Possible Promo / A level Question

**Q1) To what extent was the Japanese Occupation of Southeast Asia, during world war II, the turning point in the development of the nationalist movements?**

Turning point refers to a change in the development of the nationalist movements. Previously in pre-war Southeast Asia, the nationalist movements had achieved nothing more than autonomy, being far from independence. By turning point meant that after the Japanese occupation, they are close towards achieving independence. The establishment of a better trained and armed Southeast Asian nationalist military, revival of the exiled nationalist leaders and the promotion of nationalism by the Japanese, marks as valuable instances that signaled the Japanese occupation as a turning point. However, there were also cases of continuity from the pre-war period, where the Japanese adopted similar token gestures as the pre-war western colonial rulers. Despite its presence, this instance of continuity plays a very limited role in determining the overall developments of the nationalist movements. As a result, the overall improvements made during the Japanese occupation developed the movements in a way, that turned defeat into victory. Therefore, this essay shall seek to argue that the Japanese Occupation during WWII is very much a turning point in the development of nationalist movements.

The Japanese occupation had lead to an establishment of military force in the Southeast Asian states for the first time. It gave dramatic boost to the feasibility of revolutionary tactics. This is considered a turning point as during the pre-war period, the Southeast Asian nations do not have their own military force, with their revolts often crushed by the colonial masters with minimum effort. This acquisition of a powerful military greatly improved the negotiating position of the nationalists with the colonial masters for independence. If negotiations fail, the nationalists would also be more capable than ever to fight for independence. For instance, In pre-war Vietnam, the lack of well trained and well-equipped army to challenge the French colonial regime, lead to the failure of the 1930-1931, Nghe-Tinh revolt. However during the Japanese occupation, the Vietminh was strengthen considerably from the economic and military aid from the Allies (particularly China and US) to fight against the Japanese. It involved in the creation of a well-trained and well-equipped Vietnamese guerilla army that numbered 5000 strong by September 1944 under the strong leadership of Vo Nguyen Giap. This army would later form the bedrock of the post-war anti-French resistance movement seeking to achieve independence for Vietnam. Indonesia is another example, where their military were created. The Japanese sponsored the establishment of Pembela Tana Air (PETA) in 1943, a well trained paramilitary force of 65000 which would become the backbone of the Indonesian Republican Army after the Japanese Defeat. Japanese creation of Barisan Hizbullah (God’s fones) in 1944, military wing for Masyumi which numbered 50000 by 1945 and would be actively involved in guerilla warfare against the Dutch in the struggle for Indonesian independence. Which would greatly improve the Indonesian’s negotiating position, in their post-war independence struggle against the Dutch. This formation of military force for the Southeast nationalists movements marks a turning point on their developments, as the lack of well-trained and well-equipped military during the pre-war period has resulted in the failure of many revolts. The military force is instrumental in the transformation of the nationalist movements.

The Japanese occupation brought back the radical and marginalized nationalist leaders that were previously detained or exiled during the pre-war period. The Japanese brought the nationalist leaders back in hope of using them against the allies. The absence of these nationalist leaders, effectively impeded the progress of the nationalist movements. As those radical nationalist leaders were seeking speedy independence. With their restoration of power by the Japanese, the once slower developments of the nationalist movements would be accelerated. In addition, greatly restoring the nationalists’ lost of confidence and prestige. Therefore, return of the leaders marks a turning point, as their return means a swifter road to independence. This could be seen in Indonesia, where the Dutch exiled and detained many prominent and radical Indonesian nationalist leaders by 1934, ( E.g. Sukarno, Mohammad Hatta and Sutan Sjahir) during the pre-war period. However, following the Japanese occupation, radical leaders’ existence were revived. The Japanese had appealed to key pre-war Indonesian nationalist leaders to collaborate in return for the promise of speedy self rule, leading to the reversal of political fortunes for Sukarno and Mohammad Hatta. This open collaboration and participation in the management of Indonesia also gave the nationalist leaders valuable administrative experience and massive boost to self-confidence. Both were valuable for leading the nationalist movements, after the war, towards achieving independence. Dramatically improved the organization and coordination of the nationalist movements. In Burma, during the pre-war period, the British colonial regime and U Saw government had detained and exiled radical nationalist leaders such as Ba Maw and the Thakins (Aung San, U Nu and ThanTun) by 1940. However, following the Japanese occupation, the Japanese obtained cooperation of the 30 comrades (comprising Aung San, Ne win and other Thakins) who went aboard for Japanese military training, this later resulted in the formation of the Burma-Indepedence Army (BIA) in 1942, which was to be the vanguard for establishing Burma’s independence. The army later play a prominent role in assisting the Japanese “liberation” of Burma in 1942. This marks a turning point as it shattered the original myths of British invincibility and greatly strengthened Burmese self-belief and nationalist aspirations, boosting the post-war nationalist movements. Hence, the Japanese occupation marks a turning point with the revival of the detained and exiled radical nationalist leaders. As their return, marks a swifter road towards independence.

Despite these positive boosts made from the Japanese occupation, there are also instances, where the developments of the nationalist movements remains unchanged. There are limitations on how much the Japanese Occupation had boosted the nationalist movements. During the Japanese Occupation, the Japanese practiced token gestures similar to those of the original colonial masters. This continuation of unequal partnership leads to a continuity of token gestures, made of no real substance, at the end of the day, the nationalist agendas were still not achieved. For example, in the Philippines, Japan granted it nominal independence in October 1943 in an attempt to win the loyalty of the Filipinos, but they had to sign a military alliance with Japan, shows that under the Japanese occupation, they were unable to secure their agenda to achieve a genuine independence. The agreement was in fact one level lower than the Tydings Mcduffie Act of 1934 negotiated by Quezon,which promoted full independence for Philippines by 4 July 1946.This token gesture given by the Japanese did not benefit the nationalist movements into moving closer towards independence. In Vietnam, Japanese had supported pro-Japan and anti-communist CaoDai and HoaHao religious movements in Cochin-China to perpetuate the territorial divisions between the Cochin-China, Tonkin and Anmam, undermining the vietminh’s attempt to forge unity in the nationalist movements by building up separate and powerful nationalist forces in Southern Vietnam to compete with the Vietminh. By breaking them into different fractions, it caused a disruption to the nationalist movements. By having no improvement, we can say that the Japanese occupation had its limitations on how it boosted the nationalist movements.

Despite the limited value of continuity caused by token gestures, the overall improvements were of extreme significance. As shown by the nationalist movements, they had benefited greatly by their newly acquired ability to gain better access to the national population, during the Japanese occupation. The Japanese had encouraged the use of the native’s language and symbols. While Japanese’s motive of promoting nationalism was to heighten local enthusiasm for the Japanese invasion in addition, manipulate this heightened nationalism against Western imperialism. This promotion of nationalism effectively gave the nationalists a stronger boost to their identity. These open promotions of nationalism were of nonexistent during the pre-war period, marking this a turning point indeed. During the pre-war period, the Burmese were often indoctrinated with propaganda urging loyalty to British authority.However, following the Japanese occupation, the Japanese allowed the Thakins toultilise nationalist slogans such as “ Burma for the Burmans” to whip up popular enthusiasm for the Japanese invasion. This promotion leads to a massive elevation of Burmese nationalism and inculcating a common sense of national identiy. Which is responsible for gluing the Burmese together, to participate in the post-war nationalist movements. In Indonesia’s pre-war period, the Indonesians were not taught about imperialism at schools, and were forbidded the use of national symbols. However, during the Japanese occupation, the Japanese launched a sustained propaganda campaign against western colonialism, helping to imbue in the Indonesians a feeling of hostility against western imperialism. Usage of schools, mass organizations and public rallies were used by the Japanese to mobilize Indonesians to support the Japanese. The Japanese also permitted use of national symbols (e.g. Indonesian flags and anthems.) and the use of Bahasa Indonesiain the administration.This is a hallmarn of a turning point, as the promotion of open Indonesian nationalism leads to an increase in sense of national unity. Vital for fighting the Dutch, after the defeat of the Japanese. Hence, the examples shown the improved boost to their national identity and provide unity among the nationalists. Making the acquiring of independence from the returning colonial powers a less strenuous process.

In conclusion, it can be argued that there was a form of continuity, where the Japanese occupation essentially meant a change of colonial masters, from the western colonizers to the Japanese imperialists. However, The nationalists had generally received considerable improvements that transformed the progress of the nationalists movements, getting them closer to independence. The improvements includes the formation of a nationalists military, the restoration of power of exiled nationalist leaders and the massive promotion of nationalism by the Japanese. These improvements brought significant impacts which greatly boosted the developments of the nationalist movements. The impacts included the improved negotiating position for independence and more cohesive sense of unity. Their nationalist movements were now backed with a concrete basis , with additional boost from their acquired military and national unity. Therefore, this essay seeks to argue that the Japanese occupation was indeed a turning point in the developments of the nationalist movements.