

Fieldwork For Culture and History in Hsinchu Final Report

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When I was a child, I visited the Indonesia's National Museum in Jakarta. People call it the "Elephant Building" because there's a big bronze elephant statue right out front. The building itself is pretty old, it was built around 1862 from what I've researched.

At the museum, I saw some of the oldest artifacts found in Indonesia. In caves all across the country, people discovered tools that our ancestors made thousands and thousands of years ago. There were old stone tools, like axes and arrowheads that people used for hunting and surviving back in the year of 1200-1800 in Indonesia. When walking there, I'm very interested in the old pottery found in the caves of Sulawesi. They had a very beautiful and unique pattern and it showed that even back then, people weren't just trying to survive but they want to make unique and beautiful stuff too. That was the experience I remembered when going to the museum. The museum itself located in Jakarta (its called The National Museum of Indonesia)

There are amazing temples and religious sites all over Indonesia that tell stories about its past. The biggest Buddhist temple, Borobudur, is in Central Java. It's huge and made from over two million stone blocks. The walls have carvings that show stories from Buddha's life and teach Buddhist lessons. What I find most impressive about Borobudur is that it's like a giant textbook. As you walk up each level, the carvings teach something new about Buddhist teachings.

Back in the fieldwork in Hsinchu trip, we visited the east gate building in the middle of the city and the city god temple next to it. But in East Java Indonesia, there's the beautiful Hindu temple called Prambanan. It has tall, pointy towers that reach up to the sky. The temple tells stories from Hindu books like the Ramayana through its stone carvings. Even though most Indonesian people are Muslims today, they still take really good care of these old temples because they're an important part of their history.

The way different religions have shaped Indonesia's culture reminds me a lot of Taiwan's religious diversity. Just like how Taiwan has beautiful Buddhist temples right next to Taoist ones, in Indonesia you can find ancient Hindu temples, Buddhist structures, and Islamic mosques all being preserved with equal care and respect.

Every region in Indonesia has its own special type of traditional house. In Toraja, South Sulawesi, people build houses with roofs shaped like boats. They say their ancestors came by boat, so they honor them by building houses this way. These houses aren't just places to live - they're like history books that tell stories about their culture. The most interesting thing about Toraja houses is how they're built on stilts, with the space underneath used for storing tools, showing how people adapted their homes to their way of life.

The Minangkabau of Sumatra build houses with roofs that curve up at both ends like buffalo horns. These houses are incredibly unique because they're made without using a single nail! Instead, they rely on clever wooden joints that have kept them standing strong for hundreds of years. The interiors are just as stunning as the exteriors, with rooms divided according to the family's social hierarchy and traditional customs.

The way traditional houses are built in Indonesia reminds me of some old buildings I've seen in Hsinchu. Both use natural materials and clever techniques to stay cool in hot weather. Just like Taiwanese traditional houses have courtyards for better airflow, Indonesian houses are designed to handle tropical heat.

Speaking of traditional buildings, I remember my first visit to Hsinchu's Cheng Huang Temple during a festival. The temple was filled with the scent of incense, and people were praying and making offerings. It felt so much like visiting the old temples back home in Indonesia. That same feeling of peace and tradition, just expressed in different ways. Even though the religions are a bit different (I'm a Buddhist and Buddhism in Indonesia has various religious movements), but the way people show their respect and devotion feels very similar.

Indonesian people are really good at making beautiful cloth. Each area has its own special way of doing it. In Java, they make batik by drawing patterns with hot wax and then dyeing the cloth. The patterns aren't just pretty - they all mean something. Some show status, others tell stories, and some are believed to bring good luck. I remember watching a batik artist work, it took her hours just to draw one small pattern, but she told me each line and dot had a special meaning.

In other places like Sumba and Flores, they make ikat by tying and dyeing the threads before weaving them. It's really hard to do, but the results are amazing. These textiles are so special that families keep them as treasures and only use them for important ceremonies. The patterns often tell stories about local myths or show important events in the community's history.

The careful preservation of these textile-making skills reminds me of how Taiwan keeps its traditional crafts alive. Just like how Taiwanese artisans still make traditional paper and pottery by hand, Indonesian weavers and batik makers pass their skills down through generations. Like all across Indonesia, different groups developed their own special weapons and tools. The most famous is the *keris*, a knife with a wavy blade. People believe these knives have special powers but for me I think it's not that powerful. Each curve in the blade means something different, and families pass their *keris* down through generations.

Indonesia used to have many kingdoms, and each one left behind amazing treasures. In Yogyakarta, the sultan still lives in a palace called the *Kraton*. Inside, they keep old royal clothes, golden umbrellas (which were symbols of power), and *gamelan* musical instruments that are hundreds of years old. In South Sulawesi, the kingdoms left behind beautiful gold jewelry that shows how skilled their craftsmen were. They made delicate necklaces and earrings using techniques that people still try to copy today.

What makes Indonesia really special is that people still practice many old traditions. In Bali, people make offerings every day using the same methods their great-grandparents used. Young people learn to dance traditional dances and play ancient musical instruments. In many villages, people still build their houses the traditional way and celebrate festivals like their ancestors did. Even in big cities, you can see people wearing batik to work or using traditional medicines made from old recipes.

One interesting thing I've noticed is how technology is helping preserve Indonesian culture. Many young people are using social media to share traditional art and crafts with the world. Some batik makers now sell their work online, reaching customers all over the world. There are even apps that teach people about Indonesian traditional music and dance. This reminds me of how Hsinchu, despite being Taiwan's

technological country (TSMC HQ for example), but still maintains its traditional culture. Just like how the science park located near the ancient temples, Indonesia is finding ways to blend modern technology with traditional practices.

These days, Indonesia is trying hard to keep its old traditions while also moving forward. Young artists are creating new kinds of batik with modern patterns, but they still use the traditional ways of making it. Some people are using old weaving patterns to make modern clothes that young people want to wear. Communities are also working to protect their old buildings and artifacts. They're writing down stories from older people and teaching young people traditional skills. Some villages have even started small museums to keep their local treasures safe.

Living in Hsinchu for almost two years has helped me see interesting parallels between Indonesian and Taiwanese approaches to preserving culture. Just as Hsinchu's East Gate (東門城) stands in the city center, reminding everyone of the city's history, Indonesia's ancient temples and traditional buildings remain as important landmarks in our cities. The way Hsinchu people carefully preserve their City God Temple (城隍廟), keeping its traditions alive while making it relevant for modern visitors, reminds me of how Indonesian communities maintain their ancient temples and traditional houses.

What's really special is that both Indonesian and Taiwanese cultures keep changing and growing while staying true to their roots. In Hsinchu, I've seen how the night market near the temple combines traditional foods with modern trends, just like how Indonesian young artists blend ancient batik patterns with contemporary designs. Both cultures show us that traditions don't have to be frozen in time - they can evolve while keeping their core values intact.

These cultural treasures, whether they're in Indonesia or Taiwan, aren't just relics of the past. They're part of living traditions that keep growing and changing with each new generation. Through my time in Hsinchu, I've learned that whether it's a centuries-old temple in Taiwan or an ancient keris in Indonesia, what matters most is how these traditions continue to connect people to their heritage while embracing the future.