**CHAPTER TWO**

**2. SOUTHEAST ASIA BETWEEN 1850S AND 1945**

**2.1 GEOGRAPHICAL AND SOCIO-CULTURAL SETTINGS**

Southeast Asia refers to the region of Asia comprising Indochina, the Malay Peninsula, and the Malay Archipelago. The region is bordered on the north by China; on the east by the Pacific Ocean; on the south by the Indian Ocean; and on the west by the Indian Ocean, the Bay of Bengal, Bangladesh, and India.

There are 11 countries in Southeast Asia: Brunei, Cambodia, East Timor, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar (formerly known as Burma), the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.

The largest part of mainland Southeast Asia is Indochina, containing half of Southeast Asia’s countries: Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam. To the south lies the Malay Peninsula; this extends about 1,200 km (about 750 mi) southwest from the Indochinese Peninsula. The Malay Peninsula comprises southern Myanmar, southern Thailand, western Malaysia, and Singapore just off the southern tip. The Malay Archipelago forms a huge arc south and east of the peninsulas, and contains eastern Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, East Timor, and the Philippines. The islands are all mountainous and numerous active and extinct volcanoes are scattered throughout the archipelago. The islands are extremely fertile, well-watered, and covered by rich tropical vegetation.

Southeast Asia refers to these different countries marked by some notable cultural, linguistic, and geographical similarities with apparent common historical backgrounds. It is believed that those Southeast Asian countries with a number of basic similarities in family structure, language, and rituals used in ancient times by the various royal courts are considered to have common inheritance or tradition.

The linguistic similarity that exists among many peoples in Southeast Asian region, cutting across the boundaries set, in many cases, by the Western colonial powers in the 19th century, is the most important factor leading to conclude that these countries have similar historical and common inheritance. This is the case with the quite recent suggestion that modern Vietnamese and Cambodian (Khmer) have a common, if very distant, linguistic ancestor. Likewise, the Thai language, admittedly with considerable dialectical variations, is spoken not only in Thailand, but in parts of Southern China, in Vietnam, in Shan States of Burma, In Laos, in both western and northeastern Cambodia, and, although it is less and less the case today, in the extreme north of the Peninsular Malaysia. Another most important instance of linguistic unity is the widespread of the Malay-speaking settlements. Clearly with great dialectic differences, these settlements are available throughout northern Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, and in the southern Philippines, as well as along the southern coastal regions of Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam.

Southwest Asia is still an immensely varied region marked by notable cultural diversity that seemingly encouraged by outside influence. For instance, in religious character, the region continues to be the most diverse. Islam is the dominant religion in the maritime regions of Thailand, while Theravada Buddhism is the national religion of Thailand and Cambodia. Christianity is strong in some sections of Southeast Asia, most notably in northern Philippines, while in other areas a basic animistic religious practice is the most fundamental of the population religious belief. There are followers of Hinduism among the descendents of Indian immigrants and among the indigenous populations of Bali and Lombok of Indonesia. Communism is the secular religion of Vietnam, but it is not hard to sense the continuing presence of some Confucian values in Vietnamese society. These are apparent in the Caó Dai religion that has many adherents in southern Vietnam.

There are still great cultural and political variations among the Southeast Asian countries that, at first glance, seem to possess common themes in their historical background and experience. This is owing to the influence of foreign ideas and of foreigners through trade relations, migrations, and colonialism. Thus, the impact of foreign ideas and of foreigners that showed a regional pattern of international relations in Southeast Asia since its early historic periods accounts for the present day variations. In other words, Southeast Asia did not resist the impact of both the Europeans and its neighbors, notably the Chinese and Indians. The influence of the Spaniards in the islands of the Philippines for over three hundred years can be a good reason for the Philippines cultural difference from the rest of Southeast Asian countries. Likewise, Indian and Chinese influence did play a major part in the diversification and at the same time in the development of Southeast Asian art, religion, or political theory. The people of the various countries of the region adapted the Chinese and Indian cultural elements to suit their own needs and values. The influence of China over the formation of the Vietnamese cultural life was enormous since imperial China did occupy the Red River Delta region of Vietnam and ruled it as one of the most remote Chinese provinces during the 9th century.

The influence of India over the Southeast Asian cultural life was also considerable and long-lasting. The most recognizable states of Southeast Asia, mainly of their rulers and courts, were followers of imported religions, Hinduism and Buddhism, of India. These Indian religions were one of the most important features of the acculturation process that took place in Southeast Asian region for over many centuries. The process has been given the name “Indianization,” which refers the slow expansion process of Indian cultural elements. It was an even process, with the degree of cultural impact varying from century to century, and with some areas receiving Indian influence much later than others. Indian cultural influence in the area was a result of Indian traders and priest-scholars (Brahmins) who brought Indian culture in its various forms that was absorbed by the local population and joined it to their existing cultural patterns. For various reasons, the only exceptions to escape this process of Indianization were Vietnam and Philippines. In case of the Vietnamese, they were, in the early periods of the process, living under Chinese rule. The Philippines, aided by distance geographical location, too, did not participate in this process.

Generally, for the various reasons mentioned above, Southwest Asia is proved to be an immensely varied region marked by notable cultural diversity. For instance, in religious character, the region continues to be the most diverse. Islam is the dominant religion in the maritime regions of Thailand, while Theravada Buddhism is the national religion of Thailand and Cambodia. Christianity is strong in some sections of Southeast Asia, most notably in northern Philippines, while in other areas a basic animistic religious practice is the most fundamental of the population religious belief. There are followers of Hinduism among the descendants of Indian immigrants and among the indigenous populations of Bali and Lombok of Indonesia. Communism is the secular religion of Vietnam, but it is not hard to sense the continuing presence of some Confucian values in Vietnamese society. These are apparent in the Caó Dai religion that has many adherents in southern Vietnam.

2.2 **European Penetration of the Mainland States**

1. **BURMA**

The Europeans penetration of Southeast Asia was beginning in the early 16th century, but developed more importantly during the 19th and 20th centuries. Up to the end of the 18th century, Burma had not been the target of major European expansion. A glance at its early history proves, Burma was beset by its chronic problems of ethnic disunity for many years until its vigorous leaders did form new political unity in the 2nd half of the 18th century. Burma seemed to have found new life and a measure of internal unity under the leaders of a new dynasty called the Konbaung Dynasty that was founded by Alaungpaya (r. 1752- 60). Under Alaungpaya and his successors, most particularly Bodawpaya (r. 1782- 1819), Burma, in addition to maintaining internal unity, was able to resist, even if did not entirely eliminate, external threats posed by its neighbors.

Beginning from the first half of the 19th century, however, the slow expansion of the British East Indian Company in to the areas of northeastern India, which includes Assam, Manipur, and Arakan- areas that were considered by Burmese rulers as a frontier zones under their spheres of influence- was the first set of problem posed against Burma. Although Burmese rulers of the 18th and 19th centuries did not establish strict control over this region, there was a paramount Burmese interest over the areas and no other power did expand to the areas. Since the 19th century, however, the British East Indian Company continued expanding in to these areas. The British took two reasons as a pretext to expand in to areas.

1. The idea of frontier zones as opposed to clearly delineated borders was less convincing to officials of the British East Indian Company whose power was extending over an ever wider area of India.
2. The logic that the Burmese claim for these areas lying between India and Burma, but accepting no responsibility for the misconduct of the inhabitants of these areas that was manifested through raiding in to territories under the British East Indian Company, was less acceptable to British.
3. The problem of frontier zone was not the only issue in the expansion of the British, other irritants involving differing views on the rights of British traders in these areas- or the lack in Burmese eyes of those rights- and on the appropriate level of diplomatic interchange slowly but surely poisoned relations and led to the disastrous decision by Burma’s ruler, King Bagyidaw (r. 1819- 37), to confront the British by invading Bengal.

The British force then advanced to Lower Burma and captured Rangoon. This military conquest then followed by another tragic result for Burma over the imposition of the Treaty of Yandabo in 1824 that gave the British East Indian Company control over Arakan and Tenasserim. For over twenty years, this was the limit of the British advance. Once again, however, totally different views on how government and business should be conducted in Rangoon led to a confrontation between the Burmese and the British. To make the point clearer, conflict became unavoidable following the persecution of foreign merchants by Burmese official in Rangoon, seeking personal enrichment through taking over their property and believing that Burmese prestige would be enhanced by this evidence of his unassailable power. His judgment proved fatally wrong as the British troops, first without authorization but later with approval from London, fought the Second Burma War in 1853 in which they occupied Lower Burma, an area of considerable agricultural and timber potential. After the British established themselves in Lower Burma, there was a pause in their advance. By1880s, however, Burma had become important to Britain not only as a potential source of wealth but also as an important element in Britain’s rivalry with France for spheres of influence in Asia. By the beginning of 1886 Britain had captured Mandalay and proclaimed control over those areas of Burma not previously occupied.

**B. VIETNAM**

Like Burma, Vietnam came under French colonial rule in a series of steps. But unlike Burma, the imposition of French rule over Vietnam was completed in a period of 25 years rather than nearly 60 years. For the first time in the late 1850s, when the French force advanced to Vietnam, seeing it as a spring board for trade with China and from greed interest to possess more territory in competition with Britain and to protect Christian missionaries, Vietnamese scarcely understood the nature of challenge presented by the French. Yet, they did not have either the material strength or the diplomatic capacity to chase the French from their country. The French then continued their expansion in to areas of southern Vietnam in the next decade. When the French force was occupying large, fertile area in southern Vietnam, the Vietnamese ruler and court in the capital Hue adopted a policy that had little more than hope as its justification. The Vietnamese hoped that the invaders would advance no further even if they did not go away. Opposite to their hopes, however, the French went on in the 1880s to extend their colonial possessions to include all Vietnam. In doing so, the French did more than establish a new colonial empire in the East.

By imposing an alien colonial government, the French played a great part in the destruction of the old Vietnamese political order. Because of the French reluctance both to share power with the Vietnamese in the next decades and to consider the possibility of independence for their colony, they set the stage for one of the most powerful revolutions in Southeast Asia’s history.

**C. CAMBODIA**

By comparison with Burma and Vietnam, Cambodia was a minor state in the 19th century, little remained of its greatness, so far as power was concerned. Its great temple ruins had, by the middle of the 19th century, passed out of Cambodian control to lie within the territories of the king of Thailand. The survival of Cambodia at all was a reflection of the reluctance of the rulers of Thailand and Vietnam to push their rivalry over Cambodia to its ultimate conclusion. Having clashed in a series of protracted campaigns, fought across Cambodian territory earlier in the 19th century, the Thais and the Vietnamese concluded that their best interest would be served by permitting Cambodia’s continued existences as a buffer zone between them.

The French advance from Vietnam to extend control over Cambodia beginning in the 1860s seems to have left Cambodia for long to play its buffer zone role. Moreover, the French had ensured the state’s survival and were also instrumental in boosting the prestige of the royal family and the officials associated with the court by treating the ruler of Cambodia in such a way that he managed to remain as the symbolic leader of the nation. In this regard, their actions were in a striking contrast to what they did in Vietnam and to what the British did in Burma. In Burma, the British brought the monarchy to an end. In Vietnam, the French undermined the authority of the royal house. But in Cambodia, as a result of both planning and the lack of it, the French helped the traditional royal leadership important politically.

1. **LAOS**

Although the British and the French governments’ pursued their aims in the rest part of the mainland Southeast Asia, two areas remained outside the general pattern of development. These were Thailand and Laos.

The region that is today called Laos was composed, in the mid-19th century, of a confusing pattern of minor states; none of them were able to act in any truly independent fashion. In a very real sense, the fact that a state of Laos came in to existence was the result of colonial action, more specifically, colonial rivalry between the French and the British.

With the British established in Burma and the French controlling Vietnam and Cambodia, the question of where spheres of influence would lie was a matter for prolonged debate. However, through a combination of individual audacity, great power maneuvering, and reliance on dubious claims linked to Vietnam’s past suzerainty over sections of Laos, the French were appeared eligible for Laos. The Laotian states, without unity of their own and subject to increasing disorder as Chinese refugees and bandits spilled out of China in to the region south of the Yunnan-Kwangsi border, appeared an attractive prospect for the French easy advance between 1885 and 1899. More clearly than anywhere else in mainland Southeast Asia this was a case of the European advance in bringing in to existence a new state, one that despite great political transformation has survived to the present day.

1. **THAILAND**

Thailand avoided the experience of colonial rule for a couple of reasons.

1. The British and the French colonial rivalry over Thailand eventually led to recognition of Thailand’s continued existence as a buffer zone between the two colonial powers spheres of influence. Thailand, thus, remained as an independent state between the British colony of Burma and the French colony of Indochina over the advantages of a buffer state to the two imperial rivals. But the benefits that Thailand had gained from colonial rivalry had to be weighed against the losses that resulted from the concessions necessary to preserve the goodwill, or tolerance, of the rival European powers. Through concessions foreign powers were able to, for instance, gain highly advantageous trading terms in Thailand and to insist on the right of their subjects to extra-territorial privileges should they become involved in both civil and criminal legal cases.
2. Thailand gained advantage from the leadership quality of its remarkable kings and officials to remain independent. King Mongkut (r. 1851- 1868) and his son and successor King Chulalongkorn (r. 1868- 1910) were the most important Thai rulers to plan and use ways for avoiding foreign rule. Their strategies involved positive efforts to acquire Western knowledge and diplomatic concessions that prevented any opportunity arising that could have been used by one or other of the European powers as an excuse to impose foreign rule.

Yet, despite the great talents of Thailand’s leaders, the challenge of the European powers could not be evaded entirely. France extended its control beyond the Indochinese region around the turn of the 19th century and took the territories of Thailand that lie along the Mekong River in the Laotian region and the western provinces of Cambodia that had been regarded as part of Thailand for over a century. Likewise, in 1909, Thailand conceded control over four northern Malay states- Perils, Kedah, Kelantan, and Trengganu- to the British. These states then became associated with the British colonial empire in the Malayan Peninsula and formed part of the modern state of Malaysia.

* 1. **European Penetration of the Maritime States**
1. **Indonesia**

The European presence in Indonesia, unlike other Southeast Asian countries, went back to the 16th century with the establishment of Dutch settlement. Not surprisingly, with a slow advance of this sort, Dutch settlements spread over so many years. However, the major period of Dutch advance in to Indonesia took place at the end of the 19th century.

The Dutch initially came to Indonesia Archipelago as traders. In this regard, they gained control of the major of the major ports of northern Java and the principal commercial centers of the other islands engaged in spice trade. Slowly, the Dutch East Indian Company became as much a territorial power as a trading venture. In the 18th century, when Javanese rivalries led to the collapse of the Kingdom of Mataram, the Dutch had already become sufficiently involved in manipulating the internal affairs of Java. However, until the middle of the 18th century the Dutch had only tenuous political control over most of Java, accompanying no impact in terms of Dutch culture and technology. There was only a strong economic impact as the Dutch, working through the Javanese elite and through Chinese tax agents, developed an ever increasing number of ways to raise money and to extract the maximum agricultural production for the Company’s benefit. The burden of this economic impact fell on the peasantry.

The Dutch slowly and intermittently expanded their control and established firm political rule over the Indonesian Archipelago. This expansion and firm political control was motivated by:

1. A growing market for tropical agricultural products in Europe
2. An increasing activity of other European powers in Southeast Asian region.

From the Dutch government point of view, the economic demand and foreign competition meant that it was no longer sufficient to maintain a loose control over the scattered islands, working from a limited number of bases and in association with local rules. Thus, the Dutch government now sought to establish closer control and more uniform administration in the Indies, for the Dutch East Indian Company had been abolished at the end of the 18th century.

These aims on occasion led to sharp conflict with local forces, particularly, in areas of Sumatra and Bali before they were subjugated at the end of the 19th century. Following this conquest, the Dutch systems of values were firmly established. However, more than all of the changes and developments that came with the eventual establishment of Dutch rule was the accomplishment of the framework for the creation of the Indonesian Republic.

1. **MALAYSIA, SINGAPORE AND BRUNEI**

The modern state of Malaysia, like Indonesia, finds its geographical origins in the colonial period. In ancient times, the present state of Malaysia was part of the wider Indonesian-Malay world. The area where Malaysia now formed was part of various Malay states with varying size along the sea coasts of Peninsular Malaya (the northern regions of the great island of Borneo) and in eastern Sumatra, an island that came under Dutch control. These states were ruled by Malay sultans. Non- Malay people, mainly Chinese and Indian immigrants, inhabited the hinterland of both the peninsula and Borneo.

In ancient times the area now occupied by Malaysia formed a region of shifting power and alliances. The northern states of Peninsular Malaya, notably Perlis, Kedah, Kelantan, and Trengganu, were linked in vassal relationship with the rulers of Thailand while the southern states of the Peninsula had ties with the sultanates in the areas that now formed part of Indonesia.

The European expansion in to these areas was a slow and haphazard affair. Initially, the Portuguese captured Malacca on the fringes of the Peninsular Malaya in the 16th century. This early Portuguese presence in the area was not, however, followed by any major further advance in to areas of modern Malaysia until the late 18th century. This time the Portuguese were replaced by the Dutch as the ruler of Malacca and the British established their first settlement in the territory of modern Malaysia on the island of Penang in 1786. The British then established the settlement of Singapore in 1819. By the 1830s they advanced to the point that they held three settlements called the Straits Settlements on the fringe of the Malayan Peninsula: Singapore, Penang, and Malacca, where they had now replaced the Dutch. Although these settlements were on the fringe of the Malayan Peninsula in a geographical sense, they were not part of the Malay world that surrounded them. There population grew as a result of the influx of Chinese, and later of the lesser number of Indians; but with very less migrants of Malay.

It was after the 19th century that the British settlements established links in economic terms with the Malay Sultanates. This was the case between the southern Malay state of Johore and Singapore. The economic structure of the Peninsula gradually began to transform as the three units of the Straits Settlements continued to play a significant role as centers of bases for merchants and traders, tin miners and laborers. Taking this opportunity opened for trade with the Malay states of the Peninsula, the British came first to achieve a political supremacy in the region and then came to ensure on that economic supremacy direct political control. This process that led to the final emergency of Britain over the whole of Peninsular Malaysia, in addition to the Straits Settlements, took place in the first two decades of the 20th century.

The very special result of the British colonial advance in to Peninsular Malaysia was the newly delineated geographical boundaries that were to become the basis of a later new state, Malaysia. But within the newly delineated boundaries Britain followed policies that led to the creation of new problems that are still being worked today. The creation of new boundaries is abundantly important in relation to Peninsular Malaysia, but it was very less important to Borneo, East Malaysia (the area that have come to constitute modern Sarawak and Sabah), and Brunei. The northern Borneo, which was part of the already declining power of the Brunei Sultanate that had an extensive power on the coast of Borneo and over parts of the Sulu Archipelago, was given to a commercial company called the Chartered Company of North Borneo while Brunei was left as a small enclave, becoming a British protectorate in 1888. In Sarawak, the agent of colonial advance was not a government but an individual, James Brooke, the first of the ‘white rajahs.’ In Sabah, by contrast, the colonial power was the Chartered Company of North Borneo. In each case the peculiarities of the colonial power led to very distinctive developments. Thus, the British colonial policy created such new political entities in area where there was no comparable state and no boundary lines were drawn before the British.

1. **THE** **PHILIPPINES**

European’s role in establishing the territorial boundaries of Indonesia and Malaysia applies with equal force to the Philippines. The long period Spanish rule over these islands was vitally important in delineating the boundaries of the state.

The Spanish accomplishment of control over the Philippines was a slow affair, even if it was not complete. By the middle of the 18th century, the Spanish power was able to dominate most of the areas of northern Philippines. The southern Muslim areas of Philippines never came under real Spanish control.

Repeated Spanish attempts to dominate the fiercely independent Sultanates of the southern region only achieved success over major ports such as Zamboanga. The Sultan of Sulu and his less powerful counterparts never submitted to Spanish rule. Thus, the seeds of contemporary Muslim separatism in the southern Philippines were sown long ago.

On the other hand, the imposition of Spanish rule and the additional element brought with it, i.e. Catholicism, gave the northern islands a new framework of society. Building up on the village structure of pre-colonial times, the Spaniards instituted a new, non-indigenous system in areas of administrative, economic, and religious structures. But this does not mean that this system removed all indigenous elements from Philippine society.

The historic development that marked the Philippine reaction to the Spanish rule was encouraged by the Filipinos. By the 19th century, the Filipinos became dissatisfied by the Spanish rule when it became clear that the colonial power would not allow Indios (the non-Spanish inhabitants of the island) to enjoy the same civil and ecclesiastical rights as the Spaniards. The irony was that the Indios who claimed these rights were products of Spanish schools, seminaries, and universities. Although the Spaniards who ruled in the Philippines had created a situation with no real parallel elsewhere in Southeast Asia, they faced the revolt of the subject people who dissatisfied by their exclusion from being considered as Spanish. In their resentment against such exclusion the Filipinos established their own national identity, one that nonetheless remained inseparably linked with the experience of Spanish rule and the importance of Catholicism.