

Japanese occupation affect nationalism in indonesia

Government



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Assess the impact of the Japanese Occupation on nationalism in Indonesia “Nationalism” is generally defined as the increasing desire in people to determine their identity, existence and destiny for themselves. For the Netherland Indies, nationalism movement can be traced back to around 1900, which finally led and gave rise to a new nation, Indonesia. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that nationalism movement existed prior to the Japanese occupation and therefore should not be consider a turning point that altered the entire landscape of nationalist movement in Indonesia.

In addition, the Japanese’s brutality and cruelty could have potentially hindered the progress of nationalism, as they were primary driven by their self-interest in war efforts. This paper will attempt to argue how the Japanese Occupation acts as a catalyst that sped up nationalist movement led by pre-war nationalist leaders in Indonesia, eventually paving the way for its independence. In the initial stage of the occupation, the Japanese was determined to exploit the resources and not make any political concessions to Indonesian nationalism.

The first attempt at such mass propaganda without major Indonesian nationalist leaders turned out to be a comprehensive failure. From its launch in March 1942, the Triple A movement that consist of the slogan that Japan as the leader of Asia, the protector of Asia, and the light of Asia, did not gather much support from the local. In general, the Triple A movement did not achieve its objective as few Indonesian Nationalist leaders were involved and the propaganda was too heavy-handed even in those days of early occupation for the locals to take it seriously.

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Therefore, it was only because the Japanese needed the help of the locals to aid war efforts that led them to give political concessions to nationalist leaders. Having failed to get anywhere by making no concession to nationalism and with increasing new doubts among the Japanese about the outcome of the war, the Putera --- Centre of People's Power (Pusat Tenaga Rakjat) was formed in March 1943. The Japanese selected nationalist leaders who had been imprisoned or ignored by the Dutch.

They were resigned to the fact if they were to rally the masses of Java, the Japanese would have to use the leading figures of pre-war nationalist movement such as Sukarno and Hatta. The Japanese implementation of a simplified Malay language, Bahasa Indonesia, to replace the 250 languages and dialects used in the Netherland Indies it became the main lingua franca which significant in fostering a common national identity. When they first took control of Indonesia, the Japanese decided to ban the use of Dutch language with immediate effect.

Throughout the country, the locals started to see themselves as true modern nations rather than a mixture of rival religions, languages, cultures and races. This greatly galvanise nationalist effort, as it was easier to reach out to masses comparer to before under the Dutch rule. Under the Japanese Occupation, political boards were formed and nationalism was encouraged by the new regime as the Japanese mobilized the whole population for the war effort. The Japanese utilized Sukarno, along with the other nationalists, in order to unite the Japanese and Indonesian causes.

While the Japanese military authorities were wary of giving Indonesians too much license, they recognize that they could not maintain their position by <https://assignbuster.com/japanese-occupation-affect-nationalism-in-indonesia/>

force alone. Hence, The Japanese give positions of responsibility to nationalist leaders like Sukarno and Hatta who had previously been imprisoned by the Dutch, and afforded the nationalist movement new scope for development (Vickers, 2005). Even though the original intention behind this move was to achieve Japanese war aims, such opportunity was never allowed under the Dutch Colonial rule.

Therefore, Sukarno who was enlisted by the Japanese to help them govern the country seized every opportunity to educate the masses and indoctrinate nationalist consciousness into the masses. Sukarno was a crucial figure that contributed to the rise of nationalism in Indonesia. His eloquence at political rallies was instrumental in spreading the message of freedom across a diverse Indonesia, galvanizing them to set aside their differences to united and oppose against their colonial masters.

This can be reinforced by the account of Hideo Fujiyama, who decided to desert the Japanese Army and remain in Indonesia to fight along side the nationalist army. He was primary motivated by Sukarno as he recalled the reason that inspired him to make the decision was listening to Sukarno's speech at a mass rally on September 19th, 1945 in Jakarta. He described Sukarno's speech to be " so energetic and impressive" which resulted to him " being moved" and led him to join Indonesia nationalist movement military.

Therefore, the Japanese Occupation gave Sukarno the platform to reach out to the masses as his eloquence and inflammatory speeches managed to convince them to participate in his nationalist movements. The Japanese administration gave nationalist's opportunities to become involved in government in ways that they had never known before under the Dutch rule.
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These opportunities include the access to experience and connections, which were later proved to be highly effective.

In particular, nationalist usually came to control many propaganda activities mounted by Japan, including publication and circulation of newspapers such as Sumatra Sinbu (Sumatra News), radio broadcasts, mass instructions, films and meetings. Under the networking and communication capacities offered by such propaganda bodies as BOMPA (Bodan Oentoeck Membantu Pertahanan Asia- Bureau to Assist in the Defence of Asia) in East Sumatra, nationalists were able to develop and spread popular understanding of the idea of Indonesia through the layers of indigenous society.

For the first time in decades, the masses, and not just alienated urban activists and intellectuals became continually engaged in political activity and thus, accelerated the fervor of nationalism throughout the country. The Japanese Military also help set up the formation of volunteer army, PETA (Pembela Tanah Air- Defenders of the Homeland) and provided the large number of officers and soldiers with military trainings and weapons. Few Indonesians had been given officer training by the Dutch, and they were always under the Dutch commanders.

This military training was instrumental to nationalist movement as it allowed them to be better equipped in the battle with the colonial masters between 1946-1949 when the latter tried to return and reassert their authority. It was not only the military training in PETA, but also the specific ideological training in the institute which emphasis on discipline and loyalty to country that awakened the national consciousness of the young men who enlisted into the volunteer army.

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Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that the Japanese who set up PETA had their own interest in mind as they were planning to use PETA for coastal defence against allied troops. They knew the limitations of PETA, and understood that they were not able to withstand a full-scale allied onslaught. Therefore, PETA was used to delay the enemy's advance by deploying along the coastline and obstructing an allied landing or harassing the rear wherever the allied troops might come, thus allowing time for the Japanese army to retreat.

For that reason, PETA soldiers were distributed throughout the island and were requested to remain in respective region, where they had intimate knowledge of the terrain. At the end of the war in 1959, the Indonesian government had as many as 500, 000-armed fighters at its disposal. Therefore, PETA greatly strengthened nationalism efforts and represented potentially the most effective legacy of the Japanese period in both ideological and structural terms. This paved the way for the formation of the nationalist army after the Japanese Occupation to fight against the returning Dutch colonial master.

However it is also important to acknowledge that the Japanese Occupation had detrimental effect on nationalism in Indonesia even though they allow political concession for nationalist leaders to reach out to the masses. As the Japanese were primary driven by self-interest, they were not willing to compromise war efforts in order to accommodate nationalist movements. This can be seen in their brutality towards locals, the deliberate fragmentation of Indonesia into three divisions and the Romushua program of forced labour.

By splitting Indonesia into three jurisdictions to be controlled by different divisions of Japanese military forces, nationalism in Indonesia was greatly disjointed. The three divisions consist of Java who was controlled by the 16th Army, Sumatra under the 25th Army and the rest under the 2nd Southern fleet. These became various political units with tight Japanese control together with separate administration. The notion was to ensure that any nationalist aspiration from Java to the outer islands was strongly discouraged.

As a result, political activities tumbled to an all time low as from March 1942, all political activities were disallowed and all existing associations were thus dissolved. This resulted to breaking the unifying development of Batavia as Indonesia's centre, which the Netherlands had emplaced over the years and thus compromising the idea of Indonesia as a single nation. The Romusha program was a mandatory forced labour implemented by the Japanese to aid them in their war efforts. This initiative destroyed stability and order within Indonesia and greatly hampered nationalist movements.

The Romusha normally consists of peasants from the poorer region of Central Java. They were forced by various means to contract themselves to work on military construction projects. Many of them were sent away from their homes such as Sumatra, and even away from their countries to Brunei, Siam and eastern islands. The Japanese often treated them with extreme brutality and cruelty. Even after the war, only a small handful out of the estimated 500, 000 who were mobilized to work outside their hometown managed to return back home.

Amongst these people were ordinary Javanese like Sarmann Praptowidjojo, who were forced to slave on the Burma railway. Originally from Surakarta, he had been a railway worker in Surabaya before being sent to Singapore and then on to Thailand to work on the railway, where he witnessed the destruction of the bridge on River Kwai. He and his fellow Javanese worker saw those around them dying initially at the rate of three a day, then five, then ten. Even though Sarmann survived, he joined the thousands who did not return to Java after the war, preferring to marry and live in Bangkok.

The Romusha program hindered the progress of nationalism movement as almost every echelon of the Indonesian social class was forced to comply by the Japanese to assume responsibility for the program such as organizing recruitment at village level, by propagandizing at higher levels, or simply by doing nothing to obstruct the program. Village chiefs and district officers in charge of running the program compounded its effect by designating the Romusha service in rural society they dislike or fear. Despite the political concessions given to nationalist leaders, the Japanese treated the locals with great brutality.

Apart from the Romusha program, there was a botched biological warfare experiment in 1944 carried out by the Japanese. Between 5000 to 10,000 men from a group of Romusha forced labourers held on the outskirts of Jakarta, awaiting shipment outside Java, died writhing in agony from injection of tetanus. Japanese scientists had prepared the lethal vaccines to see what their effects would be. This further reinforces the idea of Japanese brutality and cruelty towards the local. Therefore, we see how Romusha's domino effect on the masses greatly hampered nationalist movement in Indonesia.

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Even though the Japanese provided military training and platforms for nationalist leaders to reach out to the masses, it is too sweeping to label the occupation ' a turning point' in the history of nationalism in Indonesia. This is the fact that nationalism movement such as the Indonesian Nation Party (PNI) existed way before World War II, and Japanese occupation merely provided nationalist leader a platform to reach out to the masses and this in turn strengthened the nationalist movements. Nationalist sentiments were already common in the 1930s despite the Dutch colonial master clamping down hard on nationalist leaders.

A key moment which highlights the growth of nationalist consciousness came in 1928, when the the All Indonesian Youth Congress proclaimed its pledge, establishing goalsof one national identity (Indoneisan), one country (Indonesia) and one language (Bahasa Indonesia). The emergence of Indonesian Nation Party (PNI), led by the young and rising Sukarno was rapidly becoming one of the most powerful nationalist organization (Vaisutis, 2007). PNI brought all non-communist nationalist groups under its umbrella to unify them as one.

Nonetheless, there were limitations on nationalist movement prior to the Japanese Occupation. First, the emphasis on unity for the sake of the struggle meant that almost no attention was devoted to discipline, creative and accommodative thinking about the form and content of the free Indonesian state which nationalist leaders wished to create. Second, the over-emphasis on unity, together with the fiercely competitive and highly personalized world of elite Indonesian politics, effectively meant that no serious efforts were made to build bridges and create political compromises.

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Thirdly, political leaders of the 1930s used strikes and revolutionary language to challenge Dutch rule but they did not have strong enough organizational vehicle to spread their actions. Once there was a problem in their individual nationalist group, there was no longer a sense that one was able to move in and out of various groups and body. People had to give their exclusive loyalties as members of parties. The consequence of this was a splintering of the nationalist effort.

Nonetheless, the Dutch recognizes the potential influence and threat to their authority and subsequently jailed Sukarno in 1930. Therefore, we see how nationalism existed way before Japanese occupation, and nationalist leaders eventually seized the opportunity under the Japanese Occupation to spread nationalism throughout the country. In conclusion, this paper argues that Japanese Occupation acts as a catalyst that sped up nationalist movement led by pre-war nationalist leaders such as Sukarno that eventually paving the way for its independence.

Prior to the Japanese Occupation, there was subsequent number of problems that hindered nationalist efforts as political parties were full of conflicts and disunited. In addition, the Dutch clamped down hard on radical leaders and would imprisoned or exile them from Indonesia. Therefore, it was due to the Japanese occupation that provided a platform for nationalist leaders to reach out to the masses. In addition, the Japanese provided political concessions and military training which were instrumental in later years with the Dutch.

However, it is too myopic to label the Japanese Occupation as a turning point in the history of Indonesia's nationalism. This is due to the fact that nationalism was already active with the formation of the PNI and other
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nationalist groups. Also, the Japanese Occupation had the potential to greatly hamper nationalist efforts with own self-interest if not for Sukarno skilful manipulation and eloquence that steer the masses towards his nationalist cause. Thus, this paper will reinforce the stand that Japanese Occupation act as a catalyst toward nationalism in Indonesia.