



Masahiko Horie

Look Malaysia policy for 'unassuming' Japanese students

MUTUAL LESSONS: The Look East policy has taken a U-turn with Japanese youth now encouraged to look at Malaysia to learn from its society. Former ambassador to Malaysia Masahiko Horie tells Ili Liyana Mokhtar that apart from being a harmonious multicultural country, its youth have better English proficiency than Japanese youth

It used to be the Look East policy for Malaysians, but former Japan ambassador to Malaysia is now advocating the "Look Malaysia" policy to Japanese youth.

Masahiko Horie, who is now University Teknologi Malaysia distinguished ambassador, wants the youth to look at how people of different races and religions can live together harmoniously in a multiracial country.

"Japanese culture is unique and refined. We have our tea ceremony, flower arrangements, work ethics and punctuality that are praised internationally.

"However, our people are homogeneous and our understanding of different cultures is not great. Our students are shy and timid. This is

why I always tell Japanese students to come here to experience the multicultural and multireligious society where people speak fluently in many languages."

Horie, 68, said Malaysian youth have better command of the English language compared with their Japanese counterparts.

"I have been advocating the look towards Malaysia policy to students so that they are able to learn things here and, so far, the students who have applied to study here have told me many positive things.

"At my lectures in schools in Japan I always ask them to choose to visit Malaysia where they final year in high school during their get to go abroad to further their studies. So far, 10 high schools have chosen

Malaysia and they always come back impressed with the cultural harmony here."

Horie said when former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad introduced the Look East policy in 1981, its main purpose was to provide Malaysian students with the opportunity to study in Japan and to train excellent engineers who could contribute to Malaysia's industrialisation.

At the same time, it was hoped that the Malaysian students would acquire Japanese cultural virtues, such as work ethics, discipline and punctuality, which could be applied for the development of Malaysia.

Horie said in 2001, almost 20 years after the Look East policy, there were discussions on establishing a Malaysia-Japan International University of Technology (MJIIT). However, because of setbacks, the idea never came into fruition until September 2011, when it finally became a reality and was launched at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia's international campus here.

"It has been four years since the establishment of MJIIT. We began with six Japanese academic staff, 25 Malaysian academic staff and 90 students. Today, we have 70 pro-

fessors, 20 of whom are Japanese, and our students have increased to 800 students with a good mix of local and foreign students.

"We hope to increase students' enrolment to 2,500 in 2017."

Horie said that since MJIIT was a relatively new educational institution and unknown (to some), local students were reluctant to apply as they assumed that since it was a Japanese institution, the medium of communication and teaching would be in Japanese.

"I would like to inform students that we use English here, and there is no need to learn the Japanese language but should students want to learn it, there are courses available."

Horie said one of the characteristics that make MJIIT stand out from others was that it not only focuses on Malaysian students but also took in students from other foreign countries.

"The strength of this educational institution is not only in intellectual contribution by Japan but also the Japanese style of education.

"Nowadays, I try to appeal to young students in Japan to learn more from this lovely country by encouraging them to study in MJIIT. I am convinced that it would be ben-

eficial for students from both sides to study Japanese-style engineering education in English together in a stimulating learning environment."

Horie is working on setting up a disaster risk management research centre at MJIIT and as an international global environment ambassador. He often gives lectures at Japanese universities to create interest on international cooperation, namely Japanese diplomacy at Meiji University, climate change at Tsukuba University and environment and biodiversity at Kyoto University.

Another subject that Horie is passionate about is creating awareness about the sustainability of the earth's resources.

"It is an important matter because at the rate we are consuming the earth's resources, our children and descendants will be in trouble.

"Everything is changing rapidly including the weather.

"Do you know the Aedes mosquitoes have arrived in Japan? It seems unbelievable but it's a reality and it has also claimed some victims."

He said it was important that nations work together to preserve and take care of the environment for future generations.

Horie said if other countries emulated Japan in energy efficient technology there was a possibility that the world's energy consumption could be reduced by half.

