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Ethan Mark

ABSTRACT

For Japanese and Asians alike, Japan's wartime occupations are generally remembered as nightmares. Yet an exclusive focus on the commonality of Asian suffering at Japanese hands also masks a profound distinction in the occupation experiences of North- and Southeast Asia, prefigured by the prior history of Southeast Asian societies as Western colonies, and their resultant openness, to greater-or-lesser degrees, to imperial Japan's self-proclaimed role as a force of liberation and as a role model and brotherly leader of 'Asian-style' development. Japanese wartime experiences in Southeast Asia were also distinctive in the degree to which the Japanese themselves, seduced by an unprecedented string of early victories against the Western imperialists and by warm 'native' welcomes, envisioned their mission as representing a world-historical role reversal for Japan both as Asia's new hegemon and as an empire that might transcend imperialism. On an ideological level, Japan's contradictory anticolonial liberationist claims as well as the degree of local receptivity in response mark its south-east Asian occupations as distinctively revolutionary among world war two-era occupations, as such also heralding a global-historical turn to a postcolonial world of nation-states in which the contradiction of colonial occupation as anticolonial 'liberation' was to become the global norm.

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1. Introduction

In its total war that began in China in 1937, expanded to include the Southeast Asian colonial possessions of the Western Powers in 1941, and ended in defeat in 1945, imperial Japan claimed to be fighting in the name of Asian liberation, thereby bringing an end to centuries of Western colonial domination. For all who experienced Japan's military occupations during that war, however – be they Chinese, Filipino, Indonesian, Korean, Dutch, British, American, or even the Japanese occupiers themselves – these years under foreign rule are generally remembered as nightmares. And with good reason: As highlighted by such infamous signifiers as the 'Rape of Nanjing', the 'comfort women', the 'Siam-Burma Death Railway', and the *rōmusha* forced laborers, experiences of brutality, deprivation, and death became the order of the day under Japanese rule, first in occupied China and later in occupied Southeast Asia. Such realities revealed the promised role reversal of an 'Asia for the Asians' as little more than a cruel apparition, ultimately fostering widespread hatred of the Japanese as liars and hypocrites that often surpassed that of the previous colonial rulers, and

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thereby helping fuel a decisive postwar Southeast Asian turn against colonialism and ‘fascism’ in all its forms, be it ‘Western’ or ‘Eastern’. In the end, Southeast Asians and observers around the world – including mainstream scholars within postwar Japan itself – conventionally remembered Japan’s occupations, like those in Northeast Asia, in stark terms of barbarity and backwardness.¹

Yet, while it remains essential to acknowledge these dark realities across the full breadth of Japan’s wartime empire, the exclusive focus on the commonality of Asian suffering at Japanese hands has its limits, as there were also fundamental differences in how North- and Southeast Asian societies experienced Japanese occupation and responded to Japan’s promises of ‘Asian liberation’. In fact, from the perspective of global history, Japan’s shocking rollback of Western armies, its liberationist propaganda, its courting and coopting of Southeast Asian anti-colonial nationalism, and the proactive Southeast Asian response to this Japanese campaign, heralded a role reversal of immense significance. Even though dismissed in retrospect as based on false promises, Japan’s wartime occupations in Southeast Asia must nevertheless be recognized as a central catalyst in a global transition from an order of empires to one of sovereign nation states.² Under the new demands of this postwar global order, the contradiction of military occupation packaged as anticolonial ‘liberation’ pioneered by imperial Japan was to become the rule rather than the exception.

Informed by common experiences of suffering at Japanese hands, of the criminality of Japan’s wartime enterprise, and of the ultimate emptiness and hypocrisy of imperial Japan’s claims to ‘liberate Asia’, conventional scholarship of the Second World War, and of Japan’s war in Asia, has tended to paint the experiences of North- and Southeast Asia with the same dark brush. The production of such uniformly negative, black-and-white depictions of experience across Asia under imperial Japanese rule has been further overdetermined by dominant Orientalist understandings of the Japanese as well as by the national unity-building priorities of anticolonial and postcolonial nationalism, whose stark narrative frames of ‘oppression and resistance’ have found their way into much conventional scholarship. Such simplified depictions have also been furthered by the understandable longstanding concern among progressive scholars—both Japanese and non-Japanese—to be wary of taking positive Asian receptions of the wartime Japanese at face value, which might thereby serve the interests of increasingly assertive and vocal Japanese right wing revisionists keen on exaggerating them as a means of obscuring Japan’s many wartime crimes. With some recent exceptions, the result has been a general scholarly tendency to downplay or dismiss the revolutionary appeals of Japanese wartime rhetoric for non-Japanese Asians, above all for the many Southeast Asians primed by circumstances to embrace Japanese messaging of a ‘Greater Asia’. Such inattention has also meant scholarly eyes closed to the longer-term, postwar impacts and implications of the exchange, even as the wartime Japanese themselves disappeared in disgrace from Southeast Asia as quickly as they had arrived.³

This article explores the global-historical significance of Japan’s Southeast Asian wartime occupations and their promises of an Asian liberation by focusing on the experience of the strategically crucial, heavily populated island of Java, an area whose local receptivity to the promises of a wartime role reversal was as high as anywhere in Southeast Asia. It will proceed by first arguing the relevance of applying a postcolonial lens to the Second World War as global history and the centrality of the Asian experience that emerges from this perspective. We shall then revisit the global and regional context that confronted Japanese and Indonesians at the time of occupation from this perspective. This includes tracing the rise of a particularly potent interwar form of ‘Asianist’ ideology as a justification for Japan’s war, whose potential appeals within this distinctive interwar context of ‘triple crisis’, contrary to conventional understandings, extended far beyond Japan alone. I will then document the distinctive and ultimately ill-fated nature of the Japanese-Indonesian wartime encounter as an imagined role reversal for Asia, drawing primarily upon the voices of Japanese and Indonesian commentators as revealed in the pages of wartime print media from occupied Java. In conclusion I will ponder the oft-overlooked, multivalent longer-term implications of this wartime encounter for postwar, postcolonial Asia.

2. Resituating Japan's occupations in Southeast Asia within the global Second World War

From the perspective of the global history of the Second World War, recognition of the revolutionary nature of Japan's wartime occupations in Southeast Asia has long been inhibited by at least four tenacious conceptual frames: a Eurocentric frame, a nation-centric frame, an Orientalist frame, and a teleological frame informed by historical hindsight. The Eurocentric frame centers the Second World War in Europe, and envisions developments in Asia such as the Sino-Japanese War as peripheral to, or supplementary to – and thereby largely separate from – the 'main' story.⁴ The nation-centered frame, for its part, conceives of the war, wherever it is narrated, as a contest between discrete nation-states, thereby generalizing and homogenizing multiple and diverse experiences of people both across and within national boundaries into monolithic, mutually exclusive national categories. Put more provocatively, both these framings also serve to obscure cross-border commonalities and contradictions shared between Allied and Axis combatants.⁵ Most importantly for a global history of the Second World War, they mask the shared identity of Axis and Allied combatants alike as *empires* in competition with one another to dominate the world's peoples, resources, and territories.⁶ The Orientalist frame assigns essential cultural traits to 'the Japanese' that affirm them as invariably and inevitably developmentally 'behind' the 'West', and therefore incapable of possessing globally revolutionary or pioneering attributes (with a corollary that revolutionary aspects of Japan's wartime propaganda are invariably dismissed as nothing more than empty trickery).⁷ Lastly, the teleological frame imparts a retrospective inevitability to the war's trajectory, thereby rendering invisible the actual uncertainty, fluidity, and contingency that was central to the war's experience – and which is central to understanding its deeper resonances and implications.⁸

In recent decades, postcolonial histories have explored a global variety of colonial places, times, and experiences, and have challenged nation-centric histories by drawing increasing attention to the complexity of historical interactions between colonizers and colonized. They have shown that colonial interactions were characterized not only by oppression and resistance, which was the standard fare of nationalist histories, but also by complex cross-border exchanges and negotiations, often leaving lasting and ambivalent legacies.⁹ They have also highlighted Orientalist reflexes in scholarly apprehensions of non-Western history that call for a re-evaluation of conventional Eurocentric assumptions and framings of global history – with some of them calling for a conceptual role reversal that 'provincializes Europe'.¹⁰

In the entire history of colonialism, there was perhaps no more critical and significant global watershed moment than the Second World War. When one pans out from the conventional Eurocentric and nation-centric perspective to a genuinely global-historical perspective, the war comes into focus above all as a conflict between empires, at a time of fundamental crisis of the legitimacy of empire itself. It is no coincidence that within a decade and a half after Japan's surrender in August 1945, the entire prewar global world order of empires had been transformed into a world order in which the nation-state had become the universal norm – an order starkly symbolized by the appearance of the United Nations, which itself arose directly out of the experience of the war.

In taking this fresh perspective of the Second World War as a war about the fate of empires – and indeed about the fate of empire itself – Japan's experiences and encounters with the societies of Asia demand central attention. For it was in fact in its Asian theater that the war was most expressly and consciously framed by combatants on both sides as a war of 'liberation' from illegitimate imperial domination. As John Dower writes, 'Japan and the Anglo-American powers ... each raised the banner of liberation, morality, and peace. Whatever their actual deeds may have been, moreover, they condemned atrocities, exploitation, and theories of racial supremacy'.¹¹ The Anglo-American Atlantic charter of August 1941, for example, proclaimed that the Western Allies 'respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live; and they wish to see sovereign rights and self-government restored to those who have been

forcibly deprived of them.¹² If anything, Japan's propaganda was only more forceful on this score. 'Through the liberation of Asia,' wrote the commander of the Japanese 16th Army Java Propaganda Squad Lieutenant Colonel Machida Keiji in a newspaper article produced for the occupying forces in April 1942, 'this European modern culture built upon the exploitation of Asia is of necessity reformed, and a new world order is built. As a paradise is built for Asians, true world peace will be achieved ... and precisely through this struggle, the China Incident can be resolved for the first time ... The development of the New World Order depends on this Greater East Asia War'.¹³

In the last decade, scholars such as Daniel Hedinger, Andrew Buchanan, and Richard Overy have taken important strides in highlighting the essential character of the Second World War as a global conflict between empires.¹⁴ They thereby transcend Eurocentric and nation-centric conventions by emphasizing the global and interdependent nature of the conflict and the comparability of both Allied and Axis combatants as empires, accordingly expanding the war's chronological frame, beginning from Japan's invasion of Manchuria in 1931 and, in the case of Buchanan, also incorporating the period of anticolonial wars that followed upon the heels of the defeat of the Axis powers in 1945. This essay takes this project a step further in arguing that Asia's experience needs to be not only included but centered in our narratives of the Second World War as global history. For it was in fact in Southeast Asia that imperial combatants from 'East' and 'West' most profoundly came to blows in a death struggle over local hearts and minds as well as resources. It was here that a Japanese imperialism that billed itself as a liberation from Western imperialism and as a force of 'Asian brotherhood' and 'co-prosperity' encountered Asian societies that had indeed long suffered under the yoke of Western imperialism, and which therefore proved exceptionally receptive to Japan's stirring propaganda messages that heralded a transformed postwar global order.

Among Southeast Asia's Euro-American colonies, this popular receptivity to the Japanese was perhaps highest of all in the Netherlands East Indies, where local populations had experienced exceptionally widespread repression by,—and estrangement from—their Dutch colonial rulers. Within the Netherlands East Indies, it was the central island of Java, seat of the colonial government and densely populated home of the vast majority of the archipelago's inhabitants, that witnessed the most active anticolonial movement in the years before war. But just as Indonesians were unusually primed for an embrace of Japan's wartime propaganda of 'liberation', so too were many of the Japanese invaders easily seduced by the unusually warm Indonesian welcome, one that sharply contrasted with the staunch resistance that they faced in their ongoing, brutal, and stalemated war of colonial occupation in China. The Japanese occupiers themselves largely believed that theirs was a transcendent, 'world-historical' war of 'Asian liberation' and mobilized themselves and others to fight on this basis. Yet, at the same time they exhibited a profound blind spot when it came to their own contradictory role as imperialist aggressors. While scholars have conventionally framed (and thereby dismissed) this ambivalence as a disingenuousness or self-deception specifically inherent to the 'deceitful Japanese',¹⁵ such contradictions were in fact subsequently to become standard fare of 'liberationist' military interventions in a postwar world in which national sovereignty was soon to become a hegemonic global norm.

These exceptional levels of mutual receptivity to a liberationist discourse centered on a fundamental reversal of roles and power positions make the Japanese-Indonesian wartime interaction especially relevant to an exploration of the Second World War as a watershed moment of global transition from a world of empires to a world of nation-states, and make it a prime case within which to explore the complex, contradictory and ambiguous negotiations and exchanges between the two sides that accompanied it.

3. The triple crisis of the 1930s and the transnational appeals of a 'greater Asia'

Properly contextualizing Japanese and Indonesian experiences of wartime occupation means grasping how the world looked from the vantage point of Asia in 1942—a world then in the

throes of what can be characterized as a *triple crisis*. The first of these crises was economic. The Great Depression that began at the end of the 1920s ushered in the most profound crisis in the global liberal capitalist system in modern times. Across the globe, the Depression crisis was of such a profound and tenacious nature that it was near-universally viewed not simply as a cyclical downturn of the global liberal capitalist system, but rather as an existential crisis in the very fundamentals of the global economy itself. Put simply, across the world and across the political spectrum there was a ubiquitous sense that liberal capitalism had proven a failure, and that a radical alternative was needed. Such perspectives were strengthened through observation that the only place in the world that seemed to ride through the early 1930s crisis virtually unscathed was the Soviet Union.¹⁶

As the 1930s progressed, this ostensible 'success story' on the Left was joined by that of three radical challengers to the Anglo-American-dominated liberal capitalist global status quo on the political Right – Germany, Italy, and Japan – whose economies increasingly hummed while others stood still, thanks above all to massive state outlays in their armaments industries. Buoyed by a devalued currency, Japan's rebounding economy soon sought an outlet in the Asian markets of its Western colonial competitors. The resultant flood of cheap Japanese products into Southeast Asia (and a flood of Japanese shopkeepers selling them) raised Japan's profile and popularity among local populations, while eliciting defensive protectionist responses from their Western imperial competitors.¹⁷ Added to such developments as the negative League of Nations verdict on Japan's 1931–32 invasion of Manchuria, such exchanges heightened mutual mistrust between Japan and the Western powers, encouraging an increasing Japanese sense of self-righteousness and determination to go it alone that was symbolised by Japan's exit from the League in 1933. Hopeful anticipation of a reversal of economic fortunes at Japanese hands, inspired by this pre-war experience, was a major material reason that local populations in places such as Java were soon to welcome the Japanese occupiers with open arms.

In tandem with this crisis of capitalism, there was, second, a crisis of *empire*, heralded by the remarkable global rise of anti-colonial nationalist movements in the interwar period – a phenomenon that was at its strongest in Asia. Here, too, the rise of the Soviet Union played a catalyzing role by explicitly supporting and fomenting anti-colonial resistance throughout Asia, including an ill-fated uprising in Java in 1926. A contemporary newspaper editorial assessed Dutch unease on the eve of the uprising: 'in the Dutch East Indies, the demeanour of the native towards the European has passed by successive stages from an almost abject deference to a thinly veiled hostility. The Dutch colonists are accordingly anxious and restive ... Knowledge of the natives' history encourages the colonists in the view that the extreme plasticity of the native character renders outside influences particularly powerful in Java, and that it will prove disastrous if the Government stands weakly aside in the presence of subversive agitation.'¹⁸ The rise of fascism was the political Right's response to such threats from the left, embracing 'blood and soil' as solution. This was true not only for the Axis countries, and not only for Europe; some of the strongest embraces of fascism appeared among the colonizer communities of Europe's overseas colonies.¹⁹ In this way not only the Axis powers but the Allies too faced similar imperial crises in the interwar period, and all were compelled to respond – a response that indeed often exhibited little of the distinction that is otherwise so commonly assumed to have clearly distinguished the 'democratic' Allies from the 'autocratic' Axis.

An example of this phenomenon is the interwar Netherlands East Indies, where – under a typically colonial authoritarian, racist regime in which the 'native' population had long been essentially excluded from political participation – a home-grown Dutch fascist party from the metropole, the Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging (NSB), became the colony's largest during the 1930s. This was a far greater level of status and success than the party ever achieved in the Dutch metropole itself. Tellingly, the Dutch colonial regime only increased in repressiveness in the leadup to the Second World War. Belated Dutch calls upon their 'native brethren' to join them in resisting the Japanese fascist menace as the prospect of war in the Pacific drew near were often

met with a skeptical Indonesian response, as local populations were much more concerned about home-grown Dutch fascists than faraway Japanese ones. The subsequent, generally enthusiastic Indonesian response to the arriving Japanese in Java must be understood within this context as well.²⁰

The last of the three crises, profoundly augmented by the previous two, was a sense of crisis of 'the West' as such. This was not simply a crisis of capitalism or of empire as universal institutions, but a crisis of Western modernity itself. From the inhuman savagery of the First World War and the Russian Revolution partly engendered by it, to the unprecedented economic and social malaise and tensions in the wake of the war which culminated in the Great Depression, the interwar period was marked by a widespread sense that Western civilization was losing its way. In a Eurocentric colonial global order with Orientalist, racist, and essentialist East-West distinctions at its ideological core, such a spectre of the 'Decline of the West' (a phrase made famous by the bestseller of the same name by conservative German philosopher Oswald Spengler in the early 1920s) also helped to conjure up a narrative and discourse about an alternative 'Asian modernity' in interwar Japan that would offer a potentially transcendent solution to this crisis.²¹

Such visions were not entirely new to the interwar era: transnational notions of an Asian or Pan-Asian alliance against the West had existed in modern Asia since at least the late nineteenth century, and such classic essentialist dichotomies as 'Western materialism' versus 'Asian spirituality' could readily draw upon an older heritage of notions of a romanticized 'Orient' that was an inheritance of the invented traditions of the colonial period. As seen for example in the 'Theosophical' movement that began in British India and spread with great momentum into the Netherlands Indies at the end of the nineteenth century, such ideas were often the product of ideological interactions between the colonizers and the colonized. Yet, the specific transnational ideology of interwar Asianism that emerged in this period needs to be recognized as distinctive. Reflecting the above 'triple crisis', Asianism in the interwar period had a particularly radical edge to it and, correspondingly, possessed certain characteristics that distinguished it from earlier versions of pan-Asianism.²²

The first of these distinguishing characteristics was interwar Asianism's radical 'Occidentalism' assault on a 'Western' or 'White' modernity conceived of as illegitimate. This 'Occidentalism' was a kind of mirror-image of Western Orientalism in which Orientalism's mutually exclusive East-West dichotomy is a shared fundamental principle – an epistemology of 'East' and 'West' as two essentially different cultural, historical, and racial entities – but which resists Orientalism 'from within' through a *positive* valuation of 'Eastern' cultural traits as superior to those of the 'West,' whatever its indisputable material achievements. This superior 'Eastern' culture, characterized by such essentialized traits as spirituality, morality, love of nature, sense of community, and striving for consensus and harmony, was juxtaposed against 'Western' individualism, egotism, materialism, and greed. These negative traits were portrayed as drivers of 'Western' capitalism, class tensions, and imperialism that had brought the interwar world to the edge of ruin – thereby necessitating an 'Asian' intervention.²³

A second distinctive aspect of interwar Asianism was its simultaneous incorporation and rejection of Marxist-Leninist-inspired critiques of the evil modern forces of capitalism, imperialism, and the social strife and class tensions they engendered. Such critiques were swelling in their global influence and persuasiveness amidst the unprecedented multiple crises of the interwar era, particularly among all those resentful of the status quo. Spokesmen of interwar Asianism embraced such understandings and critiques as indeed inherent to modern life under *Euro-American* domination. In so doing, they also denied Marxism's universal applicability by proclaiming both its materialist understandings of social life and its proposed revolutionary solutions to the social contradictions of capitalism – in the form of a class revolution of the proletariat – as applicable only to 'Western' modernity. Japan's 'Asian' cultural essence both uniquely qualified it to liberate its Asian neighbors from such 'Western' afflictions, and uniquely exempted it as a target of these

same powerful critiques. A host of spokesmen both public and private proclaimed Japan to have modernized by selectively mastering Western technology and institutions while retaining a cultural 'Asianness' that imparted to Japan a social order that was not really capitalism or imperialism at all, but something that transcended both.²⁴ While essentially imperialist in its Japanese incarnation, from the perspective of global history, the self-denying claims of Japan's wartime Asianism can thus be seen to have located it in a transitional and highly ambivalent position between imperialism and anticolonial nationalism.²⁵

Interwar Asianism can thus be seen as a form of 'third-way' ideology, which proposed a path forward into modernity that would overcome the pitfalls of both liberalism and communism through a 'revival' of Asia's imagined original cultural traditions. In its emphasis on cultural purification as a means of transcending social divisions and mobilizing the masses in a common cause, one can see a close relation to the fascist ideologies that were on the rise in Europe as well as in its colonies. At the same time, one can identify an important distinction from European fascism in Asianism's ostensibly *inclusive* rhetoric towards the peoples of the occupied areas as fellow Asian racial and cultural brethren, and in its loud-throated rejection of 'Western' capitalism, imperialism, and racism as common enemies of a 'colored' humanity.²⁶

In those parts of Asia that had long suffered under Western colonial domination, such characteristics imparted to Japanese Asianism a distinctive transnational appeal that went far beyond those of either of its fascist allies in the European or Middle Eastern theaters of the war. Importantly, however, this appeal did *not* extend nearly as much into the northeast Asian theaters of the war, although its backers could be found there as well. Above all in China, where modern Japan already had a long history of colonial aggression including the invasion of Manchuria in 1931 and the full-scale war that followed in 1937, Japan's characterization of its wars in Asia as a fight to 'liberate Asia' from Western imperialism generally faced profound skepticism and resistance. In their increasingly desperate war of aggression in China that foreshadowed experiences of later colonial occupiers in places such as Vietnam and Afghanistan, the Japanese got bogged down deeper and deeper in a stalemated conflict that defied and confounded their expectations and desires, which undermined their propaganda claims to moral righteousness as 'liberators of Asia' from Western imperialism, and which thereby precipitated among many Japanese what historian Yoshimi Yoshiaki has aptly deemed a 'spiritual crisis'.²⁷ At the same time, it was in the face of this very mass rejection by the Chinese – and an increasing sense that such Chinese resistance posed an existential threat to Japan and its empire – that Japanese spokesman for a 'greater Asia' felt compelled not only to double down on such rhetoric but to increasingly elaborate upon it, thereby also increasing its radical edge. As characterized by one Japanese observer in December 1938, communism in China's villages was like 'air and water', and could not be beaten solely by military force. To win in China, Japan needed to promote 'a new ideology that is more easily assimilable than communism'.²⁸ Consciously or unconsciously, Chinese resistance can therefore be said to have played a profound role in inspiring the Japanese to appropriate more and more aspects of anticolonial nationalism as well as Marxism into their rhetoric and thinking – part of a more general, desperate attempt at wartime imperial damage control whose urgency increased by an order of magnitude in the wake of Japan's great gamble against the Western colonial powers launched in December 1941.²⁹

4. Japan's challenge to Euro-American colonialism in Southeast Asia

Forged in the crucible of the Sino-Japanese conflict, Japan's wartime 'Asianism' was thus the product of a military and ideological confrontation between imperialism and anticolonial nationalism – generating what might be called a decolonizing dialectic. This dialectic was to enter a new chapter, and expand exponentially in global-historical significance, when Japan's desperate search for a decisive resolution to the struggle in China drove it southward to challenge the

Euro-American colonial status quo itself. In taking up arms against such a potentially overwhelmingly powerful foe, Japan could simply not afford another 'China' debacle among its newly occupied Asian possessions.

Within this charged context, the developments of early 1942 represented a true turning point in world history, whose impact was profoundly deepened by the seemingly irresistible nature of Japan's initial onslaught. Observers in East and West alike were stunned by the scale and speed of Japanese military successes in the early stages of the Pacific War, not only at Pearl Harbor but in defeating a whole multitude of Western colonial armies across Southeast Asia. As Christopher Bayly and Timothy Harper put it in their classic study *Forgotten Armies: The Fall of British Asia, 1941–1945*, 'one might have to look as far back as Alexander the Great's lightning destruction of the Persian Empire of Darius to find anything like it'.³⁰ Contemporary observers were stunned at how the Japanese had apparently managed to defy all previous expectations and understandings of the relation between 'East' and 'West', thereby turning the very global imperial order on its head. This was a power shift of staggering proportions.

Viewing Japan's irresistible onslaught with mouths agape, the Western powers with the greatest investments in the Euro-American-dominated global imperial status quo were those most negatively stunned. For the Chinese, who had been single-handedly engaged in a desperate war of resistance with Japan for more than four years, it was a welcome strategic development to the degree that it diverted Japanese energies and brought new and powerful allies into the conflict.³¹ For the local populations of those Southeast Asian territories conquered by Japan who had long suffered under the Euro-American global order and had been seeking to resist it, but also for anti-colonial nationalists elsewhere in Asia and Africa as well as oppressed non-whites around the globe—including African-Americans in the United States—the astonishing shift in geopolitical power positions symbolized by Japan's victories in Southeast Asia were generally viewed as a revolutionary development in a much more empowering sense.³² The Japanese themselves were meanwhile thrilled and intoxicated with their unexpected gains. Many became convinced that Japan now stood at the cutting edge of world history; an outpouring of Hegelian references to Japan as an unparalleled 'world-historical' global force abounded in public discourse, both official and popular alike.³³ Yet such intoxication – a hubris which Japanese would later wryly refer to in retrospect as 'victory disease' – also greatly contributed to their failure to recognize the risks of their 'liberationist' gambit, not only strategically but also ideologically.³⁴ Japan's intent was to forever undermine the empires of its competitors in order to save its own. But for the Japanese no less than for their enemies, the anticolonial genie thus unleashed could not be restrained for long – let alone returned to its prewar bottle.

As noted above, specific local receptivities played a significant role in shaping the nature and outcome of the Japanese occupations of Southeast Asia. In the case of Java, the Dutch had been exploiting and oppressing Indonesians for centuries, and specifically in the two decades prior to the war, their response to both the political crisis of the rise of Indonesian nationalism and the socio-economic crisis of the Great Depression had been to double down heavy-handedly. Whereas colonial rulers in the neighboring Philippines, Burma, and India recognized the strategic value of making small and gradual concessions to moderate local nationalist elites that included promises of eventual autonomy while suppressing more 'radical' factions, the Dutch sent nationalist leader Sukarno and his right hand man Mohammad Hatta into exile on a remote island from 1934; there they remained in isolation until being liberated by the Japanese in 1942. Such Dutch intransigence, even in comparison to their regional Euro-American colonial competitors, fueled negative Indonesian attitudes towards the Dutch across virtually the entire social spectrum, and as a result, Indonesians were at the extreme end of Asian openness to the Japanese as a preferred alternative to Western rule.³⁵

A second factor contributing to this exceptional local openness to a Japanese-led 'liberation' of Java were inter-ethnic rivalries that had been fostered by the Dutch rulers as part of a

conscious policy of 'divide and rule'. The Dutch colonizers had historically granted the colony's relatively large ethnic Chinese community (roughly some 3% of the population) certain socio-economic privileges in exchange for performing services such as tax collection. With Dutch blessing, Chinese shopkeepers had moreover come to dominate the local retail economy, including moneylending and pawn shops. Such arrangements had fostered longstanding tensions between the ethnic Chinese community and ethnic Malays.³⁶ The earliest stirrings of the Indonesian nationalist movement had indeed manifested in the form of political and economic rivalry with the local ethnic Chinese. The latter was partly fueled by the increasing local ethnic Chinese assertiveness vis-à-vis the Dutch that was driven by identification with a rising Chinese nationalism in the 'old homeland', crystallizing in the revolution of 1911, which brought the downfall of the Qing dynasty. During the 1930s, Indonesians were aware of the frictions that dominated Sino-Japanese relations, as well as the brutality of Japan's war in China, but they remained largely indifferent to these developments due to pre-existing antagonisms with the local ethnic Chinese population. When the Japanese invaded the Netherlands Indies in March 1942, many Indonesians indeed hoped that pre-existing Japanese hostility towards the Chinese would bring about a shift in local power structures that would allow them to assume a higher social position at the expense of the ethnic Chinese as a 'shared enemy'.

In an essay published in Indonesian nationalist newspaper *Pemandangan* in Batavia (Jakarta) several weeks after the Japanese defeat of the Dutch, Islamic nationalist leader Anwar Tjokroaminoto pointed ominously to fascist antisemitic purges in Europe as a model for how the 'Indonesian race' should reckon with 'inhabitants' whose 'jewish [sic] nature' predisposed them to the corruption of Indonesia's culture and the exploitation of its people.

As Germany once faced the society of Jews, as a result of the Weimar Republic, so Indonesia too has a problem of jewishness. Meaning that there are more than a few among Indonesia's inhabitants who truly possess a jewish nature, whose behavior is jewish behavior. Laws that do not prohibit prostitution, for example, are exploited to run houses of prostitution.... In the social environment, there are also not a few instances of 'man eats man', meaning one sucks the other dry, assuming many forms, such as usury, or pursued by others through other means. People's poverty has been exploited in producing a system of credit (*systeem bon*), until the life of the average Indonesian is a life on credit, even though life on credit is more expensive than life on cash. This jewish-type of person does not fail to take maximum advantage of the peasants' ignorance. For example, when the peasant buys something, the scales are weighted heavy, while the contents are reduced. If the peasant sells something, the scales are lightened, even as the contents are many.

'Just as the German race has risen up in the aim of shining forth all its [true] qualities', concluded Tjokroaminoto, 'so the new Indonesia, under Japanese leadership, deeply desires the same sort of change, the cleanest possible filtration (*saringan*)'.³⁷ Although Tjokroaminoto did not mention the ethnic Chinese by name, the reference to local moneylending would have made the identity of the group he was referring to crystal clear for any local reader.

The promises that accompanied Japan's invasion forces thus found fertile ground among the alienated and oppressed peoples of the Netherlands Indies. But most drawn to Japan's radical Asianist ideology were members of an educated but frustrated sub-elite that was socially positioned in-between the indigenous upper nobility that had traditionally cooperated with the Dutch above them, and the massive, largely illiterate, primarily agricultural working class below them. It was from amongst this emerging middle class that Indonesia's nationalist movement had sprouted in the three previous decades.

'The times demand a new spirit', wrote H. B. Jassin, editor of the formerly Dutch-sponsored arts and culture magazine *Pandji Poestaka*, in an editorial representative of the views of this class several weeks after the Dutch surrender to the Japanese. 'We have absorbed everything Western and denigrated everything Eastern, everything that was originally ours. The Japanese are great because they could absorb the new while retaining what was theirs. We must replant our bravery, and bring back our belief in ourselves'.³⁸ In another essay Jassin envisioned an Asian order

in which 'the races of the East will stand and be led by the hand, not as 'colonized' races, but as races that are brothers, ready to help one another with the guidance of the Japanese race'.³⁹ Such statements reflected a more general Indonesian acceptance of the notion of Japanese leadership as such – so long as the Japanese came through on their promise of a mutual relationship that would transcend that of (Western) colonialism. To this extent one should consider interwar Asianism not only as a Japanese phenomenon, but also as a transnational one.

The comparatively warm Indonesian reception in turn prompted a positive response from the Japanese, fueled by an obvious sense of relief that their failures to captivate Asian hearts and minds in China were not being repeated here. Cast in the shining light of the Indonesian welcome, Japan's previous imperial failures—above all the ongoing, tenacious resistance it was encountering in occupied China—were all the more easily attributed to the ignorant Chinese themselves, whose inborn arrogance, backwardness and corruptibility by the West, the Japanese argued, rendered them incapable of grasping Japan's 'world-historical' liberation mission. A self-congratulatory mid-1942 editorial published in *Unabara*, a Japanese language newspaper produced by the 16th Army propaganda squad (*Jawa sendenhan*) in Batavia (Jakarta) for local Japanese consumption, summarized this sentiment in the form of a revealing anecdote.

There is a story of the China pacification squad (*Shina senbuhan*).⁴⁰

They argued that Japan and China have the same script and are of the same race (*dōbun dōshu*), they are brothers, and they should proceed with hands joined.

Someone in the audience replied – Alright, but China is the older brother.

It is said the members of the pacification unit had no words to answer this for some time.

How wonderful if they had been able to reply immediately.

It is a problem of history – when you are properly aware of Japan's history, the answer is extremely simple.

Japan has always been leader of the Asia-Pacific sphere from ancient times – if you know this history, that is enough.

Japan has always been constructing China – if you know this history, that is enough.

We are now seeing this truth with our own eyes in the Greater East Asia War.

We must be aware that this truth before our eyes has been continuously repeated in China since ancient times.

What is true in China is, again, true in the southern regions. Japanese people, take great pride!⁴¹

Such renewed imperial confidence, verging on euphoria, could also be measured in a Japanese rush to identify Indonesians in romantic terms as authentic Asian brethren, including discourses of the wartime encounter as a 'restoration' of ancient, 'natural' historical bonds between the two peoples that had been preternaturally torn asunder by the evil machinations of Western imperialism. The search for 'evidence' of such ancient links yielded emotionally charged identifications of purported cultural, linguistic, socioeconomic, and even racial commonalities between Japanese and Malay peoples. In perhaps the most counter-intuitive of the many role-reversals thus far highlighted in this article, such evidence was construed to situate the Japanese as culturally and even racially 'closer' to Southeast- than to Northeast Asians. In prewar days, Japan had justified its colonial rule in Northeast Asia *via* the slogan of 'same script, same race' (*dōbun dōshu*) which argued that Japan's nearest neighbors were also those racially closest to it, with the common use of Chinese characters as evidence. During the war years, Japan was now imposing a policy of heightened assimilation (*kōminka*, literally 'making of imperial subjects') upon Koreans and Taiwanese, a policy which was also based upon an assertion of racial and cultural proximity and even racial

equality.⁴² Yet on occupied ground in Java, the objective unlikelihood of a 'closer racial link' between Japanese and Indonesians was ideologically overruled by its colonial utility. For such romantic notions of a pre-existing Japanese-Indonesian connection through time and space allowed the Japanese not only to naturalize their relationship of domination over Indonesia, but also, in classically colonial fashion, to dismiss the contrasting resistance they faced from Northeast Asians as the blind and ignorant product of an inferior and more distant racial and cultural inheritance.



The cartoon 'Rice Planter Girls', which appeared in *Unabara* in May 1942, highlights such energetic wartime ideological efforts.⁴³ In it, cartoonist Ono Saseo illustrated a notion of shared Japanese-Indonesian origins expressed by many Japanese in occupied Java. 'As shown in the picture there is hardly any difference between the rice planter girls of Japan and *Unabara*' he wrote in the accompanying text. 'They must have been the same since ancient times'. 'Unabara' was an ancient Japanese term meaning 'great ocean', here used to refer to Indonesia and the wider South Pacific region.

In light of the profound contradictions between Japan's propaganda claims and increasingly bitter wartime realities, it did not take long for such initial romantic visions and hopes to be betrayed in actual practice. This undermined the early optimism that was to a remarkable extent initially shared across the national divide between Japanese and Indonesians. As Japan's occupation evolved into what one might call 'colonial normalcy', the early honeymoon was soon punctured by disappointing experiences of cultural friction, colonial arrogance, economic dislocation, and everyday violence at Japanese hands. As the war situation grew more desperate, Japanese priorities of maximal exploitation of local resources and labor combined fatally with ignorant, racist, and repressive colonial attitudes towards Southeast Asians. As millions of Indonesians were mobilized for forced labor even as they faced spiraling inflation and growing shortages of food, clothing, and medicines, a nightmare of practically biblical proportions ensued. Estimates put the cumulative figure of dead due to starvation, disease, and hyper-exploitation at roughly 4 million

across the Indonesian archipelago, and roughly 3 million in its central and most populous island of Java alone.⁴⁴ By war's end in August 1945, most Indonesians had experienced the Japanese occupation as even more destructive and rapacious than Dutch colonial rule. In a very real sense, both for Indonesians and for Japanese, the notion of Japan's Southeast Asian occupations as capable of achieving a 'world-historical' role-reversal of the unjust, violent, exploitative relations of 'Western-style' colonialism had revealed itself as little more than a deadly mirage. In the war's early aftermath, H. B. Jassin retrospectively compared Japanese wartime propaganda to 'nothing more than beautiful balloons, each bigger and more brilliantly colored than the last, but their contents only air'.⁴⁵

Still, Japan's propaganda, while ultimately indeed undermining Japan's own cause, nevertheless contributed profoundly to the momentum of Indonesian anticolonial resistance against the shared Western enemy, as it had incessantly highlighted the injustices and outdatedness of Western imperialism as an inhumane system whose demise was both necessary and imminent. As such, the promised role reversal had a longer, unintended legacy after 1945: Betrayed by the Japanese, Indonesians were more than ever unwilling to fulfill the colonial role that the returning Dutch attempted to re-impose upon them after the Second World War. It was to be a painful global history lesson for the Dutch (along with their equally naïve French counterparts in Indochina). Not only the self-seductions of their colonial rhetoric of a distinctly 'benevolent' empire but also their own wartime travails and distractions under occupation by Nazi Germany had combined to blind them to the global-historical sea change that had taken place in Asia in the years under Japanese rule.⁴⁶ After 1945, Indonesians responded to Dutch re-colonization efforts with armed resistance every bit as fierce as that which the Japanese had earlier encountered in their war in China.

5. Conclusion

Conventionally, the story of the Japanese-Indonesian wartime encounter ends here, with the revelation of the role reversal promised by the Japanese rulers as little more than a cruel apparition, ultimately fostering widespread hatred of the Japanese as hypocrites and betrayers that often surpassed that of the previous colonial rulers, and thereby helping fuel a decisive postwar Southeast Asian turn against colonialism and 'fascism' in all its forms, be it 'Western' or 'Eastern'. In the end, Southeast Asians conventionally remembered Japan's occupations, like those in Northeast Asia, in stark terms of barbarity and backwardness, thereby consigning Japan's war-times dreams to the realm of nightmare – and to the dustbin of history.

Nevertheless, the legacies of the wartime experience for both Japan and Indonesia – including the ideological intersections between Japanese imperialism and Indonesian nationalism – were more complex and multifaceted than conventional histories would generally suggest. In its attempt to simultaneously undermine the legitimacy of 'Western' imperial domination and to create an imaginary exception for itself as an 'Asian' alternative, Japan's wartime 'Asianist' rhetoric had ambivalent effects. Most Indonesians responded enthusiastically to Japanese critiques of Western imperialism. As Japanese 'anti-imperialist' hypocrisy became increasingly apparent, most also ultimately rejected the Japanese. Yet, Japanese-espoused notions of 'Asian'-style nation-building through a marriage of Western material and technological modernity and a rediscovery of local 'Asian traditions' essentially different from those of the West found a resonance that would last far beyond the ultimately disastrous Japanese occupation itself—above all for those nationalists whose social position and politics continued to predispose them towards a search for a 'third way' between 'Western' liberal capitalism and 'Western' communism. In particular for many among Indonesia's anticolonial nationalist class who assumed positions of power at the end of empire, notions of an indigenous 'Asian' cultural and social order characterized by a 'traditional' social corporatism transcendent of the tensions of class and gender inherent to 'Western' modernity – of the Asian nation-state as one big happy family – would retain a lasting and problematic appeal.

Telling in this regard was H.B. Jassin's contradictory acknowledgement of Japan's wartime propaganda as 'beautiful balloons' three years after war's end, even as he dismissed their empty contents. Even as they sought to dismiss and discredit Japanese propaganda, such characterizations also belied the latter's continued seductive appeal, above all to those like Jassin positioned in the social middle. Even if Japan faded as quickly as it had arisen from Southeast Asia's historical stage, many Indonesian nationalists continued to seek to realize the developmental promise of Western material and technological modernity while fending off both the social alienation and dehumanization of 'Western' liberal capitalism and the frightening upheaval of 'Western' Marxist-Leninist-style social revolution through an appeal to a cultural 'restoration' via imagined traditional 'Eastern' morals and values which 'Western' capitalism had eroded. In the 1980s, as Japan's postwar status revived in tandem with its economic success, leaders of such societies as Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia joined Japanese spokesmen in purveying a discourse of capitalist development characterized by 'Asian Values' – values that rendered the imposition of 'Western' notions of universal human rights, gender equality, and democracy upon an essentially different 'Asia' as little more than cultural imperialism.

Having arrived as a dream and left as a nightmare, notions of a 'Greater Asia' thus continued to haunt postwar, postcolonial Asia in a nebulous space between the two, offering seductively simple 'traditional', 'indigenous' recipes for modern ailments even as the inherited domestic social contradictions of colonialism remained as tenacious as ever, and even as the interests of the (former) colonial powers continued to dictate many of the parameters of Indonesian development and governance – particularly after the overthrow of a too-autonomous Sukarno by the more pliable Suharto after 1965. For the mass of Indonesia's population still awaiting concrete solutions to ongoing problems of poverty and exploitation decades after national independence, the promised role reversal of an Asian-style 'overcoming of modernity' remained a phantom. Yet its ongoing staying power for Indonesia's elites across time, space, and political regime is reflected in Megawati Sukarnoputri's inaugural address as Indonesia's president in August 2001. In it – at a critical moment some 56 years after the Japanese surrender, 52 years after Indonesian independence, 36 years after her father Sukarno's overthrow in a military coup led by General Suharto, and 3 years after the fall of the Suharto-led military dictatorship itself – Megawati chose to look backwards rather than forwards, taking as her cabinet's theme and slogan an indigenous term for 'mutual cooperation' (*gotong-royong*) that had first gained wide prominence during the Japanese occupation. The continuities and echoes of the interwar Asianism that had appealed not only to Megawati's father but to so many other of Sukarno's generation of Indonesian nationalists are suggestive.

I, as President of the Republic of Indonesia, have assembled a government whose cabinet I call the Mutual Cooperation (*gotong-royong*) Cabinet. This title is more than just a name. Indeed it precisely represents the life-essence of the Indonesian people/nation (*bangsa*) as family-society. We must therefore continue to preserve *gotong-royong* with care. Because only by discarding all personal interests can we work together shoulder-to-shoulder in mutual cooperation to escape from the crisis that has occupied us for so long.⁴⁷

Notes

1. The title as well as the contents of Nicholas Tarling's, *A Sudden Rampage: The Japanese Occupation of Southeast Asia, 1941-1945* (University of Hawaii Press, 2001), are exemplary of such conventional characterizations.
2. See for example Prasenjit Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2003).
3. See for example the introduction to *Imperial Japan and National Identities in Asia*, whose editors Robert Cribb and Li Narangoa assert, 'For the most part...what the Southeast Asians, like the Tibetans and the Mongolians, learnt' from the Japanese, 'were technical skills not worldviews'. Copenhagen: Nordic Institute for Asian Studies, 2003, 8. Nakano Satoshi's more recent *Japan's Colonial Moment in Southeast Asia 1942-1945* (Routledge, 2018) offers important nuance on the diversity of Japanese experience of occupation, emphasizing the significance of Japanese disillusionment in the imperial enterprise prompted by the gap between

propaganda and reality, but it has less to say about the complex implications of the exchange for Southeast Asians. 'By taking notice of the Japanese "colonial experience," especially as it regards the occupation of Southeast Asia and its failure,' he writes, 'what emerges is the experience of discovering the fact that the ways in which the Japanese Empire dealt with "the Other" known as Southeast Asia just didn't work and thus exposing the real meaning of the historical shock inflicted by that experience on Japanese participants.' Nakano, Op. Cit., 20.

4. Typical is Gerhard L. Weinberg's assertion, 'certainly the Japanese never would have expanded the war with China which they had been waging since 1937 into a portion of the wider conflict had it not been for the great German victories in the West in 1940. Without those victories, the East Asian fighting, however terrible for those involved and especially for the vast number of Chinese killed in it, would have remained an isolated war like that Japan and China had fought in 1894-95'. Weinberg, *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II* (Cambridge University Press, 2005).
5. The recent work of Andrew Buchanan constitutes a significant exception to this common frame, which Buchanan himself describes as follows: 'Historians following the so-called global and transnational "turns" have long foregrounded flows of people, goods and ideas across globalized space while downplaying traditional nationcentric modes of historiographical discourse. In particular [however], the global turn has thus far run into a roadblock with the Second World War. Despite its eminent globality, this worldwide war has received little attention from global historians, perhaps because, despite a plethora of still largely unexplored avenues of transnationality, its single most significant outcome was the "volcanic eruption" of the American nation state and the consolidation of its new, if qualified, hegemonic order'. Andrew Buchanan, 'Viewpoint: Globalizing the Second World War', *Past and Present*, 258:1 (2023), 247.
6. A pioneering and inspiring exception to this pattern is Takashi Fujitani, *Race for Empire: Koreans as Japanese and Japanese as Americans During World War II* (University of California Press, 2011).
7. See footnote 1 as well as the classic evaluation appearing in the textbook *East Asia: Tradition and Transformation* (Houghton Mifflin, 1989), 724-25, whose authors John Fairbank, Edwin O. Reischauer, and Albert Craig write that in wartime Japan, 'it was not necessary to disinter archaic myths, [for] these were still alive ... Japan was not fully modern'.
8. At least until recently, such teleological perspectives on Japan's war are so pervasive in both scholarly and popular renderings that the challenge is not to find literature that reflects them, but to find literature that does not. A prime example of a constantly reproduced and over-emphasized trope of this sort in the literature on occupied Indonesia is the way that the quick Japanese decision to ban the flying of the Indonesian flag and the singing of the Indonesian national anthem within weeks of the beginning of the occupation is typically narrated (see for example *Sukarno: An Autobiography as Told to Cindy Adams*, Bobbs Merrill, 1965). In retrospect it was all too easy to see this event as symbolic confirmation of the essential nature of Japanese rule as cynical, repressive, conservative, and colonial. While it is understandable that this event receives a great deal of scholarly and popular attention as such, the problem is that postwar narrator after narrator thereby assumes that this meaning was equally obvious to observers on the ground *at the time*. Careful attention to the actual documentary record reveals that it was not, as many observers were more susceptible to the appeals of 'Greater Asian' ideology than they later tended to admit, and were therefore inclined to give the Japanese the benefit of the doubt, at least at such an early stage of the occupation. A recent exception to this paradigm is Jeremy Yellen's treatment of Burmese and Filipino leaders' wartime responses to the Japanese, which he characterizes as 'patriotic collaboration'. A similarly nuanced characterization of Chinese wartime collaborator Wang Jingwei can be found in John Hunter Boyle's classic *China and Japan at War, 1937-1945: The Politics of Collaboration* (Stanford University Press, 1972).
9. A classic example of such literature is *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, edited by Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (University of California Press, 1997). See also for example Sebastian Conrad, 'Rethinking German Colonialism in a Global Age', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 41:4 (2013), 543-66.
10. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton University Press, 2000).
11. John Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (Pantheon Books, 1986), 15. See also Akira Iriye, *Power and Culture: The Japanese-American War, 1941-1945* (Harvard University Press, 1981).
12. Text of the Atlantic Charter published on August 14th 1941, viewed at https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_16912.htm on 4/16/2025.
13. Machida Keiji, 'Wareware no tatakai', *Unabara*, 3 Apr. 1942, p 1.
14. See Daniel Hedinger, 'The Imperial Nexus: The Second World War and the Axis in Global Perspective', *Journal of Global History*, 12:2 (2017), 2; Andrew Buchanan, *World War II in Global Perspective, 1931-1953: A Short History* (Wiley Blackwell, 2019) and 'Viewpoint', Op. Cit.; and Richard Overy, *Blood and Ruins: The Great Imperial War 1931-1945* (Allen Lane, 2021).
15. 'The desire to plunge into conquest was not new to the Japanese', wrote M.A. Aziz in a 1955 doctoral dissertation that baldly reproduced countless such Orientalist tropes, 'who, being the Chosen People, always

- believed in the divine mission of Japan to conquer and rule other countries'. M. A. Aziz, 'Japan's Colonialism and Indonesia', Martinus Nijhoff N.V. 1955.
16. See for example Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991* (Abacus, 1995), 98.
 17. For a contemporaneous Indonesian perspective on these developments see for example G.S.S.J. Ratu Langie, *Indonesia in den Pacific: kernproblemen van den Aziatischen Pacific*, S.I./s.n., 1937
 18. 'Dutch Policy in Java: Propaganda and the Native', *The Times* (London), republished in *The Singapore Free Press*, 7 October 1926 (no author named). Cited in Kankan Xie, 'The Netherlands East Indies 1926 Communist Revolt Revisited: New Discoveries from Singapore's Digital Newspaper Archives' in *Chapters on Asia* (Singapore National Library Board, 2018), 267-268.
 19. See for example George Padmore, 'Fascism in the Colonies', *Controversy*, 2:17 (1938), and Aimé Cesaire, 'Discours sur le colonialisme', Reclame, 1950.
 20. See for example Ethan Mark, 'Fascisms Seen and Unseen: The Netherlands, Japan, Indonesia, and the Relationalities of Imperial Crisis' in Julia Adeney Thomas and Greg Eley (ed), *Visualizing Fascism: The Twentieth-Century Rise of the Global Right* (Duke University Press, 2020), 183-210.
 21. See for example Ethan Mark, 'Asia's Transwar Lineage: Nationalism, Marxism, and 'Greater Asia' in an Indonesian Inflection', *Journal of Asian Studies* 65:3 (2006), 461-93.
 22. Ibid.
 23. See for example Sanoesi Pane, 'Java en de 'Buitengewesten' [Java and the 'Hinterlands']. *Timboel*, 5:19 (1931), 1-2.
 24. See for example Harry Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity: History, Culture and Community in Interwar Japan* (Princeton University Press, 2000).
 25. See for example Germaine Hoston, 'Marxism and National Socialism in Taishō Japan: The Thought of Takabatake Motoyuki', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 44:1 (1984), 43-64.
 26. See Mark, 'Asia's Transwar Lineage', Op. Cit.
 27. Yoshimi Yoshiaki, *Grassroots Fascism: The War Experience of the Japanese People*, translated by Ethan Mark (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 68, 79.
 28. Kamiizumi Hidenobu, 'Kore kara no bōkyōsen', *Bungei shunju genchi hōkoku*, December 1938, 65.
 29. As Army Information Bureau chief Mabuchi Itsuo grudgingly admitted in a 1940 text, China was 'winning in the propaganda war even as they are losing miserably on the battlefield'. Mabuchi Itsuo, *Hōdō sensen* (Tokyo: Kaizōsha, 1940), 191.
 30. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2006.
 31. See for example Rana Mitter, *Forgotten Ally: China's World War II 1937-1945* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013).
 32. On African-American responses to Japan's attacks on the Allies in the Asia-Pacific, see for example Gerald Horne, *Race War! White Supremacy and the Japanese Attack on British Empire* (NYU Press, 2004) and John Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (W. W. Norton & Company, 1986).
 33. See for example Harry Harootunian, *Overcome By Modernity*, Op. Cit.
 34. See John Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (Rowman and Littlefield, 1999), 22.
 35. For a comparison between the experiences of Indonesia and the Philippines, for example, see Theodore Friend, *The Blue-Eyed Enemy: Japan Against the West in Java and Luzon* (Princeton University Press, 1988). Friend observes that such Dutch intransigence was no doubt partly a function of the sheer degree of Dutch investment in their Indonesian colony, above all economic but also social and cultural, which dwarfed that of the US in the Philippines on all counts. As a popular early postwar Dutch slogan proclaimed, 'Indië verloren, rampspoed geboren (loss of the Indies—the birth of disaster)!'
 36. See for example J. S. Furnivall, *Netherlands India: A Study of Plural Economy* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1938).
 37. Anwar Tjokroaminoto, 'Saringan', in *Pemandangan*, 4 Apr. 1942, 1. 'Jewishness' (*jahoedism*) was not capitalized.
 38. H.B. Jassin, 'Perasaan koerang harga diri, semangat boedak', *Pandji Poestaka*, 18 Apr. 1942, 38-40. For a fuller discussion of such texts and the context in which they appeared, see Ethan Mark, *Japan's Occupation of Java in the Second World War: A Transnational History* (Bloomsbury, 2018).
 39. H.B. Jassin, 'Semangat Boesjido Dan Kita', *Pandji Poestaka*, 11 Apr. 1942, 10.
 40. Created under the auspices of the South Manchurian Railway Company (*Mantetsu*), *Senbuhan* squads consisted of men familiar with local languages and culture that were meant to use their knowledge to blend into the local population and establish local political leadership. See Timothy Brook, *Collaboration: Japanese Agents and Local Elites in Wartime China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 34-36.
 41. 'Sekidōhō' editorial section (written by editor Shimizu Nobuo), *Unabara*, 2 Jul. 1942, 1. For a fuller discussion of *Unabara*, its producers and its audience, see Mark, *Japan's Occupation*, Op. Cit.
 42. See Fujitani, *Race for Empire*, Op. Cit.
 43. *Unabara*, May 30th 1942, 1.
 44. United Nations Economic and Social Council, *Report of the Working Group for Asia and the Far East*, Supp. 10, 1947, 13-14.
 45. H. B. Jassin, *Kesusatraan Indonesia di Masa Jepang* (Balai Poestaka, 1948), 15.
 46. See for example Jennifer L. Foray, *Visions of Empire in the Nazi Occupied Netherlands* (Cambridge University Press, 2012).
 47. President Megawati Sukarnoputri as cited in *Radio Nederland Warta Berita*, 12 Aug. 2001.

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Data availability statement

All sources for this research are publically available.