

A. Introduction

The student is beginning a brief study of the Third World in which the contemporary Western World exists. This handout examines Southeast Asia directly. The course goal is **to expand one's personal historical identity into a global setting while reflecting on ethnocentrism.**

B. Pre-World War II Beginnings

Southeast Asia left its Neolithic prehistory when the people learned how to write, about the beginning of the Christian Era. Its following history may be divided into four segments: (1) the period of the Indianized states before the arrival of European adventurers to about 1500 A.D.; (2) the period of early European trading ventures (1500-1750); (3) the period of European territorial conquests (1750-1909); and (4) the overlapping period of nationalism (1896-present). The last era contains within itself the implications of what preceded. Consequently the present limited focus will be after the Second World War.

C. Dissolution and Independence

The rapid dissolution of European empires by Japan in 1941 and 1942 and the subsequent collapse of Japan in 1945 destroyed the image of invincible masters, either European or Japanese. Social disruption and opportunities for political activities by nationalist leaders gave nationalism substance and made independence a reality. The course of events freed: the Philippines in 1946; Burma in 1948; Indonesia (Netherlands East Indies on p. 981 in the sixth edition of Chambers)¹ in 1949; Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia (Indochina) in 1954; Malaya in 1957. In 1963, Singapore, Sarawak, Sabah (near Malaya), and Malaya to formed the Federation of Malaysia. In 1965, Singapore became an independent state.

D. Political Repercussions

In some degree all of the new states were troubled by remarkably similar problems including: (1) economic one-sidedness, at least partially a result of colonial extractive policies; (2) a scarcity of educated and skilled persons, in part, a result of colonial educational policies; (3) ethnic divisions of supposedly national populations, a result of imperial deference to ethnic homogeneity and willingness to divide and rule; (4) the domination of the states by revolutionary enthusiasts, a result of the struggles for independence against unwilling empires.

E. Historical Antecedents

With the above background, it is possible to consider the historical antecedents of Southeast Asia with greater meaning. Indian influence, carried by commercial travelers and seamen began to be felt on the mainland and probably in the islands of Southeast Asia about the time of the beginning of the Roman Empire and the Christian Era. The Indian influence ultimately dominated the culture of the rest of the region. It affected early political history through the institutional form of a semi-divine king. Carrying the title "king of the mountain" and linked, either through Hindu worship of Shiva or Vishnu or through Mahayana, Buddhist religion maintained conceptions of ranks of bodhisattvas through to a universal cosmology. Such a king was the core of early Southeast Asian states. Democracy was foreign.

The first of these Southeast Asian states was located on the plain of Cambodia. The southward pressure of peoples from China was a dominant pattern in Southeast Asia. Angkor was an important capital from the Sixth to the Fifteenth Centuries. After the Fifteenth Century, the Vietnamese joined those pressing steadily southward against Cambodia. During the later Middle Ages in Europe, the increasing world demand for silks and spices of the Orient brought an upsurge of trade through the South China Sea and the Strait of Malacca. After that time, Europeans pushed their way into the area. The political map and many of the institutions of government of modern Southeast Asia are derived from the period of European imperialism. The climax of this activity in the Nineteenth and the first decade of the Twentieth Centuries correspond to similar activities in Africa and China.

European political control was pushed to its limits in 1909, after which various rebellious political trends began the route to culminate, after the Second World War, with political independence. These trends included the 1909 formation of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company which built the pipe lines making Persia, now known as Iran, a leading producer of oil. In 1909, Great Britain gave up part of her control of Siam in return for land ceded to the Malay states. Political fragmentation inhibited a united front against the Europeans in South and Southeast Asia. A step toward such unification was taken in 1954 when the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty was signed by representatives of the U. S., Great Britain, France, Australia, New Zealand, Philippine Republic, Thailand, and Pakistan.

F. Attitude

The difference between East and West lies largely in differing senses of conquest. Asians wish to master themselves in order to master nature. Europeans wish to master nature in order to master the world. Asian mastery lifts beauty, grace, delicacy, gentleness, joy, happiness, cleanliness, courtesy, and decent behavior out of reality for appreciation. With Japan having such an influence on the U. S. national debt, sensitivity to such a different view of reality has gained considerable importance.²

G. Conclusion

By studying the Introduction; Pre-World War II Beginnings; Dissolution and Independence; Political Repercussions; and Historical Antecedents, the student is better able to evaluate, historically, international relations in the Twentieth Century.

Footnotes

¹ Page 911 the fourth edition of Chambers; page 1131 or 1070 ??(unable to identify as of May 28, 1995) in the fifth edition.

² Robert A. Rosenstone, ??, The Journal of American History, (June 1980): 594.