Colonial Rule in Southeast Asia

Guide to Reading

Section Preview
Through “New Imperialism,” Westerners controlled vast territories, exploited native populations, and opened markets for European products.

Main Idea
• Under New Imperialism, European countries began to seek additional territory. (p. 336)
• Rivalries for overseas territories led to Western dominance of Southeast Asia. (p. 337)
• European countries controlled the governments and economies of their colonies in Southeast Asia. (p. 339)

Content Vocabulary
New Imperialism, protectorate, indirect rule, direct rule

Academic Vocabulary
exploit, impose, regime

People to Identify
King Mongkut, King Chulalongkorn, Commodore George Dewey, Emilio Aguinaldo

Places to Locate
Singapore, Burma, Thailand, Philippines

Preview of Events

1850
1870
1890
1910
1930
1950

1887
France completes its control of Indochina

1896
France and Great Britain agree to maintain Thailand as a buffer state

1930
Saya San leads Burma uprising

Reading Objectives
1. Describe why Westerners were so determined to colonize Southeast Asia.
2. Explain the chief goal of the Western nations.

Reading Strategy
Identifying Information
Make a chart like this one showing which countries controlled what parts of Southeast Asia.

Spanish (until 1898)
Holland
United States (after 1898)
France
Great Britain

California Standards in This Section

Reading this section will help you master these California History–Social Science standards.

10.4:
Students analyze patterns of global change in the era of New Imperialism in at least two of the following regions or countries: Africa, Southeast Asia, China, India, Latin America, and the Philippines.

10.4.1:
Describe the rise of industrial economies and their link to imperialism and colonialism (e.g., the role played by national security and strategic advantage; moral issues raised by the search for national hegemony, Social Darwinism, and the missionary impulse; material issues, such as land, resources, and technology).

10.4.2:
Discuss the locations of the colonial rule of such nations as England, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Russia, Spain, Portugal, and the United States.

10.4.3:
Explain imperialism from the perspective of the colonizers and the colonized and the varied immediate and long-term responses by the people under colonial rule.

10.4.4:
Describe the independence struggles of the colonized regions of the world, including the roles of leaders, such as Sun Yat-sen in China, and the roles of ideology and religion.
The New Imperialism

Under New Imperialism, European countries began to seek additional territory.

Main Idea

Reading Connection Do you remember how the Industrial Revolution created demand for raw materials and new markets? Read to learn how European countries used “New Imperialism” to meet these needs.

In the nineteenth century, a new phase of Western expansion into Asia and Africa began. European nations began to view Asian and African societies as a source of industrial raw materials and a market for Western manufactured goods. No longer were Western gold and silver traded for cloves, pepper, tea, and silk. Now the products of European factories were sent to Africa and Asia in return for oil, tin, rubber, and the other resources needed to fuel European industries.

Voices from the Past

In 1860, E. Douwes Dekker wrote a book that described the effects of this newest phase of imperialism. Although he was a colonial official himself, Dekker concluded that the Dutch rulers had wreaked havoc on the native people of Java:

“The [Dutch government] compels [the Javanese farmer] to cultivate certain products on his land; it punishes him if he sells what he has produced to any purchaser but itself; and it fixes the price actually paid. The expenses of transport to Europe through a privileged trading company are high; the money paid to the chiefs for encouragement increases the prime cost; and because the entire trade must produce profit, that profit cannot be got in any other way than by paying the Javanese just enough to keep him from starving, which would lessen the producing power of the nation.”

Beginning in the 1880s, European states began an intense scramble for overseas territory. Imperialism, the extension of a nation’s power over other lands, was not new. Europeans had set up colonies in North and South America and trading posts around Africa and the Indian Ocean by the sixteenth century.

The imperialism of the late nineteenth century was different, however. Earlier, European states had been content to set up a few trading posts where they could carry on trade and perhaps some missionary activity. Under New Imperialism, as it is often called, Europeans sought nothing less than direct control over vast territories, mainly in Africa.

Why did Westerners intensify their search for colonies after 1880? One motive was economic. Capitalist states in the West were looking for markets and raw materials, such as rubber and oil, for their industries. They also wanted more direct control of areas with raw materials and markets.

The motives were not simply economic. European nations competed with one another for power and influence. As the rivalries intensified, each nation tried to acquire colonies to gain an advantage over its rivals. Colonies were a source of national prestige. To some people, a nation could not be great without colonies. One German historian wrote that “all great nations in the fullness of their strength have the desire to set their mark upon barbarian lands and those who fail to participate in this great rivalry will play a pitiable role in time to come.”

Imperialism was also tied to Social Darwinism and racism. Social Darwinists believed that in the struggle between nations, the fit are victorious. Racism holds that certain races are superior and that this justifies their use of force against other races or nations. As one British professor put it in 1900: “The path of progress is strewn with the wrecks of nations; traces are everywhere to be seen of the [slaughtered remains] of inferior races. Yet these dead people are, in very truth, the stepping stones on which mankind has arisen to the higher intellectual and deeper emotional life of today.”

Some Europeans took a more religious and humanitarian approach to imperialism. They felt that Europeans had a moral responsibility to civilize

Dutch plantation in Java, mid-1800s
primitive people. Some people called this duty “the white man’s burden.” The phrase was borrowed from a famous poem (see page 346). They believed that the West should bring progress to Asian and African countries. To some, this meant bringing the Christian message to the “heathen masses.” To others, it meant introducing Western democracy and capitalism to Asian and African societies.

Reading Check Describing What motivated European countries to engage in New Imperialism?

Colonial Takeover in Southeast Asia

Main Idea Rivalries for overseas territories led to Western dominance of Southeast Asia.

Reading Connection Does your school have a sports rivalry with another school? Read to learn how the rivalry between Great Britain and France led to conquests in Southeast Asia.

The New Imperialism of the late nineteenth century was evident in Southeast Asia. In 1800, only two societies in this area were ruled by Europeans: the Spanish Philippines and the Dutch East Indies. By 1900, virtually the entire area was under Western rule.

Great Britain The process began with Great Britain. In 1819, Great Britain, under Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, founded a new colony on a small island at the tip of the Malay Peninsula called Singapore (“city of the lion”). In the new age of steamships, Singapore soon became a major stopping point for traffic going to or from China. Raffles was proud of his dynamic city and wrote to a friend in England, “Here all is life and activity; and it would be difficult to name a place on the face of the globe with brighter prospects.”

During the next few decades, the British advanced into Southeast Asia. Next to fall was the kingdom of Burma (modern Myanmar). Britain wanted control of Burma to protect its possessions in India and to gain a land route to China. The British did not find this land route because the terrain was too rugged, but British activity in Burma led to the fall of the Burmese monarchy. Soon, Britain controlled the entire country.

France The British advance into Burma was watched nervously by France, which had some missionaries operating in Vietnam. The French missionaries were
persecuted by the local authorities, who viewed Christianity as a threat to Confucian doctrine. Vietnam could not stop the Christian missionaries, however. Vietnamese internal rivalries divided the country into two separate governments, in the north and the south.

France was especially alarmed by British attempts to monopolize trade. To stop any British move into Vietnam, the French government decided in 1857 to force the Vietnamese to accept French protection.

The French eventually succeeded in making the Vietnamese ruler give up territories in the Mekong River delta. The French occupied the city of Saigon and, during the next 30 years, extended their control over the rest of the country. In 1884, France seized the city of Hanoi and made the Vietnamese Empire a French protectorate—a political unit that depends on another government for its protection.

In the 1880s, France extended its control over neighboring Cambodia, Annam, Tonkin, and Laos. By 1887, France included all of its new possessions in a new Union of French Indochina.

**Thailand—The Exception** After the French conquest of Indochina, Thailand (then called Siam) was the only remaining free state in Southeast Asia. During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, British and French rivalry threatened to place Thailand, too, under colonial rule.

Two remarkable rulers were able to prevent that from happening. One was King Mongkut (known to theatergoers as the king in *The King and I*), and the other was his son King Chulalongkorn. Both promoted Western learning and maintained friendly relations with the major European powers. In 1896, Britain and France agreed to maintain Thailand as an independent buffer state between their possessions in Southeast Asia.

**The United States** One final conquest in Southeast Asia occurred at the end of the nineteenth century. In 1898, during the Spanish-American War, United States naval forces under Commodore George Dewey defeated the Spanish fleet in Manila Bay.

Believing it was his moral obligation to “civilize” other parts of the world, President William McKinley decided to turn the Philippines, which had been under Spanish control, into an American colony. This action would also prevent the area from falling into the hands of the Japanese. In fact, the islands gave the United States a convenient jumping-off point for trade with China.

This mixture of moral idealism and desire for profit was reflected in a speech given in the Senate in January 1900 by Senator Albert Beveridge of Indiana:

> **Mr. President, the times call for candor. The Philippines are ours forever. And just beyond the Philippines are China’s unlimited markets. We will not retreat from either. We will not abandon an opportunity in [Asia]. We will not renounce our part in the mission of our race, trustee, under God, of the civilization of the world.**

The Filipinos did not agree with the American senator. Emilio Aguinaldo (ah•gee•NAHL•doh) was the leader of a movement for independence in the
Philippines. He began his revolt against the Spanish. When the United States acquired the Philippines, Aguinaldo continued the revolt and set himself up as the president of the Republic of the Philippines. Led by Aguinaldo, the guerrilla forces fought bitterly against the United States troops to establish their independence. The United States defeated the guerrilla forces, however, and President McKinley had his stepping-stone to the rich markets of China.

Comparing How was the rule of the British in Burma similar to or different from the rule of the French in Vietnam?

Colonial Regimes in Southeast Asia

Main Idea European countries controlled the governments and economies of their colonies in Southeast Asia.

Reading Connection Does your school’s student council have the power to run the school? Read to learn how European countries ruled their colonies in Southeast Asia.

Western powers governed their new colonial empires through either indirect or direct rule. Their goals were to exploit natural resources and open up markets for their manufactured goods. As they pursued their goals, they often spoke of bringing the blessings of civilization to colonial peoples.

Indirect and Direct Rule Sometimes, a colonial power could reach its goals most easily by getting the cooperation of local political leaders. In these cases, indirect rule was used. Local rulers were allowed to maintain their authority and status.

In Southeast Asia, colonial powers, wherever possible, tried to work with other local elites—the religious, merchant, and social leaders in an area. This made it easier to gain access to the region’s natural resources. Indirect rule also lowered the cost of government because fewer officials had to be trained. Finally, indirect rule was an advantage because it maintained the local culture and therefore did not interfere with the customs of the people.

One example of indirect rule can be seen in the Dutch East Indies. The Dutch East India Company allowed landed aristocrats in the East Indies to control local government. The company paid these aristocrats to maintain order and collect taxes. Indirect rule, then, was convenient and cost less. Indirect rule was not always possible, especially when local elites resisted conquest. If that happened, the local elites were removed from power and replaced with officials from Britain, France, or other colonial power. This system is called direct rule.

In Burma, for example, the monarchy staunchly opposed colonial rule. As a result, Great Britain abolished the monarchy and administered the country directly through its colonial government in India.

In Indochina, France used both direct and indirect rule. It imposed direct rule on the southern provinces in the Mekong delta, which had been ceded to France as a colony after the first war from 1858 to 1862. The northern parts of Vietnam, seized in the 1880s, were governed as a protectorate. The emperor still ruled from his palace in Hue, but he had little power.
To justify their conquests, Western powers had spoken of bringing the blessings of advanced Western civilization to their colonial subjects. Many colonial powers, for example, spoke of introducing representative institutions and educating the native peoples in the democratic process. However, many Westerners came to fear the idea of native peoples (especially educated ones) being allowed political rights.

**Colonial Economies** The colonial powers did not want their colonists to develop their own industries. Thus, colonial policy stressed the export of raw materials—teakwood from Burma; rubber and tin from Malaya; spices, tea, coffee, and palm oil from the East Indies; and sugar from the Philippines. In many cases, this policy led to some form of plantation agriculture, in which peasants worked as wage laborers on plantations owned by foreign investors.

Plantation owners kept the wages of their workers at poverty levels in order to increase the owners’ profits. Conditions on plantations were often so unhealthy that thousands died. In addition, the peasants suffered from a heavy tax burden. Colonial governments taxed peasants in order to pay the salaries of their officials and other administrative costs. In effect, the subjects paid the costs of being ruled.

Nevertheless, colonial rule did bring some benefits to Southeast Asia. It led to the beginnings of a modern economic system. Colonial governments built railroads, highways, and other structures that could benefit native peoples as well as colonials. The development of an export market helped to create an entrepreneurial class in rural areas. In the Dutch East Indies, for example, small growers of rubber, palm oil, coffee, tea, and spices began to share in the profits of the colonial enterprise. Most of the profits, however, were taken back to the colonial mother country.

**Resistance to Colonial Rule**

**Main Idea** Native peoples had varying levels of success resisting colonial rule in Southeast Asia.

**Reading Connection** Do you know of any occupied countries currently objecting to being governed by another power? Read to learn how those in Southeast Asia resisted the colonial rule of European powers.

Many subject peoples in Southeast Asia were quite unhappy with being governed by Western powers. At first, resistance came from the existing ruling class. In Burma, for example, the monarch himself fought Western domination. By contrast, in Vietnam, after the emperor had agreed to French control of his country, a number of government officials set up an organization called Can Vuoug (“Save the King”). They fought against the French without the emperor’s help.

Sometimes, resistance to Western control took the form of peasant revolts. Under colonial rule, peasants were often driven off the land to make way for plantation agriculture. Angry peasants then vented their anger at the foreign invaders. For example, in Burma, in 1930, the Buddhist monk Saya San led a peasant
uprising against the British colonial regime many years after the regime had completed its takeover.

Early resistance movements failed, overcome by Western powers. At the beginning of the twentieth century, a new kind of resistance began to emerge that was based on the force of nationalism. The leaders were often a new class that had been created by colonial rule: westernized intellectuals in the cities.

In many cases, this new urban middle class—composed of merchants, clerks, students, and professionals—had been educated in Western-style schools. They were the first generation of Asians to understand the institutions and values of the West. Many spoke Western languages and worked in jobs connected with the colonial regimes.

At first, many of the leaders of these movements did not focus clearly on the idea of nationhood but simply tried to defend the economic interests or religious beliefs of the native peoples. In Burma, for example, the first expression of modern nationalism came from students at the University of Rangoon. They formed an organization to protest against official persecution of the Buddhist religion and British lack of respect for local religious traditions. They protested against British arrogance and failure to observe local customs in Buddhist temples. Not until the 1930s, however, did these resistance movements begin to demand national independence.

Reading Check  Summarizing Explain three forms of resistance to Western domination.

In 1907, Vietnamese prisoners await trial for plotting against the French. For help with the concepts in this section of Glencoe World History—Modern Times, go to wh.mt.glencoe.com and click on Study Central.

Critical Thinking

5. Evaluating Evidence Why were resistance movements often led by Southeast Asians who had been educated in the West? Initially, what were the goals of these resistance leaders? How did their goals change over time?

6. Cause and Effect In a diagram like the one below, identify the effects of colonial rule on the colonies.

Analyzing Visuals

7. Describe the situation being endured by the Vietnamese prisoners in the photo above. Be specific in your description. Based on what you have read about the poverty of native peoples at this time, would you have risked this type of punishment if you had been in their position?

Writing About History

8. Expository Writing Use varied media to determine what the United States’s relationship is today with the Philippines and how Filipino political groups view this relationship. Write an essay based on your findings.