Soft Power Building through International Education: Indonesia’s KNB Scholarship Scheme

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Abstract: As it occupies a new status in international relations, Indonesia needs to re-organize its resources in projecting the preferred image internationally. Attractiveness becomes crucial as Indonesia needs to maintain its posture as a reliable contributor to the world. This paper tries to scrutinize the un-tap potential of ideational powers Indonesia possesses. Herein the ideational power is assumed to be translated into a soft power, intangible and rely on its influential degree to persuade and attract other countries, through its public diplomacy activities. A specific correlation will be dedicated to the effort of Indonesia public diplomacy on international education. It is believed that international education progresses mutual understanding in disseminating Indonesia values and engages public audience. As a result these exchanges and engagements support the attainment of Indonesia’s interests and forwarding Indonesia’s foreign policies. A case study on KNB (Kemitraan Negara berkembang) scholarship scheme will be provided and its impact towards building people-to-people connections.

Keywords: Indonesia, international education, KNB (Kemitraan Negara Berkembang), public diplomacy

Introduction
Indonesia has secured itself a place in the middle power club of Asia. Along with its KIA^1 counterpart Indonesia, the only Southeast Asian country, is offered a member seat in the exclusive G20 forum. Individually, Indonesia undoubtedly holds on massive shares of population and enormous developing markets. Its constant contributions to maintain a leading role in ASEAN have gained trust from fellow ASEAN member states as well foreign counterparts.

Few would disagree with the fact that Indonesia has shifted its foreign projection into another level. As a middle power Indonesia sits in a position nestled between major power and minor power. Smaller compare to those that are yielding greater power but big enough to influence and contribute to international system compare to weaker states. Its recent status creates better bargaining position but inherently demand better responsibilities.

Material capabilities do matter in signifying states’ status in world politics, yet it does not invalidate the preeminence of ideational power to support such positioning. Thus, it is imperative to ensure Indonesia is able to maximize the utilization of domestic resources, both material and ideational factors, to support its international standing.

This paper tries to scrutinize the un-tap potential of ideational powers Indonesia possesses. Herein the ideational power is assumed to be translated into a soft power, intangible and rely on its influential degree to persuade and attract other countries, through its public diplomacy activities. A specific correlation will be dedicated to the effort of Indonesia public diplomacy on international education. It is believed that international education progresses mutual understanding in disseminating Indonesia values and engages public audience. As a result these exchanges and engagements support the attainment of Indonesia’s interests and forwarding Indonesia’s foreign policies.

There are three sections in the paper. The first section introduces the concept of soft power and its interpretation through public diplomacy activities. The second section sees the state of international education in Indonesia and its positive contribution towards public diplomacy activities. The last section covers the case of KNB as Indonesia’s scholarship scheme and identifies challenges it faces.

Soft Power
Nye coined the term of soft power as early as 1990 and has been define and redefine in his subsequent book in 2004 and recently in 2011. Nye famously asserts that soft power is built on the attractiveness’s level of a state; its value, culture, norm and identity. In post-modern international relations countries that become attractive ‘are those that help frame the issues, whose culture and ideas are closer to the prevailing norms and whose credibility abroad is reinforced by their values and policies’ (2008 :94)

Nye depiction on intangible capabilities has received many criticisms, arguing for its disability to provide tangible evident. It is agreeable to the extent that the limitation scholars hold in proposing tools to directly measure the value of soft power on the power equation. Another profound criticism to soft power is its reliance on value is not universal. What considers as a preferred value in one area is not necessarily accepted as common value in the other area.

However, it is undeniable that states are competing for positive perceptions from public audiences. Nye furthers his arguments by introducing a new concept of smart power so as to respond to the criticisms. In essence smart power refers to the combination of hard power and soft power to progresses national interests.

The core of soft power lies in the power of attractiveness; this can be translated as the power of influence not only to the government elites but also to the pubic audiences. However Nye also argues that as this power depends on ‘credibility’, negative perception will destroy such credibility and make soft power works at their disadvantages (2011 : 83). One way to enlarge the sphere of influences is through public diplomacy activities, in which aim to collect personal connections of public audiences.

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^1 KIA (South Korea, Indonesia, Australia) is a term coined by Jonas Parello Plesner in describing the emerging influences of countries in Asia in the 2009. However, further development has showed that India and Japan are continuously projecting their relative power through their strategic positioning in multilateral forums (India in the case of G20) or individually in bilateral alliances with powerful countries.
Nye emphasize the correlation between soft power and public diplomacy arguing that ‘even when foreign leaders are friendly, their leeway may be limited if their public and parliaments have a negative image...In such circumstances, diplomacy aimed at public opinion can become as important to outcomes as the traditional classified diplomatic communications among leader’ (2008 : 99). For soft power to be deployed, a foundation of people to people connection is needed.

Public Diplomacy and International Education

The common understanding of public diplomacy is seen as an outward looking effort states do to create a base of support in foreign countries. As states realize their co-existences required them to employ comprehensive approaches to each other, public audiences become a prominent ‘target object’ aside from their own government. Thus winning public’s heart and mind is generally accepted as states national aim.

During the backdrop of Cold War, public diplomacy activities evolved in unprecedented quantities employing both state and non-state actors as its wielder2. Interestingly, this heightened political tension pushed public diplomacy to evolve into forms laden by propaganda purposes. Since then public diplomacy activities has transformed and acquire different strategies and different methods in its applicability. This transformation has been differently recognized as old and new public diplomacy (2008 : 11).3

Scendi provides a comparison between what he stresses as traditional public diplomacy and 21st century public diplomacy. The highlights of this comparison lie in several characteristics, notably the condition in which it operates. Traditional public diplomacy takes place during tension and war time, while the new form operates during peace time. As a consequence the aim of traditional diplomacy is to achieve political change by changing of behaviors of targeted country, quite the opposite to the aim of 21st century public diplomacy is to promote receptive and positive environment for political and economic interests. The methods differ greatly, as the traditional ones stresses one way of communication, the other encourages two way conversations to build and maintain deeper relationship. The later’s target audience become much segmented and well defined, while that former seek for managing the public through persuasion, therefore sees the general public of the nation as their target.4

International education is an example of the 21st century public diplomacy. It operates during peace time and aims to promote positive environment for political and economic. The people to people connections are inherently persisting in in-shore scholarship scheme allowing foreign students to interact directly with the locals. Their integrations generate two ways of communications as the foundations of stronger mutual understanding. Furthermore, international education is part of Nye’s direct model of soft power (2011 : 93). Government engages in delivering direct resources such as public diplomacy, aid, exchanges and media to attain expected results for the initiating government.

Indonesia and Scholarship as Public Diplomacy

The history of Indonesia and International Education dated back from the onset of independence period in the 1950’s. Back then Indonesia has received its first offer from the Australian DFAT and later continued to be part of Colombo Plan scholarship program. Even now Indonesia receives education offer from various countries through their respective government like Japan, UK, US, Australia, Korea, Russia and home of scholarship agencies like Nuffic-Neso and AMINEF.

The research on the impact of international education towards the life of scholarship holder was undertook by Jemma Purdey in Indonesia (2015 : 122). Extended argument can be made on such correlation by emphasizing the positive relationship of soft power, public diplomacy and the building of people to people connections through international education. Purdey utilizes the life story approach to highlight the connection of in-shore scholarship experiences and holder’s subsequent perception, opinion and feeling toward host countries. In her research Purdey provides several indicators to measure the impact of government funded programs can have to the attainment of national goal aimed at generating positive public audiences’ perceptions. She addresses the links between international education and its contributions towards successful public diplomacy activities.

Her indicator consists of two simple questions; how the student came to be and whether their expectations are met. The first questions relies on personal motivation and pathways holders has, it is especially important to note holders’ perspectives on international education, the priority of their life and the motivation to seek for better knowledge and ambition, as well as their level of openness toward new values and social norms. Additionally, in this section Purdey notes that prior knowledge of host country is beneficial to ensure positive pre-departure perceptions. This knowledge is increasing along with the number of people who had the opportunity to study in the host countries and who have re-informed and disseminated this information to other prospective scholarship holders. It indicates that the higher the number of positive experiences the holders have towards the host countries, the higher the attractiveness level of that countries.

The second question refers to the degree of life changing situations holders encounter during their scholarships period. The research shows a varying result on the degree of cultural/life experience penetration between ‘single’ holders and ‘family’ holders. It is found that the ‘family’ holders are more exposed to the host social structure compare to ‘single’ holders. The reason is due to complicated family needs, ‘family’ holders are encouraged to depend more to the host society creating better access and deeper connection to host

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2 Even during the Cold War era non-state actors play significant contributions in connecting with foreign audiences amidst the deteriorating political situation. The prominent example is the Rockefeller (Foundation) who has furthered cultural activities as alternative ways to engage foreign publics.

3 See also Eytan Gilboa 2008 for detailed categorizations of public diplomacy.

4 The recent development in Public diplomacy shows that public diplomacy does not define as exclusively outward looking, but also inward looking; meaning that a government also need to engage its national public audiences in its activities.
countries. Meanwhile ‘single’ holders are relatively independent and less attached to host society structure. Furthermore, the type of friendships holders built with locals will define their level of penetration. Deep friendships will enrich their life experiences. Some of this encounter even evolves into marriages. Multicultural marriages will create a community of diaspora that will benefit home government by acting as bridging agent between host and home countries’s public audiences.

Indonesia and KNB (Kemitraan Negara Berkembang)

As Indonesia capability developed in recent years, it started to scale up its contribution to other countries by assuming role as scholarship provider. Relatively small in number, Indonesia’s scholarships are designed as Indonesia’s projection of growing responsibilities to less developing countries as well as its policy of engagement with public audiences. In general Indonesia’s in-shore\(^5\) scholarships can be understood as the combination of aid and public diplomacy.

Contributing in prospering the world has become Indonesia’s constitutional mandate. This spirit takes its form in scholarship schemes offered by Indonesia government. Amongst its variants of scholarship scheme, Indonesia’s endeavor to engage its fellow developing countries is realized through DCPS (Developing Countries Partnership Scholarship) or KNB (Beasiswa Kemitraan Negara Berkembang).

The first step toward establishing this partnership was originated from the 10\(^{th}\) NAM (Non Alignment Movement) in 1992. It was agreed upon among others the idea to provide scholarships by the ministry of Education and Culture (now Ministry of National Education) of Indonesia. This intention is built upon the sole aim to strengthen the relationship and mutual cooperation amongst NAM members. Additionally Indonesia saw the importance of building and maintaining cultural links amongst these developing countries.

The end of cold war provides a different political circumstance. Thus the Indonesia government has ceased to utilize the term ‘NAM’ as it deemed no longer relevant, giving birth to what is now called the Beasiswa KNB. Herein Indonesia expands the recipient countries including countries in Asia-Pacific and non-member of NAM, making KNB more accessible to wider publics.

KNB study program is eligible for postgraduate students, particularly who pursue Master Degree. The scholarship offers 3 years study period in one of universities in Indonesia, with one year dedicated to pre-master training on Indonesian Language and Preparatory Programs followed by the 2-years degree program. The one year Language and Preparatory program is especially important for a reason. The language program will equip students with the capability to interact and adjust to the daily life. Further, the language will allow foreign students to forge deeper relationship with locals and participate in the social structure. Although some universities provide English Classes, the comprehension of Indonesian language will put students in a better exposure to Indonesia’s values, norms and cultures. As argued by Purdey’s indicator, their penetration to the circumstances will influence their degree of experience on a life-changing transition. Therefore, the chances to experience social transformation are increasing along with deeper engagement.

KNB offers flexibilities in its study program involving a wide array of study field; Humanities, Science, Agricultural Sciences, Social Science, Engineering, Education, and Multi-disciplinary Studies (table 1). These subjects can be pursued across 13 appointed universities in Java comprised of Public and Private universities; 4 in Bandung, 3 in Yogyakarta, 2 in Surakarta, 2 in Surabaya, 1 in Malang and another one in Bogor. It provides financial assistance in the form of settlement allowance, living allowance, book allowances, research allowance, health insurance and round trip airfare from home countries to Indonesia.

KNB scholarship is only eligible if prospective scholarship holder has received nomination letter from both the respective home government and Indonesian embassy in home countries. This indicates that Indonesia’s mission abroad becomes the focal point of accepting and selecting the prospective scholarship holder. This primarily can ease the stay permit processes but also placed more responsibilities in Indonesia’s mission on the scholarship process.

KNB: Institutional Challenges

Challenges on the Indonesia’s mission lies on the inexistence of concerted approach and united SOP (standard of procedure) in addressing the scholarships proses. Interviews with KNB scholarship recipients in West of Java have provided insightful feedbacks on the reform needed to increase the chances of holders to have life transition experiences during their stay in Indonesia. These insights are truly imperative especially on the early stages of the process; the prior knowledge of host countries that can be provided by Indonesia’s mission abroad.

Most scholarship holders receive information about the program through local & national newspapers, Embassy/ Consulate General of Indonesia in respective countries, MOFA (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and Embassy of Education in their respective countries. Yet, they agree that the information of KNB scholarship has not yet received wider attentions. The language barriers persists in the delivery of information related to the information and selection processes at home countries.

The role of Indonesia’s missions in respective countries differs greatly. With some provide sufficient pre-departure preparations while some fail to satisfy the need of prospective holders. The differences of holders respective homes’ social structure and ‘way of doing business’ in Indonesia as well as the inexistence (sometime none) of social supports from friends or relative at host countries, put holders in a fragile condition. Therefore institutional support pre-departure and during departure is essential.

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\(^5\) Another prominent in-shore scholarship scheme that are funded by Indonesian government is the DARMASISWA, this scholarship offers a short term duration, up to 3 months. Students are provided immersion activities on traditional cultures and contemporary giving a comprehensive understanding of Indonesia. Additionally, for in-shore scholarship program that is not funded by the Indonesia’s government is ACICIS (Australia Consortium for In-Country Indonesian Studies) see Bob Sugeng Hadiwirata on Linking People.
In general Indonesia’s mission at home countries are relatively helpful with different degree of involvements. Opiyo Samuel and Mwebaza Ham both Public Servants in Uganda, currently pursuing Biology and Mathematical study says that Indonesia representative was helpful in helping with information about the scholarship, however did not provide pre-departure workshops or medical preparation. Unlike his colleagues from Nigeria, Hashim Umar Farouk currently taking environmental studies, says that he was provided pre-departure workshops and medical preparation before starting the scholarship period by the Indonesia’s representative. Additionally, Mojtaba Maktabifard – Ministry of Transportation in Zimbabwe and Stan Musa Palu -Public Servant in PNG, both says that the Indonesia’s representative was helping with the visa and the scholarship process but didn’t provide any medical and pre-departure workshops.

During their stay as foreign scholarship holders in Bandung area, few problems are emerged. First, students found that the use of Bahasa Indonesia during course has created difficulties in the studying processes. However, they understand the importance of the language as a sole way to experience the culture and integrate better to the society. Apparently, re-optimization the role of International Office is needed to provide space for better integration.

Second, unavailability or lack of institutional support provided by International Office in host University hinders foreign students to immerse into host social structure. The lack of support can be realized in the lack of emotional, preparation, immersion and consultation supports/services. There is no such student’s adviser to help the foreign students deal with problems they encounter within the university.

Third, late disbursement caused difficulties to maintain day by day living of foreign students. The delay of scholarship stipend can last up to 4 months. Fortunately some Universities have decided to resume responsibilities as a monthly guarantor. Effective and efficient fund management is especially important to address the issues of allowance distribution. Fourth, minimal information received by scholarship holder prior to departu re to host country. The information given was inadequate to explain the reality of living in host areas. This is especially true with less organized accommodation placement and delayed medical insurance.

Conclusion

The KNB scholarship schemes can be utilized to create people to people connections. Through this, Indonesian’ values, culture and norms can be understood by foreign public audiences. Therefore, as part of its international education efforts, this in-shore scholarship program progresses Indonesia soft power projection through public diplomacy activities. Indeed individual experiences, as foreign scholarship holders integrating into Indonesia society, are unique and personal, yet it is agreed to fully realize its potential contribution international education harbors toward a public diplomacy agenda, several recommendations can be made.

First, on the institutional side, it is important for our mission abroad to seek active participation and device new strategies for better announcement methods in home countries, preferably through media as information on KNB schemes are limited and yet publicly noticed. Strengthening the role of International office at host universities is equally crucial as their role as first place of reference foreign students in embarking their new journey. Special mentions are given to DIKTI, as better organization on allowance distribution is alarmingly crucial to ensure students’ survival during their study stay.

Second, progressing the penetration process between locals and foreign scholarship holders that takes place during their stay can be made through the creation of an association of foreign students as a bridge offering better access to integrate with locals values while providing a safe space of ‘the-others’ feelings in this transition. Providing dormitory can help to increase the exposure of foreign students to the local language and culture. Additionally, the adaptation process can also be achieved through the increase of contacts by facilitating international cultural, sports, and discussions activities across several universities in the area.

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