



Clothing as a Propaganda Tool for Indonesian Women on the Home Front during the Japanese Occupation of Indonesia

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Abstract. During the Japanese occupation of Indonesia, the Japanese military government produced numerous propaganda aimed at Indonesian citizens to spread the ideology of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere. One prominent example was the propaganda through traditional Japanese clothing called *monpe* for Indonesian women. *Monpe* is an old-style Japanese loose trouser typically worn by female agricultural workers. In Indonesia, the *monpe* not only displayed the power and influence of the Japanese military government over Indonesian women but also symbolized the gender role of Indonesian women as the home front desired by the Japanese military government at that time. This research analyzes the correlation between the *monpe* and the role of Indonesian women on the home front. Furthermore, this study investigates the *monpe*-wearing policy in Japan at the same time the Japanese military government adopted the identical policy in Indonesia. This paper applies the qualitative-descriptive method, in which data was obtained from magazines and propaganda newspapers published by the Japanese military government and books printed in Japan during the same period. Based on the data, it is noteworthy that *monpe* not only eased women undertaking domestic and regular jobs but also served as a uniform for Indonesian women defending their homes from airstrikes, practicing self-defense, and other beneficial purposes. Thus, the conclusion is that the *monpe* served as a propaganda tool to construct the ideal women that the Japanese military government desired: women who actively participated on the home front in wartime.

Keywords: Propaganda, *monpe*, home front, Indonesian women, Japanese occupation.

1 Introduction

The Japanese military government that came to power in Indonesia in March 1942 used various kinds of propaganda to spread the ideology of the Greater East Asian Co-

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Prosperity Sphere, which was used as a slogan in World War II. This ideology focuses on Japan's ambition to unite Asian nations and liberate Asia from Western colonialism under Japanese leadership. The Japanese military government made use of various kinds of propaganda media to be able to carry out the mission. This propaganda focused on the goal of capturing people's hearts (*minshin haaku*) and indoctrinating and taming them (*senbu kōsaku*) [1]. Through the Sendenbu (Propaganda Department), the Japanese military government spread propaganda through various media, such as plays, books, magazines, newspapers, movies, songs, and others. In addition, the Japanese military government also established the *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* (Cultural Center) in April 1943 [1]. One of the objectives of establishing *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* was to introduce and disseminate Japanese culture to Indonesians, including Japanese clothing. One of the Japanese clothes presented was the *monpe* for Indonesian women.

Monpe is loose pants commonly used by Japanese women for farming and can function to protect the body from cold air [2]. Miyamoto Seisuke, an expert on the history of Japanese clothing, said there are more than 160 types of *monpe* in Japan. *Monpe* also has different names with different forms, according to the culture and regions in Japan [3]. Miyamoto also classified *monpe* into three groups based on their shape: *tachitsuke*, *monpe*, and *karusan* [4]. *Tachitsuke* is made of a wide cloth from the knee down (4) and has a rope to tie at the waist [5]. In addition, the back of the lower knee is not sewn [4]. The *monpe* has the character of having a gusset section in the *monpe* that has been well developed and at the bottom of the knee that is made loose [5]. Last is *karusan*. In the *karusan*, a separate cloth is attached to the seam fold on the edge of the cloth, and there is a fold above the knee [5].

During World War II, the Japanese government regulated the use of *monpe* in a policy regarding the standardization of clothing for women, known as "*fujin hyōjun fuku* (women's standard clothes). *Fujin hyōjun fuku* was established in March 1941 [5]. There were several purposes for establishing this policy [6], namely (1) expressing Japanese characteristics that are suitable for women; (2) describing simplicity, modesty, and beauty; (3) increasing the efficiency of women's activities; and (4) teaching how to save and make the best use of clothing materials.

During the Japanese occupation of Indonesia, even though the Japanese military government in Indonesia did not make a policy on standardizing clothing in Indonesia, they still introduced and encouraged Indonesian women to wear *monpe*. The Japanese military government promoted the use of *monpe* in various propaganda media, such as newspapers and magazines. The propaganda for using *monpe* in Indonesia also described the role of Indonesian women, who the Japanese military government expected to act as home fronts. Accordingly, this paper discusses the relationship between propaganda for using *monpe* in Indonesia and the role of Indonesian women on the home front. In addition, to support the explanation about Indonesian women who wear *monpe* clothes and play a role in the rear of the battlefield or home front, this study uses Kanō Mikiyo's theory of home front (*jūgo*) [7].

1.1 Methods

This study uses a descriptive-qualitative method that focuses on propaganda by the Japanese military government against Indonesian women through *monpe*. The data in this study came from propaganda magazines and newspapers published in Indonesia, including *Djawa Baroe* (magazine) and *Atjeh Sinbun* (newspaper). In addition, as a comparison, references published in the same period in Japan were also used as primary references, especially regarding the policies used by the Japanese government at the same time. The data obtained was analyzed based on the text of the article about *monpe*. In addition, these data were also analyzed based on the visuals in the photo.

2 *Monpe* in Propaganda Media in Indonesia

The propaganda media in Indonesia began to introduce *monpe* to Indonesian women in 1943. For example, in the *Djawa Baroe* [8], which was published on June 15, 1943, *monpe* (in the *Djawa Baroe*, it was written as *mompe*) was first introduced as "clothing for working Japanese women" (*pakaian kaum wanita Nippon jang bekerdja*). In addition, the article also describes the roles of women who wear *monpe* in cities and villages. For example, women in the city are described as working to protect themselves from the dangers of air attacks. The women in the village are described as wearing *monpe* uniforms to work in agriculture. Based on the article's contents, the Japanese military government tried to explain to Indonesian readers that women during this war had a significant role, for example, in the production sector, such as increasing the production of food, weapons, and so on. According to the article, the *monpe* is the proper clothing for women to work in these fields.

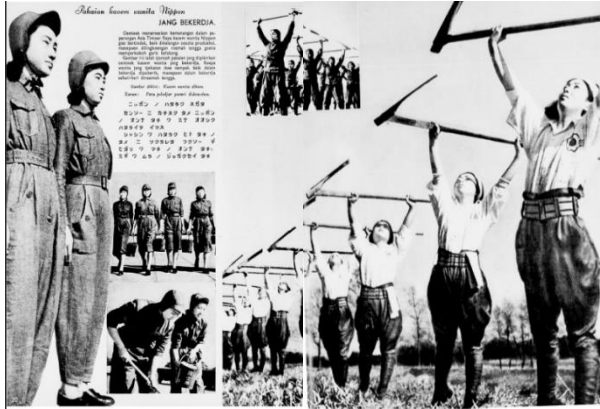


Fig. 1. "Clothing for Working Japanese Women (*Pakaian Kaum Wanita Nippon jang Bekerdjia*). *Djawa Baroe*, vol. 12, June 15, 1943, pp. 20—21. Source: Leiden University Libraries Digital Collections Indonesian Serials (NIOD).

Since 1944, in various propaganda magazines and newspapers, such as *Djawa Baroe* and *Atjeh Sinbun*, there have been articles advising Indonesian women to wear a *monpe*. These articles also describe the various *monpe* functions the Japanese military government recommended for Indonesian women. For example, an article in *Djawa Baroe*, which was published on June 1, 1944, entitled "Advising Mompe: An effort that is easy to do to solve the problem of clothing" (*Mengandjoerkan Mompe: Sebagai ichtiar jang moedah dilakoekan oentoek memetjahkan soal pakaian*) In Figure 2, several Indonesian women are seen marching wearing *monpe* pants and carrying wooden rifles. They are seen wearing *batik* cloth, the basic material for making a *monpe*. Some of them are seen wearing *kebaya* as their tops. Using *batik* and *kebaya* cloth is a characteristic of *monpe* in Indonesia. The Japanese military government, in this case, is not only trying to approach Indonesian society by introducing *monpe* as one of Japanese culture but also taking an approach by utilizing Indonesian traditional cultures, such as *kebaya* and *batik* cloth. The Japanese military government assumed that *batik* was a cloth that women in Java widely owned at that time by calling it a 'long cloth' (*kain pandjang*), as written in [9] (Fig. 2).

This *batik* cloth, classified as a long cloth, was the solution the Japanese military government offered to solve the clothing material crisis at that time because *monpe* can be made with just a long piece of cloth, and two pieces of *monpe* can be made from this material. In addition, a *monpe* can be made from cloth that is no longer used or that has been torn. *Monpe*, which does not require a lot of cloth and can be made from unused cloth, is claimed to be able to save clothing materials during wartime. Therefore, *monpe* with this style is referred to in this article as "*monpe setjara Djawa*" or "*monpe* with Javanese style".



Fig. 2. "Women from Belik Village in the mountainous area, Pekalongan Shu, actively practice with *Mompe*, which is made of long cloth (Kaoem perempuan dari Belik Son didaerah pegunungan, Pekalongan Shu, giat berlatih dengan memakai *Mompe* jang diboeat dari kain *pandjang*). *Djawa Baroe*, vol. 11, June 1, 1944, p. 6. Source: Leiden University Libraries Digital Collections Indonesian Serials (NIOD).

Furthermore, in the August 17, 1944 edition of *Atjeh Sinbun* [10], a campaign poster encouraged women to wear a *monpe* in the market and at home. Based on the poster, it can be seen that the Japanese military government encouraged Indonesian women to wear *monpe* in everyday life, for example, when going to the market and at home. In the same edition of *Atjeh Sinbun*, an article states that Indonesian women should like the *monpe* for several reasons. First, the *monpe* was practical and economical clothing in wartime. Second, a *monpe* is a simple dress that can make it easier for women to move. Mori [11] explained that *monpe* was considered the suitable clothing at that time because it did not conflict with traditional values and femininity, which the Japanese government emphasized at the same time.

3 *Monpe* and the Indonesian Women's Home Front

This paper has previously explained that the main function of the *monpe* is as work clothes for women. It relates to the propaganda sent to Indonesian women so they could cooperate with the Japanese military government behind the battlefield. This activity of helping the war behind the battlefield is known as *jūgo* (home front). *Jūgo* means "behind the guns", so *jūgo* focuses on helping the war on the battlefield but not directly fighting on the front lines. Kanō Mikiyo, in her book *Onnatachi no Jūgo* (Women's Home Front) [7] explains that since the Fifteen Years War—a term that refers to the period from the start of the Manchurian Incident in 1931 until Japan's surrender in World War II in 1945—began, there was the concept of 'virtue' of a woman' which does not only refer to the idea of 'good wife and wise mother' (*ryōsai kenbo*). However, women as citizens are also required to do something 'for the sake of the country', which

focuses on 'home front duty' (*jūgo no tsutome*) and 'home front protection' (*jūgo no mamori*) [7]. *Jūgo* in Japan during World War II was widely described as activities carried out by women, such as treating wounded soldiers, working in weapons factories, and so on.

The concept of *jūgo* creates dual roles for women. On the one hand, women still have to carry out their traditional gender roles as mothers and wives. On the other hand, women are expected to be active in the public sphere as a substitute for men, who must attend military training or be assigned to the battlefield. Kanō [7] stated that the concept of *jūgo* also played a significant role in the gender division of labor. Men are focused on their role as the 'front line' on battlefields abroad. As for women, they are assigned as '*jūgo*' or home front in the country. The role of women as *jūgo* was especially evident since the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) when women were required to follow the total mobilization system as '*jūgo no onna*' (home front woman) [7].

Apart from that, Kanō [7] also reveals three roles of *jūgo*. First, the women act as economic fighters, providing material resources consumed on the battlefield. Second, they play a role in managing consumer goods and maintaining their families' livelihoods. Third, since 1939, when there was a labor shortage, women were also assigned to participate in the production sector. Furthermore, the role of women as *jūgo* in the public and domestic spheres is lived by bringing up issues of nationalism and patriotism because *jūgo* at that time was claimed to be a manifestation of a sense of love for the motherland, which started in the family, then became the scope of the surrounding environment, and finally the country [7]. The concept of *jūgo*, which originally appeared in Japan, was later adopted by the Japanese military government in Indonesia.

Japanese propaganda magazines and newspapers in Indonesia depicted *monpe* with various women's roles as *jūgo*, for example, defending against air raids and learning self-defense. Below is an example of the role of women in dealing with air strikes, as seen in [9].



Fig. 3. Indonesian woman who acted with *Mompe* in the air strike guard exercise (*Kaoem wanita bangsa Indonesia jang bertindak dengan Mompe didalam latihan pendjagaan bahaja oedara*). *Djawa Baroe*, vol. 11, June 1, 1944, p.6. Source: Leiden University Libraries Digital Collections Indonesian Serials (NIOD).

Figure 3 above contains the caption "Indonesian woman who acted with *Mompe* in the air strike guard exercise." It can be interpreted that during the Japanese occupation of Indonesia, the Japanese military government wanted to show that women had a vital role in defense on the battlefield. In this case, a *monpe* is considered a practical outfit in defense against air strikes because the *monpe*, which is made to defend against air attacks, is designed with long pants, a long-sleeved top, and a head covering that covers the entire body, so it is claimed to be able to protect the body from air attacks.

Monpe is also described as a uniform for women to study martial arts and the military. One example is shown in Figure 2. It shows that the Japanese military government considered that women and men had the same role in defending the homeland. However, the purpose of the women wearing *monpe* and undergoing military training described in the *Djawa Baroe* was not explained in detail, whether to bring these women to the forefront of the battlefield or just for self-defense training while promoting *monpe* to Indonesian women. Nonetheless, in this case, it can be seen that there is consistency from the Japanese military government in Indonesia, which always brings issues of nationalism and patriotism to mobilize Indonesian women in this era.

Based on the description above, it is known that *monpe* was one of the essential propaganda tools for the Japanese military government to mobilize Indonesian women as *jūgo*. *Monpe*, claimed to be clothing that makes it easy for women to carry out activities, not only functions as clothing for domestic work but also works in public spaces. It can mainly be seen in the role of women in defending against air attacks and self-defense training. Through *monpe* propaganda in the media, such as *Djawa Baroe* and

Atjeh Sinbun, the Japanese military government wanted to prove that they cared about Indonesian women's role, especially their contribution as *jūgo* during wartime.

4 Conclusion

Based on the description above, it is known that the *monpe* has several functions, including clothing for work, uniforms for dealing with air strikes, and clothes that women can wear when doing domestic work. The *monpe* function is closely related to the role of Indonesian women as the *jūgo* (home front). *Monpe*, like *jūgo*, displays a dual women role. On the one hand, women are expected to continue to play a role in the domestic sphere, such as doing household chores and serving the family. However, on the other hand, women must be active in public spaces by helping defend against enemy attacks and working outside the home.

Furthermore, what needs to be noted is that even though in propaganda media such as *Djawa Baroe*, *monpe* is called a symbol of equality and identity. *Monpe* symbolizes equality because it is seen as unifying women with different backgrounds. As a symbol of identity, *monpe* is a propaganda tool to approach Indonesian women through cultural aspects. In Japan, Japanese women have known *monpe* as clothes that are close to their daily lives. However, for Indonesian women, *monpe* is a new culture. Therefore, to effectively introduce *monpe* to Indonesian women, the Japanese military government allowed Indonesian women to use *batik* cloth as the primary material for *monpe*.

However, *monpe* cannot be said to be a symbol of empowerment for women. It was because the Japanese military government had significant influence and power in regulating the use of *monpe* against women and controlling the role of women in society through campaigns for the use of *monpe*. These controls include training women to continue to behave according to the expectations of the Japanese military government, which wants to shape Indonesian women into the ideal women the Japanese government wants and cannot be separated from the feminine image of women. Through *monpe*, the Japanese military government also wanted to instill Eastern values in Indonesian women and teach them how to behave appropriately as women during wartime. It teaches loyalty, sacrifice, hard work, and love for the motherland.

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