

# A Japanese Manga Artist in Occupied Indonesia: Ono Saseo and Modern Painting in East Asia

Presented by Gen Adachi, Japan Society for the Promotion of Science Fellow

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In discussions of World War II propaganda in Japan and occupied Indonesia, the cartoon artist, Ono Saseo (1905-1954) is one of the most frequently referenced figures in relation to the increase of racial stereotypes in manga, or cartoon-style drawing. He was in Indonesia from 1942 to 1946 as a propaganda painter. This study challenges this general understanding of Ono and re-examines his work by focusing on the following three ways that we may understand the diversity of his production. First, Ono was not limited to militaristic messages in his work, but rather portrayed styles of the period with humor and fancy, inspired in part by jazz, Western films, and fashion. Second, Ono continued to produce erotic images of women even during the war, under the pretense of providing comfort for soldiers; almost all of these women were depicted as vamps who tempted or threatened men. Third, in Indonesia, he was interested in local art and established relationships with local Indonesian artists – something quite

unusual at the time. There was mutual influence, but he never depicted the dark side of the war. These three points help reveal the paradoxical motives and multiple-significance of Ono's manga works in the wartime period.

**Gen Adachi** is an art historian who has written on modern Japanese avant-garde art and manga including "Avant-garde Debates Over Japanese Tradition in the 1950's with a Focus on the Role of Isamu Noguchi," which was published in S. Inaga (ed.). *Artistic Vagabondage and New Utopian Projects*, (Kyoto: International Research Center for Japanese Studies, 2011). He is currently a Post-Doctoral Research Fellowship for Young Scientists of Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (2010-2013) and is an adjunct lecturer at Joshibi University of Art and Design and other universities.

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