

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-35506-3 - The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia: The Nineteenth and
Twentieth Centuries, Volume Two

Edited by Nicholas Tarling

Excerpt

[More information](#)

P A R T
ONE

FROM c. 1800 TO THE 1930S

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-35506-3 - The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia: The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, Volume Two

Edited by Nicholas Tarling

Excerpt

[More information](#)

This part of the work deals with Southeast Asia between the late eighteenth century of the Christian era and World War II. The opening chapter, which is in a sense complementary to the closing chapter of the previous volume, describes and endeavours to account for the incorporation of most of the region within the frontiers of European empires. Subsequent chapters describe the political structures, the economic and social life, and the religions and popular culture of the region. A final chapter includes a discussion of nationalism and nationalist movements.

In the previous phase, Spanish and Dutch realms had been established in maritime Southeast Asia. By the end of the nineteenth century, only Siam (Thailand) stood outside the formal empires of external powers. Those powers sought to avoid conflict among themselves by settling the frontiers of their territories. In so doing they took more or less notice of the previous history and present condition of the lands and peoples over which they claimed authority. Yet the frontiers had a degree of rigidity unusual in Southeast Asia.

Chapter 1 describes this outcome. It also endeavours to describe the process by which it was reached, and in particular to take account of the role within it of the rulers and peoples of Southeast Asia as well as the Europeans. Within the emerging framework, there was further interaction in many fields of human endeavour. This is in a sense the subject of the subsequent chapters in this part, which also pursue lines of investigation that parallel chapters in the first volume. Chapter 5, too, deals with the emergence of nationalism within the colonial framework. The statecraft of the imperial period came under challenge.

Within the emerging framework of that period new political structures were established. This topic is the prime focus of Chapter 2. Though still necessarily relying on the collaboration of élite elements among the Southeast Asian populations, the structures set up by the outside powers were characteristically centralized and bureaucratized. By the early twentieth century the state was capable of reaching into the ordinary life of every inhabitant to a degree and with a persistence rarely known before in the region. This, indeed, applied in Siam, as well as in the territories the external powers acquired. But neither there, nor elsewhere, did centralization or bureaucratization necessarily produce uniformity: in some cases

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-35506-3 - The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia: The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, Volume Two

Edited by Nicholas Tarling

Excerpt

[More information](#)

indeed what came to be seen as 'minority groups' within a realm containing a 'majority' gained a new degree of institutionalized cohesion.

None of the developments described in chapters 1 and 2 can be understood without placing them in the context of economic change. This is the subject of Chapter 3. Southeast Asia had long been affected by international commerce. In the period between 1800 and the Great Depression it had an unprecedented impact, particularly after 1850. This resulted from the development of the Industrial Revolution and the drive of Western capitalism. They contributed to the growth of state power, its centralization and bureaucratization. The relationship of governments and peoples were transformed. Migration to Southeast Asia reached new levels; so did migration within Southeast Asia. Cities expanded, often providing an extraordinarily unhealthy environment, but there was no call for substantial industry. The end in the 1930s of the long period of expansion in the world's economy exposed the narrow and dependent nature of the region's economy. The poor were hit hardest.

Intensified European penetration, political consolidation of the dominant states, and economic transformation especially mark the period from the mid-nineteenth century; it is marked also by a multitude of resistance movements, rebellions, and acts of insubordination. Those are the focus of Chapter 4. It seeks to present them in their own terms: not as the disturbances or dacoity of the apologists of colonial conquest; nor even as the precursors of more modern opposition movements. The movements are considered in terms of their thought, their perceptions of change, of community, of leadership. Religion, the other focus of the chapter, is seen as a crucial matrix for peasant interpretations of experience.

The popular movements of the later nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries interleaved but did not coincide with more modern nationalist movements that emerged within the colonial framework. Nationalism and its alternatives are the subject of Chapter 5. There it is argued that there were alternatives to the nationalist movements that aimed to secure control of the colonial states and that were ultimately able to do so after World War II. There were those who favoured more gradual change. There were also nationalist movements among minority peoples, and there were movements, too, that sought to transcend the externally imposed frontiers of the imperial phase. Each of the colonial powers reacted in a different way. They were all to be swept aside by another external power.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-35506-3 - The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia: The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, Volume Two

Edited by Nicholas Tarling

Excerpt

[More information](#)

CHAPTER

1

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE
COLONIAL RÉGIMES

From the late eighteenth century, the involvement with Europeans, with things and ideas European, deepened and affected the whole of Southeast Asia; but it varied in intensity from people to people and from place to place; it increased through time but at no constant pace; and it took differing forms. Furthermore, it was always a matter, to a greater or lesser degree, of interaction, rather than simply of Western initiative or challenge and indigenous response. Nor were Western initiatives and challenges the only ones. Others came to Southeast Asia, too, though in some sense they themselves had already been stimulated by the Western ones. Islam, for example, had increased its hold on archipelagic Southeast Asia in the preceding period of European enterprise: linked more closely with its homeland by better communications in the nineteenth century, it was deeply involved in many of the social and political changes which that region now underwent.

The capacity of Europe to affect Southeast Asia increased in this period on a number of counts. First, the industrialization of Europe enhanced its economic power and political potential, though proceeding in different countries at varying rates with varying degrees of completeness. Second, the world-wide improvement of communications—the introduction of steamships, the building of railways, the construction of the Suez Canal, the development of the electric telegraph—tied world and region more closely together. Third, European states became individually more integrated, more able to control their people and command their resources. Fourth, although (or because) they had so much in common, the states were at odds with each other, and the rivalry overseas that had long affected the fortunes of Southeast Asia continued to do so, though in new ways. At the same time as the Western states became more powerful, they also, though to differing degrees, became more democratized. A fifth factor, this did not necessarily work against an imperialist approach: it might intensify the rivalry among states, reducing their ability to manoeuvre; it might also commit them more irrevocably to expansionist policies, turning them into missions difficult for governments to abandon. The capacity of the Europeans to influence Southeast Asia was, sixth, enhanced by the growth of their power over the great neighbouring centres of population that had so long influenced it in a number of ways, India and China. But the changes in India and China did not eliminate

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-35506-3 - The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia: The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, Volume Two

Edited by Nicholas Tarling

Excerpt

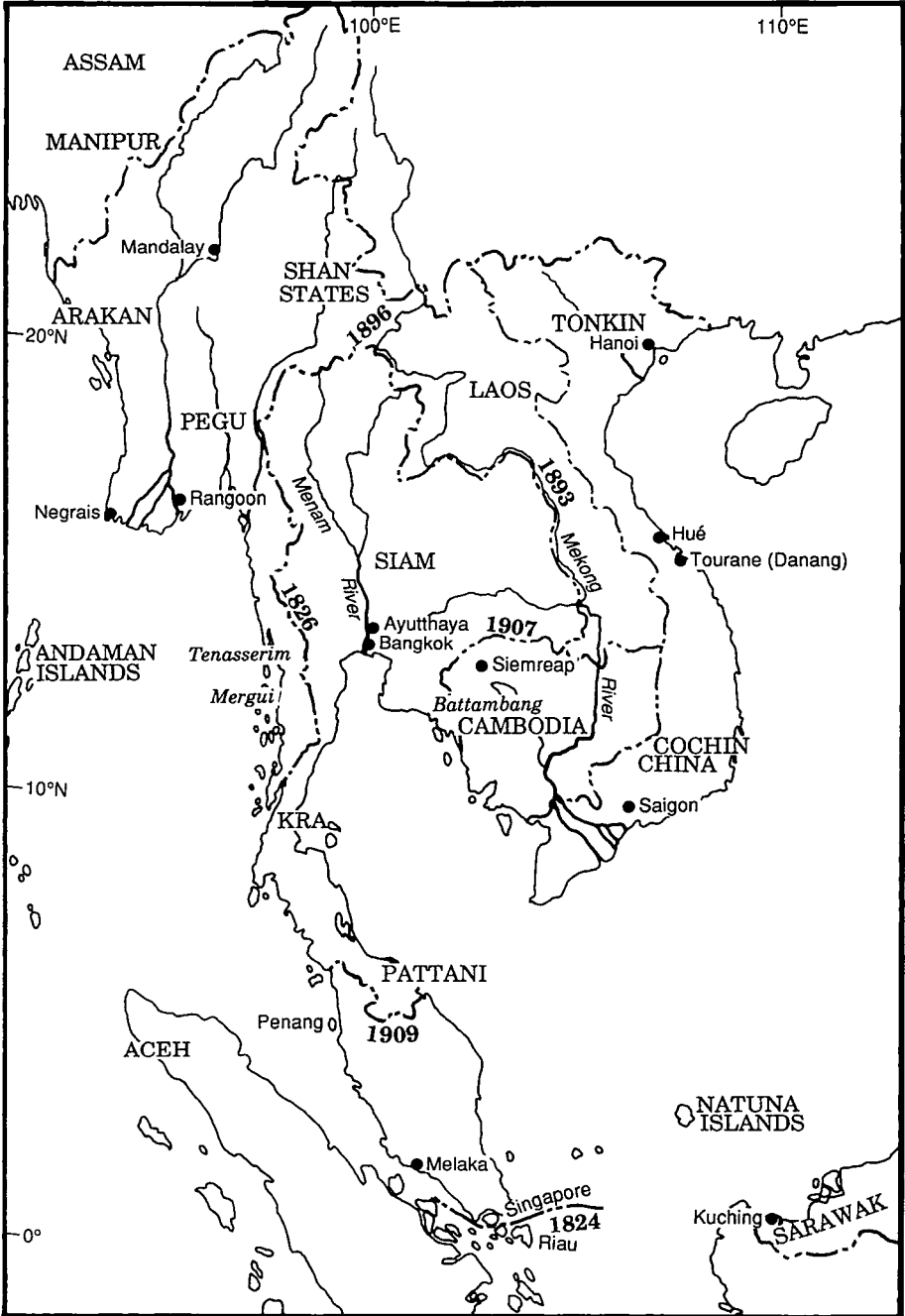
[More information](#)

their influence: they gave it new forms, and the modernization of Japan was both inspiration and threat. These factors were effective in Southeast Asia at different times, in different combinations, and in different ways.

The outcome was, however, not merely the result of all or any of these factors, singly or in combination. There were other actors on the scene—from Arabia, the heartland of Islam, now in closer touch, and from the United States, an independent commercial power from the late eighteenth century, rapidly industrializing in the later nineteenth century, developing imperial aspirations at the end of it. There were, too, the peoples of Southeast Asia themselves, who interacted with the Europeans and with others in a variety of ways, fighting, resisting, accommodating, adapting, turning and being turned to account, with greater or less vision, wisdom or acumen, at the popular and élite levels. Their aims are part of the story, though less clearly defined than those of the Europeans; and indeed they faced complex changes, difficult to appraise. In most cases, the existing state structures could not cope with the pressures put upon them and existing central authorities collapsed. Their replacements were endowed with territories out of a convenience more often European than Asian, designed, in particular, to avoid dispute among Europeans. And the new authority was, in substantial part at least, extraneous.

The political map of Southeast Asia was redrawn so that the region was almost entirely fragmented among the European powers. The process of drawing the frontiers was a long one; it was not complete—even on the map, let alone on the ground—till the early twentieth century. Most of the main lines of demarcation were, however, evident by 1870, before the full effects of industrialization were felt. Only more marginal territories remained for redistribution. They were marginal more in a geographical than a political sense. For their redistribution could still prompt disputes among the imperial powers that could become more than minor; and if those disputes did not escalate, or were readily resolved, the outcome was still important for the peoples concerned as well as for the imperial powers themselves, and, ultimately, for their successors.

In the drawing of the frontiers there was something of a paradox. In Europe the concept dealt with subjects and citizens in terms of their geographical locality rather than their personal allegiance; and the state laid claim to their taxes and imposed its obligations on an impersonal basis. That contrasted with much of previous Southeast Asian practice, especially in the archipelago where, insofar as geographical frontiers existed, they might be only vaguely defined. Often more important within states, even within some of the larger ones, were personal allegiances, client–patron relations, differential connexions between court and core, court and periphery; often more important among states were overlapping hierarchies, dual loyalties. Such structures better reflected the conditions of the Southeast Asian past. But the concept that the Europeans sought to apply in Southeast Asia also contrasted with the European present. In Europe frontiers had been created over a long period of time, often as a result of struggle, and within them new loyalties had been built up. Increasingly loyalty was to the state itself, as representing the nation in whose name, it had come to be accepted, its government ruled. No such



Map 1.1 Mainland Southeast Asia

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-35506-3 - The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia: The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, Volume Two

Edited by Nicholas Tarling

Excerpt

[More information](#)

ideology could apply to the colonial territories; nor was there a clear substitute for it. The colonial powers were utilizing a concept not only drawn from a system of international relations that differed but from one which they themselves were not in fact applying.

International relations in Southeast Asia came to be increasingly European. The frontiers were drawn so as to avoid disputes among the European powers. As a result, especially at the margins, they bore no firm relation to economic, social, cultural, ethnic or even geographical realities. The concept of a national frontier in Southeast Asia was applied in the general absence there of the relevant concept of nation. And it was applied with additional arbitrariness since it was designed to avoid conflict elsewhere.

The new governments, by necessity or design, often utilized or re-utilized old claims to suzerainty, old patterns of loyalty, old modes of administration, and at the same time they reshaped them. While their governments were relatively inactive, the discrepancy mattered less. And for a time they were to a greater or lesser degree 'law and order' states, 'arbitral' governments. The old central authorities might have been displaced, perhaps geographically as well as politically. But the new governments might still function in a limited way, adopting some Southeast Asian practices as well as European. Indeed they could give themselves—at least in their own eyes, and perhaps in the eyes of their subjects—a special role simply because of their limited function: they were there to reduce tensions among the 'opposite Interests and jarring Dispositions' to which, as Alexander Dalrymple said, colonies were so prone;¹ they were there to end tyranny, they sometimes rather more ambitiously claimed.

More tension would be felt when governments became more active—could old allegiances still be utilized?—and still more when they ceased to be arbitral—could the peoples then be held in the colonial framework? That question arose of course with twentieth-century moves—dictated by metropolitan politics but also by colonial change—towards indigenous participation in the central structures. Just because the pragmatic approach of the nineteenth century and the desire to avoid conflict among Europeans had made the territories often so heterogeneous, the tension was all the greater. A minority could live alongside an inactive government: it could accept alien arbitration. But could it accept majority rule?

The concept of the nation was developed in Europe to fill out the European concept of the state. It caused struggle enough there: it gave weapons to majorities and minorities, to those who would change frontiers and those who would insist on not changing them, to those who would challenge authorities and those who would uphold them. In Southeast Asia, the concept was again divisive as well as integrative. But, because the movements could initially challenge the Europeans, its divisiveness was at first often muted. Emerging nationalist movements could thus seek to play down tension, though their alien rulers might point it out

¹ 'Enquiry into the most advantageous Place for a Capital to the Oriental Polynesia', February 1764, Borneo Factory Records G/4/1, India Office Library.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-35506-3 - The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia: The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, Volume Two

Edited by Nicholas Tarling

Excerpt

[More information](#)

or even play it up, so as to preserve their role. It could intensify when the Europeans withdrew and their successors sought to rule as nation-states these territories with frontiers which were so much the product of colonial convenience. Authority was again in question: the successor states had to be turned into nation-states.

The making of the frontiers thus assumes a primal position in an account of Southeast Asian history in the nineteenth century. Itself the product of interactions between European and Asian, it becomes, too, the framework for continuing interaction. It is also important as a factor in the history of the nationalist movements of the twentieth century and of the post-colonial states.

The nineteenth century was, more than any other, an age of migration: the economic transformations it witnessed set in motion or speeded up movements of people on an unprecedented scale. Europeans left Europe to help build up or to create new states elsewhere, in the Americas and Australasia, in Africa and, much less, in Asia. But other peoples also moved in increasing numbers as economic change picked up pace. Southeast Asia, always a recipient of Indians and Chinese, received them on a new scale, particularly in the territories which the British came to control. There was also migration, again not entirely novel, within Southeast Asia, within the frontiers that were being established and across them. For a colonial authority, again, these movements posed few problems and offered economic and political advantages. But in the twentieth century, those movements would make it more difficult to establish a participatory political system, or even an accepted central authority ruling on a national basis.

THE ROLE OF THE BRITISH

If there was varied interaction between Southeast Asia and Europe, the Europeans were also divided. Rivalry was a factor in their expansion, for the most part spurring them on. But the process of frontier-building and its outcome were also affected by the shifting distribution of power among the Europeans, the result in a sense of the differing impact on them of common factors. For much of the nineteenth century, Britain was the predominant state in Europe and thus in the world. The French presented a challenge in the eighteenth century, but they were defeated at sea in 1805 and on land in 1815. Politically secure in Europe, Britain also took the lead in the Industrial Revolution. That gave it yet greater strength, but also shaped the application of its power. Overseas its interests became substantially commercial and economic rather than territorial and political. It saw its dominion in India, begun in the earlier phase, as essential but exceptional. Elsewhere, a combination of strategic positions and economic and political influence should suffice to protect its interests. In Southeast Asia Britain sought security and stability; it did not necessarily seek to rule, though its power might be felt in other ways.

The nineteenth-century patterns of interaction in Southeast Asia were

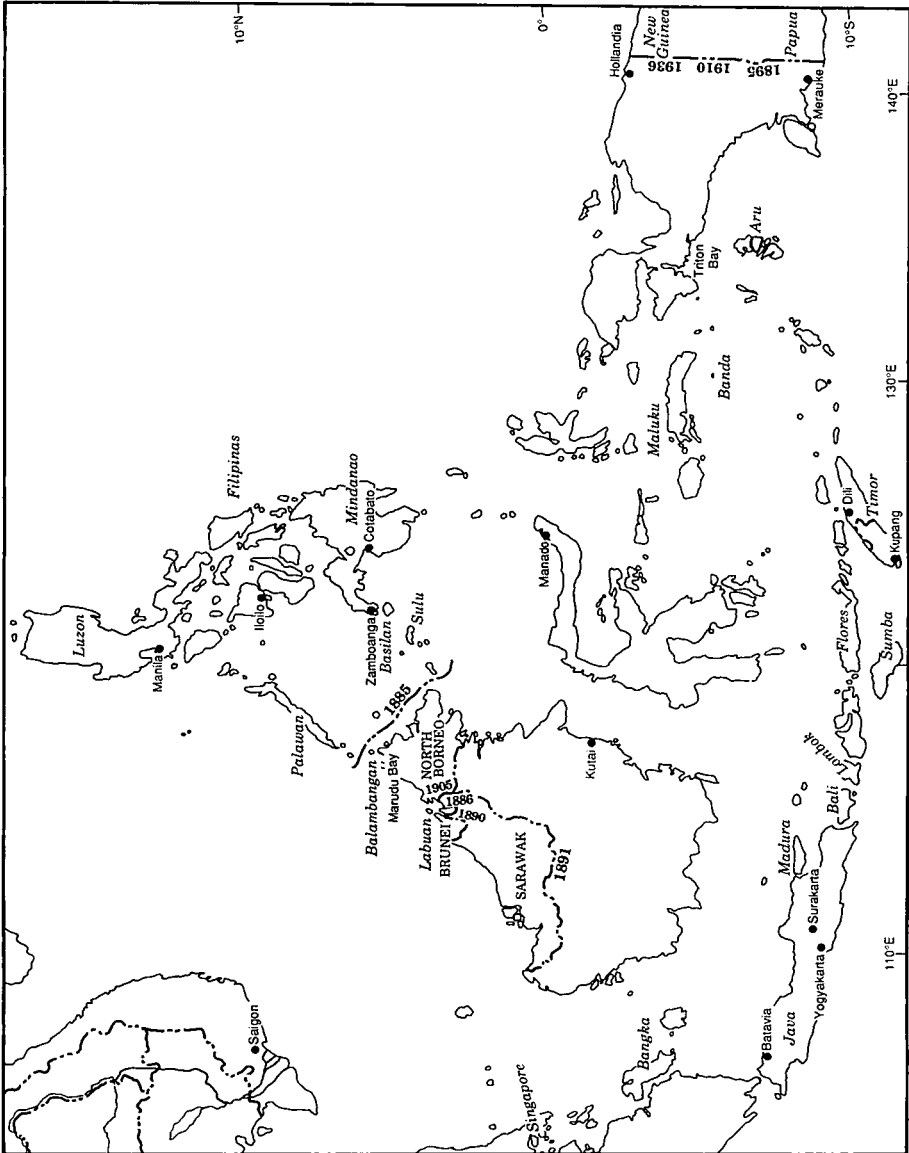
Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-35506-3 - The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia: The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, Volume Two

Edited by Nicholas Tarling

Excerpt

[More information](#)



Map 1.2 Island Southeast Asia

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-35506-3 - The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia: The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, Volume Two

Edited by Nicholas Tarling

Excerpt

[More information](#)

naturally much affected by the influence and interests of the British, particularly during the period of their predominance. That predominance they did not use to eliminate their European rivals, but rather to constrain them. The Netherlands and Spain were now minor states in Europe; they were left with substantial holdings in Southeast Asia, with claims that the British were unlikely to challenge, with the option of implementing them in their own time provided they did not undermine Britain's interests. Even France, the eighteenth-century rival, was not obstructed in its Vietnam venture. In earlier centuries, European rivalry had rarely worked to the advantage of Asian states: it spurred the Europeans on, while the chance of playing the Europeans off against one another was often a chimera. But the new pattern of intra-European relations was perhaps still less advantageous. The fact that minor European powers could rely on Britain's restraint might indeed mean that they could refrain from enforcing their claims or establishing *de facto* occupation in other than immediately essential areas. But the autonomy which indigenous rulers might thus enjoy was somewhat illusory: they had no real chance of playing Britain off against the minor powers, and their status as independent actors on an international stage was diminished by this kind of semi-condominium. The British set the agenda for lesser European powers, and for the indigenous states also. Siam (Thailand) alone retained real independence at the end of the period: it had seen that it was no longer a matter of playing off one alien power against another, but of coming to terms with the British, and it was able to do so. Directly or indirectly, Britain's influence and interest were often decisive in determining the frontiers of the new Southeast Asian states, in locating the central authorities within those frontiers, even in shaping the policies those authorities pursued.

The challenges to the patterns thus established that emerged towards the end of the nineteenth century did not merely, nor even primarily, result from the changes and tensions within Southeast Asia. They reflected changes in Europe and the world at large, in particular the external challenges to Britain's power, as industrialization affected other parts of Europe and the world, and Britain and indeed Europe itself lost their extraordinary primacy. But by the late nineteenth century the major loci of authority in Southeast Asia had been settled, and the revived rivalry of the period affected only the rounding-out of frontiers. In this phase the British moved readily from tolerating others towards compromising with them. The conference on Africa and West Africa that met in Berlin in 1884–5, and included the European powers, Turkey and the United States, provided a principle: European states would accept the frontiers established by their rivals if their claims were backed by effective occupation. The recrudescence of rivalry was thus no more to the advantage of indigenous autonomy than its earlier diminution: indeed it clearly conduced to the establishment of outside control. Intensifying rivalry in Europe and the emergence of non-European powers, the United States and Japan, had the same effect. The former urged on compromise between Britain and France, helping to determine the frontiers of Burma, Malaya, Indochina and Siam. A combination of factors helped to ensure that Spain was replaced in the Philippines by the United States and that the authority of