

Title	Personal Reflections on the Japanese Occupation in Indonesia (<Special Issue>The Formation of the Indonesian Nation : In Memory of the Late Professor Kenji Tsuchiya)
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Citation	東南アジア研究 (1996), 34(1): 211-223
Issue Date	1996-06
URL	<a href="http://hdl.handle.net/2433/56590">http://hdl.handle.net/2433/56590</a>
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Type	Departmental Bulletin Paper
Textversion	publisher

## Personal Reflections on the Japanese Occupation in Indonesia\*

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History—to begin with a much quoted definition by Professor Carr—is a never-ending dialogue between the past and the present. As the present gradually recedes into the past, our perceptions of the latter changes, and the images we have of it alter accordingly. There is also an often used metaphor, of life being likened to a journey upon a mountain. As we advance in age, we are reaching ever higher planes, and the view of the field we have left behind is constantly changing the higher we climb. The scenery is also changing according to weather conditions, sometimes bright and sunny but at other moments cloudy and somber. Likewise our views and sentiments of the past will change according to time, place, and “weather conditions” of the moment.

There is a part of our past which we—Japanese and Indonesians—have in common. Although it was the same past, perceptions of it differ. Indonesians and Japanese tend to look differently at those years we have shared in the past. But even among Indonesians themselves and among the Japanese also, perceptions are not the same. It is for this very reason that I am limiting myself on this occasion to talk about my own *personal* reflections.

This year, 1995, is a year of commemorations. It was 50 years ago when World War II ended and the process of democratization could begin in Japan. The end of militarism paved the way for political liberalisation and transformed the Japanese people socially as well as culturally during the difficult postwar years. A tradition of hard work and discipline, of collective endeavour and social solidarity proved to be valuable assets to face the economic challenge of the early decades after the war, and eventually shaped the present condition of Japan as a first-rate economic power in the world with an affluent society.

For the Indonesians it was also a difficult time, but problems were not similar. First we had to fight for our independence in the face of Dutch reactionary forces, and internal

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\* An early version of this text was presented as a general lecture at Otani University, Department of Intercultural Studies, Kyoto, Tuesday, April 25, 1995.

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conflicts had to be overcome to preserve the integrity of the nation. The economic crisis, accompanied by an ever soaring inflation culminated in the *prahara* (calamity) of 1965. Today there are still many many problems to be solved, but as we are now celebrating *Indonesia Emas* (the Golden Anniversary of the Republic) Indonesians are looking with more confidence towards a future when the fruits of *Pembangunan*, the Development Programme, can be distributed and shared in equity by an increasing number of the population.

The turbulent years between 1942 and 1945 in Indonesia's history which is known as the period of Japanese Occupation have different meanings for Japanese and Indonesians. And only those, Japanese as well as Indonesians, who have made peace with their own past, can look back with feelings of acquiescence, and perhaps fulfillment and appreciation, to those years of suffering and hardship. For despite adverse conditions and painful experiences during a time of war, those years had been years of trial and determination which have molded us into what we are today.

Before continuing, however, I have to make a rectification. The wartime years were no doubt a period of hardship and suffering, but being in my early teens at the time, we, including my brothers and sisters as well as my immediate friends, had been spared of most of the troubles since our parents had protected us from many worries and problems of life during the war. It was they who had to face and absorb all kinds of shocks, making ends meet and securing food, clothing and other necessities of life for the family which then must have been very difficult indeed. Only much later did we learn how bad things had actually been, and it is still with feelings of appreciation and thankfulness to our elders that we look back to this part of our past.

But of course those years were not as carefree for us as it would have been in normal times. There was a war going on, and the situation was uncertain. We heard about fathers and brothers being taken to prison, some even tortured to force out confessions about a certain "crime," and such fate could also befall our own elders, because even a false report would have been enough for the occupying forces to take action without proper trial. So we have learned to be careful of our actions and speech so as not to compromise those who were near to us.

And during the last year of the war feelings of uncertainty of one's own life increased. It was evident then that Japan was losing the war, for everyday Allied planes flew over the country raiding and bombing what they thought to be military targets but which more often than not were dwellings of innocent villagers. It must be admitted that prior to the attacks the planes dropped pamphlets urging the people to stay away from these targets, but nobody dared to pick up let alone read those warnings for fear of being turned in by informants. And again, it is with gratitude that we look back to these events from which we succeeded to get off scot-free.

Living a relatively protected life in a small town where communication with the outside world was lacking, made us also unaware of what was happening in other places

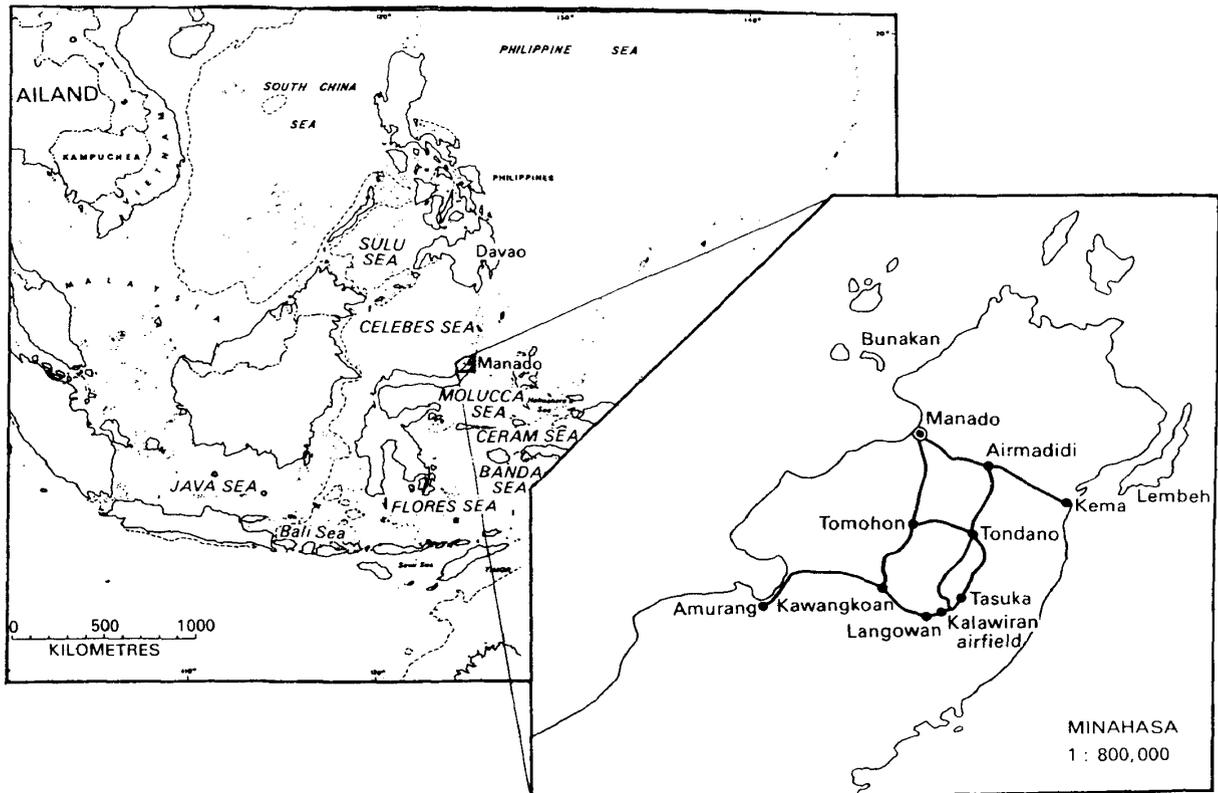
of Indonesia. Only much later did we learn about atrocities, about the procurement of forced labour, of “comfort women,” and of the massacres that was taking place in Kalimantan towards the end of the war. No doubt for those who endured all these experiences personally, reflections on this period would be different from my own.

Reflections are more than mere recollections. They are reconsiderations, ideas about something that arise in one’s mind after thoughtful contemplation based on one’s experiences and one’s own readings and comprehension about the past. Owing to the time constraint, I will here limit myself to three topics only, which I think were influential in shaping the course of Indonesian history : the end of Dutch rule, national identity, and the 1945 Generation.

### The End of Dutch Rule

The occupation for us in North Sulawesi began on January 11, 1942, about three months before the Netherlands East Indies government capitulated to the invading Japanese forces. I was then living with my parents and grandparents in Tomohon,—a small town in Minahasa in the northeastern tip of the island of Sulawesi,—about 12 years old (13 according to the Japanese system), a pupil of the seventh grade (which was then the highest grade) of elementary school.

I remember the day very well and can still hear the voice of a neighbour calling in the



morning, urging us to leave the town as Japanese troops have landed in Manado, the capital of the region, which was only 25 kilometres away from our town. Although we know that sooner or later we will feel the impact of the war, begun on December 8, 1941, we have never thought of evacuation. Ever since the month of December, just a few weeks after the outbreak of the war, Japanese planes have been flying reconnaissance missions over the area, and there was even an attack on Tasuka, a Dutch amphibious aircraft base on the lake of Tondano. Indeed, Micronesia where the Japanese have settled after the First World War, is only a few hours' flight away from this part of Sulawesi, but we have never thought that they would have landed here, at least not so soon.

With feelings of apprehension we stayed at home, listening to the radio (but the NIROM, the Netherlands Indies radio station in Java, was obviously ignorant at the moment of what was happening in far away Minahasa!), awaiting further developments, and seeing hordes of people fleeing we-did-not-know-where-to with their belongings. About noon some distant shots were heard, but as the afternoon wore on, the shootings sounded nearer and nearer. Not long afterward we saw KNIL soldiers (the Dutch East Indies Army) retreating, some of them discarding their uniform, apparently with the intention to desert. They were not taking the main road, but were seen everywhere, among bushes and under the trees. The gunshots continued and came menacingly nearer.

I cannot remember who made the first move, but all of a sudden without uttering a word, we all ran to the backyard and further down to the rice fields behind our house. There was, however, not much shelter except for a small makeshift used for watching the birds that would come to eat the ripening *padi*. But the shooting sounded more closer, so we went further and further until we arrived at a hut which appeared to be fully packed with refugees like us. Meanwhile the sun had set, and together with the crowd, most of them strangers or people not recognisable because of the dark, we spent the whole night in anxiety of what was to come. Now and then somebody joined us, and I remember a new arrival telling that he had actually *seen* Japanese soldiers in the village. I also remember my father exclaiming that it was the end of Dutch rule, of long centuries of foreign domination. He was an activist in the nationalist movement, and only later did I realise that he said it with a sense of relief.

Some Dutchmen might also have had the feeling that it was the end, for they started destroying everything of consequence. Perhaps this was one of the measures they were ordered to do in the last instance when there was no way out and when the battle was lost. But usually destruction was limited to things of strategic value, like bridges and bastions to prevent the enemy from using them in their offensive. But the bridges remained intact so that the invading troops could easily cross the river valleys. However, lost forever were the colonial archives of the residency of Manado, the public records kept by the government for at least two and a half centuries. An uncle who was employed in the office of the Minahasa Council (Minahassaraad) opposite the Resident's

headquarters, witnessed how Dutch colonial officials themselves set fire to the papers. Apparently for them there was a feeling of loss : the world they knew had ended. Surely the colonial government did come back after the war, but history would never be the same again.

We now know that the Japanese invasion of Manado was carried out by the Sasebo Combined Landing Force who departed from Davao in Mindanao, the day before, in six transport ships with naval escort [J. J. Nortier 1988]. The force consisted of 2,500 men, divided in three groups, one making a beach-head in Kema (the seaport on the east coast) and two in Manado itself, north and south of the Dutch fortification. As was usual practice of Japanese landing forces, it took place in the early morning before dawn.

They were assisted by the Yokosuka Special Landing Force, a total of 519 parachutists. At about 10 o'clock in the morning of the 11th of January the first batch of 334 parachutists were dropped on Kalawiran, an airfield near the town of Langowan south of Lake Tondano. The following day another group of 185 men parachuted on the same spot, and already on that same day all landing forces had made contact with each other. The Japanese occupation of Minahasa had become a reality.

Although many political activists were relieved that Dutch power had ceased to exist, they were watching and waiting carefully what the new rulers were going to do. Unlike in some places in Java and Sumatra where the invading troops were welcomed as liberators, the local people just waited for things to come. Perhaps they were taken aback or even frightened by the harsh measures of the conquerors, for on the first day some people caught at looting shops and abandoned houses were shot without mercy. Thus martial order and discipline was instilled very early, and in the beginning it was wise to keep a safe distance from the new masters.

Those who saw the troops as liberators, however, were soon to be disappointed. The red-and-white flag which they hoisted to welcome the Japanese soldiers and as an expression of rejoice, was prohibited by the occupation government. Indeed, the slogan that "Asia was returned to Asians" which in the Indonesian language was *Asia telah kembali kepada bangsa Asia* could also be interpreted as "Asia returned to [an] Asian nation" which was Japan! A wellknown slogan said that Japan was the "leader," "protector," and the "light" of Asia.

In any case, it was not [yet] the intention of the Japanese wartime government to hand over the Archipelago to the Indonesians. The main purpose for the occupation of the Netherlands Indies was to have access to the raw materials of the country, especially oil which was of vital importance to the war effort. Early in 1941 the Imperial Army even envisaged to cooperate with the Dutch colonial government as they did with the French in Indochina. According to the "Draft of the General Plan for Rule in Occupied Areas in Southern Operations" (*Nanpo Sakusen ni okeru Senryochi Tochi, Yokoan*) the East Indies should be ruled jointly with the Netherlands and not placed under Japanese military rule whereby Japan had control over things of military importance which meant the mainte-

nance of public order, securing of natural resources, and local supplies for Japanese, while the Dutch would continue to have control over internal affairs, economics, education, etc.<sup>1)</sup>

The Imperial Navy, on the other hand, had a more “progressive” vision as they acknowledged some of the aspirations of the Indonesian independence movement. In a book issued by the Navy in August 1941 called “A Policy Study on the Dutch East Indies” (*Ran'in Taisaku no Kenkyu*) it was argued that the Indian Archipelago be brought into the proposed Greater East Asia Coprosperity Sphere led by Japan. Efforts should be made to create the new order in the Far East by peaceful means, but if necessary Japan should not refrain from using force. Eventually the Archipelago could be made into a colony, perhaps a protectorate and given autonomy, or joined in a federal system. A semi-independent status for Indonesia was thought to be the most appropriate solution, but for the time being military rule would be imposed.

If at the outset plans for administering the areas to be occupied in Southeast Asia differed among the armed forces, by November 20, 1941, less than three weeks before the attack on Pearl Harbor, a “Basic Plan for Administering [the] Southern Occupied Area” (*Nanpo Senryochi Gyosei Jisshi Yoryo*) was submitted which outlined three rules that were largely to determine the policy of Japan’s military regimes in Southeast Asia: (1) maintenance of public order and peace, thus implying that Japan would refrain from encouraging the independence movement; (2) procurement of crude oil and other major resources; (3) self-sufficiency for the local Japanese military forces, meaning that supplies are to be obtained in the area itself, not from Japan. Evidently Japan’s image of Southeast Asia during the Meiji Era was still alive: “North for Man, South for Materials”—Japan as the seat of culture and skilled manpower, and Southeast Asia as the place for raw materials and labour. Although many Japanese have changed their opinion about Southeast Asia since then, Southeast Asians still have the impression that there are still many adherents to this idea in Japan today.

The defeat at the battle of Midway in June 1942 was a turn in the Pacific War in favour of the Allies, but when in July 1944 the Americans had conquered the island of Saipan, the situation changed from bad to worse for Japan. In North Sulawesi, American raids and bombardments became the order of the day, and in September 1944 the city of Manado where I was attending secondary school (*chu-gakko*) was completely destroyed, soon to be followed by air raids on other towns. The town of Langowan which was in the vicinity of an airfield, was also totally destroyed.

It was during this time, to be exact on September 7, 1944, when Premier Koiso Kuniaki announced before a special session of the 85th Imperial Diet that the East Indies would be given independence “in the near future” [Anderson 1961]. Although local commanders were instructed not to hurry with preparations towards this end—they

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1) See Goto [1983]. The following parts are also heavily relying on Goto’s article.

should keep the date of independence indefinite—the use of national symbols such as the singing of *Indonesia Raya* which was to become the national anthem, was allowed. Indeed during the six months after the Koiso Declaration activities in this direction moved “at a snail’s pace” [*ibid.*: 9].

Real actions were only taken during the first months of 1945. And on March 1, 1945 the establishment of a Committee for the Investigation of Indonesian Independence (BPKI, Badan Penyelidik Kemerdekaan Indonesia) was announced by the Gunseikan (head of civilian administration) which was to study the way the independent state should be administered and ruled. It was an obvious move to solicit support from the local population when the Americans were already back in the Philippines and the British had returned to Burma. Soon, the following month, Okinawa would be occupied by American forces and the Japanese in the Archipelago were thus more and more being cut off from their home country. It should also be remembered that only two weeks before, on the night of February 14th, a revolt erupted in the Peta (Pembela Tanah Air, Defenders of the Fatherland) garrison of Blitar (East Java).

Subsequent events are wellknown to the general public: the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the eventual capitulation of Japan. Less known, however, at least to the general public in Japan, are the events in Indonesia following the defeat in August 1945. The birth of the Republic of Indonesia is still regarded by many as a fabrication of the Occupation Government. In fact, that was also the Dutch stand after the war who maintained that the new republic was a Japanese product and, therefore, should be treated similarly as those established by the Japanese Government in Burma and the Philippines. It denies the fact that independence was proclaimed by the Indonesian people, the culmination of decades of national struggle for freedom which found its momentum in the aftermath of the Pacific War when the Japanese have capitulated while the Dutch were away.

Admittedly the deliberations of the BPKI (since August 7 replaced by the PPKI or Panitia Persiapan Kemerdekaan Indonesia, the Committee to Prepare Independence for Indonesia) set up by the Occupation Government had prepared for the infrastructure, but apart from appointing the members of the Committee, the military regime was not involved in the debates. Indeed most Japanese officers saw the Committee only as “a sop to Nationalist sentiment” [*ibid.*: 28]. But the Indonesians developed it into a platform for drawing up more concrete plans for the future. It was here also that the *Pancasila*, the five principles that became the philosophy of the state, has its roots.

No doubt the psychological shock that was caused by the news of Japan’s surrender was very hard to be absorbed by the Occupation troops from the highest to the lowest ranks. But good military discipline demanded a strict obedience of the Imperial declaration about the end of hostilities. Even those Japanese who are sympathetic to the Indonesian cause had to follow Imperial orders which meant that they have to be disarmed and wait for their repatriation. They were also given orders by the Allies to be

responsible for peace and order in the area and maintain a status quo. Therefore, officially they would and could no longer support the Indonesian desire for independence.

The Japanese in Indonesia at this stage could be distinguished into two categories, according to Goto [1984], the “allegiance” and the “renunciation” type. The former who formed the biggest majority obediently returned to Japan where they had to lead a new life under American occupation, while the latter renounced their allegiance to the Emperor. Among the second group there were those who chose to die and committed suicide, and those who identified themselves with Indonesians by fully immersing into the Indonesian community. Some of them participated actively in the war of independence. It was for example as an Indonesian citizen with the name of Abdul Rachman when Ichiki Tatsuo was killed in a battle near Malang (East Java) on January 9, 1949.

### Indonesian Identity

When we returned to our homes the next day after having spent the night of the invasion in the hut with so many people, the first question Japanese soldiers asked us was “*Oranda-ka, Indonesia-ka?*” [are we Dutch or Indonesian?]. I am not sure whether the same question was asked in all newly occupied areas in Indonesia, but the name *Indonesia* was certainly used in the eastern part where the Imperial Navy held sway. The plurality of ethnic groups here created the need for a common noun and *Indonesia* was the most convenient choice.

For Minahasans and any other indigenous ethnic groups it was not a difficult question to answer, but to some people, for example those of mixed (mostly Dutch) descent, it must have been a crucial problem indeed. To be identified as Dutch meant to be interned in camps and to suffer humiliation and hardship under the military guards. However, some Eurasians purposefully turned themselves in, either to have a “secure” life among like-minded people rather than to have an uncertain future under an alien regime, or to be assured of a Dutch status which in the colonial context of racial discrimination was denied to them.<sup>2)</sup>

By hindsight, this simple question of asking people whether they were Indonesians or not, was in essence a very important step towards the growth of the Indonesian nation. On October 28, 1928 youth organizations of the independence movement, consisting of people from different ethnic groups, pledged to be members of one nation and residents of one fatherland: Indonesia. They, together with their more senior partners had consciously opted for a merger of all ethnicities into one nation. They were, however, a

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2) This dilemma for the Indo-Europeans during the Japanese Occupation in Java is the theme of a novel by Beb Vuyk, *De eigen wereld en de andere*.

small educated elite among the masses. And now, for the first time in history everybody in the occupied area was confronted with the idea of identifying themselves, consciously or subconsciously, with the ideals of the *Sumpah Pemuda*, the Youth Oath of 1928.

In official practice, however, the Indonesians are referred to as *genjumin* (natives), but as the Japanese language had just been introduced this designation was not widely known among the people and, therefore, for them it did not have the negative connotation as its Dutch equivalent of *inlander*. Perhaps also the word was not used in a derogatory sense. Anyhow, the Japanese were later prohibited of using it, and were told to use *Indonesia-jin* instead. This was announced on the Emperor's birthday on April 29, 1945, together with the permission of flying the Indonesian red-and-white flag on certain buildings specified by the Gunseikan.

We did not realise it at the time, but now, thinking about the early weeks of occupation, it is indeed surprising that the invading troops knew about the name *Indonesia*, for in those days it was not widely used, certainly not outside the Archipelago except in the anthropological sense in academic circles. In the 1930s, however, some leaders of the Independence movement had made contact with Japanese political circles, and it must have been through such channels that news about Indonesian aspirations for freedom had trickled down to the Japanese public.

Here it should be pointed out that the Independence movement was divided into two groups, the cooperators and non-cooperators (or usually known as *ko* and *non* respectively). The first group of politicians tried to achieve independence by joining the representative councils set up by the colonial government where they championed their cause, while the latter simply regarded that the colonial system was illegitimate and, therefore, refused all forms of cooperation with the Dutch government. Members of the second group such as Sukarno, Hatta, Cipto Mangunkusumo, Syahrir, Iwa Kusumasumantri, etc. were exiled by the Dutch to remote places.

When the war in Europe broke out, particularly when the Netherlands were occupied by Nazi Germany, the non-cooperators condemned the fascist ideology which was then spreading over the European continent. They sympathised with the Dutch who were now suffering under an illegitimate fascist regime and hoped that democratic forces would soon gain the upper hand.

On the other hand, the cooperators more and more lost their confidence in the Dutch as they found out that they were unwilling to yield any form of self government to the Indonesians. The mild and moderate motion in the People's Council (Volksraad) known as the Soetardjo Petition which demanded autonomy within a union of the Dutch kingdom, was kept suspended for a long time, and only after two years the reply came, in the negative!

No wonder some prominent members of the *ko*-faction began to seek other ways, and Japan was then considered as an alternative. Sato Nobuhide, director of the Batavia branch of the Economic Bureau of Tokyo Municipality, and adviser to the Chief of Staff

of Navy Headquarters, was actively collecting information on the economic situation in the Indies in the late 1930s. This was in preparation for the 1940 meeting on trade between Japan and the Netherlands Indies. Among the main contacts of Sato was Mohammad Husni Thamrin, leader of the nationalist faction in the Volksraad and Vice Chairman of the Council. Thamrin became more and more outspoken about his Japanese sympathies, and in his famous last speech in the Council he referred to the name of Kobajasi (i. e. the spelling of Kobayashi, the leader of the Japanese delegation to the trade meeting) as “**Koloni Orang Belanda Akan Jepang Ambil Seantero Indonesia**” (The whole Dutch colony of Indonesia will be taken by Japan). This and other such statements made the Dutch authorities suspicious. His house was searched for incriminating material, and while under house arrest he died suddenly on January 11, 1941 [Goto 1986]. It must be here noted that Thamrin during his tenure in the People’s Council had successfully campaigned to have the name *Indonesia* and the use of the Indonesian language accepted in the Volksraad.

The adoption of the Indonesian language as the national language is an important asset in the process of national integration. The decision was made in 1928 at the Youth Congress and was explicitly mentioned in the Oath which said that Indonesians will have one language, Malay, which was for ages the *lingua franca* in the Archipelago. Later the name Malay was substituted for “Indonesia,” and indeed since then the language developed separately from “classical” Malay used in the 1920s.

When the Japanese occupied the Indonesian Archipelago the use of the Dutch language was forbidden. In the early period Japanese authorities made every effort to introduce the Japanese language. It was part of an effort to transform the local people into “imperial subjects,” and everywhere language schools were established. But it proved to be an impossible dream, so the choice fell on Indonesian (at first called *Marai-go*, but since 29 April 1945 officially named *Indonesia-go*) as the official vehicle of communication “for smooth execution of Japanese administration.” It was thus out of pragmatical considerations that the Japanese authorities promoted the use of the language. But it provided an opportunity for the Indonesian people to develop it into a modern language so that it became a vehicle for education in schools up to university level.

### The '45 Generation

As we are commemorating fifty years of Indonesian independence, many of the founding fathers have gone, and sooner or later the remaining members of the 1945 Generation will follow. It is a generation who has known three periods, the years of Dutch colonialism, Japanese occupation, and independent government—the last one of their own making after more than four years of hard struggle.

Theirs was a generation of very mixed ethnic backgrounds. Many of them had, beside instruction in the intricate rules of traditional custom, undergone years of religious schooling. Others went to Dutch educational institutions where they were taught Western values and principles. They also learned Dutch patriotic history and songs which sang of a country with “white tops of the dunes” and “the bronze-green oak-woods where nightingales sing.” But patriotic feelings learned through songs about a far away country never seen were soon addressed to one’s own. A song composed when Holland was under German occupation began with the hope that “Once the day will come when the Netherlands will rise again” was conveniently applied to Indonesian circumstances under the Dutch themselves.

The Japanese Occupation abolished the various schools established during the colonial period and introduced a unified system of education, of course now oriented towards the Land of the Rising Sun. Here also patriotic songs were taught, but the white tops of the dunes had been replaced by the white-capped top of Mount Fuji, and the green oakwoods had to make way for the cherry blossoms of the mountain and the plum blossoms in wintertime. Thus the '45 Generation was immersed in different kinds of patriotism which they interpreted in their own way. Soon they were chanting patriotic songs of their own making, in praise of “the waving green palm trees at the sea-shore.”

Very rigorous training was given to young men, the *pemuda* who became the backbone of the war of independence. They came from all walks of life and received military training in specially established *dojo*. Yet despite the harsh discipline they had to endure, in general they look back to these days not with resentment. On the contrary, they recollect this period with much appreciation and pride.

Discipline in the Seinendojo (Youth Training School for Military Arts), according to a participant, “was very extreme.” If a mistake was made they “were beaten over the head with shoes and things like that.” Nevertheless the Japanese commander was “admired and respected...enormously. He was very brave, quite honest and ruthlessly impartial...” [Anderson 1972 : 22 – 24].

Another recalled that the training was not purely military. Training for Peta officers did not only consist of an “intensive study of the history of the military arts, military strategy, combat tactics and weapons technology.” It was more intended “for acquiring physical and spiritual strength.” The Japanese instructors insisted that “victory or defeat did not depend on the size of one’s military forces. Smaller forces could always conquer their adversaries, provided they had a burning spirit of struggle and had undergone complete training... Thus they implanted the idea that the single most important quality of a soldier was the soldierly spirit.”<sup>3)</sup>

Spiritual strength derived from so many sources produced the singular blend of the *Spirit of 1945*—which was the special mark of the generation that had to face the

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3) See Soehoed Prawiroatmojo [1953 : 50, 54, 57, 59], quoted in [Anderson 1972].

challenges of the time. A generation that has learned from personal experience that the cherished dream of freedom will never be earned as a gift, neither from colonial authorities nor from the occupational administration. It has to be achieved by a united effort, through physical and psychological hardships, and personal sacrifice.

### Conclusion

My classmates and I were twelve-year old schoolchildren when the war began. The end of the war found us as adolescents of nearly sixteen. They were thus important formative years, sometimes very confusing, but opening windows to different worlds with different values and principles. They were also decisive years for the history of the Indonesian state and nation.

I hope to have made it clear that the Proclamation of Independence which gave birth to the Indonesian state was an entirely Indonesian affair. The Japanese Occupation government—apart from some individual sympathisers—was an aloof outsider. From the very outset it was not the official intention to grant the Indonesians political freedom. But there were indeed some “progressive” elements, especially in the Navy, who thought that eventually the people should be given a semi-independent status. However, the vicissitudes of war necessitated the Japanese government to give concessions which the Indonesian leaders had made fully use of. The capitulation completely halted Japanese moves. On the contrary, by order of the Allied command they had not only to abandon their former comrades, but instead turn against them which in several places had caused bloody skirmishes between the two parties.

But the period of Occupation was not without rewards. It put an end to Dutch rule in the first place. It provided an opportunity for the people to foster feelings of solidarity in times of hardship, nourish their national identity, and gather self confidence to determine their own future. It also brought the peoples of Japan and Indonesia together which, despite awkward relationships between rulers and ruled, created personal bonds of friendship, developed understanding and appreciation of each other's culture which would be valuable assets for both sides in future dealings when the war was over.

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