

Interview @ KIZUNA

As part of the activities of Student Lounge KI-ZU-NA, on September 17, 2021, we had a chance to interview one of our international students, Mr. Eko Heru Prasetyo, about his student life at Kyoto University. Mr. Prasetyo is a PhD candidate in the Graduate School of Economics. He won the grand prize and the audience choice prize in the Short Movie Contest 2020 for International Students in Kyoto, a competition hosted by STUDY KYOTO (<https://www.studykyoto.jp/contest2020/>). His prize-winning work, "Full-time father, full-time student," narrates some of his experiences at Kyoto University, and the interview also delves into many of the topics covered by his movie, as well as his accomplishments in various fields. The interview was conducted in English by Tamami-san and Ayami-san, two students working as tutors at KIZUNA. The interview was conducted in-person in accordance with the university's Covid-19 prevention guidelines.

1. Would you tell us where you are from?

My home town is Pakis, which is a small town in Malang, East Java, Indonesia. For Indonesians, it is known as a cool area near the mountains. It only has a dry season and a rainy season. Temperatures fluctuate around 25°C throughout the year. Speaking of summer heat, Kyoto is much hotter and more humid, though.

After graduating from high school there, I moved to Yogyakarta. In my opinion, Yogyakarta is similar to Kyoto in terms of culture and history.

2. Can you briefly tell us about your research?

I am a doctoral student in the English program of the Graduate School of Economics.

* My research is focused on Indonesian digital business companies.

For example, motorcycle taxis are a common means of transport in Southeast Asian countries, including Indonesia.

In this field as well, services are increasingly being provided online.

Even in fields that have existed for some time,

companies continue to attract and develop customers by incorporating digitalization.



*For information about Kyoto University's English-taught degree programs, please refer to the website at:

<https://u.kyoto-u.jp/-3md4>

3. What brought you to Japan?

Participating in an exchange program between Gadjah Mada University (UGM) and Kyoto University (KyotoU) played an important role. When I was doing my first master's program at UGM, I had the opportunity to study at KyotoU from December 2015 to January 2016. I was impressed with the quality of education at Kyoto University and started thinking about coming back to get my second master's degree after the exchange program. Apart from that, I wanted to experience all four seasons of Japan, especially the cherry blossoms in spring and coloured leaves in autumn.

4. What is the difference between your home country and Japan?

I am happy with KyotoU's academic freedom. In Indonesia, the subjects to be taken and the classes to be attended are decided in advance. In contrast, KyotoU allows students to attend all classes of interest to them and choose from many options. Supervisors encourage students to acquire knowledge by being interested in a wide range of fields, not just economics and business.

5. What do you find difficult in life in Japan?

Finding a means of transport. Motorcycles are a common means of transportation for people in my country, but I do not have a driver's license in Japan, so I have been walking and cycling more often. It sounds healthy, but my dormitory at KyotoU was near the mountains, so it was difficult to commute to university by bicycle, especially in winter. For me, people are very quiet in Japan. My smartphone is always in silent mode because it gets people's attention when the phone rings.

Another thing is food. The number of shops offering halal food has increased, but the choices are still limited.

6-1. What made you decide to apply for the Short Movie Contest?

The host organization, STUDY KYOTO, is well-known among international students for providing useful information. Shortly after coming to Japan, I learned about the contest through their website. One of my hobbies is taking pictures and uploading them to social media to share my life in Kyoto with my friends and family in my home country. Therefore, this contest was a great opportunity to create my story using the photos I took between my arrival in Kyoto and the completion of my master's course.

6-2. Any advice for applicants?

Be honest with your experiences. In my opinion, the judges are expecting a movie that portrays how we feel about living in Kyoto. Do not give up even if you do not have a camera. I created that movie by editing the photos and videos I took with my smartphone.

7-1. How do you balance family life and research activities?

Sometimes it can be stressful and difficult. When I wrote my master's thesis, my son was only three months old. I also needed to go to Indonesia for one month to collect data. But without my family, my life would be lonely, so I had no choice but to learn how to create a balance.

7-2. Do you have to work at home?

I try to work at home, but my kids never let me. Whenever I open my computer, they try to play with it.

8-1. How do you spend your time with your family?

On weekends, I sometimes cook Indonesian food for my kids and friends.



8-2. Do you have any favourite places to visit with your family?

It is safe to say that the Kamo River is a special place for all KyotoU students. If you do not have much energy left for your research or have nothing to do, buy coffee and go there. Museums and aquariums are also some of my favorite places. Other than that, Kinkakuji Temple is the go-to spot when my friends visit me.

9. Please tell us about the changes in your student life due to the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Honestly, I cannot think of any good things. Regarding online classes, talking to my classmates while staring at the screen sometimes makes me feel strange. Fortunately, I have earned all the credits in need, so I do not need to attend online classes so often now.

Having to cancel fieldwork in my home country was a big disappointment for me last year. I was unable to carry out productive research activities for about three months after the cancellation. It was my supervisor who saved my research plan. She advised me to conduct research activities online. Thanks to her advice, I have collected the necessary materials and data.

Everyone would agree that this pandemic is also hurting our extracurricular activities. The Persatuan Pelajar Indonesia—Indonesian Students' Union (PPI) Kyoto-Shiga, of which I once served as president, is no exception. We used to have regular meetings and gatherings to eat together and exchange information with other members, but there have been no in-person events during the pandemic, and online events are not enough for a large community like us.*

*As of May 2021, 116 international students from Indonesia are attending KyotoU. The number of Indonesian students is the third-largest after China and South Korea.

For reference: Kyoto University "Facts and Figures"

<https://www.kyoto-u.ac.jp/explore/en/data/>

10. How did you spend your time during the "stay at home" period?

My daughter's school also closed for almost two months. You can imagine how difficult it can be when you have small children at home. In such an environment, the only research activity I could do was reading. Even so, it was very encouraging that my supervisor continued to support and guide me online.

11. Where is your favourite place on campus?

The central library is the best. I leave my smartphone in the lab and bring only books to the library. That way, no one can disturb me while I am there. Furthermore, the facilities, including the Media Commons, Common Study Room, Open Space Laboratory, Learning Commons, etc., are crucial to research activities. Before the pandemic, I used the Learning Commons to practice my presentation. Making good use of the library is essential for a more fruitful student life.

Kyoto University Library

<https://www.kulib.kyoto-u.ac.jp/mainlib/en/>



12. Would you share your plan after graduating from KyotoU with us?

Teaching at a university in Southeast Asia is one of the options. If I work in Japan, I do not want to leave the Kansai area.

13. Would you give some advice for newly enrolled international students?

Stop complaining and embrace all the good and the bad. If you think Japanese science and technology are advanced, you may be a bit surprised. One good example is the payment system. In Kyoto, there is still a lot of room for development. Although the payment system has been improving since the pandemic, many cafes and restaurants previously only accepted cash.

"After the interview" from KIZUNA tutors

Ayami-san

Mr.Eko Heru told us about his diverse experiences in Japan and it was a lot of fun to talk about things like that since I could relate myself to his stories so much.

Tamami-san

Thanks to Eko Heru, we had such a pleasant interview at KI-ZU-NA. I was impressed by how he pursues his research no matter how situations change. I might try working at library without my smartphone sometimes, too. Thank you!

