Mary Somers Heidhues

Southeast Asia
A Concise History

with 131 illustrations and 11 maps
The restored monarchs vied with the Chinese emperors themselves in their adherence to Confucian orthodoxy. Yet even elite Vietnamese culture expressed other values. Vietnamese had borrowed Chinese words and used Chinese characters for writing, but they also developed and used nôm, a system of writing with new characters to express uniquely Vietnamese terms. Society, culture and politics remained distinctive, incorporating indigenous Southeast Asian and Chinese elements.

EUROPEAN CONTACTS AND EARLY COLONIZATION
No other Southeast Asian state had such an intensive exchange with China, but all of them would come under strong Western influences. When the first Europeans arrived in Southeast Asia in the sixteenth century they concentrated their attention on the maritime region, with its plethora of Islamic sultanates and other small kingdoms, the most important of which was the Sultanate of Malacca. After the fall of Malacca in 1511 to Portugal, other states such as Aceh in Sumatra and Johor on the Malayan Peninsula competed with Malacca for regional power. In westernmost Java, the Sultanate of Banten became a major port in the sixteenth century.

Many factors motivated the earliest European expansion into Southeast Asia. One was the search for spices for the European market. The second was the desire to participate in the trade in luxury goods with China, if necessary through Southeast Asia, where trade was possible even if China was closed to outsiders. In addition,
Chinese silk was a luxury item of trade, reserved for Southeast Asian rulers and their close associates; it was also exported to Europe. In this early twentieth-century photograph, a queen and a princess of Laos display their richly woven and ornamented silk garments.

both Portuguese and Spanish vessels carried Catholic missionaries to the region, in the hopes of bringing Christianity to the furthest reaches of Asia.

Portugal arrived on the scene at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Its subjection of the Sultanate of Malacca provided it with a trading base on the Straits of Malacca. From there it extended its rule to the Spice Islands in eastern Indonesia (the Moluccas or Maluku), at that time the only place in the world where cloves, nutmeg and mace grew.

Portuguese ascendancy, however, was short-lived. Corruption, cruelty and incompetence wore out its acceptance. Neighbouring Islamic sultanates attacked Malacca and tried to force the Christian intruders from the scene. Competition from the Dutch, who saw the Portuguese as rivals in politics, trade and religion, soon reduced Portugal’s hold on its outposts in the maritime region. Forced from the Spice Islands in 1605, the Portuguese also had to concede Malacca to the Dutch in 1641. This ended Portugal’s role in the maritime world; only part of the tiny island of Timor remained under Portuguese rule.

Spain profited from Ferdinand Magellan’s realization that ships could reach Asia by sailing west as well as east. This navigator, originally from Portugal, brought his fleet to the Philippine Islands in 1521, claiming them for the Spanish king, but losing his life in an
altercation with natives. Two decades later, the islands received the name of Philippines in honour of Philip II of Spain, and in the 1560s, colonization began in earnest. A major goal was the Christianization of the inhabitants. Except for the coast of the large southern island Mindanao and the islands of the Sulu Archipelago, Islam had not significantly penetrated the Philippines, although Manila was ruled by a Muslim when the Spanish arrived. States hardly existed; native government and the economy functioned at the local level only.

Spain was not much interested in the produce of the islands; instead, it instituted a system of galleon trade, centred on the capital city, Manila, with its excellent harbour. Chinese junks arrived annually to offer silk and other fine goods to Spanish buyers. They accepted only silver in payment, so each year a galleon loaded with silver from the mines of Latin America would leave Acapulco for the islands, returning to Mexico with Chinese goods for Spain (nearly all contact with the motherland was via Mexico). This exchange dominated the colonial economy until 1815.

Manila had a small community of immigrant Chinese, who were usually temporary residents. Another group, Christianized descendants of Chinese fathers and native mothers grew up, called Chinese mestizos. The Spanish favoured the mestizos but were hostile to the immigrant Chinese who had not converted to Catholicism, and on several occasions attacked them violently. Both groups however continued to grow and the mestizos came to dominate the local economy. Political and ecclesiastical power remained firmly in the hands of Spain and its native-born, though the latter were a tiny minority. They manned a skeleton military and administrative staff in the colony.

The only officials in rural areas were the Spanish-born Catholic clergy, who were charged with converting the natives, providing them with some education where feasible, and integrating them as far as possible as subjects of Spain. A grateful motherland rewarded the religious orders who provided this backbone of the colony with extensive agricultural lands, which were often let out, under the control of managers, to small farmers. This made the Church largely self-supporting, while the expenses of administering Manila were met, in theory at least, by the profits from the galleon trade. In practice, illicit diversion of funds and profits for personal use left the public purse in debt. Exploitation of the colony for the world market by producing cash crops only began in the nineteenth century.
COLONIZATION BY TRADE: THE VOC

While Spanish and Portuguese colonialism were ventures of the respective crowns, the Dutch colonized the Archipelago through the medium of a joint-stock company established in 1602, the United (Netherlands) East India Company or VOC (Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie). (As late as the twentieth century, village people in the Indies still referred to the colonial government as kumpeni, 'the Company'.) This and other companies from European nations (an English East India Company was founded in 1600) existed for trade and profit rather than conquest. The first Dutch ships had arrived in the western Java harbour of Banten in 1596, where the sultan welcomed traders of all nations. Quarrelling with Banten, and reorganizing into the VOC, the Dutch moved to the north coast of

The city of Batavia in the seventeenth century. Europeans settled in the vicinity of the VOC fort, depicted in the upper centre, close to the harbour. Around the city were extensive rice and sugar-cane fields and Chinese market gardens. Remembering Amsterdam, the Dutch laid out canals for drainage and transportation.
Java, where they could better maintain contact with the Spice Islands and participate in other Asian trade. In 1619, the VOC's director in the Indies, Governor-General Jan Pieterzoon Coen, established the city of Batavia on the site of an earlier settlement called Jayakarta (now Jakarta). Batavia was an excellent base for the spice trade, which the Dutch now monopolized, and also attracted Chinese junkers and native traders, becoming a real emporium of Asian trade. Overcoming rivalry with Banten and an attack by Sultan Agung of the central Javanese kingdom of Mataram in 1628–29, Batavia confirmed its place as headquarters of the VOC in Southeast Asia.

The Company was not interested in Christianization. In practice, Asian religions were widely tolerated and Islam grew in influence despite the Dutch presence. Nor did the VOC desire territorial aggrandizement because managing and defending large territories would divert profits to administrative expenses. What the VOC sought was trading points, either its own or at the headquarters of local rulers. It also wanted a monopoly in the products it traded, and so to exclude other traders, be they European or Asian, from dealing in the most desirable goods. Its ships carried heavy arms to enforce this exclusivity. Monopolizing the trade in spices was fairly simple, given that cloves and nutmeg only grew in a limited area, but in spite of its policy, VOC activities and weapons before long involved it in both territorial disputes and administrative expenses.

Batavia grew rapidly in importance. Many Chinese junkers visited the port, exchanging Chinese products for regional goods. The VOC, unlike the Spanish, was well-enough equipped with trading vessels to make available Asian products that were in demand in China and to encourage their exchange in Batavia. Furthermore, many Chinese settled in the town, encouraged by the Dutch. Not only did Chinese provide labour for loading and unloading ships, but they built the canals, houses and much of the infrastructure of the town. Settlements of Chinese farmers soon surrounded the city. They grew vegetables for the tables of the VOC; sugar cane, from which they sometimes brewed arrack; and indigo, which they used for dyeing textiles in a process described by Denys Lombard as 'industrial agriculture avant la lettre'. Relations deteriorated, however. A threatened rebellion of Chinese immigrants in 1740 led the Dutch to clear the walled city of Chinese by means of a brutal massacre. Laws subsequently required Chinese to live in special sections of the towns under their own headman or kapitan (captain). Some areas of modern Jakarta, especially the northern part of the city, still seem
like 'Chinatowns', although the typical Chinese shophouses have now nearly all disappeared, thanks both to urban development and, in 1998, a terrible riot which destroyed much of the traditional Chinese business district of Glodok.

Most of the rest of the population of Batavia was a mixture of immigrants from seafaring regions of the Indies and slaves from non-Islamic regions like Bali. The environs of the city were sparsely populated; Javanese and Sundanese (people from western Java), even Javanese slaves, were not allowed within the city walls for security reasons. Native settlement later increased, but for its first centuries, Batavia was a Chinese and Dutch city grafted onto a Javanese-Sundanese hinterland. Mestizo groups were strong, including Eurasians and Portuguese-speaking Christians; Batavia even had a Portuguese church. Only since Indonesian independence have the Javanese become a dominant group in the town, while ethnic Chinese form about ten per cent of contemporary Jakarta's inhabitants.

Another feature of the city was its prominent European or Eurasian families. The numbers of pure Dutch were small in early times, but men married local women - the Company required the ladies to become Christians - and founded local families. Batavia's women of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were a colourful contrast to their sombre sisters in the Netherlands. They loved elegant dress, they collected and displayed jewellery. Trying to behave as Europeans in public, they behaved in private as Southeast Asians. Slaves tended to their needs, especially betel-chewing. They bore Dutch names but they were more 'native' than 'Dutch'. Widowed husbands and, above all, sons might return to the Netherlands, but daughters would remain in the colony. Some local women founded major matrilineal families based in the colony, outliving their
husbands and using their inherited or earned fortunes to marry and remarry well, or to make good matches for their daughters.

Society in both Manila and Batavia, despite differences, retained a mestizo character into the nineteenth century. Only later did what J.S. Furnivall called 'plural societies' develop in the colonies, with a small European administrative and economic elite at the top of the pyramid, a large middle group of Chinese or other Asian immigrants in an intermediate economic position, and vast numbers of natives at the base, all of them meeting, so Furnivall wrote, only in the market-place. This description of racially ordered and divided societies became appropriate only in the more race-conscious twentieth century; in the Philippines, it probably never applied.

The Dutch planned Batavia, as the Spanish constructed Manila, on a European model. Batavia would have canals, as did Dutch cities. Soon its buildings were not of bamboo and thatch, like Southeast Asian dwellings, but of bricks and tile. The town hall, completed in 1710, is a typically Dutch construction. Northern European architecture was not entirely appropriate for tropical conditions, however, and the Dutch later adopted architecture better suited to the environment. By the nineteenth century, Batavia was expanding inland, and new urban areas were added in the twentieth century.
further to the south, Jakarta today is a mega-city, reaching for dozens of kilometres into the countryside and harbouring densely-settled
slum areas for its more than seven-million-strong population.

While the Spanish avoided close cooperation with the Chinese
immigrants where they could (and on occasion murdered them),
the Dutch found many uses for them as VOC authority expanded.
Chinese were in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries a source
of revenue through poll taxes and taxes on items they consumed.
They were useful as revenue farmers too: the Company 'farmed out'
tolls, harbour duties and other taxes to Chinese who collected them
and (usually) turned over a pre-agreed sum to the authorities. The
Dutch were not the only colonial rulers to resort to these methods;
later French and British governments, and the Siamese, too, used
Chinese opium, gambling and alcohol 'farmers' to collect taxes on
official monopolies. Revenue farming was a source of wealth, and
those who had to bear its burden grew to resent it strongly.

DUTCH TERRITORIAL CONQUESTS IN JAVA

The VOC had early occupied the Spice Islands. In addition to
Batavia, it began to set up other bases in the Archipelago. It needed
to provision its ships and its settlements with rice and other products
from the countryside, and soon developed a voracious appetite for
lumber from Java's teak forests, which was used for building and
repairing ships. These interests brought the Company into conflict
with the Sultanate of Mataram, based in central Java, which itself was
in the process of trying to extend its rule to the independent coastal
principalities along Java's north coast that had developed after the
fall of Majapahit. Conflicts during the eighteenth century gave the
Dutch more and more territorial control at the expense of Mataram.

Outside of Java, the Dutch usually were satisfied with establishing
a trading post at a major port and trying to avoid further entangle-
ment. This was not always successful, but the Dutch had few such
bases and even fewer territories outside Java until after the
Napoleonic Wars.

THE EXPANSION OF EUROPEAN CONTROL

Western advances were not just achieved through superior firepower.
However clever European weapons, Southeast Asians were just as
clever in copying them. Burmese and Vietnamese kings fought wars
with Portuguese guns. But the organization of most Southeast Asian
states was weak: armies were unprofessional and not regularly drilled
and disciplined. They were recruited from the countryside, preferably during the agricultural off-season, and easily deserted to their villages. Rulers frequently asked for European military assistance, since a few disciplined troops could create a considerable advantage in a local struggle for power. The VOC was most adept at this kind of service. In payment the Europeans often asked for — or took — new territories. The rulers' lack of attention to borders, lack of clear succession, and dispersion of authority among subordinates all gave Europeans a chance to intervene and gain at their expense. In the nineteenth century, presumed offences and pretexts for intervention were more and more common, and territorial conquest was finally justified by the supposed necessity of preventing other colonial powers from gaining a foothold.

As long as European colonies were urban enclaves, social change was limited and old traditions of authority remained in the countryside. Yet even early colonialism affected trading patterns, producing new wealth in some areas, and spreading poverty in others. A striking example is the deliberate destruction of the spice trees in the Spice Islands in the eighteenth century by the Dutch, who were convinced that oversupply was depressing the prices for cloves and nutmeg. The measure condemned the area to chronic poverty.

The territorial expansion of the VOC on Java finally eliminated Mataram, leaving two rival claimants to its heritage on Java, each with tiny territories, the Sultan of Yogyakarta and the Susuhunan of Surakarta. Yet the late eighteenth century saw the downfall of the VOC. Other traders were now active in the region, undermining the monopolies so important to the Company's hegemony. In 1786 the founding of the island of Penang as a British station off the west coast of the Malayan Peninsula gave British traders an additional advantage. The British, many of whom were private traders not associated with the East India Company, demanded free access to trade in the Archipelago and the Peninsula, and were now strong enough to undermine Dutch connections by dealing directly with local rulers. This rivalry cost the VOC dearly.

Other problems were internal. VOC officials were filling their own pockets first, and corruption contributed to the bankruptcy of the firm. Weighed down by debt, the VOC was abolished on 31 December 1799, and the Dutch state assumed its liabilities and its assets — one of which was most of the island of Java. In the following century, the Netherlands would extend territorial rule over the Indonesian Archipelago.
Singapore seen from Government Hill in 1830, just eleven years after it was founded by Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles (1781–1826). Raffles (below) had a keen intelligence and an enormous appetite for work. He assembled large collections on the nature, history and culture of Java and Sumatra.

BRITAIN

The East India Company soon expanded from Penang Island to a strip of land on the Malayan Peninsula. During the Napoleonic Wars the British occupied Dutch possessions in Asia. In 1811, Thomas Stamford Raffles, an employee of the East India Company, became Lieutenant Governor of Java. After the British decided to return the Archipelago to the Dutch, Raffles founded a base in Singapore in 1819. This small village on an island at the tip of the Malayan Peninsula had an excellent harbour and was exceptionally well-suited to attract trade and to serve as an entrepôt for Southeast Asian products. Singapore grew rapidly, drawing thousands of Chinese and other immigrants, and becoming a base for Chinese as well as British economic interests in the region.

In 1824, the British and Dutch signed a treaty separating their interests in Southeast Asia. The British evacuated Benkulen in Sumatra, long a colony of the East India Company, while the Dutch turned over Malacca, now a second-rank harbour, to the British. The three British settlements of Penang, Singapore and Malacca became the Straits Settlements in 1826; they were transferred to the Colonial Office in 1867. At first, the British avoided further involvement on the Malayan Peninsula, but in the course of the nineteenth century, they built up a colony out of the diverse Malay
British troops storm the main stockade in Rangoon during the First Burma War of 1824–25. They consolidated their control over Burmese territory in two further wars of 1852 and 1885, making Rangoon their capital.

...
security of the border. Burma failed to respond in a way the British felt they could trust; its rulers, the Konbaung dynasty, with their capital again at Ava, had a characteristically Southeast Asian lack of interest in borders. In 1824–25, the First Burma War resulted in the loss of the peripheral Burmese provinces of Arakan and Tenasserim to the British. A second war, in 1852, to punish the king's 'arrogance', secured British control of Lower Burma. The king retreated to Upper Burma, the core area of his realm. This more arid rump territory was not viable; famine ensued, and the opening of new land in the delta of Lower Burma attracted thousands of refugees and immigrants to British territory. A third war followed in 1885, partly to deter French expansion from Indochina that threatened India's flank. With the conquest of the capital at Mandalay, the Burmese monarchy was abolished and the land ruled directly as a part of the colony of India.

FRENCH INDOCHINA
French interest in Indochina, as they later called it, was not only awakened by persecution of Catholics (see pp. 94–95), but also by the wish to secure the economic benefits of colonialism. In 1858–62, the French conquered the lower part of Vietnam, which they called Cochin China. This rather sparsely settled area offered possibilities for plantations and other commercial interests. The French subsequently extended their rule over the central part of the country around Hue, adopting the name Annam for this region, and, after a short period of fighting, took Hanoi in 1883, calling the north Tonkin. The name 'Vietnam' disappeared from official use. These three discrete colonies were finally combined with Cambodia (a protectorate since 1863) and Laos (most of which was subjected in 1893) into French Indochina. An emperor was retained in Hue, but his authority did not extend to Cochin China, which was directly ruled by France, and even in the protectorates of Annam and Tonkin French officials gave the orders. In 1907, the French ousted the Siamese from two formerly Cambodian provinces. In both Cambodia and Laos, kings remained in office, although the French now had a decisive voice in determining the succession to the throne. The Cambodian monarchy, at least, appeared grateful for French intervention, since that land had borne the brunt of both Vietnamese and Siamese aggrandizement for centuries, and Cambodians had reason to believe their territory would finally be swallowed by one or the other.
way the British, with their Asian lack of resulted in the king's retreat more arid rump opening of new ends of refugees lowered in 1885, that threatened Mandalay, the ed directly as a

, was not only (5), but also by m. In 1858–62, ich they called ed possibilities French subse- of the country on, and, after a ing the north cial use. These th Cambodia was subjected ained in Hue, a, which was tes of Annam 7, the French provinces. In although the succession to shared grateful the brunt of centuries, and uld finally be

A French woman in nineteenth-century Indochina poses in a rickshaw. This two-wheeled vehicle was introduced into British and French dominions from Japan. Rickshaw pullers were among the poorest and most miserable of urban coolies.

King Sisowath of Cambodia (r. 1904–27, second from left) was dominated by French colonial administrators in the early decades of the twentieth century, as this line-up suggests. The French gold braid and sash, however, are barely a match for the silks and satins of the Khmer court.
USA
One more country would join the ranks of the Southeast Asian colonial powers in 1898, when the USA acquired the Philippines from Spain after a short war over their respective interests in the Caribbean. The declared intention of the American colonial experiment, against considerable domestic opposition, was, in the word of President William McKinley, to 'Christianize' the population – some two hundred years after Spain had accomplished the task.

CONSOLIDATION OF INDEPENDENCE IN SIAM
Only Siam escaped colonization. By the early twentieth century, although much reduced in territory, it remained an independent state, and was at least freed of its rivalry with Burma. The successors of King Rama I (r. 1782–1809) changed Siam from a mandala-state – one in which the centre exercised loose control over satellite polities and territory expanded or contracted according to the strength of alliances with those satellites – to a modern, territorially defined state. By the time of Mongkut (Rama IV, r. 1851–68), the Siamese recognized the dangers of European colonialism and resorted to a careful programme of change to meet the colonial challenge. Successive kings integrated subordinate polities, though they subsequently lost some of them to British and French expansion on the mainland. On the other hand, modernization (sometimes with the help of foreign advisors) and diplomacy enabled Siam to retain its political independence.

Mongkut and his gifted son Chulalongkorn (Rama V, r. 1868–1910) deserve much of the credit for this. They also helped Siam's cause when they convinced the British that it would be in their interest to preserve Siam's independence and to keep the French at bay. Their successors were less adept, and changes in Siamese society brought new groups to the fore. In 1932, new civilian and military elites forced the reigning king, Prajadhipok (Rama VII, r. 1925–35), to accept a constitution, ending Siam's absolute monarchy.