

EDITORIAL NOTE

SPECIAL ISSUE ON 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF JAPAN STUDIES PROGRAM, UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA

*WILAYAH: THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF EAST ASIAN
STUDIES*

Vol. 12, No. 2, 2023

The year 2023 marks the 30th anniversary of the Japan Studies Program at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Malaya. The program was established in 1993 before being upgraded in 1996 to the Department of East Asian Studies. Korea and China Studies were introduced along with Japan Studies at the new department. Today, hundreds of Japan Studies alumni from the department are actively working in Malaysia as well as abroad. Some of them are serving in government and private enterprises as well as some are owners of companies. Therefore, the current volume commemorates the 30th anniversary of the Japan Studies Program.

The volume contains of five articles with the first written by Mikihiro Moriyama of Nanzan University. The article entitled *Sejarah Perkembangan Pembelajaran Bahasa Melayu di Jepun* explores the development of Malay language learning in Japan. According to the writer, Japanese people started learning Malay at the end of 19th century with the first Malay primer published in the 1900s. Since then, the number of books and dictionaries in Malay have increased. The author argues that the language was learnt for business interests such as operating rubber plantations and iron mines and other businesses, in other words, mainly to communicate with the locals. The Japanese were of the view that Malay was the most significant language among many languages used in the southern region. For this purpose, Japanese nationals began learning Malay in schools in Japan. Accordingly, the peak of Malay language learning was during the Japanese expansion period of militarism in the 1940s. The total number of publications in the Malay language reached more than 50 titles during this period. After the end of the Second World War, Malay language learning did not receive much attention until business interests in Asian countries began to be stimulated by the Japanese government policy as well as communications during war reparations.

The second article contributed by Md Nasrudin Md Akhir entitled *From Conflict to Cooperation: How Synthetic Rubber was Instrumental in Culminating Japan-ASEAN Ties*. This article provides an overview of Japan-ASEAN relations for the last 50 years. According to the author, Japan-ASEAN relations in the late 1960s and early 1970s were less encouraging due to dissatisfaction with the issue of synthetic rubber between 1972 and 1974 as well as the negative responses during Kakuei Tanaka's visit to five ASEAN member countries in 1974. However, Malaysia's main ministries took a different approach of the threat of Japanese synthetic rubber through a "softening up" measure instead of "hard-bargaining tactics" by proposing the ASEAN platform as a strategy for dealing with the Japanese government. Interesting, the article showcases a laconic view of the extent to which Japan's relations with ASEAN encountered numerous difficulties at different periods in time before arriving to the current positive phase. Contemporary relations reflect strong resilience and bond based on mutual interests and shared responsibility in promoting regional harmony and development.

The third article is written by Nor Asyikin Jamaludin and Asmadi Hassan entitled *Persepsi Warga Universiti Malaya Terhadap Nasihat untuk 'Tidak Ikut Serta' dalam Sambutan Bon Odori di Malaysia*. The authors examine the perception of University of Malaya community towards the instruction given by the Malaysian religious minister and agencies to the Muslim community to 'not participate' in the Bon Odori festival. However, the findings suggests that respondents had different views on the instruction given, whereby majority of the Universiti Malaya community viewed the Bon Odori festival positively and they also felt that the advice given by the religious authority to Muslims was appropriate. Overall, the study helps readers understand current social and religious issues, and understand the level of acceptance of the Muslim community towards Bon Odori.

The fourth article entitled *Evolution of Japan's Pacifist to Realist Diplomacy: From Yoshida Shigeru to Fumio Kishida* by Geetha Govindasamy. The article seeks to answer two questions. What are the newer security policies promoted by Japan and are they significant in empowering Tokyo to become an international security and foreign policy leader? The article found that for decades, the Yoshida Doctrine was the basis for Japan's foreign policy when the state's priority was economic prosperity and security. However, the severity of the current security environment surrounding Japan desperately needs a different set of foreign policies and diplomacy. The transformation started during Shinzo Abe's administration which has now been continued by Fumio Kishida, albeit with slight changes here and there. Kishida's values based realism policies are aimed at protecting Japan as well as transforming the state into a key global player and contributor in security issues. Strengthening defence capabilities, enhancing multilateralism and improving relations with neighbours have indeed transformed Japan into a more responsible, capable and respected global player.

The last article written by Siti Aminah Omar, Rohayati Paidi and Fumitaka Furuoka entitled *Isu-Isu Berkaitan Ekonomi Gig di Jepun: Analisis Laporan Akhbar*. The article revolved on the transformation of news coverage in Japan which was previously focused on the preparation for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics to the pandemic-related issues, mainly related to gig economy workers. The article aims to identify current issues related to the gig economy in Japan, focusing on online food delivery platform workers through media coverage analysis. The research found that Asahi Shimbun's news reporting on the gig economy during the COVID-19 pandemic tended to be more negative in sentiment than positive. Negative sentiment emerged due to prominent reports of dissatisfaction among gig workers with the Uber Eats Japan food delivery service company, primarily stemming from changes in the delivery compensation system.

Overall, we hope that this volume would be useful in furthering the understanding and creating awareness of Japan, serving as a guide for policymakers, industry stakeholders, academics at large.

Dr. Asmadi Hassan

Dr. Geetha Govindasamy