Southeast Asia and the Pacific

Guide for Reading

- What effect did imperialist rivalries have on Southeast Asia?
- Why was Thailand able to remain independent?
- How did the United States expand in the Pacific?

A Vietnamese official, Phan Thanh Gian, faced a dilemma in 1867. The French were threatening to invade. As a patriot, Phan Thanh Gian wanted to resist. But as a devoted follower of Confucius, he was obliged “to live in obedience to reason.” And based on the facts, he concluded that the only reasonable course was to surrender:

“The French have immense warships, filled with soldiers and armed with huge cannons. No one can resist them. They go where they want, the strongest [walls] fall before them.”

Phan Thanh Gian made his choice with a heavy heart. By avoiding a useless war that would hurt his people, he became a traitor to his king. For that decision, he wrote, “I deserve death.”

Leaders throughout Southeast Asia faced the same dilemma during the Age of Imperialism. As they had in Africa, western industrial powers gobbled up the region in their relentless race for raw materials, new markets, and Christian converts.

Colonizing Southeast Asia

Southeast Asia commanded the sea lanes between India and China and had long been influenced by both civilizations. In the 1500s and 1600s, European merchants gained footholds in the region, but most of the Southeast Asian peoples remained independent. When the Industrial Revolution set off the Age of Imperialism in the 1800s, the situation changed. Westerners played off local rivalries and used their modern armies and technology to colonize much of Southeast Asia.

Dutch colonies. In the 1600s, the Dutch East India Company gained control of the fabled riches of the Moluccas, or Spice Islands. (See the map on page 384.) They then reached out to dominate the rest of Indonesia. The Dutch expected their Southeast Asian colonies to produce profitable crops of coffee and indigo as well as spices.

British inroads. In the early 1800s, rulers of Burma (present-day Myanmar) clashed with the British, who were expanding eastward from India. At first, the Burmese misjudged British strength. In several wars, they suffered disastrous defeats. By the 1880s, Britain had annexed Burma as part of its Indian empire. The Burmese, however, constantly resisted British rule.

The British also pushed south through the Malay Peninsula. The bustling port of Singapore, on the sea route between the Indian Ocean and the China Sea, grew up at the southern tip of Malaya. Soon, rubber and tin from Malaya along with profits from Asian trade were flowing through Singapore to enrich Britain.

French Indochina. The French meanwhile were building an empire on the Southeast Asian mainland. In the early 1800s, French missionaries began winning converts in what is today Vietnam. The region had long been influenced by Confucian traditions. Vietnamese officials tried to suppress Christianity by killing converts and missionary priests.

As with Burma and the British, the Vietnamese misjudged European power. In the 1860s, the French invaded and seized a chunk of Vietnam. Over the next decades, they added more lands, eventually seizing all of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. The French and other westerners referred to these holdings as French Indochina.

European rule. By the 1890s, Europe controlled most of Southeast Asia. They introduced modern technology and expanded commerce and industry. They set up new enterprises to mine tin and harvest rubber, brought in new crops of corn and cassava, and built harbors and railroads. But as you will read later in this chapter,
The French in Indochina  By the 1890s, France controlled most of modern-day Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. The French allowed local rulers to keep their titles but forced them to give key powers to colonial officials. At left, a French colonial governor meets with the king of Laos. The king is dressed in traditional clothes but wears a pair of western-style shoes. Below, a Lao woman pulls a French woman in a rickshaw. The rickshaw was based on a French vehicle. It was introduced to Japan by missionaries in the late 1800s and spread to other parts of East and Southeast Asia. Political and Social Systems Why do you think the French allowed rulers to keep their titles?

Thailand Survives

Sandwiched between British-ruled Burma and French Indochina lay the kingdom of Siam. As you have read at the beginning of this chapter, Siam escaped becoming a European colony partly because its rulers did not underestimate western power and avoided incidents that might provoke invasion.

Although King Mongkut had to accept some unequal treaties, he set Siam on the road to modernization. He and his son, Chulalongkorn, who ruled from 1868 to 1910, reformed government, modernized the army, and hired western experts to train Thais in the new technology. They abolished slavery and gave women some choice in marriage. Thai students traveled abroad and spread western ways when they returned home. As Siam modernized, Chulalongkorn bargained to remove the unequal treaties.

In the end, both Britain and France saw the advantage of making Thailand a buffer, or neutral zone, between them. In the early 1900s, they guaranteed its independence. But then, to stop other imperialist powers from pushing into Siam, each set up its own sphere of influence there.
Imperialism and Nationalism in the Philippines

In the 1500s, Spain had seized the Philippines and extended its rule over the islands. Catholic missionaries spread Christianity among the Filipinos, and the Catholic Church gained enormous power and wealth. Many Filipinos accused the Church of abusing its position. By the late 1800s, their anger had fueled strong resistance to Spanish rule.

The United States became involved in the fate of the Philippines almost by accident. In 1898, war broke out between Spain and the United States over Cuba's independence from Spain. (See page 677.) During the Spanish-American War, American battleships destroyed the Spanish fleet which was stationed in the Philippines. Seizing the moment, Filipino leaders declared their independence from Spain. Rebel soldiers threw their support into the fight against Spanish troops.

In return for their help, the Filipino rebels had expected the Americans to recognize their independence. The peace settlement with Spain, however, placed the Philippines under American control.

Bitterly disappointed, Filipino nationalists renewed their struggle. From 1899 to 1901, Filipinos led by Emilio Aguinaldo (ah gee nahl doh) battled American forces. Thousands of Americans and hundreds of thousands of Filipinos died. In the end, the Americans crushed the rebellion. The United States set out to modernize the Philippines, promising Filipinos self-rule some time in the future.

Western Powers in the Pacific

In the 1800s, the industrial powers began to take an interest in the islands of the Pacific. At first, American, French, and British whaling and sealing ships looked for bases to take on supplies. Missionaries, too, moved into the Pacific region. As in Africa, they opened the way for political involvement.

Samoa. In 1878, the United States secured an "unequal treaty" from Samoas, gaining rights such as extraterritoriality and a naval station.
Other nations gained similar agreements. As their rivalry increased, the United States, Germany, and Britain agreed to a triple protectorate over Samoa.

Hawaii. From the mid-1800s, American sugar growers pressed for power in Hawaii. When the Hawaiian queen Liliuokalani (lee lee oo oh kah LAH née) tried to reduce foreign influence, American planters overthrew her in 1893. They then asked the United States to annex Hawaii, which it did in 1898. Supporters of annexation argued that if the United States did not take Hawaii, Britain or Japan might do so.

Looking ahead. By 1900, the United States, Britain, France, and Germany had claimed nearly every island in the Pacific. Japan, too, wanted a share of the region. Eventually, it would gain German possessions in the Pacific, setting the stage for a growing rivalry with the United States.

SECTION 2 REVIEW

1. Identify (a) French Indochina, (b) Chulalongkorn, (c) Emilio Aguinaldo, (d) Queen Liliuokalani.
2. (a) Which European nations set up colonies in Southeast Asia? (b) What products did they take from these colonies?
3. What steps did Thailand take to preserve its independence?
4. How did the United States acquire each of the following: (a) Philippines, (b) Samoa, (c) Hawaii?
5. Critical Thinking Comparing Compare the partition of Southeast Asia to the partition of Africa during the Age of Imperialism. (a) How was it similar? (b) How was it different?
6. Activity Create a map and timeline showing colonization of Southeast Asia and the Pacific during the Age of Imperialism.

Self-Rule for Canada, Australia, and New Zealand

Guide for Reading
- How did Canada achieve self-rule?
- How did Australia and New Zealand emerge as independent nations?
- What effects did colonization have on the Aborigines and Maoris?
- Vocabulary indigenous, penal colony

The pattern of imperialism in the British colonies of Australia and New Zealand differed from that in other parts of the world. The indigenous (ihn DHI uh nuh), or original, inhabitants of these regions were relatively few in number, and white settlers quickly subdued and replaced them. Still, the process of “replacement” was as deadly as it had been when Europeans settled the Americas some 200 years earlier.

These two English-speaking colonies, as well as Canada, won independence faster and with greater ease than England’s territories in Africa or Asia. One reason was that nonwestern peoples had no cultural roots in western-style government. However, western racial attitudes also played a part. Imperialist nations like Britain felt that whites could govern themselves. Nonwhites in places like India were thought to be incapable of shouldering such responsibility.

The Canadian Pattern

Canada’s first European rulers, you will recall, were the French. (See page 401.) When France lost Canada to Britain in 1763, thousands of French-speaking settlers remained there. After the American Revolution, an estimated 30,000 or more colonists who had remained loyal to Britain fled to Canada. Unlike the French-speaking Catholics, the newcomers were English-speaking and Protestant. Rivalries between the two groups have been an ongoing theme in Canada’s history ever since.
Questions for pages 664-666
(Stop before “Western Powers in the Pacific”)

1. What happened throughout Southeast Asia during the mid-late 1800s?

2. What three areas did the British take over?

3. What three present-day countries did the French take over and what did they call this area?

4. What was the former name of Thailand? Why was it not colonized by Europeans?

5. Explain how imperialism occurred in the Philippines.