

“Asia for Asians”: Revisiting Pan-Asianism through the Propaganda Arts of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere

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Abstract

The slogan “Asia for Asians” has been a central concept of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere and propagated by Japan as it imperialized parts of East Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, and Oceania. Without bias to the resulting historical developments and realities, Pan-Asianism is revisited through the propaganda arts and materials proliferated by the Empire of Japan towards its agenda of a unified Asia. Aided by knowledge of art history and criticism, six specifically chosen propaganda arts are analyzed using theories of image analysis drawing from the works of Guillermo (2001), Bartmański, Alexander, and Giesen (2012), and Ross (2002). Three main themes are analyzed: the image of the sphere, the collective identity of the countries in the sphere under Japan, and the meaning of co-prosperity. The themes provide an insight into the development of Pan-Asianism as propagated by the Japanese Empire in its attempt towards Pan-Asianism through the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.

Keywords

Pan-Asian Identity – Tenka – epistemic merit model – semiotic analysis – iconic power

1 Introduction

1.1 *Greater East Asia Propaganda*

The slogan “Asia for Asians” summarizes the central concept propagated by Japan as it imperialized parts of East Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, and Oceania through the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. From the 1930s to the late 1940s, the Japanese worked to build and enforce a concept in territories it occupied that propagated an idea of a self-sufficient union of Asian nations led by the Japanese and free from the rule of powers from the West (Matthiessen 2015). The desire to build a so-called Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere was announced on August 1, 1940, which implied the addition to the core region of Japan, Manchukuo, and China, the countries located in the Southeast Asian region (Mimura 2011). Consequently, a Greater East Asia Conference was held two years after serving to propagate the long-existing propaganda exemplified in the words “Asia for Asians” (Andrew 2003). This solidified the Pan-Asianism rhetoric, which solicited the loyal commitment of occupied countries to Japan’s war efforts. As the imperial rule of Japan expanded, annexing different countries in the Southeast Asian region, the need for a unified Asian concept became more indispensable, especially as puppet regimes were established in different countries.

One of the most critical aspects of the sphere is the propaganda efforts to canonize the idea in the minds of the Asian people through the concept of a collective Asian identity. Different techniques were employed by the Japanese government, such as the establishment of mutual cultural societies which could indoctrinate natives of the occupied territories with the ideals of the “Sphere” alongside the use of Japanese to supplant the dominant use of English (Rhodes 1976). During the propaganda efforts pamphlets depicting different Asian people and co-existing in harmony through acts such as marching, working, and breaking bread were proliferated in the territories. While the concept failed after the Japanese surrendered to the Allies in 1945, the “Sphere” of unified culture and economy of Asia is one important attempt towards Pan-Asianism against the occupation and colonization of territories in Asia by nations from the West. Thus, this move to establish a collective Asian identity under Japanese rule is the most imminent response prompted by the hegemonic ideological occupation coming from the West during the past century. Consequently, with the technological condition of the time, one such way to propagate the idea was through the use of propaganda art printed and distributed in different countries under Japanese occupation, often dropped by airplane in the Philippines, Malaya, North Borneo, Sarawak, Singapore, and Indonesia (Rhodes 1976). However, some of these propaganda materials were

also distributed by puppet governments and proliferated by cultural societies such as the Association for Service to the New Philippines or the KALIBAPI (Javier 1975). The propaganda materials were often posted in public locations and promoted as part of Japanese cultural education, where concepts such as a collective Asian identity and anti-Western views were introduced to the people. Meanwhile, some propaganda materials were released in Japan with the Japanese people as their intended audience. Thus, it can be said that propaganda art became one of the most significant devices used by the Japanese to instill the idea of “Asia for Asians” in the people of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere.

1.2 *Art and Propaganda*

All art is propaganda. This concept, which comes from the title of George Orwell’s collection of essays published in 2003, summarizes the complicated relationship between art and propaganda. The power of art to communicate has been used for centuries to canonize and reinforce ideals and structures in society. However, it is vital to recognize the intent with which art is made in order to distinguish propaganda arts from other forms that may convey similar messages, such as political art. Ross (2002) defined propaganda as “an epistemically defective message used with the intention to persuade the beliefs, opinions, desires, and behaviors of a socially significant group of people on behalf of a political organization, institution or cause” (25). This definition considers defectiveness under the epistemological merit model, which is the blurred representation or deliberate misrepresentation of truth intended by a certain institution to persuade people. In this model, Ross applied the examination of epistemological merit to artforms such as films as they are analyzed alongside their contexts in society. The distinction between art and propaganda is further reinforced by Chambers (1983), who examined posters as part of the propaganda machinery of Western countries during the second world war and classified them into the following thematic categories: appeal to patriotism, the war effort, and negative images against the enemies. Therefore, the conditions of what constitutes propaganda art considered in this study focus on the epistemic deficiency in art and the deliberate utilization by governments and institutions, in this case, the Japanese, towards specific agendas in an attempt to influence a population.

Guillermo (2001) proposed a method for “reading the image” of art. This method of inquiring into the meaning of art through four planes of image analysis has been widely used as a material in the field of art studies. The four planes include the basic semiotics, the iconic, the contextual, and the evaluative plane. For the purpose of this study, three of these planes are employed, mainly

the semiotic plane, iconic plane, and contextual plane, with the former two dealing with the image itself and the overall semiotics through the interplay of signs, and the latter, the contextual meaning of these images in relation to the society and history. The iconic power of images is also examined alongside the theories of Barmański, Alexander, and Giesen (2012) regarding the power of images and symbols where societal actors have an iconic consciousness to experience material objects and understand them both through cognition and moral evaluation. The iconic power of art as employed in the propaganda arts of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere dwells on both the aesthetic and wide social semiotics contextualized within societal changes. Guillermo (2010) also explored the cultural revolution in China in the time of Mao Zedong and the process where revolutionary arts and propaganda were created as a result of socio-political struggle. It assumed a militant character and became a weapon of social change. Overall, these theories in the field of art studies provide the conceptual and theoretical framework employed in this paper.

Without bias to the resulting historical developments and realities, this paper aims to revisit Pan-Asianism by examining propaganda arts in the form of posters, postcards, and a board game proliferated by the Empire of Japan towards its agenda of a unified Asia. Aided with the researcher's knowledge in art history and criticism, informed decisions were made in selecting six propaganda arts of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. Factors considered include the exemplification of the epistemological merit conditions initially examined through theories from the writings of Guillermo (2010), Ross (2002), and Bartmański, Alexander, and Giesen (2012). Other specific considerations include the obvious and easily recognizable textual and visual representation of the "sphere", recurring symbols and images that encapsulate the dominant issues determined by the scope of this paper. The diversification of theories also augments the specific methodology followed by this paper to offer a comprehensive examination. Other non-Western theories are also employed such as the concept of the *Tenka* to explain the concept of imperialization in the Asian context. Thus, the paper seeks to provide a multifaceted examination of the semiotic-iconic, and contextual meanings exemplified in the propaganda arts through the interplay of signs, images, symbolism, and epistemological merit. Overall, these insights drawn from the analysis provide an overview and a look at Pan-Asianism and the concept of "Asia for Asians" of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere as seen in its propaganda art.

1.3 *The Sphere and Its Image*

Defining the image of the sphere can be analyzed not only through its geographical depiction but also through its socio-political and economical facets. In a map presented by Mimura (2011) in a paper titled “Japan’s New Order and Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere: Planning for Empire,” the expansion of the sphere is historicized through the subsequent and consequent occupations. This can be traced starting from the occupation of Manchukuo in 1932, parts of China by 1938, and parts of Southeast Asia including Burma, Thailand, French Indochina, and the Philippines by 1942. The expansion of the sphere, which was historicized by Mimura (2011), created internal divisions within the sphere itself. Seen by Fisher (1950) as divisions that can be depicted as three concentric circles that consist of the main Japanese islands, the continental bases primarily made of Manchukuo and Northern China, and the peripherals, which are described as “underdeveloped colonial islands of the South.” The aforementioned division of the sphere, as well as its overall constituency, is reflected in the geographic map present in the art of a board game called *Dai Toa Kyoiken Meguri* or “a trip around the ‘sphere.’” In Figure 1,

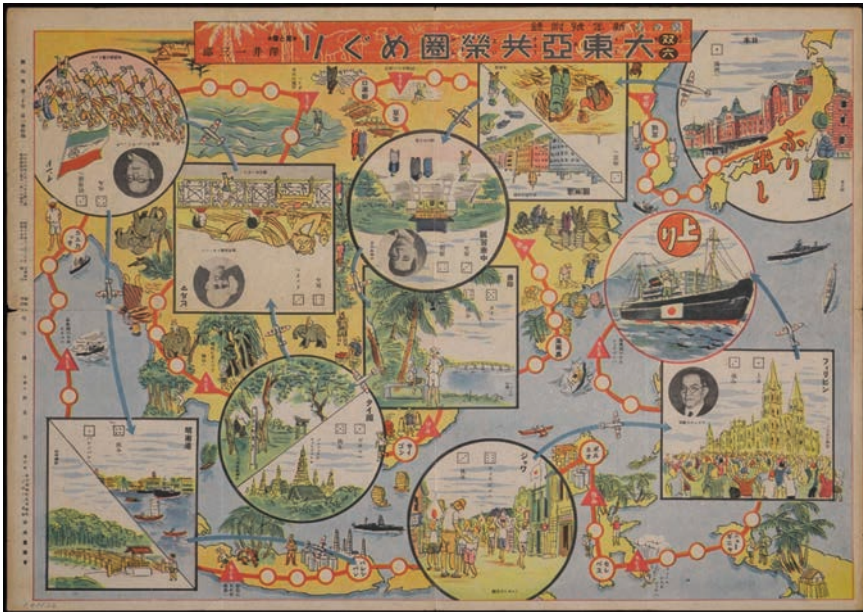


FIGURE 1 *Dai Toa Kyoiken Meguri (A Trip Around the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere Game).*
 FROM TOKYO NOGYOKAI (1994). PRINCETON UNIVERSITY DIGITAL LIBRARY (COTSEN COLLECTION).

it can be observed that most parts of the territories appear on the work with panels focusing on four puppet states, mainly China, Burma, India, and the Philippines. Portraits of the presidents and political leaders of the countries, such as Jose P. Laurel (Philippines), Ba Maw (Burma), Subhas Chandra Bose (India), and Wang Jingwei (China), appear in panels that represent stopovers in this around-the-sphere trip. Parts of French Indochina are also shown, albeit without a ruling figure depicted. A lot of semiotic and contextual meanings can be drawn from the artwork of the board game through its use of landmarks and the material culture of the occupied territories. Material culture, such as coconut trees, is present in the islands such as the Philippines, while people riding elephants are seen in mainland Southeast Asia, which suggests a stereotypical depiction of life in those areas. Mountainous landmasses are also depicted, as well as desert planes in the Northern region of the Southeast Asian mainland and the West of Asia, respectively. Activities of people such as plowing land, selling fruits, and gathering straws are shown alongside images of Japanese soldiers helping the locals. Japanese planes are also shown dominating the air, and ships traveling freely in the seas from one island to another. The internal division in the sphere is faintly reflected in the difference in activities shown in the map. As Fisher (1950) notes, Manchukuo and China became the center of raw material production, depicted in the map as laboring people, whilst the Southeast Asian lands are exoticized such as in the presence of natives riding elephants.

The board game positions players as if they are tourists traveling to different parts of the sphere. The tourist, wearing a typical explorer's hat and backpack, starts the journey from Japan to what looks like its capital Tokyo. They then proceed to Southeast Asia, particularly to Burma, where panels depict scenes of buildings and landmarks, people bowing in front of a palace, as well as Burmese people gathering straw. The next panels show different sceneries and landscapes, including what seems to be a view of a Burmese railway built by the Japanese during World War II. A panel also shows religious and temple architecture in the ancient city of Bagan. The next stop is India where panels show a huge statute of a sleeping Buddha and military men marching with the country's flag. A huge jump will bring the tourist to French-Indo China, where landscapes and trading ports are shown alongside people waving Japanese flags welcoming the traveler. The tour ends in the Philippines, where people are cheering in front of a cathedral and where the traveler finally rides a ship with the Japanese flag, signaling they are returning to Japan. The use of the different landmarks and sceneries is critical in this propaganda art, it shows to the player the diversity of the region through the unique cultures of different communities in the sphere. However, the positive and harmonious scenarios

conceal the horrors of war and adds to the epistemic deficiency of this propaganda art. To an audience, the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere is posed as a beautiful region and destination where the Japanese are warmly welcomed and supported by the locals concealing the violence and injustices reported in history.

Meanwhile, a particular and localized depiction of the sphere is seen in Figure 2, a propaganda poster proliferated and produced by Japanese-Sponsored governments in China. The poster depicts three Chinese people, two women and one child, looking up at a map showing the Chinese part of the empire of Japan bordered by Manchukuo in the North and by the unoccupied parts of the Chinese Mainland in the West. Japanese military forces are shown in the territory with drawings of soldiers holding their weapons, tanks, and planes bearing the Japanese flag and warships in the seas bordering the region. The map also depicts ordinary citizens in their day-to-day life, such as fishing, herding, plowing, selling, and riding animals, which indicates a harmonious living condition. The depiction of the three characters in the poster is also particularly interesting, the two women, who bear smiles on their faces, look pleased with the presence of the Japanese forces in the region. One of the women points to the map as if showing the “sphere” to the child and the audience. The child looks at the map with visible enthusiasm as he reaches out to it with both hands, potentially signifying the acceptance of the citizens of the current status quo. Basic semiotics can also explain the use of colors



FIGURE 2
Japanese Propaganda Poster 21. Propaganda Poster in Chinese produced by the Japanese-Sponsored government in China (1937–1945).
 CHAPMAN UNIVERSITY DIGITAL COMMONS.

particular in the dress, such as the use of red and orange, which are colors of prosperity and good fortune, and green for purity and innocence fitting to a child. Meanwhile, at the top of the poster, words written in Chinese say “Establishment of the new regime after Chiang’s withdrawal” which legitimizes the new order under the Japanese rule.

One of the most striking elements present in the poster is the Five Races Under One Union Flag. The flag, made up of five colors, represent the five major ethnic groups of China living harmoniously under one nation, which parallels the concept of the Co-Prosperity Sphere. According to Fisher (1950), the focus on the East Asian region of the sphere and the process of pacifying China is directly related to the goal of Japan to realize the full potential of Manchuria through the use of American and Russian colonization methods. Thus, the people of this region were treated as lesser equals while the region’s resources were utilized through the production of raw materials and the labor of its people. This is significantly different in the subsequent colonization of the peripheral Southeast Asian lands. Contextualizing this with the current Japanese occupation, the use of the five races flag symbolizes the unity of the citizen not just under one nation but under the leadership of the Japanese. The flag is omnipresent in contrast with the Japanese flag, which is slightly smaller and relatively fewer in number, indicating an interesting power dynamic, one that can be related to the Empire of Japan’s relationship with its puppet states. This prosperous and harmonious narrative is juxtaposed with Japanese airplanes dropping bombs in different locations on the map. *Paifangs* or gateways are seen burning and destroyed, particularly ones that do not bear the flag of the five races. The scenes are easy to miss and not immediately seen at first glance and imply that the citizens enjoy relative harmony while the war still happens in the region. The three characters previously mentioned also add to this implication that the citizens support the ongoing war. The subtle depiction of war as well as the Japanese presence, proves the epistemic merit and lack thereof as theorized by Ross (2002) in the propaganda arts of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. Its iconic power can affect the consciousness of the population as it faintly injects and rationalizes the Japanese presence and the war, juxtaposed with harmonious living in the region.

1.4 *Collective Identity, Japanese Rule*

Benedict Anderson (2020) theorized the concept of “imagined communities”, in which nations and nationalism are defined by socially constructed communities that are imagined by people. Moreover, in order to establish a collective identity of a community, it needs to be constantly reaffirmed and enforced through

different activities and traditions (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992). One such way to reinforce the notion of collective identity is through the use of the arts, or in this case, propaganda art. In Figure 3, a postcard depicts people of different races and ethnicities celebrating around a Japanese flag. They have visible smiles on their faces, and they hold hands in unity while a Japanese soldier raises the flag of Japan on a pole. Beneath the pole, on its base, the “Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere” is inscribed in Japanese script. The depiction of the different races is noteworthy in this postcard. They are distinguishable by their physical characteristics that largely draw from stereotypes. They are also made to be representative of different races with different characteristics and cultural identities, such as island natives with indigenous attires, dark colored skin, and curled hair; an Indian depicted with a turban; locals depicted with the Asian conical hat; another wearing a Mongolian hat; a Vietnamese and a Chinese woman in their traditional dresses; and many more elements that allude to unique cultural identities. The use of vivid and different colors in the entire image also adds to the basic semiotic meaning of unity and diversity. The diverse colors that come together represent the unity of the different races, which are collectively part of the Sphere despite their diversity and differences. It is also worth noting that the use of different colors conveys the idea of diversity as part of the propaganda art’s basic semiotics. However, such differences are largely exaggerated and draw from stereotypes, and are not widely represented by all the people in the region. The divisions between

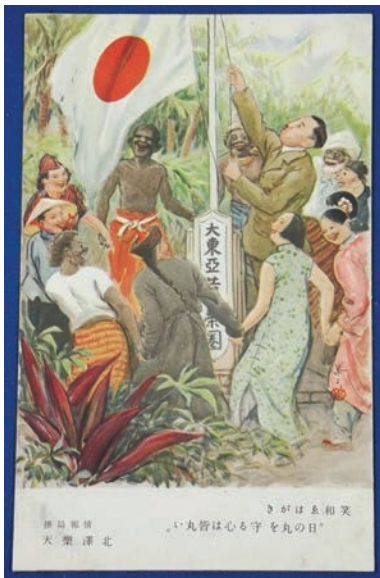


FIGURE 3
 1940's *Japanese Asia Unity Propaganda Art Postcard "Smile and Harmony."*
 JAPAN WAR ART GALLERY COMMONS.

the East Asians and the Southeast Asians are also reflected in their clothes. Whereas the former is depicted wearing formal and proper attire, the latter is purposely depicted wearing backward-looking traditional attire in order to present an exotic image. This depiction provides a stark contrast between the two regions in the postcard. Nevertheless, the actions of the characters in the artwork communicate the “unity” propaganda which ironically reinforces these divisions despite the unequal perceptions of Japan by the different peoples of the Sphere.

The Japanese flag in the center of the postcard, which is being raised by the Japanese soldier, creates a fascinating framing of the power dynamic in the Sphere as reflected in this propaganda. Although the co-prosperity between the members of the different races is promoted, the Empire of Japan still rules over them. The people even celebrate this rule as reflected in the poster, and the Japanese person enjoys a spot clearly central and above the other people of the sphere. This imposes the rule of Japan above the people and gives the impression that different races from around the sphere accept and embrace this new order. Kleinschmidt (2021) provided an analysis of the ideological background of Japan’s expansion as reflected in the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. According to him, the Japanese believed in the idea of the *tenka* or “all under heaven”. *Tenka*, which originates from the philosophical and political worldview *tanxia* of pre-modern dynastic China, offers an alternative explanation or motivation for imperialism from the non-Western point-of-view (Murthy 2017). This philosophical concept explains the dynamism of collectiveness and the pursuit of collective identity under one “heaven”, in this case, the different races falling under one political and cultural sphere. This concept of a world order, which considers all human beings and societies that fall under one sky as part of one collective, is integrated not just into the concept of the sphere but also as a driving force of imperialism itself. Moreover, fused with the ideas of Western imperialism, this concept of a world order gave rise to a new powerful ideology that in turn formed a collective identity of co-prosperous nations and races whilst under the power and rule of the Empire of Japan. The propaganda postcard makes use of the iconic power of different elements, such as the different races and the soldier raising the flag of Japan, in order to delicately show and communicate this ideology. In relation to the epistemological merit model, the propaganda technique employed made use of epistemological belief rooted in the concept of the *tenka* and fused with the Western imperialist ideal of influence over occupied social groups which leads to their acceptance of a collective identity and prosperous living in pan-Asia, with Japan ruling as savior, protector, and leader as mandated by the heavens.



FIGURE 4 *Japanese Propaganda Poster 10.* Propaganda Poster in Chinese produced by the Japanese-Sponsored government in China (1937–1945).
CHAPMAN UNIVERSITY
DIGITAL COMMONS.

Another poster that depicts a similar narrative in a simpler and more subtle manner is seen in Figure 4. The poster, which was made and created for China and Manchuria, only shows three people. Like in Figure 3, they are distinguishable through their physical characteristics and cultural identities, such as clothing. The two characters from China and Manchuria, one female and one male, are seen dressed in their traditional national attires, while the Japanese character in the center wears a sailor uniform that alludes to him being a traveler from a foreign land. However, the easiest give-away to know their ethnicities is through the flags they are holding – the flag of Manchukuo, the Japanese flag in the center, and the Five Races Under One Union flag. The characters from China and Manchuria raise and wave their flags proudly while the Japanese flag is held calmly, slightly lower, by the character in the middle. The words “Gung-ho of Japan, China and Manchuria, peace on Earth” are written at the lower part of the poster in Chinese script. The term Gung Ho originates from a Chinese term that means “working together,” and was widely used during the Second Sino-Japanese war. The term alludes to a united, enthusiastic and energetic people that are used in this poster to imply the camaraderie between the three different people from Japan, China, and Manchuria. This is also signaled by how the two characters from China and Manchuria cling to the hands of the Japanese character in the middle of them. This can be interpreted as the dependency of the two territories on the Empire of Japan. Thus, the positioning of the Japanese character is meant to

communicate Japan's rule in the sphere beyond the collective union between the different people. As Swan (1996) puts it:

It is clear that while the Japanese certainly sought to free East Asia of White colonial rule, they were not fighting to free its peoples from colonial domination ... the policy decisions and plans for the new order that Japan envisioned for East Asia clearly show that for all intents and purposes the old western colonial order was to be replaced by a far more regulated and organically functioning new colonial order centered totally in Japan (146).

This is also reinforced by the symbolism of two doves flying above the characters amidst stylistically rendered clouds reminiscent of Japanese-style paintings. The doves, in Asian culture, symbolize lasting peace that can be contextualized to the harmonious living in the sphere when the three nations unite with Japan in a central position while China and Manchukuo are treated as “lesser equals.”

1.5 *Co-Prosperity and Harmony*

One of the key terms in the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere is co-prosperity. The concept is derived from the kanji character 栄 (*sakae*), which means glory, honor, to flourish and to prosper. Prosperity is generally defined as the condition of thriving toward success. Contextualizing this with the sphere, it denotes the collective economic, social, and political flourishing of the nations under the sphere through policies related to trade, production, strategy, and liberation from Western control. Two facets of prosperity are seen in the chosen propaganda posters, one centers on the prosperous relationship between the Asian people towards Japan, and the second, the collective partnership and co-prosperity between the different nations. The first one is evident in Figure 5, where people of different races are seen seated around the table trading products that symbolize their nations. A large map of the greater east Asia is present behind them. Like the previous depictions of identity, much of it owes to the stereotypical characteristics of their race, although this is even more directly denoted by the inscriptions on their armbands. The people seated represent a part of the sphere. They offer different products and raw materials placed on the table, with China presenting ore, Burma presenting rice and oil, Dutch East Indies presenting a *mugo* plant and oil, Philippines presenting copper and agricultural products, Malaysia presenting tin and a *mugo* plant, French Indochina presenting rice, Thailand presenting an elephant carrying a



FIGURE 5 1940s Mini-Poster Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere Conference. JAPAN WAR ART GALLERY COMMONS.

rice sack on its back and pulling lumber, and Manchukuo presenting tea leaves and coal. All of the characters appear to be proudly offering raw materials and economic products from their respective nations.

However, the diverse Asian people and their offerings contrast with the Japanese soldier seated at the table and his offering. He presents tanks and ships of war, which represent the mission of the Japanese empire to “liberate” Asia from the colonization of the West. It gives the impression that in exchange for the economic products and raw materials, the Japanese forces fight the battle against the Western invaders, which provides us with an insight into the power dynamics in the Sphere’s ideology:

In the concept of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere, one can see on a grand scale the same methodical, integrated, rationalistic approach that the Japanese had directed at their own empire. The government again took the leading role, setting out the priorities for the various parts of the sphere and their economic, political, and strategic relationships to Japan

SWAN 1996, 146

This is further reinforced by texts at the sides of the image written in Japanese, which translates to “Let us unite the East Asian countries and offer each other’s resources to create a prosperous mutual economy.” The propaganda art reflects Japan’s role in uniting the economies of the territories under the sphere and leading them by using their force and military might.

The perceived divisions between East Asians and Southeast Asians are clearly seen in Figure 5. In the work, the character representatives of China and Manchukuo are depicted wearing proper military uniforms while the Southeast Asian members are dressed again in backward-looking traditional attires, similar to Figure 3. As noted by Fisher (1950), the regions of Manchukuo and China form the continental base of the sphere. Their primary function was to provide the temperate raw materials, especially the minerals required for heavy industry sectors, such as mining. Meanwhile, the colonial lands of the south were considered underdeveloped, and the people were seen as “exotic savages.” From an economic standpoint, the Japanese aimed to utilize the region for the iron ore located in East Malaya, lateritic iron and ferroalloy reserves in the Philippines, and other materials such as wood, bamboo, earthenware, limestone, cement, coal and timber (Fisher 1950). Thus, the divisions between the peoples of the sphere are parallel to the economic structure desired by Japan with its leadership at the center, the heavy industry materials strategically placed in the neighboring East Asian region, and the rest of the products placed in the Sphere’s periphery. Again, this hierarchy between the peoples and the economic structure is reflected in this particular mini-poster (Figure 5). Two other people representing India and Australia can also be seen looking from outside the door. The Indian representative is depicted wearing a turban, while the Australian is an aborigine wearing native indigenous clothes. The text written on the poster conveys the message, “India and Australia will join realizing the identity of East Asians.” This particular message and depiction demonstrate the desired expansion of the Greater East Asian identity and the coverage of the Sphere not just from Japan towards East Asia and Southeast Asia but also even reaching to South Asia and the Oceania.

Another poster, which represents the Japanese people with the depiction soldiers, presents the ideas of peace and harmony. This can be hypothesized as a way to remodel the negative impression of Japanese soldiers as cruel, harsh, and unapproachable. As Giles (2015) states, “in order to rationalize the military abuses against the Chinese, Japan utilized diplomacy and propaganda to announce a bloc against the West, promising to liberate East Asia from the West” (6). In Figure 6, we can see Japanese soldiers interacting with children. These interactions give them a softer and friendlier image. Particular scenes show children carrying Japanese flags playing with and being carried by soldiers,



FIGURE 6 *Japanese Propaganda Poster 01. Propaganda Poster in Chinese produced by the Japanese-Sponsored government in China (1937–1945).*

CHAPMAN UNIVERSITY DIGITAL COMMONS

soldiers helping a man push a cart, and soldiers supporting and buying from a street-seller. These interactions are summarized with Chinese inscriptions which translate to “please see how kind the Japanese Army is.” However, much of this can be refuted by the recorded abuses and the consequent failure of the Japanese to occupy the territories peacefully and thus prove to be an epistemic deficiency conveyed by this propaganda. Quoting from Giles (2015):

Japanese propaganda surrounding the Sphere boasted promises of harmony of the Asian peoples within the sphere, but reality often steered far from these promises. The Japanese often used brutal measures in the handling of the native peoples within the Sphere. While the promises of the [Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere] GEACOP were probably genuine to most Japanese people and even some of their political leaders, much of the blame for its failures rests with the Japanese military men who occupied the nations within the Sphere (22).

Giles (2015) further expounded this failure of the Japanese soldiers to create peace and harmony and related it to racism, stating that while the Japanese boasted slogans such as “Asia for Asians,” they also considered the race of mainland Japan to be the dominant race and placed the rest of the Asian

people in their “proper place” under Japanese rule. All of these reinforce the discussion on the ironies and juxtapositions of truth and propaganda with regard to the image of the sphere, the unity of the Asian people under the rule of Japan, and the promise of co-prosperity and harmony – the underlying themes and messages conveyed by the propaganda arts of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.

Conclusion

The concept of Pan-Asianism is widely reflected in the propaganda arts of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. As a matter of fact, Pan-Asianism is one of its key ideals in establishing the sphere and uniting the Asian people, as reflected in the slogan “Asia for Asians.” The three main themes explored in this paper provide an understanding not only of how Pan-Asianism is reflected in the propaganda arts but also of the nature of propaganda in relation to the epistemic truth (Ross 2002). The propaganda posters also showed the interplay of signs and symbolism through the overall semiotic and contextual meanings associated with the concept of the sphere (Guillermo 2001) as well as the iconic power of the symbols reinforcing it (Alexander, Bartmański, and Giesen 2012). The use of language is also important to note in relation to the propaganda’s intended audiences. For instance, most propaganda materials are written in Japanese even though only one piece of propaganda art examined in this paper is directly intended for a Japanese audience. It can be assumed that the posters are part of the cultural education in the different societies built by Japan, which promotes the use of the Japanese language. Ironically, this can pose a problem since not a lot of people became proficient in the Japanese language, and thus, would have to rely only on their interpretations of the art. However, this is not the case with China and Manchukuo, where Chinese characters, which are similar to *kanji*, are employed.

In analyzing the three main themes in this paper, first, in the image of the sphere, Pan-Asianism is promoted in the propaganda through the showcase of different beautiful landmarks and material culture in the different parts of the Sphere. This can be seen in the art of a boardgame told in the point-of-view of a Japanese traveler taking a tour in the Sphere. Meanwhile, the unity of the five races is focal in the depiction of the sphere in the Chinese mainland, juxtaposing peace with war through the presence of soldiers, tanks, and planes alongside locals going on with their daily activities. It can be noted that there is a perceived division between the East Asian part of the sphere and the

Southeast Asian regions. Stark contrasts are seen in the depiction of China and Manchukuo as developed in contrast to the Southeast Asian countries that are presented as underdeveloped. Nevertheless, all the characters in the propaganda art are also depicted to be very accepting and welcoming of the Japanese presence and the ideals of the Sphere. Regarding the second theme, we see the formation of the collective greater East Asian identity, people of different races are posed in harmony circling a Japanese soldier raising the flag of Japan. The use of basic semiotics such as color also reinforces the idea of unity in diversity among the different races. Another poster depicts two people from Manchukuo and China clinging on to a Japanese and communicating the idea of peace. While such an idea of collective identity under a Pan-Asia is prescribed under the Sphere, the significance of Japan's role as the central ruler of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere is evident through the subtle composition and placement of signifiers. In addition, there is also a hierarchical structure reinforced where the people of Manchukuo and China are perceived as “lesser equals” of the Japanese, while the Southeast Asians are often exoticized, as seen in the different traditional attires worn by the characters. The collective Asian identity can also be analyzed through the lens of the *tenka*, which offers a non-western philosophical motivation towards imperialism, whereas the people of the sphere fall under “one heaven” and therefore, must belong to one nation. Fused with the concepts of Western imperialism, the *tenka* became a powerful ideology that reinforces the concept of Pan-Asianism in the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.

Lastly, the meaning of co-prosperity is explored in relation to two facets. One, the trade and economic partnership between the members of the Sphere, as depicted by the different races offering their products and raw materials at a table in exchange for Japan's war efforts. Different races and their cultural identities are depicted, which draws a lot from the stereotypical ideas about the locals from the different parts of the sphere. The previously mentioned hierarchical viewpoints established between the peoples echo the socio-economic structure desired by Japan in the workings of the sphere where the neighboring East Asian countries strategically provide raw materials for heavy industries while the peripheral Southeast Asian lands, which are perceived as undeveloped, provide supplementary raw materials. The centrality of Japan and the power dynamics depict the promise of Japan to unite Asia while it fights its war against the Western forces symbolized by Japan's offer in the table in the form of tanks and warships. The imposition of the centrality of Japan's war efforts and rule is more direct compared to Japan's positioning in the other propaganda. The second facet also explores the goal of the propaganda

to cleanse the image of the Japanese soldiers, paint them as benevolent, and repair the damage to their reputation due to the abuses and horrors that resulted from the war and occupation. Such use of propaganda falls deep into the epistemic deficiency as theorized by Ross (2002) and its consequent proliferation to influence the consciousness of people through art's innate iconic power.

While propaganda conveys messages with the goal of persuading the people, it must also be noted that propaganda does not completely influence the perceptions of people and may even result in subversive interpretations. This is echoed by resistance movements against Japan's imperialism in history and should be further explored in future studies on art and propaganda of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. Overall, the different themes explored in this paper, as drawn from the image analysis of the propaganda arts of Japan for the sphere, provide insights into the development of Pan-Asianism and its different ideologies and facets. These are conveyed through the profound use of art and propaganda and the use of purposeful semiotics and iconicity, which gives us an understanding of Pan-Asianism contextualized in history and epistemologically examined. The concepts in this paper can also be further explored in relation to the concurrent influences in the contemporary era, especially in states where propaganda is constantly utilized. Moreover, a critical understanding of Pan-Asianism vis-à-vis art and propaganda is vital nowadays, especially in times of global conflict, the continuous proliferation of misinformation to conceal the truth, and the constant invention and redefinition of people's identities in Asia and in other places around the world.

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