Korean women workers during the Park Chung-Hee's era are topics frequently researched by the students of Korean Studies. To map possible future trajectories of Korean Studies research in Indonesia, it is necessary to identify recurring topics researched by Indonesian students of Korean Studies.

Although Korean Studies can be considered a new academic discipline in the world of research in Indonesia, it seems to have attracted the attention of certain social institutions. In 2020, the think-

tank agency Habiebie Center, in collaboration with the Korea Foundation in Indonesia, succeeded in conducting research on the topic ‘Three Reasons Indonesia and South Korea Establish a Special Strategic Partnership’.

Another organization named Historika also actively introduces Korean history to Indonesian millennials. Historika has succeeded on several occasions in collaborating with the Korean embassy (Korean Culture Center – 한국문화원 *Hankuk Munhwawon*) and local governments in Indonesia to provide a space for historical discussions regarding the Indonesian national hero from Korea, Yang Chil-Sung. Korean history had a special place in the general Indonesian audience. There are various reasons for this circumstance, one of which is these events’ extensive yet casual method of describing Korean history, as the organization does not heavily rely on academic approaches in informing their audience. In other words, Historika’s presentation of Korean history with a more casual manner so that their audience could learn more about the topic in a way that they listened to a story.

In addition, a media institution called Han.Guk.Sa also holds free webinars and discusses various topics related to Korean history. Through this media institution, Korean history is also conveyed in a more casual manner so that it is easily accepted by the general public, especially the millennial generation, the majority of whom are fans of Korean culture. The audience of Han.Guk.Sa comes from different backgrounds, namely students, historical researchers, and the general public. The Korean institution KSIC Indonesia (Korean Sejong Institute Center Indonesia) similarly holds webinars on Korean history and culture for Indonesian KSIC participants. Mainly focusing on Korean culture, KSIC’s webinars are accompanied by historical insights.

The explanation above shows Indonesian millennials’ enthusiasm for Korean history study forums, and this opens up possibilities for the development of studies related to Korean history. Additionally, the interest of Indonesian millennials in the study of Korean history confirms the need to further support the development of Korean language skills in Indonesia. If the mastery of the Korean language is further expanded among Indonesian millennials, it will be easier for students and historical researchers to use Korean historical sources and compose Korean historiography, which will also enrich the repertoire of Indonesian historiography, especially from the Japanese colonial period to the independence movement.

In an interview with Johari (2018), a speaker in one of Historika events, he mentioned what he called ‘the universal value’ of the Indonesian independence movement, namely the participation of foreigners to join the Indonesian people in fighting for independence. This statement pertains to the history of the involvement of Koreans in Indonesia’s independence movement, which marked Korean people’s entrance across the boundaries of Indonesia’s historical space. Despite the increasingly massive currents of the Korean wave in Indonesia today, such historical reality is not easy to replicate, let alone document in the form of writing. Therefore, it is necessary to review the themes of Korean history (such as Korean Youth Independent Movement in Indonesia) and link these themes with Indonesia’s historic events. By pointing out the similarities and links between Indonesian and Korean history, writers and researchers can not only build a shared discourse for the younger generations of the two countries, but also contribute to improving the diplomatic relation between the two countries.

### **3.3 The Historical Development of Diplomatic Relations between Korea and Indonesia**

From the point of view of diplomatic relations, both Korea and Indonesia in the 1960s period were in a complex condition. Many agents interacted with each other, thus giving rise to foreign policies that are different from previous periods. Through international negotiation with America and Japan, Park Chung-Hee outlined the policy of expanding diplomatic relations with Southeast Asian countries. The decision is considered a means to achieve Korea’s goal of becoming a politically and economically strong nation. Korea’s expansion of diplomatic relations with Southeast Asian countries in the 1960s eventually affected the social and cultural dimensions of Korean Studies in Indonesia.

During the reign of Rhee Syngman (1948-1960), diplomatic relations between Korea and Indonesia had not been established at all. Both Korea and Indonesia both faced a new situation where each country had to strengthen its ideology, with the goal of aligning with developed countries. Because of the new situation, even though Korea

and Indonesia had already had an encounter through the Korean Youth Independence Movement during Japan's colonial rule of Indonesia, Korea still viewed countries of the Global North as an important factor of the nation's diplomatic relations.

The early period of 1960 was a time when Korea needed an evaluation to reorganize its diplomatic strategy. The April Revolution that erupted in 1960, which resulted in the beginning of Park Chung-Hee's government in 1961, became a gateway to the diplomatic relations between Korea and Indonesia. Park Chung-Hee highlighted the important role of the Information and Culture Bureau in supporting the establishment of Korea's foreign policy, so the Bureau was put directly under the auspices of the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Choi 2019: 9-10). Korea's trade field policy in the 1970s was to expand trade for all countries of the world. Therefore, it is no wonder that countries in the Southeast Asian region, including Indonesia, suddenly became important targets of Korea's expansion of export trade.

The diplomatic relationship between Korea and Indonesia has prompted cultural production in the academic space as well as the public space. For instance, as a response to globalization, the *segrehwa* policy should be recognized as a deciding factor in delivering the Korean wave. The ramifications of the policy have caused a mutualistic symbiosis in the diplomatic relations of Korea and Indonesia. In addition, historical records have shown the presence of a Korean youth figure named 양칠성 Yang Chil-Sung, who was involved in the Indonesian independence movement in the Garut region of West Java. His existence inspired many works in Korean and other cultural products created by Indonesian millennials. Beyond the historical research conducted by scholars of the Korean studies program in Indonesia, other Indonesian millennials have creatively made products resulting from the acculturation of the two countries' cultures. A notable example of this would be Hanboks with batik cloths and patterns, which have proven to be profitable commercial products.

From the above-mentioned cases, it is clear that Indonesia's current socio-cultural landscape allows its people to continuously nurture the diplomatic relations between Korea and Indonesia. In relation to this, Indonesian millennials occupy a strategic position for their fluency in Korean and their knowledge about Korean culture. As they hold an important role in nurturing future diplomatic relations

between the two countries, Indonesian millennials need to occupy strategic positions in documenting and maintaining Indonesia's diplomatic relations with Korea. Although Korean Studies in Indonesia has only been around since the early 2000s, there have been social agents who have made social and cultural contributions to the development of Korean history studies in Indonesia. Subsequently, their contributions to Korean studies affect how the two countries understand each other and maintain harmony in their diplomatic relations.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The development of Korean studies in Indonesia cannot be separated from the role and influence of at least two parties: Korean investor groups and Indonesian intellectuals. Further insights on this topic can be found in historical evidence beyond the diplomatic relations between Indonesia and the Republic of Korea. Consequently, in subsequent developments, since 2018 the study of Korean history in particular has transformed into a discipline that is studied by not only university scholars, but also the general public, especially the millennial generation.

Although initially, there was skepticism on whether the possibility for the study of Korean history could develop in Indonesia, several survey results and observable audience interest at every Korean history seminar organized by several non-academic parties have presented evidence that suggests otherwise. The study of Korean history, which is characterized by obstacles in mastering historical sources, needs to be reworked for the millennial generation, especially in the sense that the studies cover the development and expansion of Korean history in Indonesia. Due to shared historical experiences between Korea and Indonesia, Korea's position in Indonesia's history certainly engenders an outlook that is different from how Indonesia views the Netherlands and Japan in its history. Korea's presence during Indonesia's independence movement can be emphasized as the first historical point that initiated Korea's existence in Indonesia's historiography. Additionally, Indonesian millennials' mastery of Korean language is a valuable asset for not only developing the study

of Korean history in Indonesia but also improving the diplomatic relations between the two countries.

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