European Colonization – Southeast Asia

Malacca – Established by Parameswara on Malay Peninsula about 1402 – he created a monopoly trade alliance with the Ming dynasty in China and became major center of trade in SE Asia, replacing the economic and political power of the Srivijaya (Java) Empire.

Parameswara is said to have converted from Hinduism to Islam in 1409 – then he became known as “Sultan of Malacca.” He then went by the Muslim title of Sultan Mahmud Iskandar Shah. His empire became the first major Muslim empire in SE Asia.

Europeans wanted to gain hold of the lucrative trade routes of SE Asia and Malacca was one of the most important ports in this trade network. Portuguese first arrive in Malacca in 1409, but are driven out. The Portuguese return in 1511, led by Afonso de Albuquerque. Albuquerque brings 1200 men and 17-18 ships. Albuquerque is able to make allies with local Chinese, Malay and Indian groups who are unhappy with the current sultan’s rule and these allies help him defeat Malacca’s Sultan, Mahmud Shah. Mahmad Shad flees and builds a new capital elsewhere.

The Portuguese hold onto Malacca for many decades, but it does not bring them much wealth. The Chinese refuse to trade with Malacca now that the Portuguese are in power. In fact, back in China many Portuguese traders suffer retaliation for what happened in Malacca by the Chinese imperial government. Portuguese in China’s trade cities are arrested, imprisoned and executed for Portugal’s attack and conquest of China’s ally, the Sultanate of Malacca. Any Portuguese ships that land in China are confiscated and the sailors are publicly executed in grotesque displays.

The Portuguese would later lose their control of Malacca due to an attack by the Dutch in 1641. The Dutch would hand over Malacca to the British in 1824 as part of the Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1824. Malacca would become part of British Malaya.

Malaysia (British Malaya) - In 1786 the British Empire established a presence in Malaya, when the Sultan of Kedah leased Penang to the British East India Company. The British obtained the town of Singapore in 1819 and in 1824 took control of Malacca following the Anglo-Dutch Treaty. By 1826 the British directly controlled Penang, Malacca, Singapore, and the island of Labuan, which they established as the crown colony of the Straits Settlements.

The Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1909 formalized Great Britain’s control of additional territories added to British Malaya at the expense of Siam. Singapore would be taken by the British in 1914.

Burma – The port city of Thanylin was under Portuguese control from 1602-1613. However, the Portuguese governor was eventually captured and executed by the Burmese in 1613. Britain began to take control of Burma during the first Anglo-Burmese War of 1824-1826. Britain controlled all of Burma after the Third Anglo-Burmese war of 1885.
Both the British and The French hoped to find a direct shipping route to interior China via the river systems flowing through Southeast Asia.

Riots by the Burmese against the British were common during the period of British rule.

**Indonesia (Dutch East Indies)** – The Dutch sought access to and hoped for control of the great trade networks of Southeast Asia. Nutmeg was the most desired and lucrative of all spices grown in Southeast Asia at the time. The Dutch built a fortress in 1619 in Batavia (known today as Jakarta, on Java Island). The Dutch had to first burn and destroy the original city of “Jayakarta” that occupied the site where they would build their new fort.

To their original monopolies on nutmeg, mace spice, cloves and cinnamon, the Dutch introduced non-indigenous cash crops like coffee, tea, cacao, tobacco, rubber, sugar and opium, and safeguarded their commercial interests by taking over surrounding territory.

The Dutch expanded from Batavia, taking Malacca by force from the Portuguese in 1641, and taking more territory until they would come into conflict with the British as both nations sought more control of Southeast Asia. In 1811, Great Britain would directly control most of the Dutch colonial holding in Southeast Asia as a result of the Napoleonic Wars, but would agree to give most of them back to the Netherlands five years later.

The Dutch, like all of the other European powers, would face growing resistance to their rule in Southeast Asia through the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

**Philippines** – These islands were claimed by Ferdinand Magellan for Spain on his voyage around the world in 1521. Ironically, Magellan was killed in the Philippines in 1521. The Filipinos at this time were divided into numerous kingdoms and states. Among them were the kingdoms of Maynila, Namayan, and Tondo, the confederation of Madyas, the state of Ma-i, the rajahmates of Butuan and Cebu, and the sultanates of Maguindanao and Sulu. Like other parts of SE Asia, the Philippines had been heavily influenced by animism, Hinduism and Buddhism, as well as Islam in the southern islands.

The first Spanish colony in the Philippines did not exist until 1565. It was founded in Cebu. The Spanish made Manila the colony’s capital in 1571. The Spanish had to often fight both indigenous revolts and attacks from foreign powers including both the Chinese and other European forces. In fact, the British held control of the Philippines briefly from 1762-1764.

The Spanish would cede control of the Philippines to the US in 1898 after the Spanish defeat in the Spanish-American War. The Filipinos had thought that the US would grant them independence at that time. When Congress and US President McKinley instead annexed the Philippines as an American territory, a bloody war between insurgent Filipino freedom fighters, led by the first elected president of the Philippines, Emilio Aguinaldo and American troops would ensue, producing the Philippine-American war of 1899 – 1902. Aguinaldo would be
captured. Although 34,000 Filipino troops were killed, it is estimated that over 1 million other Filipinos died as a direct or indirect consequence of the war (starvation, imprisonment, disease, etc.)

**Indochina** – Like the British, the French hoped to find a direct shipping route to interior China via one of the river systems of SE Asia. Thereby they hoped to avoid shipping goods all the way to Hong Kong or Shanghai by finding a shorter route. Although there are no navigable rivers in SE Asia that flow all the way to interior China, the French, British and Dutch would find their colonies to become a source of raw goods and cheap labor which could be used to placate the growing industrial appetites of Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries.

The French had initially formed a positive relationship with the Vietnamese emperors beginning in 1802 when a small French force assisted Prince Nguyen Anh in securing the throne from his rivals. Nguyen Anh would then become Emperor Gia Long and this new emperor was very tolerant of the French and their Catholic religious beliefs. He permitted French Catholic missionaries to work relatively freely to try to convert members of his kingdom to Catholicism though the emperor himself never converted.

However, later emperors were distrustful of the French and believed that Catholicism was undermining the emperor’s authority. These later emperors began to try to suppress the spread of Catholicism. Missionaries were banned and arrested from time to time. Sometimes the emperors even executed French Catholic priests. In 1858, Emperor Napoleon II of France sent French troops to Vietnam to stop the oppression of Catholics there. French troops captured Saigon in 1859.

In 1862, the Vietnamese Emperor, Tu Duc, signed a treaty giving Cochin China (southern Vietnam) to the French.

In 1863, the French coerced the young king in Cambodia to accept “French protection,” supposedly convincing him that he needed them to protect him from Vietnamese and Thai interests in his country. The French essentially took political control of Cambodia at that time.

In 1885 - France took control of Tonkin (northern Vietnam) from the emperor.

By 1887 – Annam and the emperor (all of Vietnam) is now completely controlled by France

1893 – The French take control of Laos from Thailand and add it to their colony of French Indochina

After taking complete control of the region, the French colonial government allowed the Vietnamese emperor and mandarins (lesser rulers) to maintain their titles and positions as long as they implemented French policies. If an emperor or mandarin rebelled, he was imprisoned and replaced. Over time, many Vietnamese came to regard the emperors and mandarins as traitors of
Vietnam since they eventually became no more than political puppets for the French. Resentment against the emperor and mandarins as well as the French would grow during the colonial period.

Although Annam and Tonkin were nominally still ruled by the Vietnamese emperor during the colonial period, Cochinchina in the south was under direct French rule. The Vietnamese people had the fewest rights in Cochinchina and a form of slavery was instituted in this region on the rubber plantations even though slavery was formally illegal throughout the French Empire. “Volunteers” were taken from Annam and Tonkin and forced to work on rubber plantations in Cochinchina. It was illegal for them to leave these plantations and sickness and mortality among “volunteers” working on these plantation was very high. The death rate of the approximately 80,000 “volunteer” rubber workers was four times higher than the average death rate in the colonies (which again was much higher than the death rate in Western Europe at the time).

Poverty, hunger, oppression, and disease would all lead to the rebellions against the French in Indochina. Two major groups of rebels would emerge – the communists and the nationalists. However, these two groups would join forces at various times to try to drive the out the French, (as well as the occupying Japanese forces during World War II).