

The Reach of Imperialism 1800-1914

THE STORY MATTERS...

After 1870 the industrialized nations of Europe engaged in an unprecedented competition to acquire overseas colonies. A struggle for economic and military power largely motivated this intense rivalry, which historians refer to as the “new imperialism.” The “Jewel in the Crown” of the vast British Empire was India. The British attempted to dominate every aspect of Indian life, including the culture. One Indian who resisted this cultural imperialism was the Bengali writer Rabindranath Tagore

Lesson 25-1

Colonial Rule in Southeast Asia

READING HELPDESK

Academic Vocabulary

exploit export

Content Vocabulary

imperialism racism protectorate
indirect rule direct rule

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

• What effect might social, economic, and religious conflicts have on a country?

IT MATTERS BECAUSE

During the nineteenth century, many Western powers scrambled for new territories in Southeast Asia and Africa. Governing by either indirect or direct rule, the Western powers controlled the governments and economies of their colonies. Some territories resisted colonial rule, but most early resistance movements failed.

The New Imperialism

GUIDING QUESTION *What were the motivations for the new imperialism?*

In the nineteenth century, a new phase of Western expansion began.

European nations began to view Asian and African societies as a source of industrial raw materials and a market for Western manufactured goods.

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 and trading posts in North America, South America, and Africa by the sixteenth century.

However, the imperialism of the late nineteenth century, called the “new imperialism” by some historians, was different. Earlier, European states had been content, especially in the case of Africa and Asia, to set up a few trading posts where they could carry on trade and perhaps some missionary activity. Now they sought nothing less than direct control over vast territories.

Why did Westerners begin to increase their search for colonies after 1880? There was a strong economic motive.

Capitalist states in the West were looking for both markets and raw materials such as rubber, oil, and tin for their industries. The issue was not simply an economic one, however. European nation-states were involved in heated rivalries. They acquired colonies abroad in order to gain an advantage over their rivals. Colonies were also a source of national prestige. To some people, in fact, a nation could not be great without colonies.

In addition, imperialism was tied to Social Darwinism and racism. Social Darwinists believed that in the struggle between nations, the fit are victorious. **Racism** is the belief that race determines traits and capabilities. Racists erroneously believe that particular races are superior or inferior.

Racist beliefs led to the use of military force against other nations. Some capabilities Europeans took a more religious and humanitarian approach to imperialism. They believed Europeans had a moral responsibility to civilize primitive people. They called this responsibility the “white man’s burden.” To some, this meant bringing the Christian message to the “heathen masses.” To others, it meant bringing the benefits of Western democracy and capitalism to these societies.

READING PROGRESS CHECK

Explaining How did Europeans justify imperialism?

Colonial Takeover

GUIDING QUESTION *What led to Western dominance in Southeast Asia?*

The new imperialism was evident in Southeast Asia. In 1800 the Europeans ruled only two societies in this area: 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 sent Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles to found 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, it soon became a major stopping point for traffic traveling to or from China.

Analyzing PRIMARY SOURCES

American Imperialism

“Mr. President, the times call for candor. The Philippines are ours forever. And just beyond the Philippines are China’s illimitable 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.”

– Senator Albert Beveridge, from a speech before the U.S. Senate, January 9, 1900

ANALYZING

How does Beveridge’s statement reflect a mixture of moral idealism and a desire for profit?

During the next few decades, the British advance into Southeast Asia continued. Next to fall was the kingdom of Burma (modern Myanmar). Britain wanted control of Burma in order to protect its possessions in India. It also sought a land route through Burma into southern China. Although the difficult terrain along the frontier between Burma and China caused this effort to fail, British activities in Burma led to the collapse of the Burmese monarchy. Britain soon established control over the entire country.

France

France, which had some missionaries operating in Vietnam, nervously watched the British advance into Burma. The local Vietnamese authorities, who viewed Christianity as a threat to Confucian doctrine, persecuted the French missionaries. However, Vietnam failed to stop the Christian missionaries. Vietnamese internal rivalries divided the country into two separate governments – the north and the south.

France was especially alarmed by British attempts to monopolize trade. To stop any British movement 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 1883 France seized the city of Hanoi and later made the Vietnamese empire a French **protectorate**.

In the 1880s, France extended its control over neighboring Cambodia, Annam, Tonkin, and Laos. By 1887 France included all 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. But the rivalry between the British and the French threatened to place Thailand under colonial rule, too.

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

In 1898 during the Spanish-American War, U.S. naval forces under Commodore George Dewey defeated the Spanish fleet in Manila Bay in the Philippines. 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. The islands gave the United States convenient access to trade with China.

Many Filipinos did not wish to be under American control. Emilio Aguinaldo (AH • gee • NAHL • doh) was the leader of a movement for independence in the Philippines. He began his revolt against the Spanish and went into exile in 1898. 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 U.S. troops to establish their independence.

The fight for Philippine independence resulted in three years of bloody warfare. However, the United States eventually defeated the guerrilla forces, and President McKinley had his stepping-stone to the rich markets of China.

READING PROGRESS CHECK

Identifying What prompted Britain to colonize Singapore and Burma?

Colonial Regimes

GUIDING QUESTION How did colonial powers govern their colonies?

Western powers governed their new colonial empires by either indirect or direct rule. Their chief goals were to exploit the natural resources of the lands and to open up markets for their own manufactured goods.

Indirect and Direct Rule

Sometimes a colonial power could realize its goals by cooperating with local political elites. For example, the Dutch East India Company used indirect rule in the Dutch East Indies. Under **indirect rule**, local rulers were allowed to keep their authority and status in a new colonial setting. This made access to the region’s natural resources easier. Indirect rule was cheaper because fewer officials had to be trained. It also affected local culture less.

However, indirect rule was not always possible. Some local elites resisted foreign conquest. In these cases, the local

elites were replaced with Western officials. This system was called **direct rule**. Great Britain administered Burma directly through its colonial government in India. In Indochina, France used both systems. It imposed direct rule in southern Vietnam but ruled indirectly through the emperor in northern Vietnam.

To justify their conquests, Western powers spoke of bringing the blessings of Western civilization to their colonial subjects, including representative government. However, many Westerners came to fear the idea of Southeast Asian 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. This policy often led to the development of plantation agriculture. In this system, peasants worked as wage laborers on the foreign-owned plantations. Plantation owners kept wages at poverty levels to increase profits. Conditions on plantations were often so unhealthful that thousands died. Also, peasants bore the burden of high taxes.

Nevertheless, colonial rule did bring some benefits to Southeast Asia. A modern economic system began there. Colonial governments built railroads, highways, and other structures that benefited Southeast Asian peoples as well as colonials. The development of an export market helped 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 colonizing country.

READING PROGRESS CHECK

Describing What kind of economic system did colonial rulers establish?

Resistance to Colonial Rule

GUIDING QUESTION *How did indigenous people in Southeast Asia respond to colonial rule?*

Many subject peoples in Southeast Asia resented colonization. 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 Vuong (“Save the King”). They fought against the French without the emperor’s help.

Sometimes resistance to Western control took the form of peasant revolts. 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.

Early resistance movements failed. They were overcome by Western powers. In the early 1900s, however, a new kind of resistance emerged that was based on nationalism. The leaders were often from a new class that the colonial rule had created: Westernized intellectuals in the cities. They were the first generation of Asians to embrace the institutions and values of the West. Many were educated in the West, 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. Instead, they simply tried to defend the economic interests or religious beliefs of the Southeast Asian peoples. In Burma, for example, students at the University of Rangoon 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, such as those begun in Burma, begin to demand national independence.

READING PROGRESS CHECK

Stating Why were resistance movements often led by Southeast Asian people who had been educated in the West?

REVIEWING VOCABULARY

imperialism	the extension of a nation's power over other lands
racism	the belief that race determines a person's traits and capabilities
protectorate	a political unit that depends on another government for its protection
indirect rule	a colonial government in which local rulers are allowed to maintain their positions of authority and status
direct rule	colonial government in which local elites were removed from power and replaced by a new set of officials brought from the colonizing country