

Anticolonial Fascism: The Japanese and the Making of the Indonesian Army

A research progress update

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This paper focuses on the distinctive social and ideological circumstances of the Japanese wartime training of Indonesian paramilitaries and the subsequent impact of this experience upon independent Indonesia's formative history, including the development and evolution of the Indonesian army in the Sukarno years and the army-led and U.S.-supported installation of the army-dominated Suharto regime in 1965-66. For many of the Japanese involved in the wartime paramilitary training project, they represented a somewhat autonomous laboratory for the realization of ambitions whipped up by Japanese propaganda but frustrated in practice. Both for the Japanese trainers and the young, impressionable Indonesian participants, who were consciously chosen from conservative social backgrounds, the experience was often life-shaping, sometimes building strategic personal relationships that extended far into the Cold War, with hidden, ambiguous and profound consequences. The former trainees, and many of those in turn trained by them, would form the core of the leadership of the new Indonesian army, and they would carry anticommunist, anti-Chinese, gender-, ethnic- and cultural- essentialist sentiments nurtured by the Japanese with them into the Cold War and its new alignments. For their opponents as well as allied interests both foreign and domestic, they represented a formidable force, and their institutional and ideological legacy remain as strong as ever.

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