



## THE ROLE OF KEIMIN BUNKA SHIDOSHO IN THE DYNAMICS OF ART IN INDONESIA 1943-1945

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DOI: 10.22437/js.v5i1.40471

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Submitted: 30/12/2024, Revisioned: 03/02/2024, Accepted and Published: 10/16/2024

### ABSTRACT

*This research discusses the role of the Keimin Bunka Shidosho (KBS) institution during the Japanese occupation in Indonesia, particularly in the realm of arts and culture. KBS, established by the Japanese government, aimed to use art as a tool of propaganda to support Japanese interests. Various art forms, such as literature, painting, music, drama, and film, underwent significant changes under the influence of KBS. This study uses the historical research method, which involves four key stages: heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. Through this method, the research investigates how artists navigated the tension between political control and creative expression. This research is important in understanding how cultural institutions were used to influence public sentiment and how artists responded to ideological pressure. The urgency lies in examining how, even under occupation and censorship, art became a space for negotiation, resistance, and the assertion of national identity. The findings show that while some artists worked within the framework of KBS, others resisted or embedded nationalist messages in their works. As a result, art during the Japanese occupation not only functioned as a propaganda tool but also as a means to foster resistance and national pride.*

**Keywords:** Keimin Bunka Shidosho (KBS), Japanese Occupation, Indonesian Arts, Nationalism, Resistance

## INTRODUCTION

In facing the war against the Allies in an effort to build an empire in Asia, Japan became involved in World War II in the Asia-Pacific region. Southeast Asia, and Pacific regions to serve as targets for its imperialist policies.<sup>1</sup> Indonesia became one of the countries targeted by Japan in Southeast Asia. This was because Indonesia was a region rich in natural resources that could help support Japan's needs during the war.<sup>2</sup> Japan's interest in Indonesia made it necessary for Japan to implement strategies to control Indonesia, one of which was through propaganda. Japan conducted extensive propaganda during its occupation of Indonesia as an effort to maintain its power in the country. The Japanese propaganda was carried out intensively through various media and channels available at that time. Japan published various newspapers in different regions to spread its propaganda, such as the newspapers *Asia Raya*, *Tjahaja*, *Sinar Matahari*, *Sinar Baroe*, and others.<sup>3</sup>

Various forms of propaganda were carried out by Japan in Indonesia, one of which was through arts and culture. In certain studies, art has been utilized as a medium for propaganda. A review of the capacity of art to function as a medium for communist propaganda in Europe was conducted by Starodubets and Stasiuk, with the support of Suvorova's research. Gooding-Williams also asserts that art is propaganda.<sup>4</sup> According to Sheng Zou, the aesthetic qualities of a subject possess a latent propagandistic capacity that can be utilized for persuasive purposes.<sup>5</sup> During World War period, propaganda assumed a pivotal role in shaping public opinion, mobilizing popular support, and maintaining morale, both among military personnel and at home. The governments of the involved countries employed systematic propaganda to justify the war.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Amelia F., *Pendudukan Jepang di Indonesia* (Alprin, 2019), pp. 1–5, Perpustakaan Nasional Republik Indonesia (iPusnas).

<sup>2</sup> F., *Pendudukan Jepang di Indonesia*, pp. 2–3.

<sup>3</sup> Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia, *Di Bawah Pendudukan Jepang Kenangan Empat Puluh Dua Orang Yang Mengalaminya*, 4th edn (Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia, 1988), pp. 5–6, Perpustakaan Nasional Republik Indonesia.

<sup>4</sup> Galyna Starodubets and Oleksandra Stasiuk, 'Social and Political Paradigm of Totalitarianism in Poster Art of the USSR and Communist Poland during the Period of Late Stalinism', *Eminak*, no. 4(48) (2025), pp. 96–115, doi:10.33782/eminak2024.4(48).753; Anna Suvorova, 'Alexander Lobanov: The Reception of the Political in Soviet Outsider Art', *Quaestio Rossica*, 8.5 (2020), doi:10.15826/qr.2020.5.546.

<sup>5</sup> Sheng Zou, 'Aesthetic Subjectification Through Ambivalent Play: Exploring a Ludic Theory of Popular Propaganda', *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 2022, 2022, doi:10.1177/01968599221125532.

<sup>6</sup> Elisabeth Fondren and John Maxwell Hamilton, 'The Universal Laws of Propaganda: World War I and the Origins of Government Manufacture of Opinion', *Journal of Intelligence History*, 22.1 (2023), pp. 1–19, doi:10.1080/16161262.2022.2036498; Bahar Aşci, 'The Art of Influence: Propaganda as a War Tool During Imperial Invasions and First Aerial Leaflets', *The Historian*, 86.1 (2024), pp. 34–49, doi:10.1080/00182370.2024.2436305.

Japan specifically established a cultural institution called Keimin Bunka Shidosho, which in Indonesian is known as Poesat Keboedajaan (Cultural Center). This institution had actually been planned since October 1942, when a meeting was held at Ir. Sukarno's house on October 6 to discuss the Indonesian arts center, which was led directly by Ir. Sukarno. Prior to that, a cultural institution led by Mr. Soetardjo had already existed. At that time, the Indonesian Arts Center (Poesat Kesenian Indonesia) had an organizational structure headed by Sanusi Pané, with a central board and a performance training body led by Andjar Asmara. This central arts body aimed to create a new Indonesian art by adjusting and improving regional arts into a new Indonesian art. As a result, the arts center then held an art performance on December 8, 1942.<sup>7</sup> In the following year, in April 1943, two important institutions, namely culture and the arts, were merged into Keimin Bunka Shidosho. Keimin Bunka Shidosho was an organization that supported the propaganda body. It was responsible for introducing traditional Indonesian arts, while also educating Indonesian artists. However, at the same time, this cultural institution also benefited Japan by promoting Japanese culture in Indonesia.<sup>8</sup> Keimin Bunka Shidosho (KBS) was established on April 1, 1943, and was located at the cultural center building in Rijswijk (now Ir. H. Juanda Street).<sup>9</sup> To hold art performances, KBS did not use the building in Rijswijk but another building located at Noordwijk 39.<sup>10</sup> The opening ceremony of Keimin Bunka Shidosho was held on April 18, 1943, by the Head of the Dai Nippon Army Government, J. M. Goenseikan Seizaboero Okasaki.<sup>11</sup> This institution had the duty to direct and supervise the artworks of Indonesian artists to ensure they did not deviate from Japanese policies. The KBS institution was divided into smaller units based on different art types such as (a) literature, (b) fine arts (painting and sculpture), (c) music, (d) performing arts (theater and dance), and (e) film.<sup>12</sup>

Each division had its own dynamic. For example, painting developed through art exhibitions that invited Indonesian painters to participate. On March 24, 1944, Keimin Bunka Shidosho announced through newspapers that the institution would hold a visual arts exhibition and invited Indonesian artists to submit their works to the institution. In addition to paintings, the event also showcased other art forms such as

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<sup>7</sup> Asia Raya, 'Poesat Kesenian Indonesia', *Asia Raya* (Jakarta, 7 October 1945), Perpustakaan Nasional Republik Indonesia.

<sup>8</sup> Dewi Yulianti, 'Mewaspada Propaganda Melalui Kajian Sejarah (Studi atas Sistem Propaganda Jepang di Jawa (1942-1945)', *HUMANIKA*, 15.9 (2012), p. 7, doi:<https://doi.org/10.14710/humanika.15.9>.

<sup>9</sup> Rosihan Anwar, *Sejarah Kecil Petite Histoire Indonesia Jilid 7, Kisah-Kisah Zaman Revolusi Kemerdekaan* (Penerbit Buku Kompas, 2015), p. 36, Perpustakaan dan Arsip Daerah Tangerang Selatan.

<sup>10</sup> Keimin Bunka Shidosho, 'Pertoendjoekan Steleng', *Asia Raya* (Jakarta, 20 April 1943), Perpustakaan Nasional Republik Indonesia, Lantai 7-Salemba Raya.

<sup>11</sup> Anwar, *Sejarah Kecil Petite Histoire Indonesia Jilid 7, Kisah-Kisah Zaman Revolusi Kemerdekaan*. 36

<sup>12</sup> Nino Oktorino, *Ensiklopedi Pendudukan Jepang di Indonesia* (PT. Elex Media Komputindo, 2013), p. 54, Perpustakaan Nasional Republik Indonesia.

sculptures, caricatures, masks, and everyday objects with artistic value.<sup>13</sup> These events became part of the dynamic of the arts and indicated the development of painting in Indonesia.<sup>14</sup> In reality, even though it became a place for the development of Indonesian arts, Keimin Bunka Shidosho also acted as an institution that had the principle of censoring opinions and ideas spread to the public, so local artists were required to follow the rules enforced by the institution and the government, strictly regulating the work of Indonesian artists. The impact of this was evident in the changes in art development, such as in music. For example, Keroncong music that contained Western references was removed, and some Western lyrics were replaced. Keimin Bunka Shidosho ensured that all forms of art were part of the "Greater East Asia Prosperity Sphere".<sup>15</sup> In Indonesia, the development of art had already begun during the Dutch East Indies period due to the active presence of European artists who settled and spent a long time in the archipelago. These artists played an important role in fostering modernism in Indonesia.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, this study focuses on how the changes or developments became part of the dynamics of art in Indonesia after the Japanese occupation and all the regulations in Indonesian arts.

Research on Keimin Bunka Shidosho, the development of the arts, and information about related figures such as artists to analyze the role of KBS in the dynamics of art has been conducted. One such previous work is the book by Dio Yulian Sofansyah titled *Propaganda Romusha Sandiwara dari Jepang* (Romusha Propaganda: Japanese Drama) that describes how Japan carried out propaganda, especially through theater.<sup>17</sup> Another important literature is a book by H. B. Jassin titled *Kesusastraan Indonesia di Masa Jepang* (Indonesian Literature in the Japanese Era), published in 2018.<sup>18</sup> H. B. Jassin's assessment of literature during that period is important to understand the role of KBS in arts, especially in literature. There's also Rosihan Anwar's book *Sejarah Kecil Petite Histoire Indonesia Jilid 7, Kisah-Kisah*

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<sup>13</sup> Djawa Hookoo Kai Keimin Bunka Shidosho, "Seteleng Hidoep Seni-Roepa jang ketiga di Djawa Baroe," *Asia Raya*, Maret 24, 1944, [https://digitalcollections.universiteitleiden.nl/view/item/3216426?solr\\_nav%5Bid%5D=9378ce7553823657da4d&solr\\_nav%5Bpage%5D=0&solr\\_nav%5Boffset%5D=0#page/1/mode/1up](https://digitalcollections.universiteitleiden.nl/view/item/3216426?solr_nav%5Bid%5D=9378ce7553823657da4d&solr_nav%5Bpage%5D=0&solr_nav%5Boffset%5D=0#page/1/mode/1up).

<sup>14</sup> Keimin Bunka Shidosho, 'Seteleng Loekisan', *Asia Raya* (Jakarta, 15 September 1944) <[https://digitalcollections.universiteitleiden.nl/view/item/3205879?solr\\_nav%5Bid%5D=d4badf0c4a06149f9ae1&solr\\_nav%5Bpage%5D=0&solr\\_nav%5Boffset%5D=6#page/1/mode/1up](https://digitalcollections.universiteitleiden.nl/view/item/3205879?solr_nav%5Bid%5D=d4badf0c4a06149f9ae1&solr_nav%5Bpage%5D=0&solr_nav%5Boffset%5D=6#page/1/mode/1up)>

<sup>15</sup> Lana Lana, "'Allegro Di Krontjong": Life and Works of Amir Pasaribu' (unpublished Bachelor of Arts with Departmental Honors, Wesleyan University, 2012), p. 20, doi:10.14418/wes01.1.1763.

<sup>16</sup> Yin Ker and others, 'Teaching the History of Modern and Contemporary Art of Southeast Asia', *Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia*, NUS Press Pte Ltd, 4.1 (2020), pp. 101–203, doi:10.1353/sen.2020.0005.

<sup>17</sup> Dio Yulian Sofansyah, *Propaganda Romusha Sandiwara dari Jepang*, I (Matapadi Presindo, 2019), Perpustakaan Nasional Republik Indonesia.

<sup>18</sup> H. B. Jassin, *Kesusastran Indonesia di Masa Jepang*, Digital (Edisi Pustaka Jaya, 2018), Perpustakaan Nasional Republik Indonesia (iPusnas).

*Zaman Revolusi Kemerdekaan* (A Small History of Indonesia Vol. 7, Stories of the Revolutionary Independence Era).<sup>19</sup> In this book, the writer examines Keimin Bunka Shidosho from the perspective of someone directly involved in the institution. Through Rosihan Anwar's perspective on Keimin Bunka Shidosho, the writer also gains insight into the responses of artists to this Japanese-made art institution. This is because, in addition to being a journalist, Rosihan Anwar was also an artist and writer involved in Keimin Bunka Shidosho. The information written by Rosihan Anwar in his book is combined with other data sources to see the role of this Japanese art institution, KBS, in the dynamics of art in Indonesia between 1943 and 1945.

There also an article written by Yin Ker, et al., *Teaching the History of Modern and Contemporary Art of Southeast Asia*, published by NUS Press.<sup>20</sup> This article analyzes the development of modern and contemporary art in Indonesia, particularly during the Japanese occupation, where it is mentioned that during the Japanese occupation, the growth of art modernization in Indonesia, which had already begun, further developed through Keimin Bunka Shidosho. Another relevant source utilized in this study is the article titled "*Pendidikan Seni Rupa di Indonesia: Sejarah, Peran, dan Tantangan Masa Depan*" ("*Art Education in Indonesia: History, Role, and Future Challenges*"). This article examines the development of art education in Indonesia, which is an essential aspect to consider in analyzing the dynamics of the arts. From the various books and articles above, no writing has been found that specifically discusses KBS and its role in the development of art in Indonesia.

This article focuses specifically on the art dynamics influenced by the Japanese propaganda institution. This study explores the rationale behind the utilization of Indonesian art for propaganda purposes, particularly by the Japanese occupation government. It delves into the methodologies employed in the use of art as a medium of propaganda and the impact of Japanese propaganda on the artistic output of the institution, emphasizing the significant influence of the attitudes and reactions of artists on the creation of artistic works. This study analyzes the structure, policies, and operations of Keimin Bunka Shidosho as a pivotal entity within the art ecosystem during the occupation. This study contributes to the existing discourse on the manner in which foreign powers manipulate local culture, as well as the manner in which local actors navigate within that framework. This study contributes to the existing discourse on the manner in which foreign powers manipulate local culture, as well as the manner in which local actors navigate within that framework. The findings concerning the utilization of these institutions by artists for nationalistic purposes could constitute an original contribution to the study of Southeast Asian art history.

## Method

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<sup>19</sup> Anwar, *Sejarah Kecil Petite Histoire Indonesia Jilid 7, Kisah-Kisah Zaman Revolusi Kemerdekaan*.

<sup>20</sup> Ker and others, 'Teaching the History of Modern and Contemporary Art of Southeast Asia'.

In this research, an appropriate research method is needed to analyze the issue to be studied. Research related to past events uses historical research methodology. The historical method consists of heuristics, criticism, interpretation, and finally historiography. In the source collection stage (heuristics), the author uses data and sources that include interview recordings found at the National Archives of the Republic of Indonesia (ANRI), old newspapers such as *Asia Raya*, *Borneo Shinbun*, *Atjeh Shinbun*, and others. There are also old magazines that feature works by KBS artists, such as the magazine *Djawa Baroe*. In the writing process (historiography), the author organizes the research into a coherent and systematic text. The events, which have been compiled through historical research, are written in a manner that follows a clear chronological order. This paper outlines the issues or events that led to this research. Additionally, the methods and approaches used in this study are explained. This paper also briefly touches on the development of art before the arrival of the Japanese and the establishment of KBS in order to observe the evolution of art before and after the Japanese occupation. Several periods that influenced the development of art are the influence of Islam on art, the influence of Dutch colonialism, and the rise of nationalism in Indonesia. Following this, the discussion proceeds to explain the Keimin Bunka Shidosho institution and its policies regarding art and publications in Indonesia. In the fourth chapter, this paper explains the impact of Keimin Bunka Shidosho's policies on the dynamics of art, as well as the responses of artists to these policies, which ultimately influenced the forms and themes of artistic production in Indonesia

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Indonesian Art Under the Influence of Islam, Dutch Colonialism, and Nationalism

To understand the extent of the role of the Keimin Bunka Shidosho institution in the dynamics of art in Indonesia, it is also necessary to examine the evolution of art in Indonesia, so that clear differences in form, style, and theme can be observed. Especially in Indonesia, the history of art is deeply tied to the history of the nation in the context of colonial and post-colonial periods. Most modern Indonesian artists were born during the Dutch East Indies period, such as the artists' association PERSAGI (1937).<sup>21</sup>

Islamic missionaries, particularly Sufis in the archipelago, used art as an effective means of preaching. One of these forms was *shalawat* (prayers and praises for the Prophet Muhammad SAW), which developed into a rich tradition of spiritual art full of religiosity. Islamic preaching, as recorded in literature, was particularly successful in India and Southeast Asia through the tradition of reciting the stories of the Prophet, such as the *Kasidah Burdah*, *Kasidah Barzanji*, and others. In addition to being a medium for religious preaching, *shalawat* became a creative medium for the development of religious art and music, evolving into its own musical genre. This made

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<sup>21</sup> Ker and others, 'Teaching the History of Modern and Contemporary Art of Southeast Asia', p. 183.

Sufis not only spread the word of Islam but also left an aesthetic imprint on the arts and music of the archipelago.<sup>22</sup>

The rise of Islam in the archipelago also influenced other aspects of art and culture. One of the most prominent influences was in architecture and decorative arts.<sup>23</sup> Another development influenced by Islam was literature. The evolution of Islamic literature in the archipelago is strongly characterized by the use of Malay language. In its first wave, from the 14th to 16th century, Islamic literature in the archipelago focused on introducing cosmopolitan ideas and Islamic teachings. Numerous works from Arabic and Persian were translated into Malay, with Islam becoming a new reality in the intellectual thought of the archipelago.<sup>24</sup> One of the most notable forms of Islamic poetry is divine poetry, which became an essential part of modern poetry, reflecting significant moments in the poet's spiritual awareness, inner turmoil, spiritual search, and other aspects. The Islamic phase in modern Indonesian poetry began with the *Poedjanga Baroe* group, particularly with Amir Hamzah.<sup>25</sup>

Music in the Dutch East Indies, influenced by Dutch colonialism, displayed "Indies" characteristics, such as the European brass-band influence seen in *Tanjidor*.<sup>26</sup> In other developments, *keroncong* music became the musical accompaniment for *stamboel* theater. The fusion of *keroncong* music and dance within the theater gave rise to the "Indies" characteristic known as *komedie stamboel*.<sup>27</sup> The impact of Western colonial influence can be seen in the structure of performances. The revival of modern theater in the Dutch East Indies, influenced by the West, included drama groups such as Miss Riboet's Orion and The Malay Opera "Darnadella".<sup>28</sup> Western modern influences led theater in the Dutch East Indies to evolve from stories based on foreign themes, such as Middle Eastern tales initiated by *stamboel*, to stories based on local conditions in the East Indies, whether contemporary or the story from the past.<sup>29</sup> Another prominent form of art influenced by colonialism was painting. The arrival of Europeans introduced modern art movements to the Dutch East Indies. Indonesian painter Raden Saleh is a key figure in this development, with his work characterized

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<sup>22</sup> Abdul Hadi WM and others, *Sejarah Kebudayaan Islam Indonesia: Sastra dan Seni*, 1st edn (Balai Pustaka, 2022), pp. 381–82, Perpustakaan Nasional Republik Indonesia (iPusnas).

<sup>23</sup> Uka Tjandrasasmita, *Arkeologi Islam Nusantara*, 1st edn (KPG (Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia), 2009), p. 240.

<sup>24</sup> WM and others, *Sejarah Kebudayaan Islam Indonesia: Sastra dan Seni*, p. 76.

<sup>25</sup> WM and others, *Sejarah Kebudayaan Islam Indonesia: Sastra dan Seni*, pp. 409–14.

<sup>26</sup> Djoko Soekiman, *Kebudayaan Indis dan Gaya Hidup Masyarakat yang Pendukungnya di Jawa (Abad XVIII - Medio Abad XX)*, Pertama (Yayasan Bentang Budaya, 2000), p. 91, Perpustakaan Nasional Republik Indonesia.

<sup>27</sup> Djoko Soekiman, *Kebudayaan Indis dari Zaman Kompeni sampai Revolusi*, 2nd edn (Komunitas Bambu, 2014), pp. 68–69, Perpustakaan Nasional Republik Indonesia.

<sup>28</sup> Jakob Sumardjo, *Perkembangan Teater Modern dan Sastra Drama Indonesia*, 1st edn (PT. Citra Aditya Bakti, 1992), pp. 116–19, Perpustakaan Nasional Republik Indonesia.

<sup>29</sup> Soekiman, *Kebudayaan Indis dari Zaman Kompeni sampai Revolusi*, p. 70.

by dramatic and exaggerated emotions in his realistic and naturalistic style.<sup>30</sup> Additionally, the *Mooi Indie* or *Hindia Molek* movement, coined by Sujoyono, included European and a few local Indonesian artists who painted the exotic beauty of the archipelago from a Western perspective. Indigenous artists in the *Mooi Indie* movement included Abdullah Suriosubroto, Abdullah (son of Dr. Wahidin Sudiro Husodo), Wakidi, and Mas Pirngadi.<sup>31</sup>

Nationalism in Indonesia began to develop in the 1930s with the rise of intellectual movements. Many educated individuals established intellectual organizations, such as the *Algemeene Studie Club* led by Soekarno in Bandung, the *Indonesische Studie Club* founded in Surabaya by Dr. Sutomo, and *Perguruan Taman Siswa* founded by Ki Hajar Dewantara in 1922. In the field of art, *Perguruan Taman Siswa* even held an art exhibition in 1927. The works displayed in the exhibition focused on the suffering of the colonized people, contrasting sharply with the style of *mooi indie* art, which depicted an image of beauty and elitism, masking the harsh realities of life in the Dutch East Indies. This shift in the representation of art also influenced the formation of the *Persatuan Ahli Gambar Indonesia* (PERSAGI) on October 23, 1938, led by Sujoyono, Abdulsalam, Rameli, and Agus Jaya.<sup>32</sup> Within PERSAGI, the focus was not on technique but on emotional expression through painting, aligning it with nationalist ideals.<sup>33</sup> The primary goal was to develop a new style of Indonesian art that reflected the spirit of the nation, as opposed to the *mooi indie* style, which emphasized beauty and elitism. PERSAGI's works reflected the suffering and reality of the colonized people, marking a stark contrast to the *mooi indie* tradition. PERSAGI succeeded in organizing a major exhibition in 1938.<sup>34</sup>

Another art form that developed during this period was Indonesian literature, which fervently worked to shape a vision of Indonesian nationalism. A notable movement in literature was the publication of the *Poedjangga Baroe* literary magazine in July 1933, which greatly influenced the era.<sup>35</sup> Armijn Pane noted that the *Poedjangga Baroe* group unintentionally emphasized lyrics in their works.<sup>36</sup> The literature of the *Pujangga Baru* generation (1933-1942) reflected the writers' ideas, experiences, and modernized views, with a focus on Western cultural influences. The purpose of *Poedjangga Baroe* was to spark a new literary and cultural movement that

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<sup>30</sup> Setianingsih Purnomo, 'Seni Rupa Masa Kolonial: Mooi Indie vs Persagi', *Ultimart: Jurnal Komunikasi Visual*, 7.Vol 7 No 2 (2014): Ultimart: Jurnal Komunikasi Visual (2016), pp. 9–11, doi:<https://doi.org/10.31937/ultimart.v7i2.391>.

<sup>31</sup> Purnomo, 'Seni Rupa Masa Kolonial: Mooi Indie vs Persagi', pp. 11–13.

<sup>32</sup> Purnomo, 'Seni Rupa Masa Kolonial: Mooi Indie vs Persagi', pp. 13–15.

<sup>33</sup> Purnomo, 'Seni Rupa Masa Kolonial: Mooi Indie vs Persagi', pp. 14–15.

<sup>34</sup> Purnomo, 'Seni Rupa Masa Kolonial: Mooi Indie vs Persagi', pp. 15–16.

<sup>35</sup> M. C. Ricklefs, *Sejarah Indonesia Modern 1200-2008*, trans. by Tim Penerjemah Serambi, 1st edn (PT Serambi Ilmu Semesta, 2008), p. 412.

<sup>36</sup> Armijn Pane, 'Perkataan Tjinta dan Kekasih', *Poedjangga Baroe*, 1933, p. 68, Perpustakaan Nasional Republik Indonesia.

would energize the people of Indonesia.<sup>37</sup> This group sought to unite writers from various regions and religions in pursuit of a national vision and to foster a new spirit of cultural unity in Indonesia.<sup>38</sup>

### **The Dynamics of the Keimin Bunka Shidosho Institution**

The Keimin Bunka Shidosho institution, hereafter referred to simply as KBS, was established on April 1, 1943, and was located in the central cultural building in Rijswijk (now Ir. H. Juanda street).<sup>39</sup> The opening ceremony of the Keimin Bunka Shidosho was held on April 18, 1943, by the Head of the Dai Nippon Army Government, J. M. Goenseikan Seizaboero Okasaki.<sup>40</sup> The appointment of the KBS governing board took place on April 3, 1943, with Sanoesi Pané as the chairman.<sup>41</sup> The establishment of this cultural institution initially brought hope to Indonesian artists, offering a new opportunity for the advancement of art in Indonesia. However, at the same time, the KBS became a suppressor of the freedom of artistic production and works in Indonesia. While the institution provided space, funding, and a platform for the publication of Indonesian art, it simultaneously acted as a censorship body, ensuring that artworks adhered to the principle of "Greater East Asia Prosperity." Essentially, Japan censored opinions and ideas that were disseminated to the public, ensuring that the population did not entertain any thoughts of rebellion against Japan's position in Indonesia.<sup>42</sup>

Artists at the KBS were used for direct propaganda missions, often being sent to various locations by the Japanese command. For example, in September 1943, Japan sent several KBS members to various regions in Java to campaign for increased textile production, particularly cotton. Among the KBS members sent on this campaign were Usmar Ismail (literature), G.A. Soekirno (painting), and C. Simandjuntak (music), led by Y. Sakai, and they were sent to Pasuruan in East Java. C. Simandjuntak composed four songs aimed at boosting the morale of workers, especially those in cotton fields and factories.<sup>43</sup> The arts published in newspapers by the KBS reflected Japan's policies regarding art activities in Indonesia, such as government announcements, competition criteria, and the outcomes of meetings and conferences

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<sup>37</sup> Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana, 'Menoedjoe Seni Baroe', *Poedjangga Baroe*, 1933, pp. 4–5, Perpustakaan Nasional Republik Indonesia.

<sup>38</sup> Sumaryanto, *Ensiklopedia Kesusastraan Indonesia*, Digital (Aneka Ilmu, 2019), pp. 81–82, Perpustakaan Nasional Republik Indonesia (iPusnas).

<sup>39</sup> Anwar, *Sejarah Kecil Petite Histoire Indonesia Jilid 7, Kisah-Kisah Zaman Revolusi Kemerdekaan*, p. 36.

<sup>40</sup> Anwar, *Sejarah Kecil Petite Histoire Indonesia Jilid 7, Kisah-Kisah Zaman Revolusi Kemerdekaan*. 36

<sup>41</sup> Keimin Bunka Shidosho, 'Poesat Keboedajaan', *Asia Raya* (Jakarta, 7 April 1943), Perpustakaan Nasional Republik Indonesia, Lantai 7-Salemba Raya.

<sup>42</sup> Lana, 'Allegro Di Krontjong', p. 20.

<sup>43</sup> Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia, *Di Bawah Pendudukan Jepang Kenangan Empat Puluh Dua Orang Yang Mengalaminya*, p. 73.

among artists, which mirrored Japan's own policies.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, by 1944, Japan further tightened censorship regulations on artworks. For instance, the Osamu Seirei (law) No. 6, which governed the supervision of publishing, contained sixteen articles. This law reflected how the KBS institution tightened rules and censorship in order to publish artworks produced within its framework.

Regarding Islam, the KBS did not pay much attention to Islamic arts. However, from the activities conducted by the KBS, there were instances that leaned towards Islamic themes. For example, there were competitions involving the gambus, mentioned in KBS publications. While the exact date of the gambus competition is not specified, it is noted that the KBS organized such events.<sup>45</sup> Japan often held gambus performances for entertainment, competitions, or broadcasts on the radio, much like during the Dutch colonial era. An example of this is a gambus performance at the Geloegoer Zoo in Medan.<sup>46</sup> From the description above, it is clear that Islamic arts, such as the gambus, continued to thrive. Although Japan did not specifically focus on Islamic arts, activities like gambus music, which were closely related to Islamic arts, developed, and new gambus groups emerged. Additionally, Japan showed its interest in the development of Islamic culture in Indonesia by establishing the Islamic Cultural Hall (Balai Keboedajaan Islam).<sup>47</sup> Japan also involved KBS in Islamic events, such as during post-Eid gatherings. During these events, KBS showcased Bali dances by Kotot Soekardi and Wayang Seken.<sup>48</sup>

When the KBS was dissolved, Ny. Lasmidjah, the secretary of the institution, described how artistic activities at the KBS had dwindled, while political activities became more overt and frequent. As the 1945 proclamation approached, Japan no longer dared to visit the KBS building and began showing more respect for Indonesians. The KBS office then became a stage for Sukarni, Adam Malik, and other freedom fighters, who, along with the remaining members at the KBS office, prepared for the proclamation.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Maman S Mahayana, 'Japanese Occupation Government Policy in Indonesia on Culture and Literature: A Case Study of Asia Raya', 25.2 <<http://download.garuda.kemdikbud.go.id/article.php?article=1676383&val=297&title=Japanese%20Occupation%20Government%20Policy%20in%20Indonesia%20on%20Culture%20and%20Literature%20A%20Case%20Study%20of%20Asia%20Raja%20Newspaper%201942-1945>>.

<sup>45</sup> Keimin Bunka Shidosho, *Keboedajaan Timoer* (Keimin Bunka Shidosho, 1945), p. 119, Perpustakaan Nasional Republik Indonesia.

<sup>46</sup> Kita-Sumatora-Sinbun, 'Tontonan dan Pelipoer Gamboes Di Keboen Binatang', *Kita-Sumatora-Sinbun* (Sumatra Utara, 6 November 1943), p. 2 (p. 2), Digital Collections, Leiden University Libraries.

<sup>47</sup> Asia Raya, 'Balai Keboedajaan Islam', *Asia Raya* (Jakarta, 6 April 1943), Perpustakaan Nasional Republik Indonesia.

<sup>48</sup> Hosokawa Kaori and Sendenbu, 'Programa Malam Gembira', *Asia Raya* (Jakarta, 22 September 1944), Digital Collections, Leiden University Libraries <<http://hdl.handle.net/1887.1/item:3205864>>.

<sup>49</sup> Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia, *Di Bawah Pendudukan Jepang Kenangan Empat Puluh Dua Orang Yang Mengalaminya*, p. 78.

On August 15, 1945, Japan announced its unconditional surrender to the Allies. On the morning of August 17, 1945, Sukarno proclaimed Indonesia's independence. Soon after, the government structure was formed in Jakarta. Between August 18 and 25, the Japanese forces in Java and Sumatra disarmed and disbanded PETA/Giyugun, Heiho, and other Japan-sponsored organizations, including the KBS, which was also dissolved.<sup>50</sup> A poignant event occurred during the final days of the KBS, as recounted by Rosihan Anwar in his book. Artists gathered for one last meeting before the Cultural Center (Poesat Keboedajaan) disbanded following Indonesia's independence proclamation. With memories of their past experiences, suddenly Ny. Bintang Sudibjo, known as Ibu Sud, who was the vocal coach for the youth choir, rose from her seat and began singing the song "Tanah Airku Indonesia." The entire gathering joined in, singing with deep emotion.<sup>51</sup> Shortly after this moment, the KBS cultural center building was taken over by Allied forces. The artists left the premises, but the truck used by the Poesat Keboedajaan theater group for traveling performances was successfully taken by Sumanto and Djajakusuma, members of the group.<sup>52</sup>

### **The Influence of Keimin Bunka Shidosho on the Dynamics of Art in Indonesia (1943-1945)**

The Keimin Bunka Shidosho (KBS) institution mobilized artists to stir up enthusiasm and bolster public confidence in the superiority of the Japanese military. In a letter from H.B. Jassin to M. Dimiyati, it was revealed that the works expected under Japanese rule were those that supported development ideals and provided life guidance for the people.<sup>53</sup> For every art piece with a propaganda theme, the KBS frequently organized art performances. For example, a performance called *pertoendjoekan steleng* was held by KBS from April 29 to May 9, 1943, where the institution called on artists to support Japan's ultimate victory.<sup>54</sup>

#### Literature

The development of literature at the time reflected a change in characteristics, themes, and the types of literary works produced. During the Japanese occupation, they demanded that literature align with the interests of the Japanese government. KBS was tasked with censoring and guiding literary works to ensure they aligned with Japan's objectives. Prominent figures during this period included Armijn Pané, Usmar Ismail, and Rosihan Anwar.<sup>55</sup> It could be said that literature under the Japanese

<sup>50</sup> Ricklefs, *Sejarah Indonesia Modern 1200-2008*, pp. 443–50.

<sup>51</sup> Anwar, *Sejarah Kecil Petite Histoire Indonesia Jilid 7, Kisah-Kisah Zaman Revolusi Kemerdekaan*, p. 44.

<sup>52</sup> Rosihan Anwar, 44-45.

<sup>53</sup> Budi Susanto, *Politik penguasa dan siasat pemoeda : nasionalisme dan pendudukan Jepang di Indonesia*, 1st edn (Kanisius, 1994), p. 87, Perpustakaan Nasional Republik Indonesia.

<sup>54</sup> Posat Keboedajaan bagian Seni-Rupa, 'Pertoendjokan Steleng', *Asia Raya* (Djakarta, 20 April 1943), Perpustakaan Nasional Republik Indonesia.

<sup>55</sup> I Made Suarta, *Pengantar Bahasa dan Sastra Indonesia: Sejarah dan Perkembangannya*, 1st edn (Pustaka Larasan, 2022), pp. 56–57

occupation experienced a decline. The strict regulations and censorship imposed by the Japanese made it difficult for Indonesian literature to develop freely. Only two novels were published by the official Balai Pustaka during the occupation, which critics Ajip Rosidi and A. Teeuw, as cited by Budi Susanto, considered to be propaganda novels without literary value.<sup>56</sup>

Similar to novels, poetry was largely published only after the Japanese occupation ended. Initially, writers adhered to Japanese policies on artistic expression, but over time, they began to find ways to express subtle rebellion. This included creating works with double meanings. In the poem by Rosihan Anwar titled *Lukisan*, there is a line 'mari bersama menyusun kemenangan!' which can be interpreted as the victory of Greater East Asia, but it could also carry the meaning of the following line, 'Lamalah sudah bangsa menanti' which can be interpreted The nation has waited for a long time.<sup>57</sup> It suggests a sense of prolonged anticipation or longing, likely referring to the hope or struggle for independence that the Indonesian people had been waiting for. This symbolic literary work, from the perspective of Japan, would appear to align with Japanese censorship standards, but when viewed from the perspective of the Indonesian people, it serves to build the spirit of struggle and Indonesian nationalism.<sup>58</sup> In the context of literature under KBS, the *Pujangga Baru* movement was disbanded, and its magazine was banned because Japan considered it too Western and progressive.<sup>59</sup> Since Japan's occupation and its intervention in artistic affairs, everything that was developing with a Western orientation was eliminated, including the literary development of the *Poedjangga Baroe* movement, with its ideas, style, and form of nationalism and patriotic spirit.

#### Theater

At the beginning of the Japanese occupation, theater activities in the community ceased temporarily, despite being vibrant in the 1930s. However, by the end of 1942, theater troupes such as *Bintang Surabaya* began to reemerge, continuing the traditions of *Darnadella*.<sup>60</sup> A shift occurred from professional theater to amateur theater, with many intellectuals forming their own independent troupes, often dominated by students. The first amateur group was *Sandiwara Angkatan Muda Mata Hari*, led by professional artists Andjar Asmara, Ratna Asmara, and Kamadjaja, which was formed on April 6, 1943.<sup>61</sup>

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<[https://pbi.unismuh.ac.id/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/E-Book\\_Pengantar-Bahasa-Sastra-Indonesia.pdf](https://pbi.unismuh.ac.id/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/E-Book_Pengantar-Bahasa-Sastra-Indonesia.pdf)>.

<sup>56</sup> Susanto, *Politik penguasa dan siasat pemoeda: nasionalisme dan pendudukan Jepang di Indonesia*, p. 129.

<sup>57</sup> Susanto, *Politik penguasa dan siasat pemoeda: nasionalisme dan pendudukan Jepang di Indonesia*, p. 137.

<sup>58</sup> Jassin, *Kesusastraan Indonesia di Masa Jepang*, pp. 17–18.

<sup>59</sup> Sumaryanto, *Ensiklopedia Kesusastraan Indonesia*, p. 82.

<sup>60</sup> Sumardjo, *Perkembangan Teater Modern dan Sastra Drama Indonesia*, pp. 128–31.

<sup>61</sup> Sumardjo, *Perkembangan Teater Modern dan Sastra Drama Indonesia*, pp. 132–33.

Other groups, such as *Murni* in Semarang, *Pantjawarna* led by Njoo Cheong Seng and Armijn Pane, and the famous *Maya* troupe, also emerged. *Maya*, established on May 24, 1944, by Usmar Ismail, D. Djajakusuma, Surjo Sumanto, Rosihan Anwar, and Abu Hanifah, represented a rebellious spirit, with its members resisting Japanese control and freely developing their creative talents.<sup>62</sup> In contrast to Japanese-controlled performances, *Maya* offered a fresh experience, with performances that featured improvisation and unscripted dialogues.<sup>63</sup> Japan, displeased by the growing popularity of *Maya*, responded by organizing performances under the *Perserikatan Oesaha Sandiwara Djawa* (POSD)<sup>64</sup>. POSD established on January 15, 1945. POSD, led by Heinatsu Eitaroo, a Korean national, aimed to oversee and control all theatrical performances in Java, ensuring that they aligned with Japan's interests.<sup>65</sup>

In POSD, many new regulations were introduced, where to prevent deviations, the improvisational style of the 1920s-1930s, which had often been used before, was then prohibited to ensure that actors would not fill the dialogue with content aimed at criticizing Japan or promoting nationalism. The regulations regarding the drama script in Japan's artistic policies ultimately led to a change, making dramatic literature a crucial and central component in every performance.<sup>66</sup>

#### Music

Before the establishment of KBS, propaganda songs began to be created as early as April 1942. However, the founding of KBS further amplified the creation of music and songs with a propagandist tone. Utoyo, the head of KBS's music division, encouraged Indonesian poets and musicians to compose these songs. These songs, often with upbeat rhythms, were designed to boost the morale of the population facing difficult socio-economic conditions. They were frequently integrated into performances and films.<sup>67</sup>

In the realm of music, Western influences were removed from lyrics, especially in genres like *Keroncong*. KBS truly ensured that all forms of art were a continuation of the "Greater East Asia Prosperity" ideology.<sup>68</sup> Under Japanese rule, *Keroncong* was made "more polite and moral," with simplified melodies, formal attire for performers like kebaya, and less stylistic variety.<sup>69</sup> Another significant development was the rise of

<sup>62</sup> Sumardjo, *Perkembangan Teater Modern dan Sastra Drama Indonesia*, p. 133.

<sup>63</sup> Anwar, *Sejarah Kecil Petite Histoire Indonesia Jilid 7, Kisah-Kisah Zaman Revolusi Kemerdekaan*, pp. 39–40.

<sup>64</sup> Anwar, *Sejarah Kecil Petite Histoire Indonesia Jilid 7, Kisah-Kisah Zaman Revolusi Kemerdekaan*, p. 41.

<sup>65</sup> Sumardjo, *Perkembangan Teater Modern dan Sastra Drama Indonesia*, p. 136.

<sup>66</sup> Sumardjo, *Perkembangan Teater Modern dan Sastra Drama Indonesia*, pp. 136–37.

<sup>67</sup> Aiko Kurasawa, *Mobilisasi dan Kontrol : studi tentang Perubahan Sosial di Pedesaan Jawa 1942-1945*, trans. by Hermawan Sulystio, 1st edn (Grasindo, 1993), pp. 253–55, Perpustakaan Nasional Republik Indonesia.

<sup>68</sup> Lana, 'Allegro Di Krontjong', p. 20.

<sup>69</sup> Magdalia Alfian, 'Keroncong Music Reflects the Identity of Indonesia', *TAWARIKH: International Journal for Historical Studies*, 4 (2) (2013), pp. 176–77 <<https://journals.mindamas.com/index.php/tawarikh/article/view/555/553>>.

*seriosa* songs, which saw a key figure in Cornell Simandjuntak. These patriotic propaganda songs were often played on the radio during the occupation, such as “Menanam Jagung”, which was broadcast to encourage agricultural production.<sup>70</sup>

In addition to Keroncong songs, there were Japanese military and heroism songs that were repeatedly taught in schools, training centers, Seinendan and Fujinkai meetings, and other organizations. There were two types of songs promoted: Japanese songs imported to Java and propaganda songs created in Indonesia. These songs were compiled into books, recorded on gramophones, and then distributed to schools, organizations, workplaces, and others.<sup>71</sup>

In the realm of music, an aspect that can be taken is the requirement to use the Indonesian language, especially to spread Japan’s propaganda messages. This helped increase the number of Indonesian speakers, fostering a sense of unity among the people and strengthening nationalism in Indonesia. It eliminated themes that glorified Western culture in the music and art created, leading Indonesian artists to turn to local culture and values for inspiration.

The joyful propaganda songs, which celebrated the greatness and beauty of the homeland, instilled pride in the hearts of the Indonesian people. This, in turn, indirectly contributed to the rise of nationalism and pressured national leaders to continue demanding that Japan fulfill its promises.<sup>72</sup>

#### Painting

During the Japanese occupation, visual arts, particularly painting, were driven by two main organizations: KBS and the cultural division of *Poesat Tenaga Rakjat* (POETRA).<sup>73</sup> Through these organizations, native artists received material support, such as oil paints, canvases, and studio space, along with financial assistance. Some notable artists involved with KBS included Affandi, S. Sudjojono, Emiria Soenassa, and Basuki Abdullah. KBS also facilitated open classes, technical training, and exhibitions.<sup>74</sup>

At the beginning of its occupation in 1942, Japan dissolved the Indonesian Association of Painters (PERSAGI) to limit the potential for resistance movements against Japan. As a result, individuals who were previously part of this organization were absorbed into POETRA and KBS. Despite Japan’s strict control, there was a

<sup>70</sup> Sharifah Faizah Syed Mohammed, ‘The History and Development of Lagu Seriosa in the Context of Musical Nationalism in Indonesia’ (Monash University, 2016), pp. 82–83 <[https://bridges.monash.edu/articles/thesis/The\\_History\\_and\\_Development\\_of\\_Lagu\\_Seriosa\\_in\\_the\\_Context\\_of\\_Musical\\_Nationalism\\_in\\_Indonesia/4888025?file=20021657](https://bridges.monash.edu/articles/thesis/The_History_and_Development_of_Lagu_Seriosa_in_the_Context_of_Musical_Nationalism_in_Indonesia/4888025?file=20021657)>.

<sup>71</sup> Kurasawa, *Mobilisasi dan Kontrol: studi tentang Perubahan Sosial di Pedesaan Jawa 1942-1945*, p. 253.

<sup>72</sup> Lana, ‘Allegro Di Krontjong’, p. 21.

<sup>73</sup> Tika Awalini, Warih Handayaningrum, and Welly Suryandoko, ‘Pendidikan Seni Rupa di Indonesia: Sejarah, Peran dan Tantangan Masa Depan’, *Prasi: Jurnal Bahasa, Seni dan Pengajarannya*, 18.02 (2023), p. 168.

<sup>74</sup> ‘Seni Rupa Indonesia pada Era Pendudukan Jepang dan Aspek Materialitas di Balik Aspirasi Ketimuran’, *Komunitas Salihara*, 28 May 2021 <<https://salihara.org/seni-rupa-indonesia-pada-era-pendudukan-jepang-dan-aspek-materialitas-di-balik-aspirasi-ketimuran/>>.

paradox between the increasing freedom for visual artists and the restrictions on other forms of art.<sup>75</sup> Many painters were given the opportunity to hold solo exhibitions, and there were occasional art competitions with specific themes.<sup>76</sup> In this case, the painters responded with freedom and creativity that was not forced. However, any work that criticized Japan would still result in warnings or censorship.

#### Film

As soon as Japan arrived in Indonesia, they took full control of the film industry, seizing all film companies. This was one of the urgent tasks for the Japanese military government, which formed the *Jawa Eiga Kōsha* (Japanese Film Distribution Company) in October 1942. Led by Japanese critic and staff of *sendenbu* Oya Sōichi, this organization oversaw all film policies in Indonesia.<sup>77</sup> Film became a powerful tool for disseminating propaganda because it could easily influence people across all social strata.<sup>78</sup>

The Japanese occupation influenced the Indonesian film industry by raising awareness of the power of film as a social communication tool. It also contributed to the promotion of the Indonesian language and the fostering of national pride. Films like *Keseberang* subtly incorporated themes of nationalism, despite still aligning with Japan's "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere" narrative.<sup>79</sup>

### Artists' Response to Keimin Bunka Shidosho Policies

Classifying artists' responses to the Keimin Bunka Shidosho (KBS) policies into two opinions—supporting or rejecting—would be quite challenging. At the beginning of the Japanese occupation, many artists welcomed the presence of the Japanese, but over time, they became more aware of the coercive nature of these policies, which primarily benefitted Japan. As a result, differing responses emerged, with some artists continuing to align with their priorities or interests, some opting to rebel, and others choosing to maintain a dual role, using their works to defend Indonesia and promote nationalism in subtle ways that could pass Japanese censorship.

Artists who supported the KBS policies are those who remained within the institution without rebellion or creating works outside its rules, despite knowing that the policies primarily served Japan's interests. One such artist was Mualim Sabri Munir. In an interview, Mualim shared that during the Japanese occupation, he led and directed a theater group called *Sibolga Gekidang*. The plays they performed were ones that

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<sup>75</sup> 'Seni Rupa Indonesia pada Era Pendudukan Jepang dan Aspek Materialitas di Balik Aspirasi Ketimuran'.

<sup>76</sup> 'Seni Rupa Indonesia pada Era Pendudukan Jepang dan Aspek Materialitas di Balik Aspirasi Ketimuran', pp. 41–43.

<sup>77</sup> Kurasawa, *Mobilisasi dan Kontrol: studi tentang Perubahan Sosial di Pedesaan Jawa 1942-1945*, pp. 237–38.

<sup>78</sup> Adi Putra Surya Wardhana, 'Propaganda Ideologi Bushido dalam Film Djagal Tanah Djawa pada Masa Pendudukan Jepang', *Handep Jurnal Sejarah dan Budaya*, 5.1 (2021), pp. 49–68 (p. 56), doi:10.33652/handep.v5i1.202.

<sup>79</sup> Usmar Ismail, *Usmar Ismail Mengupas Film*, 6th edn (Penerbit Sinar Harapan, 1983), pp. 55–56, Perpustakaan Nasional Republik Indonesia.

aligned with Japan's interests.<sup>80</sup> In addition to leading the theater group, Mualim was involved in Japan's government's propaganda efforts for Greater East Asia, even though Mualim himself was a religious figure. He explained that he did this to avoid accusations of being anti-Japanese or anti-Greater East Asia.<sup>81</sup> Apart from fear, some artists also stayed on principle. This occurred with R.M. Soetarto, who worked in the film industry. Soetarto stated that he worked with the Japanese to gain knowledge, seeing it as a professional decision rather than an act of collaboration. For him, it was a matter of principle. In his interview, Soetarto also briefly mentioned some of the things he learned while working with the Japanese.<sup>82</sup>

Some artists, however, tried to break free from the constraints imposed by the institution and the stifling policies it enforced, establishing their own artistic groups to regain their creative freedom. One such example was the formation of the *Maya* theater troupe, born out of dissatisfaction with the policies of the Japanese authorities, particularly KBS. D. Djajakusuma in an interview explained that the *Maya* amateur theater group provided a space for artists to freely engage in their craft. The *Maya* organization was not dictated by Japan's policies, and therefore, the stories they performed were selected freely, without Japanese restrictions. In addition to performing in one location, the *Maya* troupe frequently toured villages and towns to entertain the local population. Besides their theatrical performances, a choir led by Cornell Simandjuntak also performed their works.<sup>83</sup>

Artists who were opposed to Japan can be classified as those who used their art for the benefit of Indonesia. D. Djajakusuma also mentioned that, at that time, artists could not escape the political situation, which was closely tied to the progress of the Asia-Pacific War and the connection between the artists and the *Menteng 31* youth movement. Leading up to and after Indonesia's declaration of independence, artists continued to fight and were later involved in a new organization called *Seniman Merdeka* (Free Artists), which included former KBS artists like Usmar Ismail and Cornell Simandjuntak. They toured villages to spread and defend Indonesia's independence in preparation for the return of the British, Gurkha, and other forces.<sup>84</sup>

Painters also contributed in their own way, using leftover paints from KBS for the struggle. They created posters, pamphlets, and images to boost morale in the fight against foreign rulers. This artistic activity was particularly prominent towards the end of the Japanese occupation and during the early days of independence.<sup>85</sup> One of the

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<sup>80</sup> Mualim Sabri Munir, *Proyek Sejarah Lisan Arsip Nasional RI* (Sibolga, 1975), Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia.

<sup>81</sup> Mualim Sabri Munir, *Proyek Sejarah Lisan Arsip Nasional RI*.

<sup>82</sup> Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia, *Di Bawah Pendudukan Jepang Kenangan Empat Puluh Dua Orang Yang Mengalaminya*, p. 80.

<sup>83</sup> D. Djajakusuma, *Proyek Sejarah Lisan Arsip Nasional RI* (Jakarta, 1984), Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia.

<sup>84</sup> D. Djajakusuma, *Proyek Sejarah Lisan Arsip Nasional RI*.

<sup>85</sup> Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia, *Di Bawah Pendudukan Jepang Kenangan Empat Puluh Dua Orang Yang Mengalaminya*, p. 75.

notable painters, S. Sudjojono, had been part of KBS' s visual arts division since 1944 and served as a mentor for KBS's fine arts program. However, he had been aware from the very beginning of the Japanese occupation that Japan's intentions were not genuine in helping Indonesia. Sudjojono, who had been involved in nationalist movements and was a former member of GERINDO, shared :

"At the end of the Dutch colonial period, Japan gave us hopes, such as, Now Indonesia will see the Red and White flag fly. But I told my friends with a laugh, 'Which Red and White? The Red and White ball, or the real Red and White?' And it turned out I was right. That's why I thought, Let's not let our painters be used as propaganda tools for Japan".<sup>86</sup>

Despite his awareness of Japan's underlying motives, Sudjojono chose to cooperate because he wanted to prevent Indonesian artists from being exploited by Japan, especially when all nationalist organizations and movements were disbanded. Sudjojono explained:

"If they give us paint, I'll take it. But for what purpose? Don't ask me. Because for me, the most important thing is culture for humanity, not for war. So, I diverted it. Not openly, because if I refused, I would definitely be arrested".<sup>87</sup>

In the end, artists, particularly those within the cultural propaganda institutions like KBS, played their part in Indonesia's struggle for independence in their own ways. Whether through writing, painting, or theater, they fought the occupation in their own creative ways. Even pro-Japanese artists, who were nationalists at heart, chose to stay because of their principles and professional commitments as artists. Ultimately, no one could entirely justify Japan's use of art as a propaganda tool in Indonesia.

## Conclusion

From the discussion above, it can be concluded that the KBS institution, which was initially established by Japan for propaganda purposes, eventually played a significant role in the development and dynamics of art in Indonesia. Additionally, KBS also had a dual role as a gathering place for artists, fostering nationalist ideas. The policies of KBS became a catalyst for the dynamics of art in Indonesia, where Indonesian artists, with their ideas and nationalism, managed to bring about changes in art, whether in terms of form, theme, style, or meaning, despite the pressure from Japan.

The role of KBS in the dynamics of art in Indonesia included transforming and developing forms, styles, and themes in art. In literature, under KBS, the expectation was that the produced works would serve the interests of the Japanese government. Prior to Japan' s arrival, literature had developed freely based on ideas and expressions. However, with the Japanese occupation, literature was restricted and

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<sup>86</sup> Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia, *Di Bawah Pendudukan Jepang Kenangan Empat Puluh Dua Orang Yang Mengalaminya*, p. 81.

<sup>87</sup> Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia, *Di Bawah Pendudukan Jepang Kenangan Empat Puluh Dua Orang Yang Mengalaminya*, pp. 81–82.

pushed to align with Japanese interests. Similarly, in theater under KBS, there was a shift from professional theater to amateur theater. Technically, performances during the Japanese era were different from those before, with performances now held in fixed locations rather than traveling, and requiring a more structured approach with written scripts and actors memorizing their dialogues.

In music, during the Japanese occupation, there was a visible change in the lyrics, as Western elements and languages were replaced by Japanese or Indonesian. As a result, the use of the Indonesian language expanded. Western influences, especially in songs and music like Keroncong, were also eliminated. KBS ensured that all forms of art aligned with the concept of “Greater East Asia Prosperity.” In visual arts, Indonesia saw significant development and increased public exhibitions. The visual arts under Japanese control appeared to have more freedom compared to other forms of art. Many local painters were also given opportunities for personal exhibitions. Finally, in the field of film, Japan’s arrival in Indonesia removed the previous focus on commercialism and Americanism, replacing it with propaganda, which introduced a new awareness of the function of film as a social communication tool.

In conclusion, the KBS played a pivotal role in shaping and influencing the evolution of Indonesian art during the Japanese occupation, impacting not only the form and style of various art disciplines but also contributing to the broader movement of Indonesian nationalism.

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