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# PROCEEDINGS

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**THE 4<sup>th</sup> INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE  
LANGUAGE, SOCIETY, AND CULTURE IN ASIAN  
CONTEXTS (LSCAC 2016)  
on “Cultivating and Casting Asian Diversities:  
Empowering the Asians”**

**Malang, May 24 – 25, 2016**

**Hotel Atria, Malang, East Java, Indonesia**

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Malang, May 24 – 25, 2016

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Dr. Soe Marlar Lwin, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Welcome Messages	vii
Opening Speech; Rector Universitas Negeri Malang, Indonesia	ix
Message from Hyderabad University, India	xi
Message from Mahasarakham University, Thailand	xiii
Message from Hue University of Education, Vietnam	xv
Organizers	xvii
Table of Contents	xix

## Keynote Speakers

KS 1	Promoting Language Learners' Cross-cultural Awareness through Comparative Analyses of Asian Folktales <b>Soe Marlar Lwin</b>	01 – 01
KS 2	Local Wisdom with Universal Appeal: Dynamics of Indonesian Culture in Asian Context <b>A. Effendi Kadarisman</b>	02 – 02
KS 4	Asian Intellectuals for Cultural Resistance: Departures and Disruptions <b>Azhar Ibrahim Alwee</b>	03 – 03

## Theme 1

### Foreign Language Teaching in Asian Contexts

FLT 9	Integrating Extensive Reading in Connecting EFL Students to Culturally Relevant Texts in Indonesia <b>Dani Safitri &amp; Leo Candra Wahyu Utami</b>	4 – 8
FLT 10	Lesekiste Mit Übergangsstufe (Reading Box) in German Language Learning <b>Desti Nur Aini</b>	9 – 15
FLT 11	Foreign Students' Understanding towards Indonesian Cultural Terms in BIPA Program <b>Dian Febrianti, Girindra Wardhana &amp; Timotius Ari Candra Aprilianto</b>	16 – 22
FLT 12	The Importance of Cross Cultural Understanding in Foreign Language Teaching in Asian Contexts <b>Dian Ratnasari, Erfan Mokhammad Wijaya &amp; Ryan Nuansa Dirga</b>	23 – 30
FLT 14	Core Features of Activities Undertaken by Professional EFL Teachers to Develop their Pedagogical Competence in Teaching Preparation <b>Dini Kurnia Irmawati &amp; Utami Widiati</b>	31 – 37
FLT 16	Javanese Speakers in Intersection: Competing Language Ideology <b>Dzulfikri Mawardi</b>	38 – 44
FLT 18	Prewriting and Drafting Strategies of Graduate Students in Writing Term Papers in English <b>Enny Irawati</b>	45 – 55
FLT 19	Evidence-based Language Learning Strategies across Nationalities: A Comparison of Indonesian and Japanese Students <b>Fathor Rasyid</b>	56 – 66
FLT 21	An Analysis on the Grammatical Errors in Students' Writing at English Program STKIP Taman Siswa Bima <b>Fitri Ningsi</b>	67 – 73

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

FLT 22	Introducing the Material Development Project for Future Teachers of English for Young Learners <b>Gita Mutiara Hati</b>	74 – 79
FLT 23	Indonesian Vocabulary Learning Model for Foreign Speakers at the Beginner Level <b>Hariratul Jannah &amp; Sjahriah Madjid</b>	80 – 86
FLT 25	Increasing Vocabulary Comprehension through the Bingo Game for 3rd Graders of Lab School, Jakarta <b>Herlina Usman</b>	87 – 95
FLT 26	Promoting the Ability of EFL Students in Producing English Orally through Created Case Study (CCS) <b>Khadijah Maming</b>	96 – 108
FLT 27	Creative Activities (ICA) and Reading Text Higher Order Thinking Skills (ReadTHOTS) Application in English Language Teaching (ELT) <b>Khairunnisa Hatta &amp; Amaluddin</b>	109 – 119
FLT 28	Friendly Atmosphere to Promote Young Children Emergent Literacy <b>Kristi Nuraini</b>	120 – 125
FLT 29	Cultural Integration with Scientific Approach in Teaching Indonesian to Speakers of Other Languages (TISOL) In Indonesia <b>Kundharu Saddhono</b>	126 – 134
FLT 31	Self-Efficacy and English Language Anxiety among Vocational Students of SMKN 10 Malang <b>Lufiana Harnany Utami &amp; Tutut Chusniah</b>	135 – 141
FLT 32	Enhancing Students' Self-Directed Learning through Posters in Speaking <b>Lulus Irawati</b>	142 – 147
FLT 33	A Preliminary Study on EFL Learners' Pragmatic Competence <b>Mei Hardiah</b>	148 – 153
FLT 35	Discourse Analysis of EFL Teachers' Request <b>Muhammad Arif Al Hakim</b>	154 – 160
FLT 36	The Development of An Integrative Model for Indonesian Language Teaching Materials in ICT Based Socio Culture Studies for Intermediate Non Native Speakers <b>Muhammad Badrus Siroj</b>	164 – 167
FLT 37	Improving the Students' Reading Skill by Using Cooperative Model Teams Assisted Individualization at Vocational School <b>Muhammad Dwi Farhan</b>	168 – 172
FLT 38	Providing Effective Feedback to Students' L2 Writing Errors <b>Muhari</b>	173 – 179
FLT 39	Students' Learning Strategies on Speaking English at Pondok Pesantren Darul Hijrah Martapura, South Kalimantan <b>Nida Mufidah</b>	180 – 189
FLT 41	Assessment of Exposition Text to Develop Critical Thinking Skills for Junior High School Students	190 – 198



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<b>Nur Khoiri, Imam Agus Basuki &amp; Endah Tri Priyatni</b>	
FLT 42	Encouraging Multimodal Learning and Collaborative Teaching to Develop Clinical Communication Skills	199 – 208
	<b>Paulus Widiatmoko</b>	
FLT 43	The Effectiveness of Movie Scripts in Teaching Listening	209 – 214
	<b>Rengganis Siwi Amumpuni</b>	
FLT 44	Teacher Talk: Corrective Feedback Used by the Lecturer on University Students' Grammatical Errors in Speaking Class	215 – 222
	<b>Ridha Uyun Arundina</b>	
FLT 45	Corrective Feedback to Minimise Plagiarism in Students' Academic Writing	223 – 228
	<b>Rina Agustina &amp; Listiani</b>	
FLT 47	Knowledge about Writing as a Predictor of Writing Performance	229 – 236
	<b>Rofiqoh</b>	
FLT 48	Logical Flaws in Indonesian Students' Argumentative Essays	237 – 242
	<b>Rohmani Nur Indah</b>	
FLT 49	The Use of Indonesian Cultural Traditions in Teaching Reading for Indonesian Students	243 – 250
	<b>Santi Andriyani</b>	
FLT 50	CLIL and English Teachers' Competencies Improvement	251 – 258
	<b>Sawitri Agustrianti</b>	
FLT 51	Polite Interaction as Socio-Cultural Manifestation inside the Classroom: A Study on Students' Perception	259 – 266
	<b>Sheila Agustina</b>	
FLT 53	Social Construction on Cultural Multiculturalism	267 – 272
	<b>Sukanto &amp; I Nyoman Ruja</b>	
FLT 58	Power in Cross-Cultural Encounters: Problems in Comprehending Bahasa Indonesia Lectures by Foreign Students	273 – 280
	<b>A. Syukur Ghozali</b>	
FLT 60	Does Support Make a Difference? Investigating the Possibility of Teachers' Educational Culture Change in a Supportive Indonesian Classroom Environment	281 – 286
	<b>Yuniar Dwi Ansari Siregar</b>	
FLT 65	Improving EFL Students' Speaking Skills by Using Discourse Completion Task at English Center UIN Malang	287 – 292
	<b>Septia Dwi Jayanti</b>	
FLT 66	The Debate of Written Corrective Feedback: What to Do and Where to Go	293 – 298
	<b>Suhartawan Budianto, Nur Mukminatien &amp; M. Adnan Latief</b>	
FLT 67	The Use of Authentic Materials in Improving Writing Skill of the Eight Graders of MTs Negeri Model Palu	299 – 308
	<b>Sriati Usman &amp; Sitti Muzdalifah</b>	
FLT 68	The Teaching of Semantic Field in Improving Buginese Learners' English Vocabulary: An Experimental Study	309 – 317
	<b>Patahuddin Hakim &amp; Syawal Awal</b>	

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

FLT 69	Strategies to Overcome Problems and Difficulties in Teaching and Learning English Listening Comprehension <b>Noor Maulidia</b>	318 – 324
FLT 75	Communicative Language Teaching and Its Achievements: A Study of In-Country Program in Indonesia from 2013 – 2015 <b>Gatut Susanto</b>	324 – 334
FLT 79	Problem Identification of Genre-Based Teaching of Writing using Monomodal Teaching Materials <b>Sri Mulatsih ; Muhammad Rifqi &amp; Muslih</b>	335 – 341
FLT 63	Making their Voices Heard: Introducing the Joy of Poetry Writing in Foreign Language Classroom <b>Niamika El Khor</b>	342 – 346
FLT 81	Learning the Language or the Substance?: A Case in Research Statistics Course <b>Nurul Chojimah</b>	347 – 350
FLT 86	In Lieu of That: Multiple Stay – Stray Presentations for More Intensive Learning <b>Furaidah</b>	351 – 356
FLT 92	Immersion Program In Teaching Indonesian Language and Culture for Thailand Students At Sanggar Kampung Indonesia Tulungagung <b>Mohamad Jazeri</b>	357 – 362
FLT 93	The Influence of L1 and L2 in English Stress Shift Production of the EFL Learners in Indonesia <b>Dhinar Arienintya</b>	363 – 368
FLT 98	Designing Arabic by Newspaper: Congratulations, Condolences and Advertisements for the Study Program of Arabic Teaching, State University of Malang <b>Nurul Murtadho</b>	369 – 377
FLT 99	Problem Solving Based Assessment <b>Suyono, Endah Tri Priyatni, Titik Harsiati &amp; Imam Agus Basuki</b>	378 – 383
FLT 101	To Develop Comprehension in Reading through Self Questioning <b>Pudiyono</b>	384 – 389

## Theme 2 Dynamics in Asian Societies

DyAS 2	Gender Orientation in a Number of Indonesian Newspaper Short Stories: A Structural and Sociological Study with an Emancipatory Perspective <b>Bambang Suwarno &amp; Suriyam</b>	390 – 395
DyAS 3	Defining The Power of New Rich in Indonesian Popular Culture <b>Harifa Siregar</b>	396 – 401
DyAS 5	Underwater Cultural Heritage Management: Case Study Sites in Karimunjawa <b>St. Prabawa Dwi</b>	402 – 408
DyAS 6	Child Marriage Prevention Based on Integrated Plan of Policy and Action to Reduce The Index of Case and Practice of Child Marriage in Remote Areas <b>Yusuf Hanafi</b>	409 – 417

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

DyAS 7	The Cultural Perception of Using Ethnic in the Vocabulary of Banyuwangi Folk Songs <b>Imam Suyitno</b>	418 – 425
DyAS 8	The Principal Supervision to Improve Teacher Competency in Indonesia <b>Zahrotun Ni'mah Afif</b>	426 – 436
DyAS 10	Chakri Dynasty's "Open Door" Policy in Nineteenth Century: The Background of International Integration of the Modern Thailand" <b>Dang Van Chuong</b>	437 – 442
DyAS 11	Proposing the Solutions for Sustainable Exploitation of the Region's Natural Coastal Resources in Thua Thien Hue Province, Vietnam <b>Nguyen Hoang Son, Tran Thi Tuyet Mai, Le Van Tin &amp; Le Phuc Chi Lang</b>	443 – 450
DyAS 13	The United States Factor in Vietnam's Thirty Years of Renovation Process (1986-2016) <b>Bui Thi Thao</b>	451 – 458
DyAS 14	The British Presence in the Malay Peninsula from the Second Half of the 18th Century to the 19th Century: The Causes and the Roles <b>Le Thi Qui Duc</b>	459 – 464
DyAS 18	The Impact of Global Advertising on the Language and Culture of India <b>Priyanka Rachabattuni</b>	465 – 473

## Theme 3 Fine Arts in Asia

FiAA 1	Batik as a Surface Technique for Contemporary Artwork in Digital Era <b>Desy Nur Cahyanti</b>	474 – 477
FiAA 3	Aesthetics of Baratan and Batik as Indonesian Cultural Heritage in Poem "The Lore Of Life" <b>Taufiqurrohman</b>	478 – 484
FiAA 4	Portraying the Divine: Murals In India <b>Rajeev Vasudevan</b>	485 – 491
FiAA 5	The Empowerment of Asian Cinema through Melodrama <b>Nandi Chinni Kumar</b>	492 – 497

## Theme 4 Modern Asian Literatures

MALi 2	The Relationship Between Parents and Children in the Kamil Kilani's Text Entitled "Umarah" <b>Eva Farhah</b>	498 – 505
MALi 3	Anti-Homophobic Discourse in "Delailah Tak Ingin Pulang Dari Pesta" <b>Kholidatul Imaniyah &amp; Qurrota A'yunin</b>	506 – 511
MALi 4	Postcolonial Home in Seribu Kunang-Kunang Di Manhattan Work of Umar Kayam <b>Maharani Intan Andalas</b>	512 – 516
MALi 5	Characters Identity Quest on <i>Hujan Bulan Juni</i> Novel by Sapardi Djoko Damono <b>Muhammad Rosyid Husnul Waro'i</b>	517 – 523

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

MALi 6	Globalizing Indonesian Literature: Mapping the Attempts <b>Suryo Tri Saksono</b>	524 – 529
MALi 7	Indonesian Women's Role, Characteristics, and Conflict in Contemporary Literary Works <b>Zakiyatul Mufidah Achmad</b>	530 – 535
MALi 14	The Writing Style of Female Authors in Japanese Contemporary Feminine Literature <b>Hoang Xuan Vinh &amp; Hoang Huu Phuoc</b>	536 – 540
MALi 15	Character Ambivalence in Facing Social Changes in <i>Shifu Becomes Dumb and Dumber</i> by Mo Yan <b>Arkan Tanriwa &amp; Nurni W. Wuryandari</b>	541 – 549

## Theme 5 Pop and Digital Culture in Asia

PDCu 1	Power of Advertisement: A Comparison Study between Indonesia and Thailand Cigarettes Advertising <b>Dian Purwitasari</b>	550 – 556
PDCu 2	Local Children Stories in Visual Media: A Content Analysis <b>Nopita Trihastutie</b>	557 – 563
PDCu 3	Cultural Cognition of "Selfies" as Pop Culture in Indonesia: A Rationale <b>Shinta Amalia</b>	564 – 569
PDCu 4	Karaoke on Youths' Perspectives: What are Their Motives? <b>Umi Halimah &amp; Titis Agunging Tyas</b>	570 – 575

## Theme 6 Indigenous Languages in Asia

InLA 3	The Reflection of Proto Melayu Polinesia (PMP) to Dayak Ngaju Language- Kalimantan Tengah: Historical Comparative Linguistics <b>Nur Lailatul Aqromi; Ayunda Riska Puspita</b>	576 – 589
InLA 5	Dialect and Its Implication on Translation <b>Yuli Kuswardani</b>	590 – 595
InLA 6	Why Do We Need to Preserve Asian Languages? - A Case of Lambada Language <b>Kishore Vadthya</b>	596 – 601
InLA 8	The Bugis' Living Principles in Paseng as a Form of Local Wisdom in South Sulawesi <b>Abdul Kadir; Aziz Thaba</b>	602 – 611

## Theme 7 Socio-cultural-based Education in Asia

SoEA 1	Comprehending the Learning Process of Peer Feedback Activity of EFL Students with Autism in Different Settings <b>Alam Aji Putera; M. Adnan Latief; Ali Saukah &amp; Sri Rachmajanti</b>	612 – 618
SoEA 4	Enhancing EFL Students' Sociocultural Awareness through the Use of Multimedia	619 – 623

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<b>Dwi Fita Heriyawati</b>	
SoEA 6	Javanese Etiquette: Developing Preschool Students' Affective Domain	624 – 631
	<b>Hayu Dian Yulistianti</b>	
SoEA 7	Analysis of Students' Attitude toward Product Attributes in College (A Case Study In UPN "Veteran" East Java)	632 – 637
	<b>Ika Korika Swasti</b>	
SoEA 9	Education – based Culture	638 – 643
	<b>Lilik Indrawati</b>	
SoEA 10	Vocational High School Development to Support Creative Industry Based on Local Potentials in Eastern Indonesia	644 – 653
	<b>Nugrahardi Ramadhani; Rabendra Yudistira Alamin; Denny Indrayana; Waluyo Hadi</b>	
SoEA 11	Reog Ponorogo Performing Arts in the Context of Cultural – based Education	654 – 661
	<b>Trisakti</b>	
SoEA 12	Preserving Local Culture through Grebeg Maulud Festival	662 – 672
	<b>Vita Vendityaningtyas</b>	
SoEA 15	Hoi An World Heritage (Vietnam): A Progress of Cultural Interference and Acculturation	673 – 678
	<b>Dang Van Chuong &amp; Nguyen Thi Vinh Linh</b>	
SoEA 16	The Indigenous Meaning of Pencak Silat Martial Art	679 – 684
	<b>Suryo Ediyono</b>	
SoEA 17	Ki Hajar Dewantara and Socio-Cultural Movement in Establishing Education in Indonesia: A Review on History	685 – 691
	<b>Arif Bulan &amp; Nandar Sujono</b>	
SoEA 21	The National Heritage of Ki Hadjar Dewantara in Taman Siswa about Culture-based Education and Learning	692 – 706
	<b>Siti Malikhah Thowaf</b>	
SoEA 23	Preventing Disengagement Of Santri In Islamic Boarding School	707 – 712
	<b>Alimul Muniroh; Arif Mansyuri</b>	

## Theme 8 Multicultural Education in Asia

MuEA 1	Children Literature as Beneficial Media for Multiculturalism Learning	713 – 719
	<b>Abdurrahman Zulfadhli; Yenni Hayati &amp; Asri Yasnur</b>	
MuEA 2	Multicultural Education in Asia: Raising Students' Intercultural Awareness and Celebrating Cultural Diversities	720 – 726
	<b>Andreas Winardi</b>	
MuEA 3	Integrating Local Culture in Foreign Language Learning	727 – 734
	<b>Dian Ratna; Erfan Mokhammad Wijaya &amp; Ryan Nuansa Dirga</b>	
MuEA 4	The Role of Multicultural Education in Building the Quality of Democracy in Indonesia	735 – 742
	<b>Eko Handoyo; Martin Herna Susanti</b>	
MuEA 6	Reconstruction of the Pela Concept as the Contribution to Multicultural Education in Moluccan Context	743 – 749

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

MuEA 8	<b>Flavius Floris Andries</b> How Cross Cultural Understanding Course Can Enhance Students' Critical Thinking Skills	750 – 756
MuEA 9	<b>Mirjam Anugerahwati</b> Ethics Education in Language Learning Intercultural Communicative in a Multicultural Context	757 – 764
MuEA 10	<b>Rusdhianti Wuriyaningrum &amp; Suparno</b> Students' Learning Styles in a Multi-Ethnicity School: A Case Study in SMAN 7 Samarinda	765 – 773
MuEA 12	<b>Iya Setyasih</b> Multicultural Education Values in Literature	774 – 784
	<b>Muliadi</b>	

## Theme 9

### Environment and Sustainable Development in Asia

ESDA 1	The Meaning of River for Banjarmasin Community, South Kalimantan	785 – 790
	<b>Parida Angriani; Sumarni; I Nyoman Ruja &amp; Syamsul Bachri</b>	
ESDA 2	Penanggungan Sites, Reserved the Sacred Mountain: Reflecting the Harmony between Human and Environment	791 – 800
	<b>Reza Hudiyanto &amp; Ismail Lutfi</b>	
ESDA 4	The Position of Moluccas in Commercial Rivalry Between Spain and Netherlands in East Asia in Seventeenth Century	801 – 808
	<b>Tran Thi Que Chau</b>	
ESDA 7	Indigenous Knowledge Management in Ebony Fruits Dyeing at Bann HauSapan Group Phutthaisong district in Buriram	809 – 816
	<b>Tassanee Buarapha</b>	

## Theme 10

### ICT-based Education in the Asian Contexts

ICTAC 1	Utilizing Whatsapp Group as Supplementary Speaking Media in EFL Context	817 – 826
	<b>Abdullah Gusti Efendy &amp; Azhizha Nilawardani</b>	
ICTAC 4	ICT – Based Education in the Asian Context: An Indonesian – Class Phenomenon	827 – 832
	<b>Eka Wahjuningsih</b>	
ICTAC 6	Media Television as the Mass Media and Cultural Industries	833 – 840
	<b>Gunawan Susilo</b>	
ICTAC 7	Tourism as a Magnet to Learn Foreign Language	841 – 845
	<b>Khoi Riyah &amp; Moch. Arif Bina Mandra</b>	
ICTAC 8	ICT – Based Teaching and Learning in FLL SWCU: A Study of Students' Points of View	846 – 853
	<b>Maria Christina Eko Setyorini</b>	
ICTAC 10	Challenges and Opportunities for Applying E-Learning (Learning Management System) at IAIN Antasari	854 – 861
	<b>Raida Asfihana</b>	
ICTAC 11	Design and Development of Online Teaching and Learning (OTL) Using	862 – 868

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Moodle Learning Management System (LMS) Based on Information Technology (IT) <b>Siyamta; Punaji Setyosari; Waras Kamdi &amp; Saida Ulfa</b>	
ICTAC 12	ICT in the EFL Speaking Classroom <b>Teguh Sulistiyo</b>	869 – 874
ICTAC 13	Strategy for Discovery Learning Ability to Increase Understanding and Application of the Concept of Science in Primary School <b>Marzoan; Punaji Setyosari; Saida Ulfa &amp; Dedi Kuswandi</b>	875 – 881
ICTAC 14	Old Software, New Purpose: Exploring PPT for Interactive Language Learning <b>Francisca Maria Ivone</b>	882 – 891
ICTAC 15	Cloud Computing Framework for Provisioning of Educational Resources <b>Narottam Das Patel; Rajeev Wankar</b>	892 – 899
ICTAC 21	Students' Views On The Use Of Book And Web-Based Materials For Their Eit Classes: A Study On ICT-Based Education In Indonesian Context <b>Ida Isnawati</b>	900 – 910

## Theme 11 Early Childhood Education in Asia

ECEA 1	Parents' Involvement as the Basis of Early Childhood Education: A Case Study in Malang, East Java <b>Agus Dermawan &amp; Satrio Binusa Suryadi</b>	911 – 915
ECEA 2	The Importance of Home School for the Early Childhood Physical Development <b>Agustinus Takaredase</b>	916 – 923
ECEA 4	Nursery Rhymes: The Alternative for Developing Cognitive, Affective, and Psychomotoric Realms for Preschool Children Education in ASEAN <b>Arti Prihatini; Giati Anisah; Elfira Sonia Soli</b>	924 – 934
ECEA 6	Bilingualism in Foreign Language Learning Development: The Use of Early Childhood Students' Mother Tongue in EFL Learning <b>Hany Novya; Nafisya Alfiani Aisyah</b>	935 – 940
ECEA 7	Age's Effect on ELT: Considering Early School Age for Language Learning <b>Marzuki &amp; Moch. Noor</b>	941 – 954
ECEA 9	Appreciation and Creation in Learning the Art of Ceramics as a Form of Cultural Preservation for Kindergarten Students in Surakarta <b>Novita Wahyuningsih &amp; Joko Lulut Amboro</b>	955 – 961
ECEA 10	Strategies in Foreign Language Teaching in Early Childhood <b>Retno Indah Rahayu</b>	962 – 968
ECEA 11	Early Childhood Sex Education from Gender Perspective <b>Ria Angin &amp; Endang Djatmikowati</b>	969 – 976
ECEA 12	A Literature Review: The Importance of Psychological Well-Being in Early Childhood Education (Indonesian Case) <b>Riza Amaliya</b>	977 – 983
ECEA 13	Aesthetic Experience through Decorative Drawing to Stimulate Children's	984 – 990

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Imagination	
	<b>Ruth Ardianti</b>	
ECEA 14	Syllabic-Based Approach for Learning to Read in Bahasa Indonesia for Early Graders	991 – 999
	<b>Sony Sukmawan &amp; Lestari Setyowati</b>	
ECEA 16	Innovation of Traditional Game Media “Engklek” In Helping Language and Culture Learning	1000 – 1004
	<b>Ruliani Adzima; Aiga Ventivani &amp; Sri Wahyuningsih</b>	
ECEA 17	An Outlook of Pre Schooling in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana States Of India	1005 – 1011
	<b>Upender Gundala</b>	

## Theme 12 Asian Culture and Heritage

ACH 1	The Traditions of “Queue” and “Antru” of the Communities of Downstream Watershed Solo River in East Java when Faced with Flood	1012 – 1023
	<b>Ach Fatchan</b>	
ACH 3	Comparing Indonesian and Western Culture in Salah Asuhan Novel: A Literary Criticism Approach	1024 – 1031
	<b>Aliva Rosdiana</b>	
ACH 4	Javanese Mind-Set in the Account of Thomas Stamford Raffles	1032 – 1039
	<b>Daya Wijaya</b>	
ACH 6	The Traditional Culture of Mutual Cooperation in Bahuma Activity by Banjarese Farmers in South Kalimantan	1040 – 1048
	<b>Karunia Puji Hastuti</b>	
ACH 7	ASEAN- China Relations in Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa	1049 – 1056
	<b>Kasma F Amin</b>	
ACH 8	Chicken and its Perspective in Javanese Society: The Study of Anthropological Linguistics	1057 – 1063
	<b>Latif Amrullah</b>	
ACH 10	Verbal Tradition as a Cultural Power in Building Civilization	1064 – 1069
	<b>Nur Hadi</b>	
ACH 12	Food Metaphor and Diasporic Identity in Bharati Mukherjee’s Wife and Jasmine	1070 – 1075
	<b>Retno Wulandari</b>	
ACH 13	The Javanese Local Wisdom Described in Murwakala Performed in the Oral Tradition of Ruwatan	1076 – 1081
	<b>Siti Masitoh</b>	
ACH 15	The Impact of Tourism on Indian Culture	1082 – 1089
	<b>P.S Pratheep</b>	
ACH 17	Female Liberation in Javanese Legend “ Jaka Tarub”	1090 – 1096
	<b>Inayatul Fariha &amp; Nabhan Fuad Choiron</b>	

## Theme 13 Educational Governance in the Asian Contexts



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

EdGA 1	The Role of Peers, Mastery Motivation and Self-Efficacy in Academic Cheating <b>Andrian Pramadi; Marthen Pali, Fattah Hanurawan &amp; Adi Atmoko</b>	1097 – 1101
EdGA 2	Students' Voice: What Makes Teachers Ideal? <b>Daniel Ginting</b>	1102 – 1108
EdGA 4	Model of Educational Leadership in the Implementation of Curriculum 2013 <b>Imam Gunawan</b>	1109 – 1118
EdGA 7	The Development of Anti-Corruption Education: An Evaluative Study about the Effectiveness of Literature Study in the Study of Anti-Corruption Education <b>Ninik Indawati</b>	1119 – 1124
EdGA 8	The Issue of the Implementation of 2013 Curriculum in Teaching English at Junior High School Level <b>Nuri Ati Ningsih</b>	1125 – 1130
EdGA 6	Pre-Service Teachers' Self-Reflection on their Profession Development upon Joining the SM-3T Progtam: Indonesian Context Perspectives <b>Nina Amalia Nurichsania</b>	1131 – 1139
FLT 82	Language Experience in Foreign Language Learning: Effects of Psycholinguistics and Sociocultural Factors <b>Niesia Novarina</b>	1140 – 1145
□□□□	Teaching of English in Indonesia: Globalization vs Identity <b>Rininta Triwuri Cahyaningpuspita</b>	1146 – 1150
LSCAC 2016 Profile		
Concluding Remarks		
Universitas Negeri Malang Profile		
Hyderabad University Profile		
Mahasarakham University Profile		
Hue University of Education Profile		
D'Topeng Kingdom Museum Profile		



## JAVANESE MIND-SET IN THE ACCOUNT OF THOMAS STAMFORD RAFFLES

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**Abstract:** It is believed that the continuity of socio-cultural structure is based on complex ideas. These ideas are useful to create a civilized society. Javanese, as a part of Asian societies, has a complex thought. One orientalist, Thomas Stamford Raffles, has observed and has been impressed with Javanese civilization. He has studied all matters about Java from socio-cultural structure to economic base. His accounts were already published in London 1817 entitled "History of Java". Many people have really admired him, but they do not realize the bias of the orientalist's work. His work is not only aimed to fill the gap of knowledge on Java but is also directed as a way to colonize Java. He used his knowledge to manage the Javanese. He has known that "the Javans (Javanese) are obedient, honest, and faithful". This stereotype might lead him to introduce the jury system and the petition. It is intriguing to know the life of Thomas Stamford Raffles, his stereotype on Javanese, his stereotype on Javanese way of thinking, and his policies in Java. It can be useful, for people at present, how to understand Javanese. In short, this study is also aimed to add to the few Indonesian historiography written by Indonesian.

**Keywords:** *History of Java, British colonization, Indonesian historiography, romanticism*

### INTRODUCTION

It is believed that Javanese mind-set is difficult to explain. Some people might say that they have a deep-thinking and others agree to claim that they are easily affected. Thomas Stamford Raffles has a different view from his contemporaries. He argues that Javanese has a civilized pattern. On the other side, Stockdale and Thorn, or the Dutch agree to sign that Javanese are lazy. Raffles, inspired by Van Hogendorp, however, believes that Javanese are obedient, honest, and faithful. This is determined by the ruling class. If the ruling class appreciates their work, they will obey the rule but people will be lazy, dishonest, and unfaithful if their works are are not respected. It seems to be useful to elaborate Raffles' and his contemporaries' stereotype on Javanese mind-set.

Their works could be categorized as the classical literature. The word "classic" means their works are relevant for different ages, across space, and time (Wijaya, 2015, p.18). They could direct us to re-visit what exactly the nature of Javanese mind-set is. Raffles' *History of Java* should be placed as an important work. Quilty (1998) not listed in the reference claims that Raffles's work is critical. However, he uses the hand of his residents to observe the hinterland of Java but he re-reads the reports. He discusses the findings through some theorists like Malthus, Smith, or Montesquieu. This paper will focus on Raffles' stereotype on Javanese, Raffles' stereotype on Javanese way of thinking, and Raffles' policies in Java. In addition, his contemporaries' works will be used to enrich the discussion on Javanese mind-set.

## METHOD

This study is a library research. This study has used some steps mainly in reading critically and making a note. It has considered all Raffles' primary sources available in online and offline library. Those are *Substance of a Minute* (1814); *Review of the Administration, Value, and State of the Colony of Java with Its Dependencies* (1816); *History of Java* (1817); and *Statement of the Services* (1824). It has also compared the works with his cousin's memoir, *Thomas Raffles, Memoirs of the Life and Ministry of the rev.* (1864), his second wife's memoir, Sophia Hull, *Memoirs of the Life and Public Services of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles* (1885), and his contemporary's work, Thorn's *Memoir of the Conquest of Java* (1815). In addition, this study has analyzed and compared the findings with some secondary sources. Finally, the author would conclude the analysis shortly.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Stereotype on Javanese

Raffles had a different view to colonize Java. *Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (VOC) was often to face Javanese as "the cash cow". They labelled the inhabitant "the indigenous". They claimed them as the laziest people. However, Raffles and the later humanistic conquerors tended to manage a colony of Java with humanistic hand but the deficit of treasury fund forced the Dutch to implement the cultivation system (the culture system). They made "a myth of lazy native", borrowing Alatas' accounts (1988), driving people to believe that Javanese were deserved to forcibly work. In 1833, Johannes Van den Bosch in Ingleson (2015, p. 24) wrote that "Javanese were happy to have few working hours that the standard one". This was caused by the environment and the stereotype on Javanese. They believed that the labors (Javanese labors) did not have any will to increase their material life. Most Europeans claimed that increasing the wages would stimulate the laziness of Javanese to work.

The myth of lazy native had been a mass knowledge for Europeans. The government used the ideas of lazy native to justify the practices of oppression and injustice in mobilizing of labors in the colony. They described the negative image of native to justify their colonization in Nusantara. They also used this social fact to guarantee the ideological construction relevant to their needs (Alatas, 1988, pp. 2-3). In addition, every colonial policy was directed by the voice of a certain party in its independent country. The Dutch had two parties. Those were conservative and liberal parties. Every policy shaped by the conservative would be criticized by the liberal party and vice versa. The peak of their conflicts reflected on how to manage a colony. Both conservative and liberal parties tended to prioritize their importance in any colonial policies (Alatas, 1988, p.86).

One of liberal members, Dirk van Hogendorp, argued that the colonial system was completely an oppression. He wanted to abolish the forced worker, slavery, and the forced selling crops. In contrast, he tried to introduce free trade and free workers. He seemed to be shaped by the spirit of French Revolution. The liberal movement started to affect his colonial perspective. However, the lazy native account drove the government not to abolish the forced worker but this argument was broken by van Isseldijk in his letter of 31 August 1802 seeing corrupt people in authority. He supported the abolition of the forced worker, the introduction of free trade, and the negation of oppression. Herman Warner Munting pointed out that the



laziness of Javanese were present because of the working circumstance (Alatas, 1988, pp. 90-91). The humanistic assumptions of van Hogendorp preceded and inspired Raffles in deciding the fixed tax, the property recognition, and recognition of the land ownership in the colony. Raffles (1817, pp. 276-277) realized that:

“Where not corrupted by indulgence on the one hand or stupefied by oppression on the other, the Javans (Javanese) appear to be a generous and warm-hearted people. In their domestic relations they are kind, affectionate, gentle, and contented; in their public, they are obedient, honest, and faithful. In their intercourse with society, they display, in a high degree, the virtues of honesty, plain dealing, and candour ... though not much addicted to excess, and of rather a slow temperament, they are in general liberal and expensive, according to their means, seldom hoarding their wealth, or betraying a penurious disposition. Fond of show and pomp, they lay out all their money, as soon as it is acquired, in the purchase of articles of dress, horses, and splendid trappings but they possess a quality which is not always joined with a love of splendour, either in nations or individuals; they are cleanly in their persons, and pay the greatest attention to neatness, as well as to glare and finery ... the Javans are exceedingly sensible to praise or shame, ambitious of power and distinction; but their national oppressions or agricultural habits have rendered them somewhat indifferent to military glory, and deprived them of a great portion of their ancient warlike energy. They are more remarkable for passive fortitude than active courage, and endure privations with patience, rather than make exertions with spirit and enterprise ...”

Based on his accounts of “where not corrupted by indulgence on the one hand or stupefied by oppression on the other, the Javans (Javanese) appear to be a generous and warm-hearted people”; Raffles believed that the good governance in managing a colony of Java was a government believing on his people as the source of social harmonization. In addition, he claimed that Javanese needed a just leader and were capable of managing his people considering the passive characteristic. It was well known that the political system of Javanese society was despotic. This brought Raffles to shape the system of direct rule. Javanese, who were claimed as the obedient and honest people, convinced him that the jury system could be easily used in Java.

Therefore, the Javanese's hope on justice would be gained. The tendency of hedonist and consumerist drove Raffles to shape Java through the wheels of capitalism like free trade. The Javanese would be the promising market for his company. Javanese were seemed to be a good partner in building the internal bureaucracy of company. They would be the Raffles' agent in deciding the tax and in collecting the land-rent cost.

### **Javanese Way of Thinking**

Javanese placed the assimilative way of thinking in their journey of the life. This was depicted in the history of Nusantara. In the period of pre-Hindu, people had known a political institution in smallest level of communities (village). When the trading contact with India had been increasing, the local chiefs encountered Indian politic and religious views. The substance of the view was the idea of central state-organization and hierarchies depending on the King-God. The ideas of the local chiefs were seen as ideological framework to legitimate their authority (Magnis-Suseno, 1984, p.23). Javanese chiefs openly thought to foreign culture. They accepted what they thought good and the foreign culture was necessary to



be adapt with their local culture. However, the local chiefs used the new credo as a new legitimation but this was not erasing the previous tradition.

Borobudur as a heritage of foreign effect had some interpretations on the function. If Borobudur could be realized as the place of worship then Borobudur played a role as a symbol and a realistic power for the believers. However, Borobudur had been the other meaning that was the graves for the kings of powerful Shailendra. This directed us that Borobudur was a first realization for the Javanese mind-set to accommodate the foreign religions and their importance. Shaivism and Buddhism could peacefully live side by side in Java. This indicated how Javanese effort to unite different perspectives. Javanese had a capability to find the basic union from the different things. At present, they were not only using religions to legitimize a politic but also creating the new religion of Shaivism-Buddhism (Magnis-Suseno, 1984, pp. 24-25).

The appearance of Islam was formerly accepted by the lower-middle class. They believed that the Islamic appearance would make a freedom from the king's oppression. Islam taught the principle of egalitarianism. This teaching would be accepted by many people. Islam came to Nusantara in the form of impure teaching. According Magnis-Suseno (1984), the Islamic arrival was not pioneered by the Wahabism but the Sufism of Gujarat. The Islamization faced a smooth process without any big challenges and could be placed and integrated in the local patterns of cultural, social, and political life of Java. Intriguingly, the nine *wali* (nine saints), claimed as the early disseminator of Islam in Java, used the local tradition, like puppet, to spread the words of *Holy Qur'an*.

Riklefs (2013) stated that it was common that people had the feeling of some turbulence between becoming Muslim and becoming Javanese at that time. Islamization had described the pattern of difference and difficulty since the early period. There were two processes happening together: the Muslims from abroad stayed in a place and becoming Javanese; meanwhile the local people converted to Islam and becoming Muslims. In addition, the feeling turbulence was not only for those supporting Islam or Javanese but also the increasing of Western influence. The local chiefs were confused to decide between becoming Muslims and becoming Christians in the wave of two religious influence. According to Vlekke (2008, pp. 108-109), the kings faced two options to be an ally for Portuguese or made a cooperation with Johor and Demak due to the further decision whether to choose Christian or Islam. Interestingly, they were not affected by the substance of both teachings, however they saw the beneficial teaching for them. One of local chiefs using Islamic and Javanese traditions in facing the Western power was Sultan Agung, the king of Mataram. He wanted to unite and make a peace between the palace and the Islamic traditions. Sultan Agung maintained the mystical relationship of Ratu Kidul; at the same time, however, he took a tricky decision to decide Mataram as Islamic kingdom. He had made many pilgrims to the grave of Sunan Bayat, a figure claimed to be as the first Islamic disseminator in Mataram. In addition, he also arranged a marriage between one of his princesses to the prince of Surabaya. The prince then told Sultan Agung that there would be the Wali's appearance who was the ancestor of the king. Interestingly, Sultan Agung introduced the book of *Usulbiyah*. The book described the prophet Muhammad wearing a gold crown from Majapahit. This description showed the union of two symbols of Islam and Java (Riklefs, 2013, pp. 32-33).



The Islam-Java was tolerant compared to Islam in other places. According to Crawfurd (1820, p. 47), Javanese were good imitators but in this respect they fell short of the Hindus. They were capable to adapt the teachings of Islam with the previous worshipping. This showed the character of Javanese which were capable to have a good relationship with the wave of globalization (Moertono, 1985, p. 18). Javanese were often to say the outsiders with the words “*ki-sanak*” or “*saderek*”. Those words meant relative. They always thought that the material deficit was not the prominent thing. It was to gain brother or sister which was important. This showed that in trading Javanese did not search for the profit. They claimed that the loss of profit was a forgiven activity as long as they got a brother or sister in stead (Moertono, 1985, p. 18).

The characteristic was affected by the basic framework of Javanese life that was a social harmony. According to Magnis-Suseno (1984, p. 38), Javanese had two patterns of conducts in their social activities. The first pattern dealt with the assumption of a person that she/he should have a functional act in order to minimize a conflict. The second pattern drove people to speak and appreciate others based on their status and role. Both principles were the normative framework determining the forms of concrete interaction.

It was clearly stated that the Javanese characteristic was to act moderate and to prioritize the life harmony. The Javanese culture was not a static culture and isolated society. They openly thought that the world was changing. However, the foreign influence had already affected Javanese but Javanese were capable of defending their tradition and they could even influence the foreign ones. Magnis-Suseno (1984, p. 1) argued that the Hinduism-Buddhism entering to Java was adapted to the Javanese culture from pre-Hindu which was animistic and magical. This was also true when Islam came with a monotheistic breath meeting the animistic-mystical culture known at present as “Islam Nusantara”.

### **British Policies in Java**

Three main policies of Raffles in Java were the representation of the assimilative way of Javanese thought. Javanese were the open-minded people. They took a positive thing of foreign culture without ignoring their personality. The first policy, Raffles revised the treaty arranging the relationship between the Dutch government and the kings of Java. Raffles (2014, pp. 157-158) believed on the view of Dirk van Hogendorp who argued on Javanese constitution. The main principle of building a system in Java was the land owned by the king. Therefore, what people had and gained was owned by the king. He then permitted people to own the land based on the king’s rule. King had the absolute law. Raffles used the king’s right to legitimize Java and its dependencies under the British East India Company (EIC).

However, the kings of Nusantara saw the different perspective. They claimed the English coming to help them in dispossessing the Dutch. The board directors of EIC in London had an interest to dispose the influence of French-Dutch in Southeast Asia, however Lord Minto and Raffles looked at the rich of natural resources in Java. They looked at Java as the heaven of natural and cultural sources. The kings of Nusantara made a corrupted policy without waiting Raffles’ agreement, like Palembang massacre. This was added with the disintegration of the Yogyakarta king in recognizing the British sovereign in Batavia. Raffles thought that they ended the previous system planted by the Javanese ancestors. Raffles annexed both and they were oppressed by his power.



The second policy, Raffles reformed totally the tax system. He wanted to help people from the oppression and destroyed feudalism. Wijayanti (2011, p. 121) explained that Raffles believed that the land-rent system aimed not only to set most people free from slavery and feudalism but also to strengthen the importance of British finance. The turning point of Raffles thought was based on the principle of “the state is the landlord”. The farmers had the right to use and cultivate the land. The farmers would be the tenant of the king. This view created the practice of obligation for the farmers to pay some charges. This led Raffles to collect the tax from people.

Raffles implemented the direct rule system like promoting a resident from his right-hand, however he still used the local chiefs to collect taxes from the tenants. According to Wijayanti (2011, pp. 126-129), the motive forcing Raffles to decide the local chiefs was the efficiency and safety principle. Basically, Raffles believed that the oppression would develop if the local chiefs helped him to execute his policy. However, Raffles found that the ignored elite would disturb the government performance. He used the tax collection in the context of a head and not referring to a village. The collection of land-rent was based on the quality and quantity of the cultivated land.

The dividing of land-rent category seemed to be the result of his reflection on the land-rent system formed by an agreement between the farmers and the local chiefs or the Dutch residents. Raffles (2014, p. 94) claimed that the local and the Dutch government did not decide the fixed-rent. They seemed to change the land-rent for their interest and, therefore, made farmers suffer. In reaching the wealth of people, Raffles (2014, p. 101) explained that all crops would be the farmers’ private property after paying their land-rent either money or their commodities. The farmers should allocate their crops to pay the tax based on the government category. The farmers should pay a half of the predicted crops for the first class *sawah* (rice field); 2/5 of the predicted crops for the second class; and 1/3 of the predicted crops for the third class. The farmers would pay less charge if they plant the corn in *tegalan* (the dry field); the first class would pay 2/5 of the crops; 1/3 of the crops for the second class; and 1/4 of the crops for the third class (Raffles, 2014, p. 99).

Raffles (2014, p. 175) accepted the suggestion of van Hogendorp in managing Java. He believed that Javanese would achieve welfare if they had a leader or a king who could meet their people’s needs. It was because Raffles believed that the Javanese and the local chiefs were corrupted. According to Raffles (2014, pp. 174-175), the residents, given the king’s authority, would sell his village to Chinese if they did not have much money and were pressed by the needs. The regent seized the people’s property, meanwhile the villagers had an obligation to send some tax from all collected crops. It was easily imagined how the oppressed demand had to be faced by the suffering people. This injustice action showed the failed government resulting in the collapse of a certain area.

This became the basis of his final policy. He re-organized the administrative institutions. Monopoly and contingent were really harmful. He seemed to be responsible for the condition. He ruled Javanese by the direct rule system. This system was a reflection of despotic Javanese culture. The executive and judicative power were owned by a person however he tended to direct the power to the justice. The standard of justice and government were measured based on Holy Qur’an and *adat* law. Javanese were the new believers of Islam. The logical consequence was the Islamic law was taken but the law could not



replace the local beliefs and *adat* law (Raffles, 2014, p. 177). In the period of British colonization, the regent was not only a leader but also the head of *jaxa* and a judge in his areas (Raffles, 2014, p. 685).

Raffles (2014, p. 157) believed that Javanese were honest. Their honesty was reflected in their clear confession in the court, without pretending or lying, on their related crimes. They also added the information in forcing the evident. This characteristic led Raffles to use jury system in the process of justice. The regent acted as a *jaxa* and deciding the chosen people as jury. The persons composing this jury ought to be as near as possible in terms of equality and rank in life with the prisoner. But no one under the rank of the head of a village would be competent to act as a jury man, as persons below that office, or in the orders of life the person senior in dignity among them shall be appointed to act as foreman (Raffles, 1816, p. 162). Interestingly, before the regent ran the justice in the court, he should read people's petition. Civilians should put a piece of paper of testimony into a box before the main door of the court. The *jaxa* should consider all petitions and should invite the writers as a witness in order to stand the justice (Raffles, 2014, p. 700).

## CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Javanese are often claimed as lazy, however their laziness is affected by the corrupted leader. Raffles, however, has argued that Javanese are diligent and faithful if we appreciate them. It has been useful for him to understand the Javanese system. Raffles believes that the cognition on people's character could ease the leader to decide the appropriate policy. Therefore, he has explored Javanese way of thinking before he applies his policies. He has known that Javanese have assimilative way of thinking. Hence, he issues policies in conjunction with the Javanese characteristic. It is clearly seen that we do not judge people by its cover but we should know them deeply.

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