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Kita Sumatera Sinbun newspaper as Japanese propaganda media in East Sumatera, Indonesia, 1943-1945

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Abstract

Japan's ambition to be an Asian giant has been shown since 1937 in the Asia-Pacific War or in Japan it is called the Great East Asian War. In an effort to win the sympathy of the Asian people, Japan carried out various propaganda campaigns. In Indonesia, the propaganda was launched by the Japanese military government was very intensive by stating that they were brothers in arms to drive out Western imperialism, and promised independence for Indonesia. To launch its propaganda, Japan facilitated and supervised what was published in Indonesian newspapers every *shu*. In East Sumatera, the Japanese-founded propaganda newspaper is called *Kita Sumatera Sinbun*. Although the coverage of *Kita Sumatera Sinbun* newspaper varies, almost all of the content contains propaganda for domestic and foreign consumption. This study aims to reveal why Japan formed the *Kita Sumatera Sinbun* newspaper as their propaganda media in East Sumatera, and how the impact of the propaganda narratives in this newspaper on the political, economic and social aspects of the people of East Sumatera.

Keywords: Japanese occupation; Asia-Pacific War; *Kita Sumatera Sinbun*; East Sumatera.

1. Introduction

Japan's ambition to become an Asian giant was demonstrated by its planned and relatively quick conquest of the Greater East Asian war. The plan was later seen with the subjugation of the Southeast Asian region by the Japanese military. This region of Southeast Asian is important because it is rich in natural resources and mining, which is indispensable for Japan's war logistics needs. Therefore, Japan occupied Southeast Asia, including Indonesia, which was under Dutch rule at that time.

One of the areas of Indonesia which became the target of the Japanese occupation besides Java Island was Sumatera Island. Sumatra as the main target because it has oil mining and having richness in natural resources, could easily be conquered by the Japanese military only four days after the Dutch East Indies government officially surrendered in the Kapitulation of Kalijati on March 8th, 1942.

Japanese troops entered Sumatra on March 12th, 1942 through Tanjung Tiram, East Sumatera. A day later, on March 13th, 1942, part of the Japanese army occupied Medan. When the Japanese army enters Medan, the Dutch Police Commissioner Maseland, who is a Japanese woman and sympathetic to Japan, comes to greet the group. Meanwhile the other officials and Sultan Deli waited at the police station. After that, all the officials headed for the Medan Hotel, where Colonel Yokota (Commander of the Japanese Secret Police) was headquartered (Sinar, 1991).

During the early days of the Japanese occupation of East Sumatera, there was no significant development. The Japanese government only used office buildings that existed during the Dutch era. For the running of the administration, the Japanese military government uses employees who have previously worked in administrative matters, it's just that every head or leader in a government agency must be from the Japanese army. Perhaps the most striking thing that was done by the Japanese military government at that time was to remove and prohibit all Western attributes and replace them with Japanese rule. In addition, the Japanese military government saw the potential of the East Sumatera region as a granary which was rich in natural resources useful for war needs, especially its rubber plantations and oil mining in Pangkalan Brandan (Pelzer, 1985).

During the Japanese military rule in East Sumatera, it can be said that tobacco plantations, which during the Dutch era were the essential commodity, received less attention. This was because Japan focused on the logistical needs of war, so that many tobacco plantations were converted to rice cultivation which could support Japan's war logistical needs. In addition, rubber and castor bean plant commodities have become even more important and are widely cultivated. To work on these agricultural lands, the Japanese military government mobilized the people to support the food procurement program for the common interest. One of the programs was Japan took and distributed plantation company land to village workers and farmers to plant rice and castor trees (Pelzer, 1985).

In an effort to win the sympathy of the people, the Japanese military government carried out very intensive propaganda to convince the people that Japan was a comrade in the war to form a new order in Asia. One of the ways Japan took to realizing its propaganda goals was to employ Indonesians in the fields of school teachers, artists, literary figures and journalists. Some of the instruments in Japanese propaganda efforts are films, dramas, puppets, radio, and newspapers (Ricklefs, 2010).

To spread its propaganda, the Japanese military government also allowed the publication of Indonesian language newspapers every *shu*. In East Sumatera, the newspaper is called *Sumatera Sinbun* which has been published since November 1942. However, since August 1943, *Sumatra Sinbun* has changed name to *Kita-Sumatora-Sinbun*. This Japanese daily newspaper was issued by Syonan Sinbun Kai (Reid, 2012). Not many journalists or Medan city politicians can be accommodated in *Kita-Sumatora-Sinbun*. Therefore, most of them worked at *Sendenhan* (Japanese propaganda agency). *Sendenhan* conducts propaganda in various cultural activities, namely through performances, art exhibitions, and others, all of which are actually packaged in a contra-Western program (Reid, 2012).

The news covered in the *Kita-Sumatora-Sinbun* newspaper is very diverse. But in essence all the news was propaganda by the Japanese military government to win the sympathy of the people of East Sumatera. For this reason, this study seeks to answer the forms of propaganda narrative in the *Kita Sumatora Sinbun* newspaper, and to what extent the propaganda has succeeded in influencing the political, economic and social aspects of the people of East Sumatera.

2. Method

This study intends to trace the history of the Japanese occupation in East Sumatera, Indonesia, in the period 1943-1945. The main topic discussed was the *Kita Sumatora Sinbun* newspaper as a medium for Japanese propaganda in the region. This study uses a historical research method which consists of four stages, namely heuristics, criticism, interpretation and historiography. At the heuristic stage, *Kita Sumatora Sinbun* newspaper is collected as the primary source, and other relevant literature as secondary sources. After the data was collected, it was verified, criticized internally and externally, to sort out the data to be used. After that, it is interpreted so as to produce a historiographical narrative.

3. Conceptual Framework

This research uses the concept of propaganda. Propaganda is a right or wrong idea or opinion developed with the aim of convincing people to adhere to a certain thought, attitude, or specific direction of action: usually accompanied by grandiose promises. In the Japanese colonialist definition, propaganda was carried out in order to facilitate the implementation of their policies in the occupied territories. According to Aiko Kurasawa (1993), the propaganda carried out by the Japanese military since the beginning of the occupation, is a basic obligation, and one of the most important of military government. Therefore, an independent Propaganda Department (*Sendenbu*) was formed within the military government (*Gunseikanbu*). This department was formed in August 1942, and is responsible for propaganda and information concerning the civil administration. By this propaganda, the Japanese military government paid great attention to how to "seize the sympathy of the people" (*minsbin ba'aku*) and how to "indoctrinate and conquer them" (*senbu kosaku*). The Japanese military government considered that it was necessary to mobilize the entire society and bring fully the mentality of the Indonesian people towards conformity with the Japanese ideology of the Greater East Asia Commonwealth Environment (Kurasawa, 1993: 229).

According to Benda (1985), the doctrine and mobilization of the early period of the Japanese occupation were carried out through political consolidation of Islam. The Japanese military government attempted to mobilize Indonesian Islam at the level of rural people which in the future gave an important meaning to the development of Islamic politics, so that Muslims could occupy an undeniable part of the new political organ created by the government. Most importantly, however, was the main role played by Muslims in the newly established Indonesian defense forces. Japan focuses on the strength of Islam in education. The Japanese military government recognized and attempted to exploit the key position of the Muslim scholar in approaching the Indonesian people (Benda, 1985).

Apart from Muslim scholar, which is no less important in propaganda is recruiting young people. Because after all the Japanese military government needed Indonesian youth to be trained and made into the army (Mestika Zed, 2005). According to Benedict Anderson (1988), the potential of Indonesian youth can be raised through a radical and militant way of life during military education, so that they will have the same goals and enthusiasm as Japan to win the Great East Asian War expelling Britain, America, the Netherlands and their allies who has deprived the people of independence of Asia during this time (Anderson, 1988).

In order to achieve the great ambition of winning the Greater East Asian War, propaganda was carried out in every occupied area to spread the aims and goals of Japan to the people by influencing the people (Combs and Nimmo, 1994). The methods are such as forming local propaganda organizations, recruiting propagandists from civil society, making propaganda designs through the media of newspapers, radio broadcasts, film shows, dramas, paper theater (*kamishibai*), puppets, dances, and songs (Kurasawa, 1993).

4. Result and Discussion

Kita Sumatora Sinbun is a Japanese daily newspaper published in East Sumatera. This daily newspaper is the Japanese military government's propaganda newspaper for the Great East Asian War issued by Syonan Sinbun Kai. The daily newspaper *Kita Sumatora Sinbun* is headquartered in Medan, at Jalan Tiyoda-Dori Kita 1 Tyome No. 107. This daily newspaper is chaired by Djamaloedin (Adi Negoro), while the business manager is M. Zainoeddin. The news that is reviewed of *Kita Sumatora Sinbun* newspaper is very diverse, ranging from issues of foreign and domestic politics, issues of education, recruitment of voluntary soldiers, provision of war logistics and people's needs, entertainment, and so on.

In the issue of education, the propaganda carried out by the Japanese military government is to establish schools intended for Indonesian youth. At those schools were taught Japanese language and Japanese spirit. In Medan, the schools that were founded by Japan were like the school for traditional healer. This school of traditional healers was initiated by the head of the East Sumatera health office. Among the young people studying at those schools are Batara Alamsyah Pane, Panusunan Batubara, Albert Halomoan Siregar, Syarif Siregar, Raden Suharsono, Tengku Mustafa, Humala Ompu Sunggu, Bizmah Pane, and Pangkat Harahap. After graduating, they were expected to become an extension of the Dutch military government in dealing with people's health in East Sumatera (*Kita Sumatera Sinbun*, 17 April 1943).

In addition, the Japanese military government also opened Medan Junior High School (*Syuritu Medan Dai Iti Tyu Gakko*). This school is intended for youths who used to be when the Japanese occupied this area as students at MULO (*Meer Uitgebreid Lager Onderwijs*), namely the Junior High School during the Dutch colonial rule (*Kita Sumatera Sinbun*, 23 September 1943). Not only that, the Japanese military government also opened schools for girls. The school is called "Melati" Middle School Girls (*Melati Koto Zyu Kakko*), which is located at Jalan Tamrin No. 75 Medan. Students who are accepted at this school are those who previously attended MULO or its equivalent (*Kita Sumatera Sinbun*, 14 October 1943).

In Medan, many Nippon-Go course institutes have also been opened, which are courses for studying Japanese. For people in Medan who want to learn Japanese (initial courses), the government directs them to register at the Medan Education Bureau. The course will later be held by Medan Sayakusyō, a course institution that will later provide training certificates after passing the exam (*Kita Sumatera Sinbun*, 6 August 1943). These Japanese language courses are not only scattered in the city of Medan, but also in other areas in East Sumatera, such as the opening of the Nippon-Go course in Sinembah for plantation employees (*Kita Sumatera Sinbun*, 17 September 1943), the Nippon-Go course for students at Buttai-Dori School of Tebingtinggi, the Nippon-Go course in Berastagi for school students and teachers (*Kita Sumatera Sinbun*, 14 August 1943), and the Nippon-Go course at Kebun Teluk Dalam, Tanjungbalai for plantation employees and teachers in that region (*Kita Sumatera Sinbun*, 16 September 1943).

The Japanese military government also held a training called the *Higasikaigansyu Seinan Ziku*, which was an isolated college such as the surau, where various Japanese science and stinging were taught. This training was located at Kebun Naga Huta in Bunsyu Negeri Simalungun and Tanah Karo (*Kita Sumatera Sinbun*, 14 August 1943). Meanwhile in Tanjungbalai, Asahan, the Japanese military government opened a School of Lessons which was named *Tokaigansyuritu Tandjong Balei Yosei Syo* (Tanjung Balai School of East Sumatera). This school is for all young people living in Greater East Asia. His main lessons are Japanese, military training for naval soldiers (*Kaigun Heisiki Kyoren*), general lessons on types of ships, on sea travel, machinery, and shipping laws, lessons on flag signaling, how to navigate boats and ships (*Kita Sumatra Sinbun*, October 14, 1943).

In addition, the Japanese military government also provides assistance to schools that are managed by individuals. In Tanjung Balai, the government provided assistance to enlarge the Tanjungbalai Weaving School which was opened by H.M. Noerdin was titled Tjek Mat (*Kita Sumatera Sinbun*, 14 October 1943). In Binjai, the government provided assistance for the re-opening of the Muhammadiyah School Binjai Branch. Meanwhile in Tebingtinggi, the government provided assistance to the Islamic Religious School at Kebun Bangun Bandar, with the aim that children in the area could receive education about Islam and general knowledge (*Kita Sumatera Sinbun*, 28 October 1943).

From all these schools, whether built by the government, or schools managed by institutions or individuals, they are required to include Japanese language lessons. It is one of Japan's efforts to cultivate the love of the people for Japan. In addition to education, Japanese military propaganda to win over the people is to support and give freedom to Islamic associations or organizations. This can be seen in how Japanese efforts to approach local figures or scholars to convey that the Japanese presence fully supports religious freedom. In *Kita Sumatora Simbun* newspaper, it is clear how the efforts of the Japanese military government, such as giving donations at every major event held by Muslim associations, the renovation of mosques, and Japanese representatives are always present in every assembly (*Kita Sumatera Sinbun*, 13 July 1943). They did all this to show that Japan had the same ideals as the people, namely expelling Western colonialism to create an Environment of Common Prosperity for Greater East Asia.

The success of Japan in approaching Muslim scholar and other Islamic figures did have a big influence, because most of the people of East Sumatera are Muslims. In order to maintain that, the Japanese military government over the Tokaigansyu-Tyokan-Kakka, then Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrulloh (Hamka), was appointed by the government as advisor in matters relating to Islam in the territory of East Sumatera (*Kita Sumatera Sinbun*, November 1, 1943). These Islamic figures became the main propagandists

of Japan, such as T.M. In his speeches in front of the people of East Sumatera, Hasan revealed several characteristics of Japanese people that should be emulated, because they really love their homeland, are highly disciplined, and full of enthusiasm. Hasan also said that in Tokyo there is a big mosque, which indicates that Japan supports and defends the Muslim people from Dutch oppression. For that Hasan invited the people of East Sumatera to be loyal and obedient to the rules of the Japanese military government, in order to achieve independence, free from all kinds of Barta colonialism (*Kita Sumatera Sinbun*, 11 September 1943).

To create security and meet the needs of the people of East Sumatera, the Japanese government distributed vouchers for the poor people. The coupons can be exchanged at the supply office, to get various kinds of basic necessities for rice, such as milled corn, peanuts, sweet potatoes, sugar, lamp oil, soap, and others. To increase the people's agricultural production, the government provided seed assistance and loans managed by the local kingdom, or the heads of the local area. In Serdang, for example, at the request of Bunsyutyo Deli and Serdang, the government had handed over 55,800 kg of rice seeds to be planted in the Deli Kingdom area (*Kita Sumatera Sinbun*, 27 July 1943). Meanwhile in Kotagadung, the Japanese military government provided cabbage seeds, white vegetables and turnips to the Barusjahe office, Tanah Karo, to be distributed to people who needed these seeds (*Kita Sumatera Sinbun*, 7 September 1943).

In order to win the sympathy of the people to fully support the Japanese government, the sultans in East Sumatera were also approached by the Japanese military government. Not known what kind of reward or lure the Japanese government promised, but in reality the sultans were willing to be asked by the government to go down to the fields to set an example for their people. This fact is recorded in the news published in the newspaper *Kita Sumatera Sinbun* entitled "Soeltan Asahan Toeroet Berladang", whose contents are as quoted below:

"Tuanku Sultan Asahan also cultivates the farm there. People certainly don't think that if they meet Tuanku Sulltan Asahan, he works to cultivate his fields among other cultivators. He does not appear to be awkward associating with the peasants, so that this situation adds to the excitement of the people in cultivating agriculture...." (*Kita Sumatera Sinbun*, 6 September 1943).

Apart from the above, the Japanese military government's propaganda was also mostly carried out through films and entertainment. The Japanese film that is often shown is the heroic Japanese attack film, which broke American power in Hawaii, and British in Malaya. The film depicts the persistence and strength of the Japanese military in repelling enemy troops by sinking the warships Prins of Wales and Rapulse. The film is played continuously every day. Afternoon from 2.30 to 5.00 pm in Medan Koa-kan, for school children. Then 3 pm to 8 pm in Medan Huzi-kan for adults. Sometimes the film is shown at the *Hukuraido* (now Merdeka Walk) for the public. If it is played in Hukuraido, it can be watched by approximately 5000 spectators (*Kita Sumatera Sinbun*, 13 July 1943). Apart from films, Japanese propaganda is also carried out through drama performances, paintings, dances and songs, which were spearheaded by the Medan Bunka-ka (Medan Cultural Service). The performing arts are usually held at night markets or places that have been determined by the Medan Bunka-ka.

5. Conclusion

From this research, it can be concluded that all forms of propaganda carried out by the Japanese military government have encouraged changes in society both horizontally and vertically and opened opportunities for Indonesian national figures to take part in political organizations, associations, etc. which were very difficult to happen during the Dutch era. In addition, the prohibition on the use of the Dutch language during the Japanese occupation had evened the use of the Indonesian language throughout the country. Although Japan encourages the people to learn Japanese language, Japanese military employees also try hard to learn Indonesian. By Japanese-style education that has been carried out in the occupied territories, it shows that Japan thinks that Indonesians should be fully formed into Japanese behavior patterns and ways of thinking, and propaganda is formulated as an effort to indoctrinate the Indonesian people so that they can become reliable partners in the Environment Prosperity with Greater East Asia.

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