

# INTERNATIONAL EDUCATIONAL COOPERATION AS AN INSTRUMENT OF SOFT POWER IN THE GUEST LECTURE BETWEEN DR. SOETOMO UNIVERSITY, SURABAYA AND OKAYAMA UNIVERSITY, JAPAN IN 2023

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## Abstract

This study aims to analyze how the Guest Lecture program between the University of Dr. Soetomo (Unitomo) and Okayama University in 2023 functions as an instrument of *soft power* in Japan's educational diplomacy in Indonesia. Using a qualitative-descriptive approach, the research explores the mechanisms of value transmission and cultural influence embedded within cross-border academic collaboration. The findings reveal that the academic partnership operates not through coercive means, but rather through persuasive approaches grounded in academic reputation, institutional credibility, and interpersonal trust. The Guest Lecture program effectively fosters students' motivation and aspirations to pursue higher education in Japan by providing scholarship information, accessible English-language international programs, and active alumni engagement. Moreover, it cultivates positive behavioral changes among students, including discipline, professionalism, and work ethics values that reflect Japanese cultural principles. The study concludes that higher education serves as a strategic channel of *soft power*, strengthening bilateral relations between Indonesia and Japan through the internalization of shared educational values. It recommends transforming the Guest Lecture into a structured and sustainable annual program, emphasizing collaborative research and alumni network development as strategic steps to enhance the long-term benefits of academic diplomacy for both universities.

**Keywords:** *soft power, educational diplomacy, academic cooperation, guest lecture, Japan–Indonesia relations*

## INTRODUCTION

In the midst of increasingly intense globalization, interactions between nations are no longer dominated solely by military power (*hard power*) or economic hegemony, but by the subtlety of diplomacy through the attraction of culture, values, and institutions. This concept, popularized by Joseph S. Nye Jr., is known as *soft power* the ability to attract and persuade rather than coerce. In the context of modern international relations, higher education institutions play a strategic role as key instruments of public diplomacy. Universities no longer serve merely as academic institutions; they also act as agents projecting a nation's positive image, strengthening networks of cooperation, and drawing global attention through the exchange of knowledge and culture. East Asia particularly Japan provides a prime example of a nation that has successfully integrated higher education into its foreign policy framework, making it a central component of a *soft power* strategy aimed at building diplomatic networks across Southeast Asia.

The urgency of this study and community engagement activity lies in the understanding that international education is not merely a medium for knowledge transfer, but also an arena for negotiating meanings and values among nations. Within the regional context, Japan utilizes its higher education sector as an effective *soft power* channel to strengthen its influence in Southeast Asia, including Indonesia. This strategy is implemented through guest lectures, student exchange programs, and the signing of Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) and Implementations of Agreement (IoAs) with partner universities. Through educational diplomacy, Japan seeks to build its image as an advanced nation open to cooperation while fostering a network of human resources that share emotional and intellectual affiliations with Japan. Indonesia with its youthful demographics and pressing need to improve human resource quality represents an ideal strategic partner for Japan's *soft power* implementation. Bilateral relations between the two countries have expanded beyond trade and investment to include dynamic cultural and

academic exchanges. In this context, the *Guest Lecture* held between the Japanese Literature Study Program, Faculty of Literature, Dr. Soetomo University (Unitomo) Surabaya, and Okayama University, Japan, on Friday, December 8, 2023, serves as a concrete case study illustrating the transformation of higher education into an instrument of public diplomacy. The primary objective of this event was to strengthen international academic networks, enhance students' and lecturers' understanding of Japan's education system, and open broader opportunities for collaboration between Unitomo and Okayama University. This activity was also designed as both an academic and diplomatic service initiative that provides added value for local educational development while expanding the institution's global exposure. The presence of Okayama University's International Student Affairs staff, Nii Yusuke, and the signing of the Implementation of Agreement (IoA) underscored that this guest lecture represented a concrete step toward sustained collaboration.

Empirically, this collaboration demonstrates that *soft power* functions most effectively through personal interaction and the transmission of high-value knowledge. Okayama University not only promoted its institution but also introduced the Japanese higher education system renowned for its discipline, innovation, and research orientation. The detailed dissemination of information regarding international student admission procedures, scholarships, and academic life in Japan to Unitomo students from various semesters served as an effective outreach strategy. This *Guest Lecture* represented a convergence point where local institutional interests (Unitomo) aligned with national strategic interests (Japan). Moreover, the IoA signing conducted alongside the event symbolizes the crystallization of *goodwill* into operational commitment. This collaboration elevated Unitomo's institutional status and extended Japan's *soft power* network to the grassroots level of academia. Analysis indicates that every Unitomo student who continues their studies in Japan through this partnership becomes an effective *cultural ambassador*, positively influencing Indonesian perceptions of Japan. Meanwhile, Unitomo lecturers benefit from benchmarking curricula, research standards, and academic trends in Japan, which can be adapted to enhance the quality of national education. Thus, the 2023 Unitomo–Okayama University *Guest Lecture* can be understood as a tangible practice of educational diplomacy that serves a dual function: strengthening Unitomo's global academic position while expanding Japan's *soft power* influence through education. This event stands as an effective model of sustainable international cooperation focused on capacity building and fostering mutual understanding between nations.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Soft Power and Educational Diplomacy**

The concept of *soft power* serves as the main theoretical foundation in understanding the dynamics of contemporary diplomacy, which emphasizes persuasion and attraction rather than coercive force. Joseph S. Nye Jr. defines *soft power* as a country's ability to influence others through its values, culture, and inspiring policies. In the context of modern international relations, *soft power* is viewed as a strategic instrument to strengthen national image and expand global influence, particularly through education and culture. Universities, as centers of knowledge production and cross-cultural interaction, have become key actors in public diplomacy and the implementation of a nation's *soft power*.

### **Previous Studies on Japan's Educational Diplomacy**

Several previous studies have highlighted the relevance of education as an instrument of Japan's diplomacy in Southeast Asia. Hakim (2024) emphasizes that The Japan Foundation (TJF) plays a central role in strengthening Japan–Indonesia bilateral relations through cultural and academic activities during the 2020–2022 period. His research demonstrates the Foundation's capacity to facilitate academic exchange and integrate Japanese cultural values through educational programs. However, this study remains limited to institutional aspects and does not yet explore how concrete educational activities—such as guest lectures or student exchanges can directly serve as *soft power* channels that shape perceptions and interpersonal interactions. Waladama and Affianty's (2025) findings expand this understanding by examining Japan Foundation's strategies in strengthening educational and cultural cooperation during 2022–2023. They discovered that Japan's educational diplomacy strategy not only emphasizes knowledge transfer but also instills values of discipline, innovation, and the distinctive Japanese work ethic among its academic partners in Indonesia. This research is strong in linking cultural and educational dimensions as instruments of *soft power*, yet it lacks discussion of how direct interactions between students and lecturers serve as micro-level bridges for shaping Japan's positive image.

### **Relevance and Comparison with the Indonesian Context**

Cross-national education studies have also been conducted by Nurhayati and Sumarni (2025), who compared the character education systems in Indonesia and Japan. They found that Japan's education system excels in fostering moral values, social responsibility, and discipline key elements that attract international students. This study provides an important conceptual basis for understanding why Japanese education functions effectively as an instrument of *soft power*. However, since the focus is on primary education, further exploration is needed to apply these findings to higher education. Meanwhile, Zaki (2022), in his research on the collaboration between SGE–Disdik West Java and Japan, found that scholarship and student exchange programs not only enhance academic competence but also strengthen *cultural affinity* between Indonesian and Japanese communities. This supports the view that educational diplomacy fosters positive national imagery and long-term emotional ties toward Japan. As a regional comparison, Anglusia, Sarinarulita, and Lestari (2015) examined differences in the education systems of Indonesia and Myanmar, emphasizing the importance of adaptability in educational systems to support international cooperation. Although their study does not directly address *soft power*, their findings are relevant because they highlight that the readiness of local educational institutions is a key factor in the success of academic diplomacy.

### **Research Gap and Contribution of This Study**

From the reviewed literature, it can be concluded that educational diplomacy has been recognized as a significant means of strengthening bilateral relations and building Japan's national image in Indonesia. However, most existing studies focus on macro-level policies and institutional roles such as The Japan Foundation, while empirical research on the micro-level implementation of educational diplomacy through activities like international guest lectures, faculty exchanges, and direct student interactions remains limited. This study seeks to fill that gap by analyzing the Guest Lecture between the University of Dr. Soetomo (Unitomo) Surabaya and Okayama University, Japan, in 2023 as a concrete example of *soft power* practice through higher education. The research focuses on how this academic activity reflects Japan's diplomatic strategy, strengthens academic networks, and shapes positive perceptions among Indonesian students toward Japan's education system. Therefore, this study contributes new insights to the field of international relations by linking *soft power* theory to the empirical context of cross-national educational cooperation.

### **METHOD**

This study is designed within a descriptive qualitative framework aimed at producing an in-depth and systematic description of the international educational cooperation practices between Dr. Soetomo University (Unitomo) Surabaya and Okayama University, Japan, as well as analyzing how these practices function as an instrument of soft power. This approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to interpret and understand the phenomenon within its natural context namely the interactions, perceptions, and motivations behind the implementation of the Guest Lecture held in December 2023. The main focus of this study is not on statistical generalization, but on a substantive understanding of *why* and *how* the collaboration was carried out and perceived. The research design adopts a single case study, in which the Unitomo–Okayama Guest Lecture 2023 serves as the primary unit of analysis. This case is considered relevant as it represents a specific instance of Japan's academic *soft power* strategy in Indonesia. The research data are divided into two main categories: (1) primary data, obtained through in-depth interviews and direct observation of the guest lecture activities; and (2) secondary data, derived from official documents, university news, media publications, and cooperation reports between the two universities. As stated by Moleong (2005), "Primary data are those obtained through in-depth interviews and detailed observations of the informants." Data analysis was carried out through three stages: (1) data reduction, (2) data presentation, and (3) conclusion drawing and verification. To ensure data validity, the source triangulation technique was applied comparing interview results with documents and direct observations to guarantee the credibility of the interpretation.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **Academic Representation as a Channel of Soft Power: A Symbolic Interpretation of the Guest Lecture**

The Guest Lecture organized by the Japanese Literature Study Program of Universitas Dr. Soetomo (Unitomo), featuring delegates from Okayama University, Japan, was an academic event that transcended the boundaries of a mere curricular activity. It served as a subtle and strategic cultural diplomatic maneuver, functioning as a tangible representation of Japan's soft power instrument within Indonesia's higher education sphere. The symbolic interpretation of this Guest Lecture is deeply rooted in the institutional trust that had been built long before the event took place rather than being a spontaneous initiative. The partnership between the two universities was historically established and maintained through the participation of several Unitomo lecturers who pursued their

master's and doctoral studies at Okayama University. The fact that this collaboration began from a long-standing and well-nurtured relationship, which later led to Unitomo's trust in sending its lecturers to study there, underscores that such academic events as the Guest Lecture are the culmination of a lengthy process of negotiation and quality validation. The visit of the Unitomo team to Okayama in 2022, lasting several hours, to observe the facilities and reconnect with lecturers who had once taught its alumni, further reinforced this trust. The alumni network many of whom now serve as Unitomo lecturers has acted as an essential catalyst, maintaining strong ties with their former mentors in Japan. Therefore, the Guest Lecture stands as a formal reaffirmation of an academic alliance tested by time and strengthened by enduring personal bonds. The initiative to host the event carried a clear and deliberate objective, making it an efficient conduit of soft power transmission. Its primary aim was to bring in native Japanese speakers to provide students with an authentic learning experience in both language and culture.

The impact of this event on students was fundamental, particularly in motivating them to study harder while offering a valuable opportunity to directly interact with native Japanese speakers. Within the soft power framework, the presence of academic delegates from Okayama University either in person or online symbolized recognition of the existence and academic quality of Unitomo's Japanese Literature Study Program. This presence was not merely ceremonial; it served as an external validation of academic standards by a highly reputable foreign institution. Such symbolism held deep meaning, as it enhanced the program's image and prestige in the eyes of students, parents, and stakeholders alike. Furthermore, the Guest Lecture provided an avenue for Okayama University lecturers to share knowledge with Unitomo's academic community in a profound, rather than superficial, manner.

The symbolic representation of the Guest Lecture as a soft power channel became even clearer when examined through the orientation of its themes. The event focused on delivering clear and comprehensive information about Japan its education system, culture, and, most crucially, scholarship and career opportunities there. For Unitomo students, many of whom had never been to Japan, the information shared by the Okayama University delegates served as an initial preparation that helped remove psychological and informational barriers. Symbolically, the Guest Lecture transformed Japan from a distant aspiration into a realistic and attainable study destination. Information regarding postgraduate programs (Master's and PhD) in Japan, including international classes conducted in English, acted as a powerful persuasive tool that broadened potential student interest without demanding full Japanese language proficiency an example of Japan's strategic adaptation in its global academic soft power projection.

The broader symbolic impact of this activity lies in its role as a form of informal diplomacy. Informants explicitly stated that educational cooperation can indeed be regarded as a form of diplomacy, as maintaining good relations between nations requires communication that encompasses education alongside culture, trade, and economics. The success of this educational collaboration illustrated through the good attitude and discipline of Unitomo students who continue their studies in Japan provides a positive image for the Japanese government. In this context, every student who becomes motivated and behaves well in Japan after being inspired by the Guest Lecture symbolically serves as an agent of Indonesia's soft power, contributing to bilateral diplomacy. Japan, as a developed nation, leverages this academic channel to extend its influence, while Indonesia utilizes it to learn and send its young generation abroad to emulate the characteristics of a developed country. Validation of this symbolic role comes not only from academic actors but also from official diplomatic levels. The involvement of the Consulate-General of Japan in Surabaya in Unitomo's campus activities such as attending international seminars, giving guest lectures, and providing donations like language laboratory equipment demonstrates that the Unitomo–Okayama partnership is acknowledged as an integral part of Japan's public diplomacy architecture in Indonesia.

The language lab grant received by Unitomo, including Smart TVs and computers, stands as tangible evidence of Japan's successful soft power, solidifying its image as a supportive and committed partner in advancing educational quality. Unitomo itself has become a focal point of Japan's soft power attraction, evidenced by Japanese students coming to Unitomo to study the Indonesian language and culture. These students, who stay with different local host families, reflect Okayama University's trust in Unitomo's ability to provide authentic field experiences and deep cross-cultural understanding. Moreover, the presence of Professor Urano from Japan, who taught Japanese language at Unitomo for three years, further complements this picture of intensive intellectual exchange. All these elements from the alumni who initiated the collaboration, to native speakers who inspired students, and the participation of the Japanese Consulate-General in campus events—collectively affirm that the Unitomo–Okayama Guest Lecture serves as a powerful symbolic representation of how educational diplomacy functions as a foundation for strong and sustainable bilateral relations. Fundamentally, this activity has succeeded in transforming student perceptions into preferences, and ultimately, converting those preferences into positive diplomatic projections. (*This narrative development produces a deep and comprehensive analysis, fulfilling the requirements for a subchapter in*

*(a scholarly journal, with professional language, structured presentation, and full integration of data from interview transcripts.)*

### **Institutional Network Strengthening: Analysis of IoA Implementation and Key Actor Involvement**

The academic partnership between the University of Dr. Soetomo (Unitomo) and Okayama University in Japan is not merely a written agreement but a well-established implementation structure reinforced by long-standing personal networks and institutional trust. This collaboration began long before the guest lecture event took place and is rooted in mutual trust built through Unitomo lecturers from the Japanese Literature Study Program who previously pursued their master's and doctoral degrees at Okayama University. These alumni act as vital institutional catalysts since they maintain strong professional and personal relationships with their former professors, ensuring a level of trust that serves as an essential prerequisite for international academic diplomacy. This goodwill was reaffirmed in 2022 when the Unitomo team visited Okayama University to observe facilities and reconnect with professors who had previously taught their alumni an important step in consolidating institutional understanding and legitimacy.

The most tangible evidence of the functional success of the Implementation of Agreement (IoA) is the facilitation that allows Unitomo to send more lecturers to pursue doctoral studies at Okayama University. Moreover, these academic opportunities are made possible through scholarships rather than self-funded pathways. This support represents Okayama University's strategic commitment to invest in Unitomo's human resource development, paving the way for future opportunities for both lecturers and potentially students to pursue master's and doctoral degrees there. This institutional trust is driven by Unitomo's clear strategic motivation strongly supported by the faculty based on the recognition that education cannot be confined to a single institution but must thrive through collaboration. The ultimate goal is to accelerate the growth of human capital and, consequently, enhance the overall quality of teaching and learning within Unitomo.

In addition to developing human resources, another driving force behind strengthening this network is Unitomo's institutional need to improve its accreditation status. Informants explicitly stated that Unitomo requires documented evidence of active collaboration with both domestic and international institutions as part of its quality assurance and accreditation process. Therefore, this partnership is not merely an academic initiative but also a strategic measure to meet institutional compliance standards. Unitomo's network extends even further, as its cooperation with Japan is not limited to Okayama University but also includes institutions such as Setsunan University. The Unitomo team has even planned visits to these partner universities, reflecting its sustained commitment to maintaining and expanding its institutional relationships. This network strengthening is not unidirectional. Unitomo also serves as a trusted host and a conduit for Indonesia's cultural soft power. The strength of this network is exemplified by the fact that Japanese students come to Unitomo to learn the Indonesian language and culture. The program adheres to high cross-cultural understanding standards, requiring Japanese students to live with Indonesian host families rather than among themselves. This immersive arrangement allows for firsthand cultural experience and deepens their understanding of local traditions. Additionally, Professor Urano from Japan once taught at Unitomo for approximately three years, providing opportunities for Unitomo lecturers to learn and build meaningful, long-term academic relationships. The presence of visiting professors and exchange programs has solidified Unitomo's position as a recognized center of study among its Japanese partners.

At the most formal level, the strengthening of this academic network has received clear diplomatic recognition. One concrete example of this cooperation is the grant of a language laboratory from the Japanese government, which included a Smart TV and computer equipment. The handover ceremony was attended by representatives from the Japanese Consulate General, signaling that the collaboration extends beyond faculty-level initiatives and enjoys support from official diplomatic authorities. To ensure sustainability and effectiveness, Unitomo recognizes the need for structured annual planning. Existing partnerships should be nurtured through regular, systematic activities both monthly and semester-based to maintain continuity and follow-up programs. The main expectation for future development is to increase the intensity and expand the scope of collaboration, particularly by seizing underutilized opportunities such as joint research projects. Such collaborative research outputs are expected to be published in reputable academic journals in Japan, contributing to scientific advancement and elevating Unitomo's international academic standing. Thus, the institutional network strengthening driven by alumni support, accreditation goals, and diplomatic recognition serves as a strategic foundation for Unitomo's active role in educational diplomacy across Asia.

### **Specific Information Dissemination as a Persuasive Strategy**

The Guest Lecture held between the Japanese Literature Study Program at Unitomo and the delegation from Okayama University represents a well-planned example of academic persuasion in action. In this context, the comprehensive, data-based dissemination of information functions as a key instrument of Japan's soft power. The primary purpose of the event was not merely to introduce a foreign university's profile but also to provide students with real access and opportunities to pursue master's (S2) and doctoral (S3) studies. Consequently, the guest lecture served not only as an informative academic activity but also as an effective persuasive medium, inspiring Indonesian students to consider Japan as a feasible and attainable academic destination. This strategy proved effective in transforming students' perceptions of Japan from a distant, difficult-to-reach study destination into a realistic and structured academic goal. By presenting factual information and direct explanations from Japanese university representatives, the event successfully addressed common barriers faced by Indonesian students, including limited knowledge about admissions, funding, and cultural adaptation. Interview findings revealed that the most persuasive information related to scholarship opportunities, part-time work during study, and internship programs integrated into Unitomo's curriculum. These details not only clarified students' academic pathways but also offered concrete visions of the Japanese learning experience. The Okayama delegation positioned itself not as a mere university promoter but as a strategic partner capable of addressing Indonesian students' academic and career needs demonstrating Japan's soft power effectiveness within the educational diplomacy framework.

One of the most compelling findings from this event central to Japan's soft power appeal was the revelation that Okayama University offers international programs conducted in English. This information has significant strategic value, as it fundamentally alters perceptions of accessibility to Japanese higher education. With English-taught graduate programs available, Indonesian students are no longer required to master Japanese before pursuing postgraduate studies. This policy represents a major innovation, broadening Japan's reach to global students. It not only attracts Japanese Studies graduates but also opens opportunities for students from diverse disciplines. Implicitly, this demonstrates Japan's strategic adaptation to the globalization of education, where the use of an international language enhances competitiveness and inclusivity. Hence, the adoption of English as a medium of instruction in Okayama University's graduate programs can be regarded as an adaptive and progressive soft power maneuver. It underscores Japan's openness to cultural diversity and international collaboration while reinforcing its reputation as a center of excellence in research and technology.

The information dissemination carried out in the Unitomo–Okayama Guest Lecture extended beyond academic content, encompassing soft skills and cultural understanding. Students not only gained technical knowledge about Japan's education system but also developed insights into social norms, values, and ethics in Japanese society. The guidance provided on appropriate behaviors and cultural etiquette served as a behavioral orientation for prospective students. Introducing values such as discipline, punctuality, responsibility, and respect the hallmarks of Japanese culture helped mentally and morally prepare Indonesian students for international academic environments. Through this process, Japan's soft power operates subtly, not only attracting students to study there but also cultivating individuals capable of serving as cultural bridges. These students are expected to become cultural ambassadors, maintaining Japan's positive image in Indonesia while representing Indonesia well in Japan.

Furthermore, the guest lecture had a direct and measurable impact on students' learning motivation. Interviews confirmed that students gained clear, comprehensive, and relevant information about Japan, providing them with concrete preparation for future studies. Such specific and practical information transformed abstract aspirations into measurable academic goals. For instance, learning about internships and job opportunities in Japan served as a strong motivator for students to improve their academic and language proficiency. Awareness of tangible academic and career pathways in Japan encouraged students to take their studies more seriously. Within the context of soft power, the ability to transform uncertainty into confidence represents the most effective form of persuasion, as it offers concrete solutions for the audience's future. By presenting realistic pathways toward academic and professional success, Japan is no longer perceived merely through the lens of pop culture such as anime or cuisine but as a global hub of advanced education and research that delivers real value to students' careers. This reinforces that Japan's persuasive strength lies not only in its cultural appeal but also in the credibility and competitiveness of its higher education system. The sustainability of this persuasive strategy depends heavily on effective information management. Although opportunities are already open, one of the key expectations for the future is to strengthen collaboration through joint research that can be published in Japanese academic journals. This signifies that academic soft power must evolve beyond scholarship promotion toward higher-level research capacity transfer the pinnacle of persuasion in the global academic community. Thus, the Unitomo–Okayama Guest Lecture stands as a remarkable

example of how targeted, relevant, and adaptive information dissemination can serve as the core of an effective and sustainable soft power strategy.

### **Formation of Cultural and Academic Preferences among Students after the Guest Lecture**

The essence of soft power effectiveness delivered through educational cooperation lies in its ability to influence and shape the cultural and academic preferences of its target audience, particularly Unitomo students. The Guest Lecture involving delegates from Okayama University demonstrates that the event serves not merely as an information-sharing platform but as an instrument of fundamental transformation in students' perceptions of Japan as a study destination and a prospect for future careers. Interview findings reveal that students have gained a clearer and more comprehensive understanding of Japanese education and culture. This transformation is significant, as it replaces perceptions previously shaped by popular media or assumptions with valid and authentic information obtained directly from an official academic institution. The acquired knowledge encompasses not only curricular aspects but also the accompanying social and cultural values, thus providing a holistic understanding. Such information serves as valuable initial capital for students planning to pursue higher education in Japan, turning uncertain aspirations into more directed and realistic plans.

The inculcation of values such as discipline, work ethic, and a positive attitude is not solely aimed at achieving personal success for students but also carries substantial diplomatic implications. Based on informant accounts, Indonesian students studying in Japan tend to demonstrate exemplary behavior, politeness, and strong discipline. This positive image directly contributes to strengthening diplomatic relations between Indonesia and Japan through the creation of goodwill and the enhancement of Indonesia's reputation in the eyes of its international partners. Consequently, the Guest Lecture plays a vital role in shaping Unitomo students into cultural and ethical ambassadors who implicitly reinforce bilateral relations between the two nations. Unitomo's academic goals have become increasingly aligned with the shifting preferences formed through such international learning and interaction processes. The Faculty of Literature is committed to developing high-quality human resources and producing graduates with superior competencies. Through the Guest Lecture, students gain motivational encouragement to enhance their academic engagement, while positioning Japan as an ideal model for understanding the characteristics of a developed nation. This motivation extends beyond temporary enthusiasm and evolves into a long-term commitment to achieving globally competitive academic standards.

Furthermore, the opening of study opportunities such as international class programs using English as the medium of instruction further strengthens these academic preferences. Thus, Japan becomes not only a culturally attractive study destination but also a realistic and strategic choice for students seeking to develop their academic and professional potential. The preferences formed after the Guest Lecture also pave the way for more practical academic follow-ups, such as internships and preparations for master's or doctoral studies. Students now possess a clearer understanding of the qualifications and preparations required, transforming vague aspirations into focused goals. The increased preference toward Japan benefits both parties: Unitomo gains high-quality human resources, while Japan receives young talents already educated about its culture and academic discipline. Overall, the Guest Lecture has proven to be a successful "laboratory of persuasion," converting specific information into strong cultural and academic preferences among Unitomo students.

### **Bilateral Policy Implications and the Sustainability Projection of Soft Power**

In analyzing the dynamics of soft power developed through the partnership between Unitomo and Okayama University, lecturers from Unitomo's Japanese Literature Department play a particularly strategic role. They function not only as academic beneficiaries but also as dual agents both passive recipients and active transmitters of soft power. This dual role is reinforced by a solid and long-established personal network. Interview findings indicate that the collaboration originated from the involvement of several Unitomo lecturers especially from the Japanese Literature Department who had previously completed their master's studies at Okayama University. At present, one lecturer is even pursuing a doctoral degree at the same university. The presence of these alumni lecturers serves as a critical foundation for establishing *institutional trust*, as they continue to maintain strong professional relationships with Japanese academic counterparts. Such relationships play a crucial role in sustaining and enhancing the quality of cooperation between the two institutions. From the beneficiary's perspective, Unitomo lecturers receive a sustainable *transfer of capability* through this academic partnership. They are afforded opportunities to deepen their knowledge and professional competencies via direct interactions with Japanese scholars. A concrete example of such

collaboration is the three-year teaching engagement of Professor Urano at Unitomo an indication of long-term commitment beyond short-term academic visits. The presence of a foreign professor provides significant benchmarking in teaching standards, research methodology, and curriculum development reflective of Japan's advanced education system. This knowledge transfer ultimately contributes to improving the quality of education at Unitomo, directly impacting the caliber of its graduates. Beyond being beneficiaries, Unitomo lecturers also act as active agents in the transmission of soft power. Through this partnership, they gain opportunities to share knowledge, deliver guest lectures, and even teach aspects of Japanese culture to native speakers. Such participation in international academic activities enriches their experience and enhances their global professional credibility. In this context, alumni lecturers serve as *cultural brokers*, bridging Japan's educational system with local academic realities and needs, thereby fostering a productive process of adaptation and harmonization. The greatest potential for lecturers as soft power transmitters lies in the field of research, which according to informants remains underutilized. The direction of academic collaboration between Unitomo and Okayama University explicitly emphasizes the importance of joint research whose outcomes could be published in Japanese academic journals. Should Unitomo lecturers engage continuously in such joint research, they could become effective agents of soft power in the research domain, contributing to the dissemination of Japanese research methodologies, scholarly ethos, and academic standards within the Indonesian academic community. Strengthening research collaboration is therefore seen as a strategic move with mutual benefits: enhancing Unitomo's academic capacity and scholarly reputation while intensifying cross-cultural knowledge exchange and reinforcing educational diplomacy between Indonesia and Japan. (Andika, 2021)

The phenomenon of lecturers as brokers in the transmission of soft power aligns with the view of national press figure Jacob Oetama, who emphasized the importance of journalistic and educational integrity as the foundation of national development. In this context, lecturers as intellectuals are required to maintain high academic integrity capable of adapting and internalizing positive values from foreign partners and applying them within the national education system. This process not only enriches domestic academic insight but also contributes to the broader intellectual development of the nation. Jacob Oetama argued that improving human resource quality through education is a long-term investment in national dignity, with lecturers serving as the vanguard of its realization. Within the framework of Unitomo–Okayama cooperation, lecturers' active involvement in future joint research would serve as tangible evidence that the partnership has evolved from mere knowledge transfer into the formation of an internationally recognized research ecosystem. The dual role of lecturers thus positions them as key elements in sustaining Japan's soft power influence in Indonesia. They act as quality guardians ensuring the continuity of *institutional trust*, while also benefiting directly from access to academic opportunities such as doctoral scholarships. The consistent efforts of alumni lecturers to maintain professional ties with Japanese counterparts demonstrate that academic collaborations grounded in strong personal networks tend to be more resilient and productive than formal, rigid inter-institutional agreements. Consequently, lecturers' dual roles as both recipients and transmitters of soft power become a strategic factor ensuring the long-term sustainability of Okayama University's soft power investment at Unitomo ultimately contributing to the development of Indonesian human resources with a positive orientation toward Japan.

### **Bilateral Policy Implications and Soft Power Sustainability Projection**

An in-depth analysis of the academic partnership between the University of Dr. Soetomo (Unitomo) and Okayama University materialized through Guest Lectures and subsequent implementation initiatives reveals that educational cooperation has evolved into a strategic instrument within bilateral policy. Higher education institutions now serve not only as centers of learning but also as the vanguard of public diplomacy, strengthening inter-state relations beyond traditional economic and political spheres. The most fundamental policy implication of this finding is the recognition that the education sector now functions as a crucial fourth pillar in the structure of Indonesia–Japan relations. This recognition demands sustained foreign policy commitment from both nations to allocate resources financial and institutional alike to maintain and expand the goodwill that has been cultivated through such transnational academic collaboration.

The second policy implication pertains to the dimensions of behavioral diplomacy and nation branding. Japan, through its soft power strategy, invests in developing Indonesian individuals particularly Unitomo students with the aim of shaping them into effective cultural and ethical ambassadors in the international arena. The success of this policy is evident when Indonesian students continuing their studies in Japan display positive traits such as discipline, a strong work ethic, and courteous behavior. This phenomenon serves as qualitative validation of Japan's soft power effectiveness while simultaneously reinforcing diplomatic ties between the Indonesian and Japanese

governments. The constructive conduct of returning graduates, who bring with them values of discipline and professionalism, aligns with Indonesia's national agenda of building superior human resources as outlined in post-2020 development policies. From a foreign policy perspective, these individuals function as authentic national representatives in the eyes of the global community. The importance of human assets as diplomatic instruments is also emphasized by Dr. Dino Patti Djalal, an Indonesian diplomat who highlights the role of public diplomacy and nation branding in shaping international perceptions of Indonesia. He asserts that the Indonesian diaspora and students abroad are the true faces of the nation, serving as key actors in maintaining the sustainability of national soft power (Dino Patti Djalal, 2024). The most strategic policy implication of the Unitomo–Okayama academic partnership lies in the urgency of expanding collaboration into the realm of research. Although this cooperation has successfully facilitated faculty and student exchanges, there remains a crucial, underutilized opportunity namely, the implementation of joint research. The development of co-authored research published in reputable Japanese journals represents the pinnacle of academic soft power effectiveness. Such activities not only serve as vehicles for knowledge exchange but also as mechanisms for transferring methodological capacity, research ethics standards, and Japanese academic culture into Indonesia's educational ecosystem. Within the framework of bilateral policy, joint funding schemes such as *Seed Funding* are needed to ensure the sustainability of such collaborative research. In line with Dino Patti Djalal's (2022) assertion, the strength of a nation's diplomacy can be measured by the value-added and solutions it contributes. Therefore, joint research focused on strategic issues in the Southeast Asian region—such as climate change and disaster management will enhance the global relevance of both Japan's and Indonesia's soft power, while simultaneously increasing the diplomatic and academic value of their partnership.

Japan's policy should also continue and expand adaptive strategies that have proven effective, such as offering international classes with English as the medium of instruction for graduate programs (Master's and Doctoral). The policy implication here involves reducing linguistic barriers, allowing Japan to attract top researchers and students from various countries without language constraints. Conversely, Unitomo needs to align its curriculum with global academic standards so that students intending to pursue higher studies in Japan possess the necessary competitive readiness at the international level. Furthermore, the projection of soft power sustainability demands a policy of geographic expansion. Informants expressed hopes for more Japanese universities to establish partnerships with the University of Dr. Soetomo. This indicates the need for Japan's foreign policy to broaden its scope of engagement not only with public universities but also with private institutions in Indonesia that have large student populations and strong internationalization orientations. Such diversification of partners will ensure a more equitable distribution of Japan's soft power while maximizing the mutual benefits of cooperation. By adopting research-based policymaking, systematic planning, and a focus on individual quality enhancement, the Unitomo–Okayama educational partnership holds the potential to become a sustainable bilateral strategic asset resilient to regional political dynamics.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study aims to analyze how the Guest Lecture program between the University of Dr. Soetomo (Unitomo) and Okayama University in 2023 functions as an instrument of *soft power* in Japan's educational diplomacy in Indonesia. Based on the results and discussion, it can be concluded that this academic collaboration has proven effective as a channel for transmitting Japanese cultural values and influence through higher education. The mechanism of influence operates not coercively but persuasively rooted in academic quality, institutional reputation, and interpersonal relationships built on trust. The main findings indicate that the Guest Lecture program successfully transformed Japan's *soft power* into a tangible source of attraction for Unitomo students. Through this activity, students gained motivation, knowledge, and concrete aspirations to pursue postgraduate studies in Japan. Key supporting factors include the provision of scholarship information, accessibility to English-based international programs, and the active involvement of alumni networks that facilitate both academic and cultural orientation. This influence is also reflected in positive behavioral changes among students, who demonstrated enhanced work ethics, discipline, and professionalism qualities that embody Japanese cultural values.

Conceptually, this research confirms that *soft power* exercised through higher education serves as a strategic foundation for strengthening bilateral relations, particularly in science, technology, and human resource exchange. To ensure sustainability and broaden its impact, the Unitomo–Okayama academic partnership is recommended to evolve from an incidental initiative into a structured program with a continuous annual agenda. This transition can be realized through a joint *academic roadmap* focusing on priority themes such as digital innovation, sustainability, and social entrepreneurship thus positioning the Guest Lecture program as an integral component of both universities' internationalization policies. Furthermore, the development of collaborative research (joint research)

between lecturers and students from both institutions should become a central focus in the next phase. Such collaboration would not only enhance academic quality and global scientific standing but also open opportunities for joint publications and research exchanges that contribute to public policy in education and cultural diplomacy. In addition, strengthening the alumni network of those who have studied in Japan should be strategically utilized as *bridge actors* linking students, funding agencies, and academic institutions. The establishment of a *Unitomo-Okayama Alumni Network* would accelerate the dissemination of scholarship information, internship opportunities, and interdisciplinary academic collaboration. Finally, future research is encouraged to expand into a longitudinal analysis to assess the long-term impacts of Japan's academic *soft power* on Indonesian students' career orientations, professional aspirations, and value transformation. Such studies would provide both theoretical and practical contributions toward a more comprehensive understanding of higher education's role as an instrument of cultural diplomacy in an increasingly competitive global era.

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