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Indonesian modern art historiography: national and transnational perspectives

Siregar, A.T.H.

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Chapter Five

On the Japanese Occupation Period

Between March 1942 and August 1945, the influence of "short, yellow-skinned people from the North"¹ on Indonesian artistic practice was substantial. Nevertheless, Indonesian modern art historiography contains scarcely any information on this particular topic. Many historians downplay the importance of this period by claiming that the Japanese offered "resources for artists' studios and opportunities to exhibit their work" as a conventional narrative. It is important to note that this narrative, undoubtedly accurate, was based on testimonies of those who wrote about experiences from that time. Painter Basuki Abdullah, for instance, excitedly wrote his praises of Japan. He made a comparison:

In this new era, art has received a much higher appreciation compared to the previous period. In relation to that, now there are not only many artworks on display, but also articles written about art, among them about painting. This is due to the attention and appreciation of the Government to art in general, and specifically to painting. Of course, this excellent treatment from the Government is appreciated by us – the artists – with the highest gratitude.²

In his 1943 essay, Agus Djaya expressed similar admiration. Like Abdullah, Djaya made a parallel between the Dutch colonial period and the

¹ The phrase "short, yellow-skinned people from the North" refers to the Japanese from a prophecy by Jayabaya. This prophecy, which counts Soekarno as a firm believer, says that the short people are the ones who would liberate Java. See Peter Kasenda, *Bung Karno Panglima Revolusi*, (Yogyakarta: Galang Pustaka, 2014), p. 223.

² Basuki Abdullah "Sepatah Kata untuk Pelukis-pelukis Kita" in *Asia Raya*, 29 April 1943, p.2. "Dalam zaman baru ini kesenian mendapat penghargaan yang meningkat jauh lebih tinggi dari pada zaman yang sudah lampau. Berhubungan dengan itu, bukan saja banyak dipertunjukkan pelbagai kesenian, melainkan banyak pula ditulis orang karangan-karangan tentang seni, di antara tentang seni lukis. Semua itu berkat perhatian ,dan penghargaan dari pihak Pemerintah kepada seni umumnya dan seni lukis khususnya. Sudah barang tentu sikap Pemerintah sebaik itu kami – kaum seniman – junjung tinggi dengan penuh rasa terimakasih."

Japanese occupation. He held the belief that the former did not afford Indonesians the opportunity to foster and develop their art and culture. In contrast, the current Japanese era has provided ample opportunities for advancing art and culture, specifically by supporting artists in shaping the unique identity of Indonesian painting.

Painter Suromo depicted the same indication. Although the Japanese were adept at manipulating Indonesian art, the effect of these policies on the development of a cultural infrastructure for art was significant. He acknowledged:

The era was more beneficial than detrimental for Indonesian painting, particularly when compared to the era of Dutch rule. The Japanese employed art as a means to accomplish their objectives. Significant urban areas were equipped with "Cultural Centres." These centers catered to diverse artistic interests. They offered both studios and models, which were used as subjects for painting. They arranged exhibition venues or transported artists to major cities on significant Japanese occasions. Additionally, there were prospects for hosting individual or collective showcases featuring artists from Indonesia, China, or Japan.³

Suromo's acknowledgment of the positive influence of Japanese occupation aligns with M. Balfas, who similarly evaluated the merits of the Japanese era compared to the preceding period. He recorded his viewpoint:

Merely with the arrival of Japanese soldiers, painters acquired opportunities and accolades. The Japanese consolidated all Indonesian artists into a single Culture Center with malicious intentions. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that this has become a blessing for Indonesian painting. Sudjojono has fully

³ Suromo, "Timbul dan Tumbuhnya Seni Lukis Indonesia (II)" in *Mimbar Indonesia*, 16 Juli 1949, p.19. "Zaman itu buat seni lukis Indonesia lebih menguntungkan dari merugikan. Apalagi kalau dibandingkan dengan jaman Belanda. Jepang mempergunakan kesenian sebagai alat untuk melaksanakan cita-citanya. Di kota-kota yang penting-penting didirikan badan "Pusat Kebudayaan". Badan ini melayani segala kepentingan kesenian. Diadakan sanggar (studio) model (obyek untuk digambar). Diusahakan eksposisi set tempat-tempat atau dikelilingkan ke kota-kota besar, yaitu pada hari besar resmi Jepang. Juga diadakan kesempatan untuk bereksposisi perseorangan atau gabungan (kolektif) dari golongan Indonesia, Tionghoa atau Jepang."

capitalized on the opportunities offered by the Japanese Government. He has been granted a studio where he can freely instruct his students and maintain his autonomy. The provision of material support from Japan has yielded positive outcomes. Obscure artists now frequently showcase their work in exhibitions. Consequently, the public is exposed to new concepts in painting.⁴

S. Sujojono respected the Japanese commitment to appreciating Indonesian painters for meeting the needs of artists despite being used for propaganda and strict censorship.⁵ He confessed:

Fortunately, the Japanese painters who arrived here as military and as advisors on painting were not the "Mooi Indië" types but were painters who understood the beauty of bamboo pillars, chicken coops, or factory chimneys and dock workers. Their character has proven to help the aspirations of our nation many times over. They know that artists must have the freedom to reject something they feel conflicts with their artistic sense, from those painter meetings at POETERA or *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho*. Or board meetings in preparation for an exposition, if, for example, I rejected an idea, they often accommodated or at the least stood neutral.⁶

⁴ M. Balfas, "Seni Lukis Indonesia Baru" in *Indonesia* No.4, TH.II April 1951, p. 5. "Baru dengan masuknya tentara Jepang pelukis-pelukis itu mendapat kesempatan dan penghargaan. Dengan maksud kurang baik Jepang telah menggabungkan seluruh seniman Indonesia dalam satu badan Pusat Kebudayaan. Tetapi walaupun demikian, tidak dapat disangkal bahwa ia telah mendatangkan kebaikan bagi seni lukis Indonesia. Kesempatan yang diberikan oleh Pemerintah Jepang telah digunakan sebanyak-banyaknya oleh Sudjojono yang mendapat atelier (studio), di mana ia dengan leluasa dapat mendidik muridnya telah berhasil menjaga kemerdekaan. Bantuan material Jepang telah membawa kebaikan. Pelukis-pelukis yang tadinya tidak dikenal masyarakat sekarang sering mengadakan steleng (pameran). Dengan begini orang mulai berkenalan dengan barang-barang yang baru dalam seni lukis. Berbagai-bagai aliran baru tampak dalam steleng: Naturalisme, Impresionisme, Ekspresionisme."

⁵ See Dr. Huyung's interview with S. Sudjojono in *Brochure Kesenian*, (Jakarta: Kementerian Penerangan Indonesia, 1949), p. 20.

⁶ S. Sudjojono, "Pengalaman Saya Pada zaman Jepang dan Di Zaman Revolusi" in *Budaja Djaja*, No.79, Thn.VII, December 1974, p. 717." Pelukis-pelukis Jepang yang datang kemari sebagai militer dan sebagai penasihat dalam bidang seni lukis, untung bukan sejenis pelukis-pelukis "Mooi Indie", akan tetapi pelukis yang mengerti keindahan tiang bambu, kurungan burung atau keindahan corong pabrik dan pekerja galangan kapal. Watak mereka terbukti berkali-kali juga watak yang membantu aspirasi bangsa kita. Mereka tahu sebagai seniman, bahwa tiap seniman harus punya kebebasan untuk menolak sesuatu yang dia tidak cocok dan bertentangan dengan rasa artistiknya. Dari itu, dalam rapat-

The testimonials provided by individuals who experienced the Japanese occupation underscore Japan's influence on the development of modern Indonesian art. However, the absence of detailed information on exhibition opportunities and studio facilities during this period presents a significant gap in our understanding. In modern Indonesian art history publications, the treatment of the Japanese occupation period is relatively brief. The official book *Sejarah Seni Rupa Indonesia* (History of Indonesian Art) from 1979 does not even mention the effects of the Japanese occupation period, which is a notable omission. This lack of coverage in such an authoritative art history book raises serious concerns, given that the book is intended to be a leading publication for art education in Indonesia nationally.

Jim Supangkat, too, limited his analysis of art activities during the Japanese occupation. In his book *Indonesian Modern Art and Beyond* (1997), he wrote concisely:

In 1943, *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* (Pusat Kebudayaan - Cultural Center) with its facilities for artistic activities, was established. The painters of Indonesia used the institutions to train new, young talent, while introducing Indonesian paintings to public at large. Painting, which was undergoing changes (with the mergence of Indonesian modernism) immediately, experienced a new type of observation based on a totally different point of view.⁷

I found a similar paragraph by Sanento Yuliman, who had written decades before Supangkat. Yuliman stated:

The Japanese military government, in its efforts to "awaken Eastern culture" to "advance the Greater East Asian nation," deemed it necessary to mobilize humanists and artists to "achieve the final victory in war." So, in 1945, the *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* (Cultural Center) was founded, providing facilities for artistic activities. Indonesian painters took advantage of this

rapat pelukis atau di Poetera atau di *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho*. Atau rapat-rapat juri dalam suatu persiapan eksposisi, kalau saya umpamanya menolak suatu ide, maka mereka tidak jarang mencocokinya atau paling sedikit netral."

⁷ Jim Supangkat, *Indonesia Modern Art and Beyond*, (Jakarta: Yayasan Seni Rupa Indonesia, 1997), p.44.

opportunity to train themselves and train young talents, as well as to introduce a new art of painting to the broader community.⁸

Given the scarcity of narratives documenting artists' activities during the occupation, I deem it imperative to promptly compose and impartially evaluate the dynamics of art during that timeframe. Research on this occupation era is typically examined from multiple angles, such as the youth movement and nationalism, focusing on establishing militias and armies or individuals affected by war violence. Historian William H. Frederick was aware of this deficiency. According to him, scholars have little interest in cultural issues such as media, film, language, literature, music, fine art, and intellectual life. Beyond that, in international publications, this study of art and culture has yet to involve many perspectives and contributions from Indonesian historians.⁹

This chapter presents a narrative that reinforces the argument for the significance of the occupation period to artists and its broader impact on the Indonesian art scene. This chapter will focus on Java as a significant hub due to the establishment of *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* and POETERA based on the island. The artistic dynamics are also present in Bali, Kalimantan, and Sulawesi.

However, I will limit the investigation solely to Java for the following reasons. The Dutch East Indies, which the Japanese occupied, was divided into three regions: Java and Madura were under the control of the 16th Army Division, Sumatra was under the control of the 25th Army Division, and Celebes (Sulawesi), Borneo (Kalimantan), and West Papua were under the control of the Japanese Navy.¹⁰ The significance of this context lies in its connection to the details regarding the different deployments of Japanese military personnel stationed in Java.

Hitoshi Imamura (Fig.5.1) played a pivotal role in commanding the 16th Army Division and establishing Jakarta as the military headquarters of

⁸ Sanento Yuliman, *Seni Lukis Indonesia Baru: Sebuah Pengantar*, (Jakarta: Dewan Kesenian Jakarta, 1976), p. 11. The year 1945, used as the establishment of *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* in the quote, is inaccurate.

⁹ See William H. Frederick, "Occupation Culture: Introduction" in Peter Post, et.al., *The Encyclopedia of Indonesia in the Pacific War*, (Leiden: Brill, 2010), p.348.

¹⁰ See Marwati Djoened Poesponegoro dan Nugroho Notosusanto, *Sejarah Nasional Indonesia VI – Zaman Jepang dan Zaman Republik Indonesia*, (Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 2007), p. 14. See also Harry J. Benda, et.al., 1965.

Japan. He played a crucial role in the Kalijati agreement, during which the Dutch East Indies government formally relinquished control of the region to Japanese forces. In addition, a contingent of Japanese intellectuals and artists, known as the "propaganda unit" (*Sendenhan*), arrived on Java under the command of a Lieutenant General for a specific mission. As I will explain below, the significance and impact of individuals within this propaganda unit became evident as they collaborated with Indonesian intellectuals and artists to mold the cultural framework.



FIGURE 5.1. Hitoshi Imamura

(Source: <https://www.history.navy.mil/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nhmc-series/nh-series/NH-63000/NH-63353.html>)

This chapter comprises two sub-chapters. The initial section, *Narrating the Early Occupation*, offers a comprehensive account of events between March and December 1942. This particular aspect of Indonesian art history has received minimal attention thus far. When examining this period, art historians primarily present a brief account by highlighting the disintegration of PERSAGI. Here, I disclose numerous notable occurrences during this period that must not be disregarded. The second sub-chapter, *The Propaganda Machines*, elucidates the operations of propaganda mechanisms such as the *Three A Movement*, *Sendenbu*, POETERA, and *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho*, in which Indonesian artists have actively participated.

Narrating the Early Occupation

The opening narrative of the early Japanese occupation, which always focuses on the dissolution of PERSAGI, shows a nationalistic art historical perspective that pays less attention to other important events, as will be briefly explained below.

Scholar Tod Jones discovered that the Japanese compelled the PERSAGI to dissolve.¹¹ Nevertheless, Jones failed to provide details regarding the circumstances that prompted Japan to enforce the disbandment. To comprehend the disbandment of PERSAGI, Jones relied on the writings of Kusnadi and Sudarmadji.¹² However, additional context is required to grasp the situation in its entirety.

Like Jones, Burhan could not ascertain the underlying reason for the disbandment. Burhan found himself in the same predicament as Jones, Kusnadi, and Sudarmadji. However, in contrast to Jones, Burhan did not mention Kusnadi or Sudarmadji. Instead, he constructed his argument relying on "the annotations of S. Sudjojono." Although the term "annotations" gave a genuine impression, Burhan could not discover the underlying cause.¹³ Burhan and Jones are the authors of the latest scholarly works on Indonesian art that emerged during the Japanese occupation. Regrettably, the authors of contemporary Indonesian art history failed to adequately consider the closely associated contexts surrounding the dissolution of PERSAGI.

In the context of their holy war, Japan intended to free Asian nations from Western colonialism to build the Greater East Asia Empire.¹⁴ Japan often spread the propaganda that this empire would create an international order of mutual prosperity: "the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere" (*Dai Tōa Kyōeiken*). Therefore, Japan mobilized and controlled to safeguard

¹¹ Tod Jones, *Kebudayaan dan Kekuasaan di Indonesia: Kebijakan Budaya Selama Abad ke-20 Hingga Era Reformasi*, (Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia dan KITLV-Jakarta, 2013), p. 74.

¹² See Kusnadi, "The Era of the Japanese Occupation and Early Republic" in Mochtar Kusumaatmadja (ed.), *Streams of Indonesian Art: From Pre-Historic to Contemporary*, (Jakarta: Panitia KIAS, 1990-1991), p. 83; See Sudarmadji, "Persagi" in Mochtar Kusumatmadja (ed.), 1990-1991, p. 78.

¹³ See M. Agus Burhan, 2013, p. 15. Several other art historians, including Sanento Yuliman (1976), Helena Spanjaard (1998), Claire Holt (1967), and Jim Supangkat (1997), made no mention of PERSAGI's disbandment.

¹⁴ The design of the Japanese propaganda program in Java was finalized by the second leader of *Sendenbu*, Mayor Adachi (October 1943-March 1945). In 1942, other than *Gerakan Tiga A*, propaganda emphasized the significance of the Greater East Asia war and prosperity in Asia. For further reading, see Aiko Kurasawa, *Propaganda Media under The Japanese 1942-1945*, in *Indonesia*, No.44 (October 1987), Southeast Asia Program Publications-Cornell University, p. 60 and p. 92.

social and political stability and establish its supremacy in occupied areas. Aiko Kurasawa opined that during the early months of the occupation, Japan paid extreme attention to any effort that could "grasp people's minds" (*minshin ha'aku*) and "indoctrinate and tame them" (*senbu kôsaku*).¹⁵ The implementation of this objective involved the issuance of multiple mandates and regulations as strategic measures. Consequently, the Japanese discredited all aspects of the colonial Dutch legacy and effectively reset the foundations of public life to a state of complete transformation, resulting in the emergence of a new Indonesia.

Among the Japanese mandates and regulations, I argue that Regulation (*Osamu Seirei*) No.2 on *Keamanan Masyarakat* (Public Safety) is critical to examine because it provides context for the "disbandment of PERSAGI." One of the clauses of this regulation, which had been in effect since the end of March 1942, forbade the public from engaging in activities such as uniting, gathering, spreading propaganda for the enemy, and displaying papers with pictures or words (Fig.5.2).¹⁶

Thus, the Japanese did not explicitly or directly dissolve PERSAGI, as historians have documented to emphasize it as a manifestation of PERSAGI's heroism. The disbandment encompassed PERSAGI as well as any associations, institutions, or organizations established during the era of Dutch colonial rule. Regulation No.2 imposed restrictions on individuals' actions, leading to unease among intellectuals and artists.

The Japanese, who seemed aware of the inefficiency, subsequently evaluated the consequences of the counterproductive regulation. Consequently, the rule was revoked after four months and substituted with Regulation No. 23, which restored non-political activities such as the arts, education, and science. Consequently, there was a gradual resumption of public social and cultural activities.¹⁷

Soetardji, a former member of the *Volksraad* (People's Council) during the Dutch colonial era, regarded the change in regulation as favorable. Regrettably, the conventional historiography fails to mention his actions

¹⁵ Aiko Kurasawa, *Mobilisasi dan Kontrol: Studi Perubahan Sosial di Pedesaan Jawa 1942-1945*, (Jakarta: Grasindo, 1993), p.229.

¹⁶ For further reading, see Oendang-Oendang No. 2 *Tentang Keamanan Masyarakat* (Pasal 2) in Ali Sostroamidjojo and Prajogo, *Oendang-Oendang Balatentara Dai Nippon*, (Surabaya: Penerbit D. Arnowo, 1942), p. 7. See also Gunseikanbu, *Boekoe Pengoempoelan Oendang-oendang*, (Jakarta: Balai Poestaka, 1944), p. 6.

¹⁷ *Oendang-Oendang No. 23 Tentang Mentjaboet Sebagian Larangan Bersidang dan Berkoempoel* in Ali Sostroamidjojo dan Prajogo, 1942, p. 118.

during that period. In addition, Soetardjo orchestrated the establishment of *Poesat Badan Keboedajaan Indonesia* (The Indonesian Culture Institute). The primary objective of this institution was to consolidate all cultural associations, foster the growth of Indonesian culture as homage to the formation of a new Indonesia, and, foremost, assimilate Indonesian culture with Eastern culture at large, with a particular emphasis on Japanese culture. This cultural institute also prioritized advancing various elements of Indonesian culture, such as literature, architecture, dance, music, painting, and more. In addition, this institute proactively cultivated cultural infrastructures such as museums and libraries.¹⁸

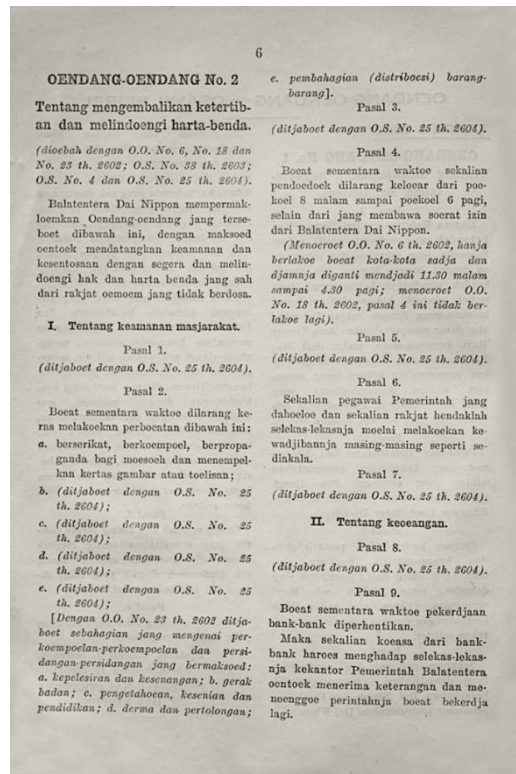


FIGURE 5.2. Regulation (*Osamu Seirei*) No.2 – *Tentang Keamanan Masyarakat* (On Public Safety) - Gunseikanbu, *Boekoe Pengoempoelan Oendang-oendang*, 1944.

Collection of Leiden University Library
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

Despite the authoritarian character of their mandates and regulations, the Japanese propagandists (*Sendenhan*) in the field were free to interact with the intellectuals and artists. The earliest interactions occurred in late March

¹⁸ See *Sinar Matahari*, 27 July 1942. Further information about the founding, membership, or activities of *Poesat Badan Keboedajaan* is difficult to trace.

1942 in Jakarta by invitation.¹⁹ During the meeting, the Japanese expressed their explicit desire to engage Indonesian intellectuals and artists in a propaganda entity, subsequently established as *Sendenbu* (propaganda department). As a precondition, the Japanese set a standard that relied on an individual's occupation during colonization, political beliefs, and position within traditional societal hierarchies. As they were to be involved in propaganda, Japan targeted those who were charismatic and agitative and had public speaking skills. Individuals who held positions as educators and harbored a negative attitude towards the Dutch were given preferential treatment in their selection as members of *Sendenbu*.²⁰

At this point, I have discovered an alternative rendition of the March gathering. To engage in a discussion, it is necessary to acknowledge the significance of two primary sources: the memoirs by Mia Bustam in 2006 and the scholarly research conducted by Imam Boechori Zainuddin in 1966. Although the meeting is not well documented in art history, both sources offer enough information to piece together the story of the early occupation.

Mia Bustam's memoirs highlight the significant contribution of her father, Raden Sasmojo, a staff member at the *Bataviaasche Kunstkring*. On an unspecified day, Bustam observed that the building, previously abandoned by the Dutch, was visited by multiple Japanese individuals. Bustam stated that they intended to utilize the rooms of the building to deliberate on the roles and responsibilities of Indonesian artists. The Japanese tasked Raden Sasmojo with creating an invitation for the artists and organizing a banquet. In addition to Sudjojono, Bustam did not provide details about the other attendees or the subjects discussed during the meeting.²¹ However, Sudjojono's presence suggests the potential attendance of other artists, particularly those previously affiliated with PERSAGI.

While not explicitly mentioning one another, Bustam's testimony and Zainuddin's research align, as Zainuddin acquired first-hand information about the meeting from S. Sudjojono, Mia Bustam's husband. Although Zainuddin did not specify the location, he asserts that the meeting with the artists occurred in April 1942, which he presumed to be the inaugural

¹⁹ *Pandji Poestaka*, 11 April 1942. There was no further mention of who attended that meeting.

²⁰ Aiko Kurasawa, 1993, pp. 233-234.

²¹ See Mia Bustam, *Sudjojono dan Aku*, (Jakarta: Institut Studi Arus Informasi, 2013), pp. 2-3. From all art historians who wrote about the situation during early occupation, only Agus Burhan referred to this memoir. See M. Agus Burhan, 2013, p. 15.

encounter between Japanese and Indonesian artists.²² He believes that this indoctrination session marked the initial stage of the Japanese's desire to exert control over artists. Despite being aware of this covert motive, the artists remained eager to embrace this invitation to collaborate. In addition to recognizing the necessity of this collaboration for advancing art, the artists also empathized with the Japanese approach, which effectively assigned artists based on their societal role.²³

The intellectuals and artists developed a distinct camaraderie during their occupation's initial phase, leading them to collaborate with the Japanese. This attitude was also replicated in the political sphere. Soekarno and Hatta, the nationalist leaders, believed that adopting a cooperative approach would foster unity in pursuing independence. Consequently, they solemnly committed to assisting in implementing the occupying regime's initiatives. These were therefore the occurrences in the art scene starting from March 1942. After this juncture, I encountered no additional noteworthy occurrences until September 1942, when Indonesian artists achieved the feat of organizing their inaugural exhibition amidst the occupation that month. Another comprehensive exhibition took place before the conclusion of 1942.²⁴ The two exhibitions consisted of the September 19th exhibition, held at the night market (the *Rakoetentji Exhibition*), and another exhibition I refer to as the *December 8th Exhibition*.

When interpreting the significance of these exhibitions, Zainuddin and Helena Spanjaard were the only historiographers who saw them through the prism of nationalism. Zainuddin, for example, asserted that the *Rakoetentji Exhibition* served as a "subtle act of defiance" by Indonesian artists, pre-empting the Japanese scheme to exert control over them. The exhibition was intended to pre-empt Japan's wishes, and it was also planned to organize a propaganda exhibition on the theme of "Victory in the Greater East Asia War," which would be held in December 1942.²⁵ Meanwhile, Spanjaard asserted that the *Rakoetentji Exhibition* embodied the artists' sense of nationalism. She also believes that Indonesian artists demonstrated a rebellious attitude despite the efforts of the Japanese to organize the *December*

²² See Imam Boechori Zainuddin, *Latar Belakang, Sedjarah dan Pembinaan Seni Lukis Indonesia Modern (1935-1950)*, Skripsi S1, Departemen Perencanaan dan Seni Rupa, Institut Teknologi Bandung, 1966, p. 34.

²³ Imam Boechori Zainuddin, 1966, p. 35.

²⁴ Except in July, the founding of *Poesat Badan Keboedajaan Indonesia*.

²⁵ Imam Boechori Zainuddin, 1966, p. 36. I think that the "Winning the Greater East Asia War" exhibition and the "December 8th Exhibition" are one and the same.

8th Exhibition. However, as I will elaborate below, neither Zainuddin nor Spanjaard used many sources to develop their interpretations of both exhibitions.

Thanks to the endorsement of nationalist leaders such as Soekarno, the *Rakoetentji Exhibition* achieved success in terms of attendance. Sudjojono, in his article published in *Pandji Poestaka*, paints a vibrant picture of the audience who attended the exhibition on a nightly basis, clearly showing their enthusiasm. Sudjojono also firmly believed that the Japanese saw the crowd, and they were deeply impressed by the intense eagerness exhibited by the public, a testament to the electric atmosphere of the exhibition.²⁶

However, not everyone was satisfied with the exhibition. Before Sudjojono, an article by someone with the initials "St" appeared in the same magazine, criticizing the exhibition. In contrast to Sudjojono's intense nationalism, "St." urged the readers to perceive the exhibition as it was and to focus their criticism on its formal elements and the themes depicted in the paintings. One of his complaints was about the exhibition's venue, which was situated at a night market. He believed that the loud atmosphere of a night market, the cramped exhibition areas, and the inadequate lighting fell short of exhibition standards and hindered the audience's ability to appreciate the paintings fully. "St." also expressed disapproval of the artistic accomplishments of paintings by Mochtar Apin, Soedarso, Soedibio, Abdoel Moeis, Akom, Soetardi, Basar, Sri Retno Poernomo, and S. Yosso, pointing out various deficiencies inherent in their painting techniques. "St." suggested that Agus Djaya and Emiria Sunassa should explore originality in their paintings.²⁷

In the same magazine, Airani, also known as Laurens Koster Bohang, also stated that Indonesian painters had not yet effectively captured the essence of the Indonesian spirit. However, he praised the exhibition's success in re-establishing a connection between painters and their society.²⁸

The Japanese closely scrutinized the potential of Indonesian painters and perceived it as a chance to propagate their political interest. However, the Japanese knew that an art exhibition had limited reach among the public in Jakarta. To honour the significance of 7 December 1941, when the

²⁶ See S. Sudjojono, "In Memoriam Herbert Hoetagoeng - 1917-1942" in *Pandji Poestaka*, 24 October 1942; Helena Spanjaard, *The Development of Modern Indonesian Painting*, in Peter Post, et al., *The Encyclopedia of Indonesia in the Pacific War*, (Leiden: Brill, 2010), p. 385.

²⁷ St., "Pertoendjoekan Loekisan Indonesia di Pasar Malam Djakarta" in *Pandji Poestaka*, 19 September 1942, pp. 848-845.

²⁸ Airani, "Peloekis-peloekis Indonesia" in *Pandji Poestaka*, 31 October 1942, pp. 1057-1058.

Japanese military launched an attack on Pearl Harbour, a year later they arranged for another art exhibition. In addition to Jakarta, this Exhibition was extended to various other cities in Java to reach a broader audience, and was reportedly highly successful.

In his article "Seteleng Gambar" (Picture Exhibition), published on 8 December 1942 in the *Pandji Poestaka* magazine, Sudjojono critiqued the inadequate exhibition venues and raised doubts about the selection criteria. He expressed that some works in the exhibition lacked merit and did not deserve to be displayed. However, Sudjojono remained optimistic, believing that the artworks showcased in the exhibition provided undeniable evidence that the advancement of Indonesian painting was unstoppable, instilling a sense of hope and optimism in the reader.²⁹

Back to Spanjaard. She argued that the *December 8th Exhibition* demonstrated notable resistance among painters to adhere to the propaganda themes propagated by the Japanese. The exhibition therefore marked the painters' nationalism. Spanjaard made a compelling argument that the painters continued to use "the same themes they have always used."³⁰

I believe that Spanjaard's nationalist interpretation of the exhibition is problematic due to the references she used. She cited Sudjojono's articles from the 1946 book edition without considering another source, *Pandji Poestaka* magazine, published in 1942. Additionally, both the 1942 and 1946 versions featured monochromatic photographs showcasing the artworks of Henk Ngantung, Affandi, Agus Djaya, and Kartono Yudhokusumo, which were used as the basis for Spanjaard's analysis. However, there are significant differences between the two versions. The photo reproduction in the 1946 version was of poor quality compared to the 1942 edition. It is therefore difficult to establish a nationalist interpretation from the limitations of photo reproduction. In contrast, the photo quality of the 1942 article is superior but still not representative enough (Fig. 5.3. A-B).

In addition to the print quality issue, Spanjaard's conclusion also lacks objectivity due to the absence of photographs depicting the works of numerous other painters featured in the *December 8th Exhibition*. Hence, it is not feasible to deduce the "nationalism content" of the Exhibition solely

²⁹ See S. Sudjojono, "Seteleng Gambar 8 Desember" in *Pandji Poestaka*, 26 December 1942, n.p. The review was reprinted after the occupation ended. See S. Sudjojono, "Seteleng Gambar 8 Desember" in S. Sudjojono, *Seni Loekis, Kesenian dan Seniman*, (Yogyakarta: Penerbit Indonesia Baru, 1946), pp. 61-68.

³⁰ Helena Spanjaard, 2010, p. 385.

based on the depictions presented in those four paintings. Moreover, this Exhibition is inherently intertwined with the Japanese strategy, which aimed to exert influence over Indonesian artists from the very beginning.

In addition, the Japanese had urged the Indonesian people from an early stage to observe 8 December as the Day of Greater East Asia Development, coinciding with the commencement of the war in the Asia Pacific region. The Japanese then disseminated diverse instructions to the public through mass media platforms. Therefore, the 8 December Exhibition was inherently included in this celebration to showcase the Japanese proficiency in mobilizing and politicizing Indonesian artists by organizing it in multiple cities. Ultimately, the painting exhibition can be considered a form of propaganda.

I argue that the *Rakoetjenti* and the *8 December Exhibition* in 1942 were two exhibitions that marked the initial merging and collaboration between the occupying government and Indonesian artists. Although both parties had propaganda motives, they derived benefits from these exhibitions. The Japanese sought to measure the influence of Indonesian leaders and artists on society. Meanwhile, artists could exhibit and strengthen their social position at the beginning of the occupation.

The Propaganda Machines

Propaganda was instrumental in influencing public sentiment, regulating the dissemination of information, and validating the Japanese imperial presence throughout Southeast Asia during the period of Japanese occupation from 1941 to 1945. This section aims to analyze the mechanisms of the propaganda machines used by the Japanese military regime to control and manipulate the local population. It will investigate *The Three A Movement*, *Sendenbu*, *POETERA*, and *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho*. The Japanese propaganda during the occupation had a multifaceted objective, encompassing enhancing backing for the occupiers, quelling resistance movements, and advocating for collaborationist notions. The Japanese forces employed diverse channels to carry out their propaganda campaigns effectively. They could effectively engage a wide and varied audience through various channels, including print media, radio broadcasts, films, and public rallies.

STÉLÉNG GAMBAR 8 DÉSEMBER



● Atas: Affandi, *Mati sebagai benteng*.
● Bawah: Henk Ngantoeng, *Memamah*.



Melihat stelling tersebut, maka dengan senang hati boleh kita mengatakan. Pemilihan gambar-gambar yang dipertandingkan memberi pandangan, bahwa pemilihan itu tidak kelir, sebagai kami anggapkan moeda-moeda. Moeda-moeda kami taket, kalau-kalau orang yang doedok pada badan diore, orang-orang yang sampai pandangan, sehingga boleh badan tadi mengalang-alang: dijalannya seni-loekis baroe.

Kegirangan kami ini disandarkan pada pemilihan loekisan-loekisan boestan Agoes Djajasoeminta, Tan Liep Poen, Otto Djajasoeminta, Simandjontak, Emerica Soenassa, Kartono Joedokoesoemo dan Kih. liander. Dan pemilihan loekisan-loekisan Basoeki Abdolleh, Affandi, Henk Ngantoeng, Siauw Tji Kwie tentoe saja moedah kita mengerti. Tetapi pemilihan gambar-gambar boestan M. Rosdi, Tetang, Oemer Basalamah, R. Goenadi, S. Yesso, Soekardi, kami tidak mengerti sama sekali. Kalau memang tidak diadakan pemilihan apa boleh boeat. Tetapi kalau ada pemilihan, maka meneroet pendapat kami tidak semestinya orang memilih gambar-gambar boestan M. Rosdi lebih dari satoe oempamanja; begitoe dioega gambar-gambar S. Yesso, Tan An, Goenadi dan basoeki lagi.

Dan satoe gambar satoe tipekoep oentoek membesarkan hati mereka dan sebagai pemberi nasihat, bahwa tidak saban orang yang bisa menggambar berarti bisa meloekis. Ini barangkali soetoe teori yang pedih, tetapi dalam pembaharuan raman baroe ini ada baling-kalau kita menempatkan orang pada tempatja masing-masing. Kalau orang berdasar menteri-cekoe, diidialah menteri-cekoe. Tetapi kalau dia memang berdasar pelekis, meskipun tehnikja masih lemah, tempat-lah mereka pada tempat pelekis. Dan tempat yang bisa dikongkan oleh saudara-saudara yang meneroet pendapat saja salah pilih tadi bisa kita sedakan boeat loekisan-loekisan Affandi, Tan Liep Poen, Emerica, Henk Ngantoeng, Basoeki Abdolleh.

lah, Agoes oempamanja, meskipun loekisan-loekisan mereka lebih dari 3 loekisan dan besarnja sebesar piano. Sebab oentoek menyalin siapa yang nomor satoe, maka orang tidak boleh melihat satoe-doe gambar sadio dari masing-masing. Dengan gambar yang ada selorang kita tidak bisa berkata Henk Ngantoeng lebih besar dari Basoeki, atau Basoeki lebih besar dari Affandi, dan Affandi lebih ketil dari Simandjontak atau Tan Liep Poen kalah oleh Basoeki.

Semoea ini disebabkan barangkali oleh sebab gedengnja koerang memoeskan. Moedah-moedahan didalam waktoe yang pendek lagi kita akan mempoenjai gedeng yang tjotok bagi pertjoendjoekan loekisan apa dioega, teristimewa boeat steling loekisan-loekisan. Kalau kita tidak mempoenja, dan dari selarang kita tidak mengoesahalannja, saja taket kalau nanti loekisan-loekisan Foutje dan pelekis-pelekis lain dari Nippon yang datang kemari akan dipertjoendjoekan (dan loekisan-loekisan ini gambar-gambar dan peperangan Pasifik sekarang loekisan-loekisan tersebut akan tidak mendapat tempat semestinya. Dan pada pandangan saja pada waktoe ini tidak ada gedeng yang "kosong" boeat steling yang akan datang itoe. Hal ini baiklah diperhatikan.

Saja masoek gedeng di Gambar Barat No. 2. Saja kesian pada poster-poster yang digantoeangan. Sebagai anak tiri mereka digantoeangan digang. Ma'afkanlah saudara-saudara pembuat poster, sebab roeangan lain ta' ada.

Kalau kita masoek roeangan loekisan-loekisan, maka tertarik kita oleh kekoetan boestan Henk Ngantoeng. Dari dioega warna brose dan hidjanja memanggi kita dan satoe kwesnja yang lebar membuat bentoe (yang boeat, platid diidialah lebrine-broesnja. Sonder ketjangan, dan meskipun tangan kanan menarik panah yang digambarnja agak salah (anatomis), tetapi hilang ketalahan tadi oleh lebagapan diwa gambar tadi. Henk Ngantoeng melihat kebagoesan sesatoe di barang yang besar, tetapi ta' lupa tetap sederhana dan biasa. Tjita-tjita Rembrandiel, akan tetapi ta' membosankan.

● Atas: Agoes Djajasoeminta, *Buddha ditjora*.
● Bawah: Kartono Joedokoesoemo, *Keboron*.



Dan tempat yang bisa dikongkan oleh saudara-saudara yang meneroet pendapat saja salah pilih ta bisa kita sedakan boeat loekisan-loekisan Affandi, Tan Liep Poen, Emerica, Henk Ngantoeng, Basoeki Abdolleh Agoes oempamanja, meskipun loekisan loekisan merel lebih dari 3 loekisan dan besarnja sebesar piano. Sebab oentoek meretankan siapa yang nomor satoe, maka orang tidak boleh melihat satoe-doe gambar sadio dari masing-masing. Dengan gambar yang ada selarang, kita tidak bisa berkata Henk Ngantoeng lebih besar dari Basoeki, atau Basoeki lebih besar dari Affandi, dan Affandi lebih ketil dari Simandjontak atau Tan Liep Poen kalah oleh Basoeki.

Semoea ini disebabkan barangkali oleh sebab gedengnja koerang memoeskan. Moedah-moedahan didalam waktoe yang pendek lagi kita akan mempoenjai gedeng yang tjotok bagi pertjoendjoekan kesenian at dioega, teristimewa boeat steling loekisan-loekisan. Kalau kita tidak mempoenja, dan dari selarang kita tidak mengoesahalannja, saja taket kalau nanti loekisan-loekisan Foutje dan pelekis-pelekis lain dari Nippon yang datang kemari akan dipertjoendjoekan (dan loekisan-loekisan ini gambar-gambar dari peperangan Pasifik sekarang loekisan-loekisan tersebut akan tidak mendapat tempat semestinya. Dan pada pandangan saja pada waktoe ini tidak ada gedeng yang "kosong" boeat steling yang akan datang itoe. Hal ini baiklah diperhatikan.



AGOEES DJAJASOEMINTA, *BODDHA DITJORA*

loekisan ini gambar-gambar dari peperangan Pasifik sekarang loekisan-loekisan tersebut akan tidak mendapat tempat semestinya. Dan pada pandangan saja pada waktoe ini tidak ada gedeng yang "kosong" boeat steling yang akan datang itoe. Hal ini baiklah diperhatikan.

Saja masoek gedeng di Gambar Barat No. 2. Saja kesian pada poster-poster yang digantoeangan. Sebagai anak tiri mereka digantoeangan digang. Ma'afkanlah saudara-saudara pembuat poster, sebab roeangan lain ta' ada.

Kalau kita masoek roeangan loekisan-loekisan, maka tertarik kita oleh kekoetan boestan Henk Ngantoeng.



KARTONO JOEDOKOESOEMO, *KEBORON*

yang asing. Dan yang menta'djoebkan saja ialah bahwa meskipun dia mendapat didikan dari beberapa pelekis, tjorak Kartono tetap Kartono. Kalau pelekis-pelekis dan seniman-seniman lain melilit-lilit hendak melepaskan diri dari pengaruh orang lain, dia enak sadio, tinggal tetap sebagai dia. Kalau seorang ahli babad (Historicus) bisa



AFFANDI, *MATI SEBAGAI BENTENG*

FIGURE 5.3. A-B. Comparison of images in Sudjojono's writing.

A) *Pandji Poestaka*, 26 December 1942 – Collection of Leiden University Library.

B) From Sudjojono's book: *Seni Loekis, Kesenian, dan Seniman*, 1946 – Collection of Perpustakaan s.14 Bandung.

Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar



FIGURE 5.4. Propaganda poster by the Three A Movement.

Collection of National Library of Indonesia
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

Gerakan Tiga A (The Three A Movement)

Before delving into the roles of *Sendenbu*, POETERA, and *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho*, it is necessary to first examine a significant movement in the historiography of the occupation, commonly referred to as *Gerakan Tiga A* (The Three A Movement) (Fig.5.4). This movement is interconnected with the propaganda movements and organizations that emerged during the occupation. I have not discovered definitive evidence concerning the artists' participation in the organizational framework of this propaganda movement. However, I believe the *Sendenhan* members, Indonesian artists, and the 1942 exhibitions were associated with the Three A Movement. Furthermore, The Three A Movement actively sowed seeds of hatred toward Western culture while exalting the significance of the East. Both elements significantly impacted the discussion and expression of art and culture throughout the occupation.

As the debut movement of *Sendenbu*, the Three A Movement was a Japanese propaganda machine to mobilize, manipulate, and brainwash the

people regarding the intent and purposes of the Japanese. In his coordination briefing, Lieutenant General Hitoshi Imamura emphasized that the arrival of the military was "to rebuild the Indonesian culture which previously was alive and brilliantly progressed."³¹ The same rhetoric was delivered by the leader of *Sendenbu*, Colonel Machida Keiji. In his May 1942 speech, Machida assured the Indonesian people that the arrival of the Japanese was to destroy the influence of Western culture and rebuild the original culture of Asia.³²

Inaugurated in Jakarta on 29 April 1942³³, the Three A Movement is closely associated with the symbol of *Nippon AAA: Ahasi Akari no Asia* (Nippon The Light of Asia), *Asahi Amijiban no Asia* (Nippon The Protector of Asia), and *Asahi Aniki no Asia* (Nippon The Leader/Elder of Asia). The "A" symbol confronted the allied "V" symbol. The three A's are not supposed to be written in sequence like "AAA," but by placing one "A" atop the two others. This arrangement of letters symbolizes the Japanese leadership of other Asian nations. Therefore, the primary purpose of "AAA" is propaganda for Japanese leadership over Asia - as was Japanese policy before the beginning of the war in the Pacific.³⁴ After May 1942, when the Japanese controlled the mass media, all newspaper and magazine publications automatically became a tool for the Three A Movement.

However, even under the management of expert Japanese propagandist Shimizu Hitoshi, the Three A Movement, which also involved conservative nationalists like Raden Samsuddin, K. Soetan Pamoentjak, Mohammad Saleh, S. A. Soebroto, and Slamet Soedibjo, did not experience significant advancement. In various places, the people did not show much passion or sympathy. This reality brought dissatisfaction among the Japanese military brass. On the other hand, the conservative nationalists working with the Three A Movement were not figures widely known by the public compared to Soekarno. When the movement began, Soekarno was still exiling at Bengkulu, Sumatra. Charismatic leaders like Muhammad Hatta - who was released earlier from exile and worked as an advisor for the Japanese military government - declined to join the Three A Movement.³⁵

³¹ "Keterangan Padoeka J.M.Luit.Generaal H. Imamura dalam peringatan Perajaan Tentjoesetsu" in *Oesaha Baroe*, 1942, p. 7.

³² *Pandji Poestaka*, 2 May 1942, n.p.

³³ Other sources say 1 April 1942. See R. De Bruin, *Sense and Non-Sense in The Three A Movement*, Penelitian The XXVII International Congress of Orientalist, Michigan-USA, 13-19 August 1967, p.7.

³⁴ R. Du Bruin, 1967, p. 7 and p. 13.

³⁵ Other sources state that Hatta served as an economic advisor for the Three A Movement. See Bob Hering, *Soekarno Bapak Indonesia Merdeka*, (Jakarta: Hasta Mitra, 2003), p. 336.

The public's passivity towards the Three A Movement was also caused by apparent Japanese interests, which always needed to be served. Historian George Sanford Kanahale assumed that despite involving both parties, the movement was entirely controlled by the propagandists, represented by Shimizu Hitoshi.³⁶ Meanwhile, historian Nugroho Notosusanto viewed the failure of this movement as being due to the tendency of the Japanese to underestimate Indonesian politics - which seemed to be an "empty barrel where one could pour the wine of propaganda so that everyone became intoxicated and happy with the arrival of new masters. There was a national Indonesian movement, led by Western-educated intellectuals, with roots mainly in Java."³⁷

The Three A Movement covered a broad scope, as it successfully embraced people from various levels of society. In multiple cities, the Japanese had already set up branches. Regeneration and indoctrination were also done through formal organizations. On June 25th, 1942, Machida Keiji founded the *San A Seinen Korensko*, or the Three A Institute for Potential Young Leaders, in Jakarta.³⁸ Aside from that, based on permanent membership of around 4,000 people, the movement supported various public activities like arts, youth activities, sports, religion, and female organizations. Yet gradually, the *Gunseikanbu* (Central Military Administration) felt that the Three A movement tended to form a mass organization instead of fulfilling its propagandist obligations. *Gunseikanbu* reasoned that the authority of mobilization should be with them. The *Kempetai* (the military police of the Imperial Japanese Army) found proof that some parties shrewdly took advantage of the movement for personal gain. However, while historians offer these analyses related to the disbandment of the Three A Movement, on September 1942, *Gunseikanbu* dissolved the Three A movement giving vague reasons.³⁹

³⁶ See George Sanford Kanahale, *The Japanese Occupation of Indonesia: Prelude to Independence*, Ph.D. Thesis, Universitas Cornell, 1967, p. 47.

³⁷ Nugroho Notosusanto, *Tentara PETA pada Jaman Pendudukan jepang di Indonesia*, (Jakarta: PT Gramedia, 1979), p. 41. "Indonesia bukanlah tong kosong tempat mencurahkan anggur propaganda agar setiap orang mabuk dan kesenangan dengan datangnya majikan baru. Terdapat suatu gerakan nasional Indonesia terutama dipimpin oleh kaum intelektual berpendidikan Barat dan berakar terutama di Jawa."

³⁸ Bob Hering, 2003, p. 335.

³⁹ George Sanford Kanahale, 1967, 48-49. See also Nugroho Notosusanto, 1979, p. 41.



FIGURE 5.5.A. *Barisan Propaganda* in Jakarta.

Collection of Nationaal Archief Den Haag.
Repro by Aminudin TH Siregar

Sendenbu

I will now briefly review *Sendenbu*, the propaganda body behind the Three A Movement. Few scholars mention *Sendenbu* without explaining its role in activating the art field.⁴⁰ Inspired by Nazi Germany's *Kulturkammer*, the Japanese structured their propaganda strategy for Indonesia.⁴¹ The presence of the Propaganda Unit (*Sendenhan*) in the 16th Imperial Army Division proves that propaganda is a crucial instrument of war to change perceptions and manipulate consciousnesses.⁴² Before it expanded, the task of the propaganda unit initially was to "destroy the enemies' desire for battle; prevent damage to resources in the Dutch East Indies; inspire the fighting spirits of the *Dai Nippon* troops; send news and reports home; monitor the population's passivity; and immediately calm them after the occupation." To achieve these goals, the Japanese sent musicians, cartoonists, writers, critics, and more writers into the battlefield, especially in Java.⁴³

⁴⁰ I only found two writers who mention *Sendenbu*, namely M. Agus Burhan and Imam Boechori Zainuddin. Yet neither clearly describes the role of *Sendenbu*. In his book, M. Agus Burhan slightly covers the role of *Sendenbu* by referring to Aiko Kurasawa. See M. Agus Burhan, 2013, pp. 50-51. Meanwhile, Imam Boechori Zainuddin provides a confusing description by making the analogy that *Sendenbu* is the "information ministry." See Zainuddin, 1966, p. 40.

⁴¹ Ethan Mark, *Intellectual Life and the Media*, in Peter Post et al., 2010, p. 349. See also Grant K. Goodman's foreword in Grant K. Goodman (ed.), *Japanese Cultural Policies in Southeast Asia during World War 2*, (London: Macmillan, 1991), p. 2.

⁴² See Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, (California: Sage Publications Inc., 1999). For Nazi Propaganda, see Welch, *The Third Reich: Politics and Propaganda*, (London: Routledge, 1993).

⁴³ *The Java Nen Kan* (1944) in Goto Kenichi, et al., *Sekidōhō; Unabara*, (Tōkyō: Ryūkei Shosha, 1993), p.



FIGURE 5.5.B.
Banner of *Barisan Propaganda*.

Collection of Museum Bronbeek – Arnhem

The *Sendenhan* or *Senden Butai*⁴⁴ consisted of 11 officers, 100 soldiers, and 87 intellectuals - *bunka jin* - or men of culture. Other sources refer to the group as *Tatakau Bunka-butai* (Fighting Culture Corps). In the military system shaped later during the occupation, *Sendenhan* changed into *Sendenbu*. This group's character resembles Germany's Kultur-Korps during World War II. They shrewdly took advantage of the latest technologies, like print and radio broadcasts, to mobilize sympathy and energy, whether among the Japanese or the Indonesian people. Historian Ethan Mark suggests this unit served as cultural intermediaries and informal advisors during the occupation.⁴⁵

The *Sendenbu* department was formed in August 1942⁴⁶ and was known by its Indonesian name: *Barisan Propaganda* (Propaganda Front) (Fig.

28.

⁴⁴ See Ethan Mark, 2010, p. 349.

⁴⁵ Ethan Mark, 2010, p. 349.

⁴⁶ Aiko Kurasawa, 1993, p. 229.

5.5.A. and 5.5.B.) and led by Colonel Machida Keiji, who led, among others, Ohya Soichi (critic-intellectual), Tomizawa Uio (artist), Iida Nobuo (composer), Ohki Atsuo (poet), Yokoyama Ryuichi (cartoonist), Kouno Takashi (artist-designer), Abe Tomoji (writer), Matsui Suisesi (film narrator), Kitaharu Takeo (cartoonist), Ono Saseo (cartoonist), Hinatsu Eitaro (film director) Hinatsu Eitarō (DR. Hu Yung), and Kurata Fumindo (film director). Not all personnel stayed long in Java, and in the middle of the occupation, several reportedly returned to Japan, including Machida Keiji.⁴⁷ After the end of the war, Hinatsu Eitarō or Dr. Hu Yung chose to remain in Indonesia and significantly contributed to the development of film and theatre.⁴⁸

Despite being part of the military, the propagandists ran *Sendenbu* independently. They smartly put forward idealism, aspiration, and their own rules, which more or less differed from the guidelines of the Japanese military.⁴⁹ In this structure, *Sendenbu* had three sections: the administration section, the news and press section, and the propaganda section (*Sendenka*). Shimizu Hitoshi led the latter section with the support of Ohya Soichi, Abe Tomoji, Takeda Rintaro, Iida Nobuo, Kouno Takashi, Hinatsu Eitaro, Yokohama Ryuichi, and Saseo Ono. Several of them would then hold essential positions in the *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho*, especially Ohya Soichi who acted as general administrator before *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* was formed, *Sendenka* was tasked in developing systematic programs for art and culture activities.⁵⁰ Other than monitoring the movements of the populace, the *Sendenbu* also held a role in designing strategies for countering Dutch and Allied propaganda.⁵¹ *Sendenbu's* next task was to straighten out behaviour in society that deviated from Japanese policy. The various slogans, prohibitions, regulations, instructions, and so on distributed through mixed mass media, posters, or leaflets were all issued – or at least were approved by *Sendenbu*.

⁴⁷ Peter Post, et.al, 2010, p. 541.

⁴⁸ Okada Hidenori "The Rise and Fall of the Nippon Eigasha Jakarta Studio" in Peter Post, et.al., 2010, p. 365.

⁴⁹ Mitsuo Nakamura, *General Imamura and the Early Period of Japanese Occupation*, Journal Indonesia Vol. 10, (Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program Publication Cornell University, October 1970), p. 9.

⁵⁰ Okada Hidenori, 2010, p.364.

⁵¹ *Sendenbu* often found anti-Japanese propaganda pamphlets in public areas like restaurants, stores, offices, and hospitals. This reality forced the *Sendenbu* to frequently remind the populace to remain vigilant. In May 1942, the *Sendenbu* threatened harsh action to anyone proven to keep pictures, books, and other printed material that encouraged anti-Japanese sentiment. See *Pandji Poestaka*, 23 May 1942.

POETERA (Centre of People's Power)

While quite a few Indonesians were involved with the Three A Movement or *Sendenbu*, a more extensive, more massive involvement of the people only happened after the forming of a movement known as Poesat Tenaga Rakjat or POETERA (Centre of People's Power) or *minshū sōyoku kesshū undō* (the total mobilization of the Javanese people). Like a "state within a state," the leaders of this large organization "managed their own government" within the Japanese military government.

Considering the breadth of POETERA's scope, I will not discuss the exploits of this organization beyond the context of art. It is important to note that POETERA's efforts to encourage the development of art cannot be separated from the work of one of its sections, the *Seksi Kebudayaan* (Culture Section). In this section, painters like Sudjojono, Basuki Abdullah, and Affandi trained young artists in painting and sculpture.⁵² In addition to that, they also organized and supervised exhibitions. The Culture Section most likely collaborated with other POETERA departments, such as the Propaganda Department. This collaboration is demonstrated by the dissemination of public announcement posters printed using the printing technique employed by the artists in the Culture Section. By implementing this collaborative framework and allocating specific tasks, the Culture Section ensured that art exhibitions were not burdened with any "propaganda responsibilities" and instead solely emphasized the artistic accomplishments of the artists.

On the subject of POETERA, I found several irregularities about their positions in the organizational structure. For instance, Burhan and Kusnadi confirmed that "Sudjojono was the leader of the culture section of POETERA,"⁵³ while Claire Holt stated that Sudjojono was "the leader of the art section."⁵⁴ Sudarmadji had a differing explanation, saying that Sudjojono and Affandi led "the painting section."⁵⁵ Aside from these irregularities, not many art historians emphasized the role of POETERA in encouraging the development of Indonesian art. Among them, only Zainuddin maintained

⁵² Prospective student registration was usually announced through newspaper. See *Asia Raya*, 30 December 1943.

⁵³ See M. Agus Burhan, 2013, p. 51 and Kusnadi, 1990-1991, p. 83. See also Kusnadi, et.al., *Sejarah Seni Rupa Indonesia*, (Jakarta: DepDikBud, 1979), p. 168.

⁵⁴ Claire Holt, *Art in Indonesia Continuities and Change*, (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1967), p. 200.

⁵⁵ Sudarmadji, *Seni Lukis Jakarta dalam Sorotan*, (Jakarta: Pemda DKI-Jakarta, 1974), p. 16-17.

that POETERA was an organization that "controlled the direction of Indonesian art."⁵⁶ Kusnadi believed that through POETERA, the artists' sense of nationalism grew stronger.⁵⁷ Sudjojono, who was directly involved in POETERA programs, remembered in reflective articles about the Japanese occupation that POETERA was "the people's political lighthouse." The organization's appeal extended beyond politics, as the militancy and idealism of art and culture workers captivated society. Sudjojono stated that despite the financial and military support of the Japanese military through their *Sendenbu* and *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho*, they could not match the influence of POETERA on the general population.⁵⁸

Indonesian art history writers are generally limited in telling the story of POETERA, and even then, almost without references. The tale of POETERA is fascinating to reconstruct as it is a large, complex organization with many branches. Before discussing that, I would like to begin with a short chronicle.

The forming of POETERA began when Soekarno put forward an idea for a new people's movement after the failure of the Three A Movement. In late December 1942, Colonel Nakayama invited Soekarno, Muhammad Hatta, Ki Hajar Dewantara, and Kyai Haji Mas Mansoer (known as the Empat Serangkai, more or less the Famous Four) to explore Soekarno's idea further. They then agreed to form a non-political movement funded by the Japanese. The movement committee would comprise these four persons and would report directly to the Gunseikanbu. It is said that the first grand meeting of POETERA, which was held on the anniversary of one year of the Japanese victory over the Dutch, was attended by many people.

On 9 March 1943,⁵⁹ at 5 in the afternoon, tens of thousands of people⁶⁰ from many cities flocked to the *Lapangan Ikada* (Ikada Square) in Jakarta. Soekarno did not waste this opportunity to ignite the people's nationalism.

⁵⁶ Zainuddin, 1966, p. 49. Despite this, we can judge that this statement came from Zainuddin's main informant, S. Sudjojono.

⁵⁷ Sudarmadji, 1974, p. 17. See also Kusnadi in Mochtar Kusumaatmadja (ed.), 1990-1991, pp. 83-84.

⁵⁸ S. Sudjojono, *Tentang Affandi*, in Ajip Rosidi, et al., *Affandi 70 Tahun*, (Jakarta: Dewan Kesenian Jakarta, 1978), p. 25.

⁵⁹ There are several versions on the year of POETERA's forming. Several sources say 1942, and other sources say that POETERA was formed on March 1st, 1943. See *Djawa Baroe* magazine, No.5, 1 March 1943. However, in *Djawa Baroe*, No.1, 1 January 1943 it was written as 8 December 1942, the first anniversary of the Greater East Asia War.

⁶⁰ Other sources noted that the Ikada field was filled with 100,000 people. See Shigeru Sato, *War, Nationalism and Peasants: Java under the Japanese Occupation 1942-1954*, (London: M.E. Sharpe, 1994), p. 54. Shigeru Sato quoted it from newspaper *Asia Raya*, 6 March 1943. See also *Asia Raya*, 7 March 1942.

He reminded the audience that the ongoing war was not merely the Japanese business but was also the responsibility of the Indonesian people. Since the Pacific War broke out, Indonesia and Japan were "one blood, one flesh, one bone, one backbone, one soul towards victory," Soekarno's propaganda stated.⁶¹ The Japanese then assigned a building on *Jalan Sunda No. 18* to be the main headquarters of POETERA. The office officially opened on April 16th, 1943, with Hatta as director general, Ki Hajar Dewantara as the head of education, Kyai Mas Mansoer as the head of public safety, and Soekarno as the chairman. According to Hatta, office hours were from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.⁶²

POETERA comprised four departments overseeing twelve sections, with only a subset of them being addressed in this discussion. Under Hatta's rendition of POETERA's framework, the culture segment was positioned within the Cultural Affairs Department, supervised by Ki Hajar Dewantara. This department oversaw the management of three distinct sections: Education, Culture, and Women.⁶³

In the *Osamu Group 16th Army Division's* documents, the culture section was part of the Operations Department. This department oversaw three sections: Information, Culture, and Women.⁶⁴ Soewandhi was designated as the leader of the Culture Section, with S. Sudjojono serving as his deputy.⁶⁵ Hatta stated that the main objective of this division was to rejuvenate the emerging Indonesian culture. POETERA perceived this assignment as a valuable chance for Indonesia following centuries of Dutch colonial domination. In the accountability reports submitted to the *Gunseikanbu*, Director General Hatta emphasized that the Culture Section must respond to each program, specifically addressing the question: What cultural direction will POETERA (Indonesia) pursue? Will it be through cultural assimilation or constructing a distinct cultural identity rooted in its national heritage?⁶⁶

Following the establishment of POETERA, Hatta provided a report on the activities of the Culture Section, which included the completion of a

⁶¹ *Djawa Baroe*, 15 March 1943.

⁶² Mohammad Hatta, *Memoir*, (Jakarta: Yayasan Hatta, 2002), p. 420.

⁶³ This structure is based on the POETERA program report, written by Hatta for the *Gunseikanbu*. See William H. Frederick, 1971, p. 40.

⁶⁴ Harry J. Benda, et.al, 1965, pp. 140-141.

⁶⁵ *Poesat Badan Keboedajaan Indonesia* which was previously founded by Soetardjo was merged into this Culture Section. See footnote no. 12.

⁶⁶ William H. Frederick, 1971, p. 40.

comprehensive roster of prominent art figures from Java,⁶⁷ the acquisition of valuable paintings,⁶⁸ the organization of entertainment shows for Japanese troops, discussions on the potential organization of diverse arts in Java, collaboration with *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho*, and the hosting of art and design exhibitions at the POETERA headquarters or night markets. Hatta documented the visitor count for exhibitions hosted at POETERA headquarters during the initial three months, although the artists and specific exhibitions were not mentioned. His records show that the number of exhibition attendees amounted to 8,773.⁶⁹



FIGURE 5.6.
Affandi's solo exhibition at POETERA's office.
(Source: *Pandji Poestaka*, 1 July 1943)

Repro by Aminudin TH Siregar

POETERA organized solo art exhibitions featuring renowned artists such as Affandi, Basuki Abdullah, I Nyoman Ngendon, Emiria Sunassa, and Kartono Yudhokusumo. In July 1943, Affandi began his debut solo exhibition at the POETERA office under the encouragement of S. Sudjojono. This exhibition is claimed to be the most successful in the occupation period (Fig.5.6).⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Records of intellectuals and artists in art and culture can be seen in the book *Orang-orang Jang Terkemoeka di Djawa*. See Gunseikanbu, *Orang-orang Jang Terkemoeka di Djawa*, (Jakarta: Gunseikanbu, 1944), pp. 417-429.

⁶⁸ Criteria for selection was not explained.

⁶⁹ William H. Frederick, 1971, pp. 46-47. The exhibition meant by Hatta most likely was Affandi's solo exhibition.

⁷⁰ See Ray Rizal, *Affandi: Hari sudah Tinggi*, (Jakarta: Metro Pos, 1990), pp. 26-27. See also S. Sudjojono in Ajip Rosidi, *et.al.*, 1978, pp. 22-23.



FIGURE 5.7.
Affandi, *Tiga Pengemis*, 1944.

(Collection of Museum Affandi Yogyakarta)

However, the Japanese maintained strict control over the exhibition programs organized by the Culture Section. Censorship was implemented during the section's solo exhibition for Affandi due to a specific painting that overtly depicted the anguish experienced by the people. Affandi portrayed the emaciated, filthy, and destitute physique of a beggar). These bodies did not conform to the desired physical standards of Japanese fascism, which sought muscle that was prepared for labor. The *Kempeitai*, the military police of Japan, issued an instruction for the removal of the painting from the exhibition wall. Remembering the censorship of Affandi's painting at that exhibition under his responsibility, S. Sudjojono expressed "This ugly beauty was considered by the Japanese an obstacle for the Greater East Asia development machine. We pushed this beautiful painting (namely that by Affandi) yet it was still prohibited. We lost, even though we were right."⁷¹

Another version of the censorship incident regarding Affandi's watercolour painting entitled *Tiga Pengemis* (Three Beggars) began when *Gunseikanbu* wanted artists to exhibit artwork depicting *romusha* workers (Fig.5.7). Affandi offered this painting, but the selection committee rejected

⁷¹ Ajip Rosidi, 1977, p. 35. "Keindahan yang jelek ini dianggap oleh pemerintah Jepang sebagai hambatan jalannya mesin pembangunan Asia Timur Raya. Kita pertahankan lukisan bagus ini tetapi dilarang. Kita kalah, meskipun benar."

it.⁷² Sudjojono confirmed this version. He believed that certain selection committee members, such as Yamamoto, Yoshioka, and Saseo Ono, were captured by the paintings' artistic excellence but could not resist the influence exerted by the *Kempeitai*.⁷³

The artists featured in POETERA's second exhibition gained more recognition from the public thanks to the diverse promotion and reviews they received from mass media outlets. Painters like Raden Saleh, Mas Pirngadie, Abdullah Suriosubroto, Henk Ngantung, Basuki Abdullah, S. Toetoe, Affandi, Emiria Sunassa, G.A. Soekirno, Dullah, Soetijoso, Subanto Suriosubandrio, Kartono Yudhokusumo, Sukirno, Suromo, Albert Hutagalung, and Kusnadi took part in POETERA's second program exhibition titled *Naturalistis dan Realistis* (Naturalistic and Realistic) from 19 to 20 August 1943. That was the first show that gave viewers a comprehensive understanding of the evolution of Indonesian painting from the naturalist style, represented by Raden Saleh, to the contemporary era.⁷⁴

The influence of POETERA expanded, and organisationally, it became more extensive, merging several professional, youth, sports, and other organizations.⁷⁵ Taking advantage of the mass media and the government network, the heads of POETERA continued to seed nationalism into the minds of the public. Soekarno wanted to make POETERA a place to prepare the minds of the Indonesian public to achieve their independence.⁷⁶ The relationship between the Japanese and POETERA eventually developed into mutual suspicion. The Japanese realized that they had failed to control POETERA as a propaganda machine according to their needs.

On 8 January 1944, the high command (*Saiko Sikikan*) announced a diplomatic plan that would merge *Himpunan Kebaktian Dokter* (Izi Hokokai, Doctor's Union), *Himpunan Kebaktian Pendidik* (Kyōiku Hokokai, Educator's Union), *Organisasi Wanita* (Fujinkai, Female Organisation) and *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* into one organization. *Saiko Sikikan* affirmed that this plan would be discussed with the *Empat Serangkai*. Of course, this was an intelligent strategy on the part of Japan to disband POETERA, as though it were at the

⁷² Claire Holt, 1967, p. 198.

⁷³ S. Sudjojono in Ajip Rosidi, *et al.*, 1978, pp. 25-26.

⁷⁴ S. "Seteleng Loekisan Naturalistis dan Realistis" in *Pandji Poestaka*, No.23, September 1943, pp. 827-828.

⁷⁵ For instance, *Pengurus Besar Persatuan Guru Indonesia*, *Pengurus Besar Istri Indonesia*, *Ikatan Sport Indonesia*, *Barisan Banteng*, and others that had tens of thousands of members. See Marwati Djoened and Nugroho Notosusanto, 2007, p. 34.

⁷⁶ Muhammad Hatta, 2002, p. 23.

request or with the support of the *Empat Serangkai*. Shortly after the announcement, while other regions were eager to establish a POETERA branch, the Japanese decided to shut down POETERA.⁷⁷ On 1 March 1944, the Japanese launched a new organization called *Djawa Hookoo Kai* (The Service Union of Java).⁷⁸

Unlike POETERA, *Djawa Hookoo Kai* was an official governmental entity directly overseen by the *Gunseikan*, who served as the leader of the military government under *Saiko Sikikan*.⁷⁹ From then on until its closure in September 1945, the *Hookoo Kai* maintained authority over civil activities. I will not discuss the activities of this organization in detail. Instead, I will explore the role of *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* within the *Hookoo Kai*.⁸⁰

Keimin Bunka Shidōsho

Even though POETERA already had a Cultural Section that actively held exhibitions and painting training, Japan felt it should build a cultural infrastructure that was easier to direct. For this reason, approximately a month after POETERA was founded, *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* was launched. Since, *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* was proclaimed active from 1 April 1943, at their offices on Jalan Noordwijk No. 39 in Jakarta. Magazine *Keboedajaan Timoer* reveals that the officiation was only affected on 18 April 1943 (Fig.5.8).⁸¹

One of the *Sendenhan*, Ohya Souichi, was appointed as administrator. With a headquarters in Jakarta, *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* also held offices in Bandung, Malang, Semarang, and Surabaya.⁸² A few months later, the newspaper *Tjahaja* in Bandung reported a branch opening in the regency of Garut, West Java.⁸³ Acting as the leader of *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* and

⁷⁷ See Noerhadi Soedarno, *POETERA (Poesat Tenaga Rakjat)*, (Jakarta: Tinta Mas, 1982), pp. 76-79.

⁷⁸ Before POETERA's disbandment, Sudjojono joined *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho*, while Affandi chose to work under *Djawa Hookoo Kai*.

⁷⁹ See Marwati Djoened and Nugroho Notokusanto, 2007, p.35. The Indonesian nationalists initially objected to the seemingly "local" name. They suggested the use of a word that would unite the people: *Indonesia*. See Shigeru Sato, *War, Nationalism and Peasants: Java under the Japanese Occupation 1942-1945*, (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1994), p. 71.

⁸⁰ See the structure of *Djawa Hookoo Kai* in Harry J. Benda, et al., 1965, p. 159.

⁸¹ *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho*, *Keboedajaan Timoer Djilid I*, (Djakarta: Keimin Bunka Shidōsho, 1943), p. 105.

⁸² Further reading about the opening of the branch and the leader's name, see *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho*, *Keboedajaan Timoer Djilid I*, 1943, pp. 105-107.

⁸³ *Tjahaja*, 27 January 1945, p.2.

management in the Film Section, Ohya Souichi reiterated the objectives of the organization in his reception speech:

The efforts of the Culture Centre in leading the general culture are meant to elevate the stature of the people, especially to preserve the classical and native art of Indonesia; aside from that, the organization will put efforts into seeding and spreading Japanese art and culture. In addition, it is also meant to teach and train artists from various fields and appreciate and reward the work of artists. Efforts will be made so that they can be sent to Japan.⁸⁴

This was not limited to a political context, as the Japanese saw Indonesian culture as an untouched "blank sheet of paper." The head of the Visual Art Section, Takashi Kohno, used that metaphor to delegitimize Dutch contribution to conserving and advancing Indonesian art. In his speech officiating the opening of *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho*, Kohno marked:

If we study the situation of painting and carving in Indonesia today, many shortcomings could be said are a result of Dutch politics in occupation. The Western influences that have held root in several layers of Indonesian society cannot be said to have infiltrated the world of painting and carving techniques. I also explained that Java's painting and carving technique is like a white sheet of paper, for better or worse. One field in culture that has not been cultivated during Dutch times leading the culture here is the culture of painting and carving. From here on, we will provide authentic leadership in this field.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ *Djawa Baroe*, 15 April 1943." Usaha Pusat Kebudayaan memimpin kebudayaan umum yang maksudnya untuk meninggikan derajat penduduk, terutama bermaksud untuk memelihara kesenian klasik dan kesenian-kesenian asli Indonesia, dan disampingnya badan itu akan berusaha pula menanam dan menyebarkan kesenian dan kebudayaan Nippon. Selain daripada itu, dimaksudkan juga untuk mendidik dan melatih para ahli kesenian di segala lapangan, serta menghargai dan menghadihi pekerjaan ahli-ahli kesenian yang utama. Pun diusahakan agar mereka dapat diutus ke Nippon."

⁸⁵ *Djawa Baroe*, 15 April 1943." Jika ditilik keadaan kesenian lukisan dan ukiran di Indonesia pada masa ini maka terdapat banyakkah kekurangan yang boleh juga dipandang sebagai akibat politik penjajahan Belanda dahulu. Pengaruh Barat yang telah meresap benar dalam sebagian lapisan masyarakat Indonesia belum dapat dikatakan masuk meresap juga dalam dunia teknik kesenian melukis dan mengukir. Saya pernah juga menerangkan bahwa kesenian lukisan dan ukiran di Jawa masih sebagai kertas putih walaupun dalam arti baik atau buruk. Satu lapangan dalam dunia kebudayaan yang belum



FIGURE 5.8. The *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* inauguration took place in Jakarta in April 1943. Sanusi Pane can be seen taking the oath on the left.
(Source: *Pandji Poestaka*, 29 April 1943)

Repro by Aminudin TH Siregar

Kohno's statement reflected the outline of *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho*'s mission, which was: to elevate the quality of life of the people; guide and safeguard (Eastern) arts and traditions; erode cultural powers that have the potential to damage; uplift pure culture-based on a new ideology; introduce the culture and situation of Japan; provide entertainment for the people and the soldiers; enlighten civic life; guide art and culture associations; encourage a cultural self and a strong cooperation with the *dai-to-a-kyoeiken* (the Greater East Asia co-prosperity sphere).

Western art and culture, which was constructed as a common enemy by the Three A Movement, returned as a theme in the opening of the *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho*. At that event, the head of *Sendenbu* reminded the administrators to address three main issues, which, in short, are: First, erase the Western culture of "art for art." This paradigm was viewed as not suitable for Eastern culture. The art workers were warned: "No honoring or paying homage to their culture, not even for a day." Second, to advance Greater East Asia culture; the only culture that must be acknowledged,

dikerjakan dalam masa Belanda memimpin kebudayaan di sini ialah kebudayaan kesenian lukisan dan ukiran. Sekaranglah kita akan memberikan pimpinan yang sesungguhnya dalam lapangan ini."

promoted, and developed is Eastern culture itself. This made sense: "Our forefathers have bequeathed this culture to us for 5,000 years." The third point relates to the Japanese request that artists strengthen their commitment and concentration to reach the final victory and that they are instrumental in determining the rise or fall of a nation.⁸⁶ This spirit of returning to the East or advancing Indonesian art based on the nation's character was consistently implanted in various meetings.⁸⁷ Therefore, by involving the intellectuals and artists, the anti-Anglo-American propaganda – associated with Western art/culture – echoed everywhere.

Notably, *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* served as the inaugural art academy in Indonesia and fostered collaboration between Indonesian and Japanese artists during the war. The Visual Art Section of this academy provided education and graduation opportunities for young artists but also actively organized exhibitions, facilitated art discussions, conducted competitions, and presented art awards.

The perception of an academy did not surface as the *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* was often narrowly translated as a "Cultural Center,"⁸⁸ despite a literal translation as follows: *keimin* = enlightenment for all; *bunka* = culture; and *shidōsho* = a place for guidance, center. The meaning of *keimin* here is not merely "to enlighten or educate" the Indonesian people on how they must do art and culture but also implies the strategic legitimization of Japanese superiority in civilization. Compared to Indonesian sources, English-language publications steered perception towards "art academy." For instance, *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* was translated as Institute for People's Education and Cultural Guidance or Popular Education and Cultural Direction Center.⁸⁹ These translations made the scope of the *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* seem broader and more formal.

Keimin Bunka Shidōsho had sections such as Literature, Theater, Film, Music, and Visual Art.⁹⁰ Every section had a supervisor, chairman, and members. The supervisors were generally Japanese, yet several Indonesian historiographers understood the personnel structure differently. For instance, Agus Djaya was even said to be the chairman of *Keimin Bunka*

⁸⁶ *Keboedajaan Timoer Djilid I*, 1943, pp. 2-3.

⁸⁷ *Djawa Baroe*, 15 March 1943, p. 8.

⁸⁸ For instance, see Zainuddin, 1966, p. 40; Sudarmadji, 1974, p. 16; Claire Holt, 1966, p. 198.

⁸⁹ For instance, see Harry J. Benda, et al., 1965, 159. See also Peter Post, et al., 2010, p. 370.

⁹⁰ In Aiko Kurasawa's version, the programs of theatre, dance, and movie was placed under the "Performance Department". See Aiko Kurasawa, 1987, p. 61.

Shidōsho.⁹¹ I think it would be more precise to say that Agus Djaya was the head of the Visual Art Section, which operated under the supervision of Takashi Kohno, Yamamoto, and Saseo Ono. Meanwhile, in describing the personnel structure, Zainuddin wrote that R.M. Subanto Suryasubandrio was the leader representing the Indonesians, with Setioso Emiria Sunassa, Sukirno, Moch. Saleh, S. Tutar, Surono, Abdul Salam, and Sastradiwirya as members. Zainuddin also mentioned that Takashi Kohno, Yamamoto, and Saseo Ono were the leaders of the Visual Art Section representing the Japanese.⁹² I argue that the persons mentioned by Zainuddin had other duties, namely as conservators for Indonesian art, a function which was only formed on 26 December 1943.⁹³ However, I have not found other sources that explain their assignment during the occupation.

Each division within the framework of the *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* was assigned distinct duties, programs, objectives, and propaganda obligations.⁹⁴ The Visual Art Section was responsible for various tasks, including showcasing paintings and photography, producing works that could enlighten individuals, and conducting active research on the accomplishments of Eastern art. In addition to overseeing two art studios, this department was also responsible for organizing regular monthly events, such as art lectures, to enhance the understanding of aspiring artists. In October 1943, Agus Djaya and Yashioaka Ken delivered a lecture on the responsibility of artists to contribute to the historical development of modern art on Java. During the event, a discussion took place regarding the ideal characteristics of an artist. It was concluded that genuine artists could not prioritize the pursuit of luxury. Art is impervious to the influence of money.⁹⁵

During a later event in June 1944, S. Sudjojono, upon joining *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho*, delivered a lecture on art titled *Menoedjoe Seni Loekis Indonesia Baroe* (Moving Towards New Indonesian Painting).⁹⁶ To disseminate knowledge and showcase artists' works, this division also

⁹¹ See Hilda Soemantri (ed.), *Indonesian Heritage: Visual Art*, (Singapore: Archipelago Press, 1998), p. 52. Solichin Salam, the biographer of Agus Djaya, even provided confusing information like the following: "Agus Djaya was the Chairman of the Indonesian Culture Centre, Visual Art Section (*Keimin Bunka Shidōsho*)."

In other words, Salam could not differentiate between the Visual Art Section as a unit and the *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* as the larger organisation. See Solichin Salam, *Agus Djaya dan Sejarah Seni Lukis Indonesia*, (Jakarta: CSIS, 1994), p. 15.

⁹² Imam Boechori Zainuddin, 1966, p. 44.

⁹³ See *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho, Keboedajaan Timoer III*, (Jakarta: Keimin Bunka Shidōsho, 1943), p. 155.

⁹⁴ Further reading, see Aiko, 1993, pp. 237-258.

⁹⁵ *Asia Raya*, 13 October 1943, p.2.

⁹⁶ *Asia Raya*, 30 June 1944, p.2.

produced an art magazine,⁹⁷ organized broadcasts, and oversaw traveling exhibitions to major cities such as Jakarta, Bandung, Semarang, Yogyakarta, Solo, Malang, and Surabaya. The Visual Art Section implemented regulations mandating that all artists enrol in the recurring biannual exhibition program.

To attract interest from prospective artists, the director of *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* requested the Visual Art Section to proactively publicize the criteria, including one specific requirement pertained to age, through various mass media channels. The individuals who were encouraged to participate in the section were those aged under 20.⁹⁸ Regarding the facilities, the department arranged two (studio) classes to accommodate many students.⁹⁹

However, if fewer students completed the examination, they would be employed in “Studio Two” and then “Studio One” would be used for experienced artists. It has been documented that, within a few months after the commencement of the class, over 40 individuals were engaged in the pursuit of art within the Visual Art Section.¹⁰⁰ In addition to academic activities and exhibitions, this section has been reported as having made donations of paintings. On behalf of the *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho*, esteemed artists such as Subanto Suriosubandrio, Otto Djaya, Agus Djaya, Henk Ngantung, S. Sudjojono, Affandi, Emiria Sunassa, Kartono Yudhokusumo, Baharuddin Marasutan, G.A. Sukirno, and Surono generously contributed their artworks to the Army Hospital (*Rumah Sakit Balatentara*) in Jakarta.¹⁰¹

The *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* remained under the jurisdiction of the *Sendenbu*.¹⁰² However, the *Sendenbu* did not control propaganda activities directly once multiple propaganda organizations were established, which created propaganda strategies and materials to be distributed among relevant work units.¹⁰³ This was beneficial, as it granted artists a certain degree of

⁹⁷ On February 1945, the Visual Art Section published a magazine titled “Loekisan”, with news and articles about art. S. Sudjojono, Chairil Anwar, and Agus Djaya wrote in this inaugural edition. Aside from that, the magazine also featured reproductions of paintings from Indonesian and Japanese painters like Affandi, Yamamoto, and Otto Djaya. See *Asia Raya*, 14 February 1945, p.2. I had not found the “Loekisan” magazine when this chapter was written.

⁹⁸ *Asia Raya*, 14 December 1943, p.2.

⁹⁹ *Asia Raya*, 23 December 1943, p.2.

¹⁰⁰ See footnotes on p. 67. See also *Asia Raya*, 23 December 1943, p.2.

¹⁰¹ *Asia Raya*, 18 December 1943, p.2. The article displays the title of each painting, yet there is no information about the reason for the donation, nor the address of the hospital. This note is important to track how the paintings circulated outside of exhibitions.

¹⁰² *Djawa Baroe*, No. 3. Th. 2603. See also *Djawa Baroe*, No. 6. Th 2603.

¹⁰³ Aiko Kurasawa, 1987, p. 61.

autonomy to convey their artistic expression. Conversely, the Japanese artists employed in the Visual Art Section of the organization upheld the independence and integrity of art, free from any influence of propaganda. According to their perspective, artists must be able to harmonize their work's artistic, entertaining, and sloganistic elements.¹⁰⁴

As time went on, the Japanese continued to demand the loyalty of Indonesian artists. In commemorating the Greater East Asia Day, the Japanese put forward a question that had to be discussed in the *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho*: "How can the elements in the art field be strengthened to reach the final victory?"¹⁰⁵ Several days later, a serious meeting was held to respond to that question. Led by Sanusi Pane, the meeting resulted in a loyalty oath of the artists:

We, the art experts, including the journalists who have met at the Commemoration of Greater East Asia Development, repeat our oath of loyalty to the Military Government of Japan and promise to fight in support of the Japanese Military with all our power until we reach the final victory.¹⁰⁶

The artists also convincingly stated their willingness to erase Western influences to commemorate the development of Greater East Asia culture. The Japanese were quite happy in response to the oath and promised not to stand in the way of the development of Indonesian culture, as the Dutch had done.¹⁰⁷

Following the dissolution of POETERA, the *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* became the sole institution responsible for organizing multiple exhibitions showcasing Indonesian and Japanese artists between April 1943 and July 1945. In contrast to the exhibition themes of POETERA, which leaned towards a nationalistic sentiment, the Japanese, through the *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho*, enjoyed greater latitude in shaping propaganda themes. These exhibitions encompassed themes such as *Meijisetsu*, *Seni Rupa Djawa Baroe*

¹⁰⁴ S. Sudjojono, *Catatan tentang Saya dan Orang-orang Sekitar Saya*, (Jakarta: KPG – Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia, 2017), p. 63.

¹⁰⁵ *Asia Raya*, 4 December 1943, p.2.

¹⁰⁶ *Asia Raya*, 7 December 1943, p.2. "Kami ahli-ahli seni termasuk joega wartawan-wartawan yang berapat dalam Perajaan Pembangoenan Asia Raya mengoelangi soempah setia kepada pemerintah Balatentara Dai Nippon dan soempah toeroet berdjoeang membantoe Balatentara Dai Nippon dengan seloeroeh dan segenap tenaga hingga kemenangan achir tertjapai."

¹⁰⁷ *Asia Raya*, 7 December 1943, p.2.

(New Javanese Art), *Peringatan Laut* (Commemoration of the Sea), *Semangat Prajurit* (The Spirit of Military), *Gerakan Hidup Baroe* (The Movement of New Life), *Romusha*, and *Membela Negara* (Defending the Country). In addition to the exhibitions officially organized by Sendenbu through *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho*, an exhibition of great significance was held to commemorate the birthday of the Japanese Emperor Hirohito (*Tencosetsu*) (Fig.5.9). This grand exhibition took place at the end of April 1943 in Jakarta, displaying works of painters such as S. Sudjojono, Subanto Suriosubandrio, Emiria Soenassa, G. A. Soekirno, I. Parera, Evi Spuit, Baharudin Marasutan, Basuki Abdullah, Kartono Yudhokusumo, Dullah, Henk Ngantung, and Soediahhardjo. In addition to paintings, posters, and sculptures were also exhibited.

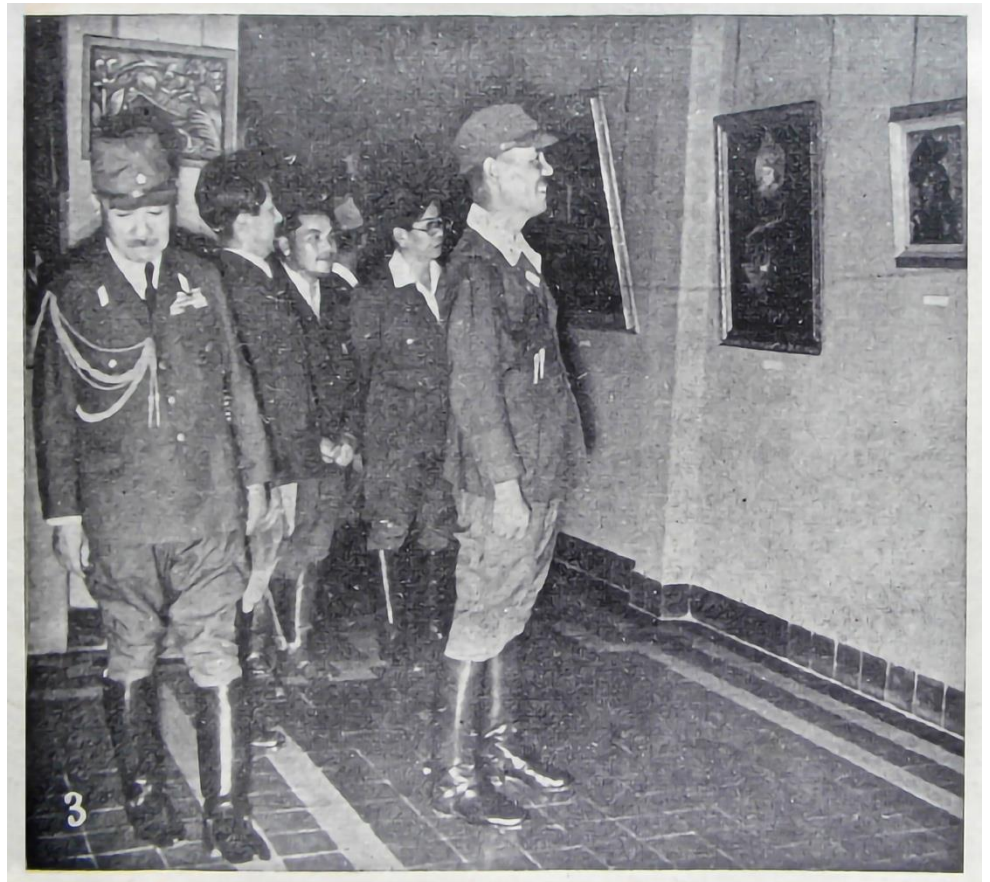


FIGURE 5.9.
Seiko Shikikan - the supreme commander – visited the *Tencosetsu* Exhibition in Jakarta.
 (Source: Pandji Poestaka, 15 May 1943)

Repro by Aminudin TH Siregar

Pertoendjoekan Seni Roepa Meidjisetsoe



FIGURE 5.10.
Paintings by award winners in the prestigious Meiji Setsu exhibition.
(Source: *Djawa Baroe*, 1 December 1943)

Pandji Poestaka magazine reviewed the enthusiasm of painters who tried to portray Eastern characteristics on their canvases. The magazine reviewer identified three styles from this exhibition: Basuki Abdullah, Sudjojono, and Emiria Soenassa. The first tends toward naturalism, the second is more toward realism, and the third is more concerned with the painter's inner sensibility in portraying nature and humans.¹⁰⁸ Below is a concise analysis of how artists incorporated propaganda requirements into their creations through exhibitions.

The *Meijisetsu* exhibition, held on 20 November 1943, commemorated the Japanese Empire's Culture Day (*Bunka No Hi*), with a promise of a cash prize for those whose work was selected. This extensive exhibition is fascinating (Fig. 5.10). It developed a "new standard of aesthetics" in presenting propaganda following Japanese wishes. To mobilize all creative potential, the exhibition expanded the categories to be limited to artwork and design work (the term "design" was already in regular use in those days).

¹⁰⁸ See reviews of this exhibition in S. "Seteleng Loekisan Pada Tentjoesetsu" in *Pandji Poestaka*, 15 May 1943, pp. 585-587.



FIGURE 5.11. A-B.
Subanto Suriosubandrio won the *Saiko Sikikan* category.

A) The painter poses in front of his winning painting (Source: *Asia Raya*, 22 November 1943).
Repro by Aminudin TH Siregar

B) Painting 12 'clock in the Rice Fields (Collection of Presidential Palace Yogyakarta).
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

Due to the significance of the exhibition, from September 1943, newspapers like *Asia Raya* and *Soeara Asia* had already announced the planned exhibition in an article titled *Seteleng Seni Roepa Nasional* (National Art Show). The aim within this framework was to accommodate and rally all groups of artists. Anyone without exception, as long as they could meet the requirements requested by the committee, could submit their works of art or designs to be selected and exhibited. The exhibition covered the following categories (according to the newspaper article): painting, propaganda art, carving art (sculpture), design work including an example of their work or model, covering buildings, gates, commemorative statues, housing, and stadiums.¹⁰⁹ The exhibition committee also accepted works from the art/design category using ceramics as a medium.

In October, *Asia Raya* newspaper reported the selection process of works submitted by participants. It was also reported that in the Visual Art Section office, the head of *Sendenbu*, Major Adachi, Machida's replacement, was present during the selection process. The jury eventually selected 70 out

¹⁰⁹ *Asia Raya*, 22 September 1943.

of 250 paintings, 8 out of 70 posters, and 1 out of 27 sculptures. The resulting selected works were not reported.¹¹⁰ Out of these, the jury selected five painters whose work deserved awards. The mass media frequently published about the award recipients and photographs of the works to prove that the artists supported Japanese propaganda.

I will now examine the artwork created by Subanto Suriosubandrio, entitled *Jam 12 Di Tengah Sawah* (12 o'clock in the Rice Fields), which was honored with the top prize in the *Saiko Sikikan* category (Fig. 5.11. A-B). The painting appears unassuming at first glance, yet it is laden with propaganda. The painting depicts a contented farmer quenching his thirst from a ceramic pitcher during the scorching midday. The artist shows the wife in the painting standing near her husband, wearing worn and unkempt clothing. Her head is lowered, seemingly in admiration for her husband's exhaustion from working in the arid rice fields, which is also evident in the background of the artwork.

On the other hand, the boy in the painting is depicted looking up proudly at his father. He is grasping a bamboo rice hat (*caping*) with both hands, giving a broad smile, indicating his pride in his father's profession. The boy seems promised to pursue his father's future path diligently. The yellow hue mirrors the intense, scorching beams of sunlight. This painting accurately depicted Japanese propaganda promoting the engaged family, the unwavering loyalty of a wife to her husband, the enthusiastic child prepared to emulate his father, and patriotism towards the homeland.

The painting by G.A. Sukirno, a former member of PERSAGI, was honored with the Sendenbucu category award by the head of the Sendenbu (the Sendenbucu). The whereabouts of Sukirno's painting are still unknown - unlike Suriosubandrio's painting, which is currently part of Soekarno's collection in the Presidential Palace Yogyakarta. The sole document for analyzing Sukirno's painting is the monochromatic photograph featured in the *Djarwa Baroe* magazine. Sukirno painted cotton tree with the clear text: *Bapa Tani, Bapa Tani Tanamlah Kapas...Pemerintah Membantu* (Dear Farmer, Dear Farmer, Please Plant Cotton...The Government Will Help). If Suriosubandrio offers a metaphor about the importance of hard work carried out by a low-income family, Sukirno's painting resembles a propaganda poster pamphlet. I assume that the Japanese admired this painting due to its alignment with their call to the public to cultivate diverse crucial crops for

¹¹⁰ *Asia Raya*, 29 October 1943.

the war effort, such as cotton (for clothing) and castor (utilized for its oil in airplane propeller lubrication).

Agus Djaya was honored with the *Gunseikan* award for his painting portraying a scene from the renowned wayang story about the *Bharata Yudha* war - a symbolic battle between the virtuous Pandawa brothers and the malevolent Kurawa, their cousins. Agus Djaya's intention in depicting the struggle was to capture the essence of the ongoing Greater East Asia war by envisioning the Japanese as the Pandawas. Viewed from an alternative standpoint, a painting that incorporates wayang as its theme can be linked to Japanese propaganda, which consistently promotes the artist's reinforcement of their Eastern identity.



FIGURE 5.12.
The fourth edition of the *Seni Rupa Djawa Baroe*.
(Source: *Djawa Baroe*, 1 November 1944)

Repro by Aminudin TH Siregar

The painting titled *Ibu Djoeni* (Mrs. Djoeni) by Barli won the *Djawa Shinbun* category. It depicts a young woman wearing a *kebaya*. Despite its simplicity, the painting is in line with Japanese propaganda, as Barli contemplates the ethical qualities of Eastern women, including loyalty, determination, tenacity, and tenderness. Simultaneously, the *kebaya*

portrayed in the painting represents the customary attire of Indonesian women and conveys a sense of non-Western cultural identity.

The fourth edition of the *Seni Rupa Djawa Baroe* (New Javanese Art) exhibition took place in November 1944. It showcased a collection of 76 paintings created by notable artists such as S. Toetoer, Subanto Suriosubandrio, and Soehargo Gembira. Their painting themes depicted the subjects of Japanese propaganda. For example, Suriosubandrio portrayed the gallantry of a youthful line of PETA¹¹¹ soldiers, as shown by the flag. This painting displays optimistic expressions, self-confidence, readiness, and bravery. (Fig. 5.12).

Meanwhile, Soehargo Gembira depicted two traditional musicians against a crowded backdrop. The painting naturally incorporated "Japanese influences" to preserve the distinctive artistic traditions of Indonesia (Eastern cultural values).

To welcome the 5th exhibition, in late March 1945, the Japanese government unveiled a proposition for an extensive exhibition that would serve as a platform for promoting the theme of the *Gerakan Hidoep Baroe* (The Movement for New Life) through various categories such as painting, posters, carving, ceramics, architecture, and more. The exhibition was accessible to all individuals, including artists from Japan. The administrators of the Art Section emphasized that the exhibition's goal was to uphold the essence of previous exhibitions by enhancing the nation's artistic landscape.

To improve the accessibility of the selection process and showcase the extensive size of the exhibition, the committee granted permission for individuals outside Jakarta to submit their work to the nearest *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* office. The selection process, supervised by Saseo Ono, Yasioka Ken, and Yamamoto, was open and accessible to the public. The Japanese authority subsequently bestowed "commendations" and "awards" upon the finest works.¹¹² Approximately two months later, the jury publicly disclosed the identities of the painters who met the commendations and awards criteria.¹¹³ The *Gerakan Hidoep Baroe* exhibition took place from 29 April to 10 May 1945 at the Visual Art Section offices at Jalan Nishiki Door No. 4B in Jakarta.

¹¹¹ PETA is an acronym for Pembela Tanah Air (Defenders of the Homeland), a prestigious volunteer group formed by Japan in 1943 by recruiting young Indonesians.

¹¹² *Asia Raya*, 29 March 1945.

¹¹³ *Asia Raya*, 28 May 1945.



FIGURE 5.13. Hendra Gunawan's painting symbolizes the association of Asian powers.
(Source: *Asia Raya*, 22 September 1944)

Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

The exhibition showcased emerging artists like Sutikna, Derachman, Trubus, Nona Patty, and Lie Twan Hion. The committee aimed to inspire the interest of other prospective young artists and motivate more experienced artists to enhance the artistic caliber of their work. I have not discovered any photographic evidence of this exhibition. The newspaper *Asia Raya* provided a report containing various names and titles of paintings, including Agus Djaya's *Menghias* (Decorate), Basuki Resobowo's *Pemandangan di Senen* (View in Senen), Affandi's *Ibuku* (My Mother), S. Sudjojono's *Pemandangan Tempat Latihan Seni Roepa* (View of the Visual Arts Training Studio), Henk Ngantung's *Sedang Mengaso* (Taking A Rest), and Otto Djaya's *Keboen Sajur* (Vegetable Garden). Shortly after the exhibition's opening, it was reported that an esteemed guest, the military government leader (*Gunseikan*), visited the exhibition and expressed satisfaction with the artists' works.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ *Asia Raya*, 8 May 1945, p.2.

A touring exhibition on the theme of *Membela Negara* (Defending the Country) was planned, employing a mechanism similar to previous exhibitions. According to the *Asia Raya* newspaper, the Visual Art Section had unexpectedly approved approximately 10,000 artworks from different regions for consideration.¹¹⁵ Aside from exhibitions, another way to observe Indonesian artists' involvement in Japanese propaganda campaigns is to examine photographs of their artwork featured in newspapers or magazines. Given the limited collections from the Japanese period currently available in Indonesian national museums or galleries, this is the most reasonable approach. Otto Djaya's painting, which depicts the propaganda theme *Semangat Prajurit* (Spirit of the Soldier) or *Kerja Bakti* (Community Service), was frequently featured in the newspaper.

Aside from Djaya, the same newspaper also featured a photograph of a Hendra Gunawan painting, who worked for the Bandung branch of *Keimin Bunka Shidsho* at the time. The painting depicts a swarm of Asian animals attacking the enemy, seemingly shoulder to shoulder. This painting directly illustrates the propaganda frequently pushed by Soekarno in his speeches: "If the Dragon of China worked together with the White Elephant of Siam, the Holy Cow of India, the Sphinx of Egypt, and the Water Buffalo of Indonesia, illuminated by the rays of the bright Dai Nippon Sun, imperialism will be erased from the earth" (Fig.5.13).¹¹⁶

Support for Japan is not always expressed through bombastic themes, as it could also be channelled through painting portraits of Japanese military officials. Basuki Abdullah is a prominent example, having painted portraits of high-ranking commanders such as Hitoshi Imamura (Fig. 5.14).¹¹⁷ However, it is essential to emphasize that this painting was one of Abdullah's early works during this period. His other painting (Fig.5.15) shows his sympathy for the Indonesian people's suffering due to the forced labor program, also known as *Rōmusha* - a Japanese word meaning an unskilled worker doing temporary construction work.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ *Asia Raya*, 6 July 1945, p.2.

¹¹⁶ *Asia Raya*, 22 September 1944. "“Jikalau Liong Barongsai Tiongkok bekerja bersama-sama dengan Gajah Putih dari Siam dengan Lembu Nandi dari India dengan Sphinx dari Mesir dengan Banteng dari Indonesia dan disinari oleh sinarnya Matahari Dai Nippon yang gilang gemilang niscaya hancur leburlah tiap-tiap imperealisme dari muka bumi.”"

¹¹⁷ This photograph was published in the *Pandji Poestaka* magazine. See *Pandji Poestaka*, 12 September 1942. See also Basuki Abdullah painting the portrait of *Saiko Shikikan* in *Asia Raya*, 26 October 1944, p.2.

¹¹⁸ For *Rōmusha*, see Peter Post, et.al., 2010, p.197-217.



FIGURE 5.14. Hitoshi Imamura by Basuki Abdullah.
(Source: *Pandji Poestaka*, 12 September 1942)

Repro by Aminudin TH Siregar

None of the Indonesian art history texts mention the activities of the *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* towards the end of the occupation, even though the organization actively arranged exhibitions during this period. In addition, there were rigorous deliberations on the future progress of arts infrastructure in preparation for welcoming Indonesian independence. During that period, the Japanese requested intellectuals and artists to carefully develop a fundamental concept of culture for the future of Indonesia. This encouragement was reiterated to the different divisions of *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho*, prompting them to become actively engaged, and led to a wildly enthusiastic response.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ See *Asia Raya*, 4 July 1945, p.2.



FIGURE 5.15.
Basuki Abdullah, *Too much and not enough rice*, 1943.

Private Collection
Photo by Venduehuis Den Haag

In addition to providing a vision for advancing culture,¹²⁰ this division also proposed that the Japanese government establish "culture schools" on a larger scale.¹²¹ An additional specific proposal entailed the establishment of a "National Culture Building," which would serve as the focal point for Indonesia's cultural initiatives.¹²²

¹²⁰ These recipes for culture abstract also surfaced from the Semarang branch. Further reading, see *Asia Raya*, 4 July 1945, p.2.

¹²¹ *Asia Raya*, 14 July 1945, p.2.

¹²² *Asia Raya*, 21 May 1945, p.2.

Artists were becoming increasingly eager to generate novel ideas in fine arts. Similar to the establishment of an investigation council for Indonesian independence in the realm of politics and nationhood¹²³, the *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* also created a specialized unit known as the *Badan Penyelidik Seni Roepa Indonesia Baroe* (Investigation Council for New Indonesian Art). This unit demonstrated inclusivity and transparency by actively encouraging public participation. Public members were allowed to contribute suggestions, which internal administrators further discussed in a dedicated forum.¹²⁴

However, the discussion surrounding art abruptly ceased when the United States deployed its nuclear weapons on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The Japanese subsequently capitulated, acknowledging their defeat in the conflict they referred to as the Greater East Asia War.¹²⁵

To conclude this section, I would like to cite the newspaper that reported the termination of *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho*. The quote holds significance as it is the sole record documenting the dissolution of this esteemed cultural institution, renowned for its era. *Asia Raya* newspaper reported the closure of *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* on 4 September 1945:

The closure of Djawa Hookookai has been announced by Djawa Hookookai Soosai on 30 August, 2605 (1945, *aths*). As a result, Keimin Bunka Shidoosyo, which is a part of Djawa Hookookai, will be closed starting from that date.¹²⁶

The newspaper additionally cited Ki Hajar Dewantara's intention to establish a new cultural institution addressing diverse cultural matters in post-war Indonesia. To assist with this undertaking, the organization wanted to employ the network of *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* branches located in each

¹²³ They are known as *Badan Penyelidik Usaha-Usaha Persiapan Kemerdekaan Indonesia* or BPUPKI (The Investigating Committee for Preparatory Work for Indonesian Independence). This committee was inaugurated on 29 April 1945 to coincide with Emperor Hirohito's birthday. Japan formed this committee to obtain support for the war from the Indonesian people, along with promising Indonesian independence.

¹²⁴ *Asia Raya*, 24 May 1945, p.2. I have not found what kind of resolutions were issued by this unit.

¹²⁵ For the naming see Kōno Kenji, *Toedjoean Perang Amerika*, in *Pradjoerit* magazine, 1 January 1945.

¹²⁶ *Asia Raya*, 4 September 1945, p.2. "Berhoeboeng dengan pemboebaran Djawa Hookookai atas pengemoeman Djawa Hookookai Soosai pada tanggal 30 Agustus 2605 (1945, *pen.*), dengan sendirinja Keimin Bunka Shidoosyo (Poesat Keboedajaan) sebagai bagian dari Djawa Hokookai moelai tanggal terseboet diboebarkan."

respective area. Additionally, it was emphasized in this news that all previous branch leaders would assume leadership roles in their respective regions within this new organization. The plan failed to materialize due to the significant socio-political changes after the occupation.

Conclusion

This chapter has unveiled a previously undocumented account of the participation of artists during the Japanese occupation, shedding new light on conventional historiography. It has underscored the vast scope of Japan's contribution during the occupation. Notably, *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho*, a pioneering cultural institution established during World War II, played a transformative role in the Indonesian art scene, reshaping its physical and conceptual aspects. This institute spearheaded the advancement of contemporary Indonesian art through many initiatives, including art awards, touring exhibitions, painting and sculpture training, art lectures and discussions, and hands-on experience in cultural organization management. The policy evolved with the successful collaboration between Japanese *Sendenhan* and Indonesian artists and intellectuals.

Undoubtedly, the themes of paintings during this period exhibited a thrilling diversity, albeit under the influence of propaganda. Japan actively encouraged Indonesian artists to engage in social dynamics and changes, redefine their painting style, and immerse themselves in cultural organizations. This period marked a significant shift for Indonesian artists, who, once overshadowed by their European counterparts, were now entrusted with shaping artistic progress and guiding society's artistic consciousness. These experiences, despite the challenging circumstances, proved to be invaluable for their future growth.

I contend that the omission of numerous events occurring between March 1942 and August 1945 in the historical accounts of contemporary Indonesian art suggests a prevailing Indonesia-centric viewpoint that disregards the contributions of non-Indonesian individuals. This argument is further bolstered by the proliferation of divergent perspectives regarding Japan's role during the occupation. Some art critics perceive works of art as being created during that time under the direction of authorities based on their preferences or interests. The purpose of such art is solely to promote a propaganda agenda, which includes promoting the cultivation of *jatropa* or

cotton trees, glorifying the bravery of romusha and soldiers, depicting the atmosphere of diligent labor, showcasing the tenderness and loyalty of women, highlighting the passion for saving money, and exposing the magnificence of Eastern culture, such as dance and music, among other themes. Consequently, the artistic outcomes lacked any spiritual essence and merely served as ornamental embellishments for warfare.

When evaluating the art during the Japanese occupation, critic Trisno Sumardjo stated that this period was just “an intermezzo” in Indonesian art history and had no influence. He wrote:

The intermezzo stage was inserted by the population of Japanese soldiers during three and a half years (1941 – 1945). Despite efforts by the Japanese government to prioritize our artists for dishonest propaganda needs, and despite the camaraderie between the modern painters of both nations, such a short time certainly did not have a spiritual impact.¹²⁷

Prominent intellectual and writer Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana also criticized the occupation period. He conveyed that Japan was no different from the Netherlands, which also liked manipulating artists. He emphasized that “the Japanese and Dutch people like to lull us to sleep, praising us with the glories of the East so that we remain in a dreamy state, remembering the glory of the past, so that we don't try to reconcile ourselves with the modern era. It is in this dream state that it is easier for our nation to become victims of foreign political and economic efforts.”¹²⁸

Interestingly, Agus Djaya, in contrast, voiced his dissatisfaction with individuals who underestimated Japan's contribution. He denounced the inconsistent attitude for failing to represent an unbiased evaluation

¹²⁷ Trisno Sumardjo, *Kedudukan Seni Rupa Kita* in Zaini (ed), *Almanak Seni 1957* (Jakarta: Badan Musyawarah Kebudayaan nasional, 1956), hal. 127-128. “Tara intermezzo dimasukkan oleh penduduk balatentara Jepang selama tiga-setengah tahun (1941-1945). Meskipun Pemerintah Jepang banyak mengedepankan para seniman kita untuk keperluan propaganda yang tentunya tidak jujur, dan meskipun ada pergaulan antara pelukis-pelukis modern kedua bangsa, namun waktu sependek itu sudah tentu tak ada pengaruh keruhaniannya. See also Chairil Anwar's criticism of the emptiness of the soul during the Japanese occupation in Aoh.K. Hadimadja, *Beberapa Paham Angkatan 45*, (Jakarta: Tinta mas, 1952), p. 34.

¹²⁸ See Gadis Rasid, *Di Tengah-tengah Perjuangan Kebudayaan*, (Jakarta: Pustaka Rakjat, 1948), p. 13. “Orang-orang Jepang dan Belanda suka menina-bobokkan kita, memudji-mudji kita dengan keagungan Timur agar supaya kita tetap tinggal dalam keadaan mengelamun, mengenangkan djaya yang lampau, hingga tidak berusaha mentjotjokkan diri dengan zaman modern. Dalam keadaan mimpi inilah lebih gampang bangsa kita menjadi kurban usaha politik dan ekonomi asing.”

accurately. He disapproved of the hypocrisy of artists and intellectuals who initially praised Japan. Still, he later shifted to denouncing and condemning the occupation era as a demonstration of Japan's brutality in annihilating culture and local knowledge. However, he refrained from explicitly naming individuals. In his reflective writings published in 1946, Agus Djaya stated that Indonesian artists may collectively criticize the fallen Japanese nation, but only if they adopt a stance of deliberate insult from the beginning. He observed that artists during that period still possessed the autonomy to make choices: "Some artists now feel annoyed because at that time they were willing to become 'romusha artists', that is their own fault."¹²⁹

Being collaborative, which was also demonstrated by nationalist leaders such as Soekarno and Muhammad Hatta, certainly did not necessarily prostitute the ideals of artists in the face of the occupation regime. Instead, they consciously adopted this attitude as an effective strategy to train and mature artists to achieve long-term goals. They chose to enrich artistic practice and accelerate the emergence of new talents. Studio facilities, art materials, and exhibition opportunities are "luxuries" they would not receive if they were confrontational. With collaboration, they were also free to develop the basis of artistic/cultural thinking to welcome the new Indonesia. In turn, all the experiences from the occupation period provided a solid socio-cultural foundation for facing the challenges of the next period, known as the revolutionary period.

In this regard, the opinion of literary critic H.B. Jassin offers relevant objectivity. Even though he is critical of Japan's promises, which he calls "*balon-balon indah yang hanya berisi angin* (beautiful balloons that only contain air)," Jassin still recognizes the contribution of *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho*. Unlike Trisno Sumardjo, who categorically rejected the impact of that era on the spiritual aspects of Indonesian art, Jassin acknowledged its significance. He stated:

People may ridicule the institution called the Nippon Brand Cultural Center, where all kinds of artistic products were ordered and made, but it cannot be denied that the results of

¹²⁹ Agus Djaya, "Kita Membikin Kita Djuga dalam hal Keboedajaan." *Merdeka*, 26 Desember 1946. "Kami dapat menjetoedjoeinja oentoek mentjatji maki bangsa Djepang, jang telah ambroek, tetapi hanja, kalau sedari permoelaan mengambil sikap mentjatji maki. Bahwa ada beberapa seniman jang sekarang merasa djengkel karena waktoe itu telah sudi mendjadi 'seniman roomoesha', itoe salahnja sendiri."

this institution were also useful at that time and in the future to unite all enthusiasm and energy. It is there that our young artists whose work is the same as the romusha, have their souls and minds tortured and their inner beings cooked for the coming revolution.¹³⁰

¹³⁰ See H.B. Jassin, *Kesusasteraan Indonesia dimasa Djepang*, (Jakarta: Balai Poestaka, 1948), p. 13. "Orang boleh mengedjek Lembaga jang bernama Poesat Keboedajaan tjap Nippon, di mana segala matjam hasil kesenian dipesan dan dibikin, tetapi tidak bisa disangkal bahwa hasil lembaga itoe bergoena djoega waktue itoe dan bagi kemoedian hari oentoek memperpadoe segala semangat dan tenaga. Di sanalah seniman-seniman moeda kita jang pekerdjaannja sama dengan romusha djiwa dan pikiran, disiksa dan dimasak batinnja oentoek revoloesi jang akan datang."

