

# Ideology and Solidarity: A Portrait of Japanese and Indonesian Intellectual Relations as Recorded in *Jawa Kantei Yowa* by Asano Akira

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## Abstract

This research aims to discover the relationship between Japanese and Indonesian intellectuals during the Japanese military occupation of Indonesia, as recorded by Asano Akira during his assignment in Indonesia in 1942. Serving as members of the Propaganda Division in Indonesia, these Japanese intellectuals had to recruit and collaborate with Indonesian intellectuals to further Japan's military objectives in the Greater East Asia War. The method used in this research is qualitative, employing textual analysis. The research reveals that Asano's interest in the ideas of Arthur Schopenhauer and Okakura Tenshin on asceticism, self-denial, simplicity, and Eastern aesthetics, nurtured his Eastern ideological perspectives. It was from this ideology that he eventually came to feel solidarity with his fellow Asians oppressed by Western domination. Therefore, this sense of ideology ultimately led him to establish friendships and cooperate with Indonesian intellectuals while serving in the Propaganda Division of Japanese Military Government.

**Keywords:** Asano Akira; Asia; Japanese Intellectuals; Indonesian Intellectuals; *Jawa Kantei Yowa*

## 1. Introduction

Nowadays, the extensive research has been conducted on the history of relations between Indonesia and Japan during the Asia-Pacific War from 1942 to 1945. However, most are seen from the political, military, and economic sides. Research on the relationship between Japanese and Indonesian intellectuals working as journalists and culturalists remains limited. Among these studies, for example, was conducted by Syahrur Marta Dwisusilo titled *The Mobility and Ideological Perspectives of Asano Akira in Java during the Japanese Occupation* (2020). Dwisusilo concluded that Asano Akira, a writer who was sent to Java as a member of the Japanese Propaganda Division, had a strong belief in the Greater Asia ideology, which was practiced in journalism and educational activities by involving Indonesian people who shared the same views on Dutch colonialism. However, this research only focuses on the application of the ideology without further discussing its relationship with Indonesian intellectuals at the time.

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The next research is titled *Japanese Propaganda Methods in Indonesia during the Military Occupation: Focusing on Kitahara Takeo's Indoneshiajin no Seikaku* (2020). Anggraeni highlights the writings of Kitahara Takeo, a writer and member of the Japanese Military Propaganda Division sent to Java in 1942. Kitahara urged the Japanese military to adopt firm policies rather than rely on mere slogans, arguing that such measures would contribute to the progress and prosperity of the Indonesian nation, thereby realizing the vision of a “Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere.” In this research, Anggraeni focuses on criticizing the Japanese military government's policies towards the Indonesians while overlooking the cooperation efforts between Indonesian and Japanese intellectuals.

This research aims to reveal the cooperative relationships between Japanese and Indonesian intellectuals during the Japanese military occupation in Indonesia, particularly in Java, which have not been thoroughly explored in prior studies. The primary focus of this research is the book *Jawa Kantei Yowa* (Notes on an Assignment in Java, 1944), written by Asano Akira during his assignment as a member of the Japanese Military Propaganda Division in Java. The book documents many initiatives of the Propaganda Division to recruit Indonesian intellectuals and foster collaboration in journalism, education, and the cultural arts. By examining these relationships, this research seeks to uncover previously underexplored facts regarding intellectual exchanges at the grassroots level during the Japanese military occupation of Indonesia.

## 2. Methods

This research uses an interpretative qualitative method, focusing on a literature review of Asano Akira's book *Jawa Kantei Yowa* (Notes on an Assignment in Java) and other relevant sources supporting the study. The researcher employs a New Historicism approach to interpret the text, which helps examine how it connects with its historical context. This perspective emphasizes that a text is not isolated; it relates to various aspects like social, cultural, economic, and political factors. By looking into the history behind the text, we can better understand its meaning. Through this approach, the researcher aims to uncover insights about the connections—both ideological and personal—between Japanese and Indonesian intellectuals.

## 3. Result and Discussion

### 3.1 Asano Akira and *Jawa Kantei Yowa*: Notes on an Assignment in Java

Asano Akira was a Japanese poet and writer born in Otsu City, Shiga Prefecture, on August 15, 1901, and passed away on January 29, 1990. He graduated from the Faculty of Law at Tokyo Imperial University in 1925 and joined the Communist Party of Japan the following year. In addition to his interest in Marxism, he admired Okakura Tenshin's (1863-1913) views on Eastern culture. In 1938, he was sent to Wuhan, China, as part of the Japanese Army's Propaganda Division during the Japanese-China War. After returning to Japan, he rejoined the Propaganda Division and was assigned to Java Island, where he stayed from March to October 1942. Following the war, he transitioned into academia, where he served as a professor at the Faculty of Letters at Rissho University in Tokyo from 1955 until 1976. He passed away in 1990 at the age of 89 due to heart failure.

Asano Akira wrote numerous books and essays on literature and culture throughout his life. During his assignment to Java in 1943 he wrote many essays which were published in the

mass media both in Indonesia and Japan. These essays were published in 2 books: *Ensei Zengo* (Before and After Expedition) published by Nihon Bunrinsha Tokyo and *Jawa Kantei Yowa* (Notes on an Assignment in Java) published by Hakusuisha Tokyo in 1944. Slightly different from *Jawa Kantei Yowa*, the *Ensei Zengo* contains essays about his thoughts on Javanese cultures. In 1996, Professor Kimura Kazuaki (1946-2015) collected all of Asano Akira's essays relating to assignments in Java and then republished them by Ryukeishosha Tokyo into 3 books: *Nanpo Choyo Sakka Sousho 1 :Jawa Kantei Yowa* (The Collection of Southern recruitmen writer's works 1: Notes on an Assignment in Java), *Nanpo Choyo Sakka Sousho 2: Ensei Zengo* (The Collection of Southern recruitmen writer's works 2: Before and After Expedition), and *Nanpo Choyo Sakka Sousho 3* (The Collection of Southern recruitmen writer's works 3: Collection of Essays).

His book *Jawa Kantei Yowa* (Notes on an Assignment in Java) was originally written in Japanese and published in 1944 by Hakusuisha Publishers in Tokyo. It serves as a record of his experiences during his time in Java. The book consists of 25 chapters, plus an additional chapter as an epilogue. Below are the chapter titles (originally in Japanese and translated in English by researcher): (1) Boestami Sensei, (2) Balai Pustaka, (3) First Contact with Local People, (4) Serang, (5) Chihaya School, (6) Yaeshio, (7) Lieutenant General Imamura, (8) Establishing Asia Raja, (9) The Leader of Parindra, (10) Singing Songs in the Middle of the Ocean, (11) About Local Poetry, (12) The Ideal of East, (13) Indonesian Latest News, (14) Japanese Language in the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, (15) Memories in the Vast Ocean, (16) Travel and Reading, (17) Local Conditions and Reading Books, (18) At the Tip of Java, (19) Literary Discussions, (20) Southern Expansion of Japanese Films, (21) About War Record Films, (22) Morning in Java, (23) Yaeshio's Final Notes, (24) Past and Present, (25) The Beginning of Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, and Java in My View(as addition).

The book also includes four photographs taken during Asano's time in Java. These images commemorate soldiers who died on the battlefield, celebrate the emperor's birthday in front of the Asia Raja newspaper office (spelled as Asia Raya), depict the learning environment at Chihaya School, and show a group photo taken at the Asia Raja editorial office (Asano, 3-4). From these four photographs, we can infer that Asano's main focus during his assignment was on military duty, journalistic work, and the education of the local community, particularly through the establishment of the Japanese model school, Chihaya Gakkou.

In the Preface of his book, Asano recounts his first landing as a member of the Army Propaganda Division in Banten Bay on March 1, 1942. After serving several months, he returned to Japan in October of the same year. He concludes his Preface by praising the Japanese Imperial Army's success in occupying Java's entire island. He expresses a desire to convey this experience to future generations. He also conveys his gratitude to the military leadership for the opportunity afforded him and vows to remember the spirit of the Imperial Japanese soldiers who fought on the battlefield (Asano, 5-6). From the Preface, we gain insight into the atmosphere of the ongoing war at the time the book was published in 1944.

In chapter "The Beginning of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere", Asano highlights various aspects of Indonesian life and its similarities with Japan. He observes that life in Java has been good and modern, indicating the success of the Dutch East Indies government's infrastructure development. Consequently, he argues that policies of violent colonization have become irrelevant (Asano, 208). While Asano notes the welcoming attitude

of the Javanese towards the Japanese, he emphasizes the need for the Japanese to improve certain behaviours, such as prohibiting children from smoking. He believes that care and guidance grounded in love can enhance the quality of life (Asano, 213). Additionally, Asano discusses the support and cooperation offered by Indonesian intellectuals and leaders to the Japanese military government in achieving the common goal of prosperity for Asian nations (Asano, 226-227). This reflects Asano's personal interest in the thoughts of Okakura Tenshin, a Japanese intellectual from the Meiji Period, who advocated for Asian nations to unite against Western domination that did not align with Asian identities. Furthermore, Asano explores Okakura's ideas on Eastern culture in the chapter titled "Eastern Ideals."

Okakura Tenshin (1863-1913), also known as Okakura Kakuzo, was a prominent figure during the Meiji Period, recognized for his contributions as both a painter and a culturalist. Despite being an Eastern artist, he extensively traveled to Europe and the United States to study Western art and to China and India to deepen his understanding of Eastern art traditions. His reflections on the existence and uniqueness of Eastern art and culture were articulated in several influential books written in English and published in Europe and America, including *The Ideal of the East* (1903), *The Awakening of Japan* (1904), and *The Book of Tea* (1906).

A key theme in Okakura's writings is the importance of appreciating and preserving Asian cultural heritage, alongside recognizing the spiritual and aesthetic values inherent in Asian traditions. His notion of aesthetics emphasizes simplicity, naturalness, and spiritual depth, hallmarks of Eastern thought. Okakura aimed to foster awareness of Asian identity and pride, advocating for a meaningful dialogue between Western and Eastern cultures. This perspective significantly influenced Asano's views on Asian nations, including Indonesia, which he believed must rise against the materialistic dominance of Western culture.

In addition to Okakura's influence, Asano was deeply interested in the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860), renowned for his seminal work *The World as Will and Representation* (1818). Schopenhauer's philosophy, which focused on atheistic development and rejected the prevailing ideas of German idealists, was notably shaped by Indian philosophies, particularly concepts of asceticism and self-denial. This intersection of Eastern and Western thought further enriched Asano's understanding of the cultural dynamics during his time. As a result of the ideology influence of these two great philosophers with roots in Indian and Asian culture, Asano has a lot of sympathy and solidarity with Indonesian intellectuals who were struggling to free themselves from Western domination.

### 3.2 Boestami: A Respected Indonesian Figure

One of the most memorable figures for Asano was Boestami, whom he affectionately referred to as "Boestami Sensei." In the first chapter of his book, Asano vividly describes Boestami as a 60-year-old poet (in 1942) with a round face and a prominent nose. His bushy mustache sat above thick lips, and when he twisted the ends of his mustache, they resembled the pointed styles of elderly men in rural Japan. Boestami's relaxed manner of speaking and frequent laughter created a warm and inviting atmosphere. From their first meeting, Asano felt strongly fondly for him (Asano, 12).

Asano further elaborates that Boestami was the Malay language teacher of his colleague Ichiki Tatsuo, who had previously lived in Indonesia. During the Dutch colonial period, Boestami was a linguistic officer at Balai Poestaka (*De Commissie voor de Volkslectuur*).

Before the arrival of the Japanese in Java, Boestami resided in Bandung with his family. However, following the Japanese invasion, Ichiki invited Boestami to join him in establishing the Asia Raja newspaper in Jakarta. This collaboration allowed Asano and Boestami to work closely together daily. Boestami's primary responsibility involved proofreading Malay articles by Nakatani Yoshio and Nakata before publication. His cheerful demeanor and support for Japan earned him immense respect among Asano and his colleagues at Asia Raja, making his presence eagerly anticipated each day (Asano, 9). In addition to his work at the newspaper, Boestami also contributed poems and literary articles to *Pandji Poestaka* and *Djawa Baroe* magazines.

Another aspect of Boestami that deeply resonated with Asano was his recounting the Indonesian people's support for Japan. Boestami shared stories of the Acehnese in northern Sumatra, who had endured decades of defeat under Dutch colonial rule. Upon hearing that the Japanese were coming to assist in driving out the Dutch, the Acehnese fighters rejoiced in welcoming their new allies. After the fall of Singapore to the Japanese military, warriors from Sumatra and Java were filled with confidence that the Japanese would soon help them expel the Dutch, British, and Americans from their lands. Asano found great joy and pride in these tales, told with Boestami's characteristic cheerfulness and laughter (Asano, 13-15).

### 3.3 Indonesian Intellectuals in Asia Raja Newspapers

About one month after Asano Akira arrived in Java, the Japanese military government implemented new regulations, including suspending several mass media outlets, particularly those in Dutch and Malay. One primary objective of this policy was to facilitate news control under the Japanese military's command. In response, the Japanese army, through its Propaganda Division, established new Malay and Indonesian newspapers and magazines, including Asia Raja. This newspaper was published under the auspices of the Djawa Shimbunsha Company, which also released the weekly magazine Djawa Baroe. The company's office was located in a building previously occupied by the De Yuni printing press, which had once printed the Dutch-language newspaper Java Bode. The company's address was Molenvliet Oost No. 8, Jakarta (now Jalan Hayam Wuruk, Gambir District, Central Jakarta).

To launch the new Indonesian-language newspaper, Asia Raja, the Japanese Military Propaganda Division required experienced Indonesian journalists. Consequently, they recruited journalists primarily from the shuttered newspaper companies. The first edition of Asia Raja, dated April 29, 1942, featured the following editorial staff: Board of Editors: Asano Akira, Shimizu N, Tomizawa Uio; Honorary Editor: Winarno; Chief Editor: Ichiki Tatsuo; Political and Public Relations Section Editor: Winarno; Social and Youth Section Editor: Mr. M. Samsudin; Honorary Editor: Sanusi Pane; Economic Section Editor: Setijono. This inaugural issue, comprising four pages, was printed in an initial run of 15,000 copies, each priced at 10 cent (Mahayana, 2013). Over time, the number of pages and the price of the newspaper fluctuated by the policies set by the Japanese military government.

In *Jawa Kantei Yowa*, Asano not only highlights Boestami as a respected Indonesian figure but also acknowledges several other Indonesians who contributed to the publication of Asia Raja. Among these were Soekardjo Wirjopranoto (1903-1962), Winarno Hendronoto (1908-1948), and Sanusi Pane (1905-1968). Soekardjo, a leader of the Partai Indonesia Raya party/ Parindra (Greater Indonesia Party), which M. H. Thamrin (1894-1941) guided, had

conservative views and looked to Japan as a model for his party's struggle against Dutch colonialism. Thus, when the Japanese military occupied Java, despite the ban on political party activities, he cooperated with the Japanese regime. Soekardjo, also a journalist, played a vital role in the editorial leadership of *Asia Raja*.

In collaboration with Soekardjo, Winarno Hendronoto, another prominent Indonesian journalist, became the editor-in-chief of *Asia Raja*. While not much is known about Winarno's background, he was recognized as a nationalist who frequently disseminated writings from Soekarno, chairman of the Pusat Tenaga Rakyat (PUTERA), and Hatta, which emphasized the importance of national unity and the ideals of independence. Senior journalist B. M. Diah noted that Winarno's courage led to his arrest and torture by the *kempeitai*, the special Japanese military police at the time, ultimately resulting in his illness. He was eventually replaced as chief editor by Anwar Tjokroaminoto, the son of HOS Tjokroaminoto (Janti, 2020).

Asano also devoted significant attention to another young intellectual, Sanusi Pane. He remarked that among the Japanese who spoke Malay, Ichiki Tatsuo was the most proficient. In contrast, Boestami possessed the best Indonesian language skills among Indonesians, with Sanusi Pane following closely. Asano even suggested that Sanusi Pane, then 38 years old, would likely succeed Boestami at Balai Pustaka (Asano, 20). According to J.U. Nasution, Sanusi Pane was the greatest writer of the pre-war or Pujangga Baru period. In addition to being a playwright, he was also an accomplished poet. His contributions to Indonesian literature remain significant, particularly in the pre-World War II era. Sanusi Pane believed that individuals immersed in Eastern culture should prioritize the purity of the soul over physical desires. His interest in Hinduism, which emphasizes the interconnectedness of humans with the universe and the importance of living in harmony with nature rather than conquering it, further informed his worldview. He greatly admired the thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore, who advocated for simplicity and a deep connection with nature. This shared appreciation for Eastern thought likely drew Asano to Sanusi Pane, as Asano himself was influenced by the philosophies of Okakura Tenshin, which similarly emphasized Eastern perspectives.

In addition to the individuals mentioned above who contributed to the editorial board and authored articles, several other Indonesian intellectuals actively wrote essays and literary works for *Asia Raja*. Notable figures included Achdiat K. Miharja, Andjar Asmara, Bakri Siregar, H. B. Jassin, Karim Halim, M. Balfas, Roestam Effendi, Rosihan Anwar, and Usmar Ismail (Mahayana, 2007: 209-2015). However, these names did not capture Asano's particular attention, and thus, they were not recorded in *Jawa Kantei Yowa*.

### 3.4 Japanese Intellectuals in *Asia Raja* Newspapers

In addition to collaborating with numerous Indonesian intellectuals, Asano, as a member of the Propaganda Division, had to coordinate extensively with his Japanese colleagues. Several Japanese intellectuals frequently appear in Asano's book, *Jawa Kantei Yowa*, including Ooki Atsuo, Tomizawa Uio, Kurosawa, Tanaka, Nakatani, Yamamura, Ichiki Tatsuo, Abe Tomoji, Kitahara Takeo, Shimizu, Saito Shimizu, and Yamamoto. Notably, Ichiki Tatsuo and Nakatani Yoshio emerge prominently in Asano's notes, as do other Propaganda Division members. Kimura Kazuaki emphasizes their roles as Malay (Indonesian) translators for the *Asia Raja* newspaper, underscoring their importance in facilitating communication

amidst restrictions on using languages associated with the enemy (Dutch, British, and their allies) during this period (Kimura, 2004: 148). Despite the potential for communication in English as an international language, the necessity for proficient Indonesian-Japanese translators was paramount.

Ichiki Tatsuo (1906-1949), described by Goto Ken'ichi in *Tensions of Empire: Japan and Southeast Asia in the Colonial and Postcolonial World* (2003), was a Japanese photographer born in Kumamoto. From a young age, he was exposed to Western thought and was baptized as a Christian. In 1928, at the age of 21, he traveled to Palembang, Sumatra, at the invitation of a friend to work in a Japanese-owned photo studio. After experiencing setbacks in his aspirations, he moved to Bandung in 1933, where he continued to work in a photo studio but faced further disappointments due to his limited social skills. Eventually, he married an Indonesian woman from Sumedang, and his life in the countryside deepened his sympathy for the Indonesian people. During his time in Indonesia, Ichiki mastered the Indonesian language. In 1938, he returned to Japan seeking support for Indonesian independence. However, upon trying to re-enter Indonesia, he received a telegram from the Dutch East Indies Government barring him due to suspicions of political activism. He returned to Java in 1942 after being recruited by the Japanese Army as a translator. Following Japan's defeat in the war, he remained in Indonesia, fighting alongside Indonesians for independence. Adopting the Indonesian name Abdul Rachman, he became deputy commander of the Indonesian Special Guerrilla Force and was killed in battle in Malang in 1949.

Nakatani Yoshio (1914-1972), another significant figure, was a Japanese scholar who had lived in Indonesia before the Japanese military's arrival. While detailed research on Nakatani is limited, Goto Ken'ichi notes that he was born into a poor family and received assistance to complete his education from the esteemed Buddhist priest Otani Kouzui (1876-1948). Following the Great Kanto Earthquake in 1924, he traveled to Malang, Java, to assist his uncle Nakagawa Anjiro in his shop. During this period, he studied Javanese language and culture at Taman Siswa School, quickly mastering Indonesian due to his perseverance and intelligence. Although initially uninterested in politics, he became aware of the democratic movement led by Indonesian intellectuals when Dr. Soetomo (1888-1938), the chairman of the Parindra (Greater Indonesia Party), visited Japan in March 1936. Shortly before the Japanese invasion of Java, Nakatani returned to Japan, where he was recruited by the Japanese Army to join the Propaganda Division in Java (Goto, 2018: 59). Both Tomisawa Uio and Asano praised Nakatani's intelligence and dedication, with Rosihan Anwar, a colleague at *Asia Raya* newspaper, lauding his exceptional command of the Indonesian language and asserting that he was the only trustworthy Japanese among them (Himemoto, 272).

The relationships among Japanese intellectuals in media and journalism during the Japanese military occupation of Indonesia were notably intense. These individuals were recruited to support the Japanese military government's goals of winning the Greater East Asia War and establishing the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. While the initial interactions between Japanese and Indonesian scholars may appear to be purely professional, they were rooted in deeper connections. This closeness stemmed from ideological similarities and a shared sense of solidarity. Both Asian nations recognized the necessity to rise against Western domination, which further solidified their alliance.

#### **4. Conclusions**

The book *Jawa Kantei Yowa* (1944) by Asano Akira has two important meanings. The first is for the history of Japan during the Asia Pacific War. The second is for the history of Indonesia during the Japanese occupation. Through this book we can find out individual thoughts and their relationship with Indonesian and Japanese intellectuals at that time. Moreover, we can find out pieces of the lives of Indonesian intellectuals recorded in Japanese intellectual writings. Through these pieces we can put together a complete series that can describe the relationship between Indonesian and Japanese intellectuals at the grassroots level during the Japanese occupation.

The discussion above highlights that Asano Akira gained a wealth of intriguing experiences while interacting with Indonesians during his time as a member of the Propaganda Division. His activities in the fields of media and journalism led him to engage with numerous intellectuals from both Indonesia and Japan. Among the Indonesian figures who made a significant impression on him were Boestami, Sanusi Pane, Winarno, and Soekardjo. From the Japanese side, notable individuals included Ichiki Tatsuo, Nakatani Yoshio, and Tomizawa Uio. A common thread connecting these individuals is their shared aspiration for the resurgence of Asian nations.

Furthermore, an important aspect of Asano's character is his profound interest in the philosophies of Schopenhauer, particularly his ideas on asceticism and self-denial, as well as Okakura Tenshin's views on the superiority of Eastern culture. These two intellectual frameworks shaped Asano's orientalist ideology, fostering a sense of solidarity with fellow Asian nations during his interactions with Indonesians in the Propaganda Division. Indonesian intellectuals' encounters with Asano and his Japanese colleagues not only elevated their sense of nationalism but also became a valuable foundation for their pursuit of an independent nation.

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