

Lecture 1: Pre-independent Southeast Asia

SAJC History Unit, 2023

- 1. Making sense of the syllabus for our learning**
- 2. [Background knowledge] When and how SEA become colonised?**
- 3. [Background knowledge] The development of nationalism**
- 4. [Background knowledge] Impact of Japanese Occupation on development of nationalism in SEA**

Syllabus Overview

In this theme, students will study how Southeast Asian countries formed nation-states after World War Two. For most countries, this was an immediate and pressing task following decolonisation. The process of forming nation-states was characterised by different groups competing to shape political developments, including political parties, the military and traditional institutions. These groups came to political dominance at different points, which was reflected in the formation of different forms of government underpinned by different political ideologies. Efforts to form states were closely associated with the task of building nations to unite the different ethnic groups that lived within the territorial boundaries of the state – a legacy of colonial rule. National unity was an important objective for Southeast Asian governments to create social cohesion and a common identity for all who lived within the state. The experiences and outcomes of governments' efforts in forming nation-states were shaped by interactions between local factors, and by international developments, in particular the Cold War.

Syllabus Content

Establishing Political Structures and Legitimacy

- Democratic and authoritarian features of different forms of government established over time
- Factors for the establishment of different forms of government: decolonisation experience, role of local political elites and masses, Cold War developments
- Consolidation of power
 - Role of government leaders
 - Sources of power and legitimacy: constitutional processes and elections, the military, traditional institutions (religion and monarchy), government performance
 - Political challenges and popular opposition
 - Cold War developments

Learning Outcomes (from the Examination Syllabus)

Students are to

- evaluate the factors that shaped the establishment of different forms of government across Southeast Asia over time;
- evaluate the outcomes of Southeast Asian governments in consolidating power in different contexts and over time.

1. Making sense of the syllabus for our learning

- The syllabus document informs us that an exploration of this topic on 'Forming Nation-States' needs to extend beyond acquiring information blindly for the sake of regurgitating it in an examination. Instead, as we read through the notes, we should consciously bear in mind that we are investigating into at least two phenomena:

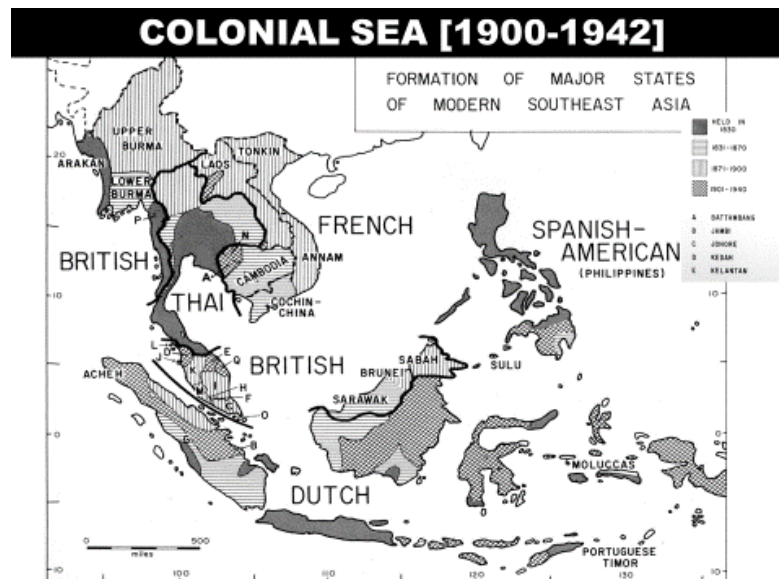
Syllabus learning outcome	Question to bear in mind
Evaluate the factors that shaped the establishment of different forms of government across Southeast Asia over time	Why did different forms of government emerge in Southeast Asia over time?
Evaluate the outcomes of Southeast Asian governments in consolidating power in different contexts and over time	Why were some forms of government more effective in consolidating power in Southeast Asian countries over time?

- It is important to note that the two learning outcomes and the accompanying questions are related.
- First, it is necessary to understand that at different junctures in Southeast Asia's history, different forms of government were established - with some lasting longer than others.
- Second, if some forms of government failed to remain in place for the entire time frame of our examination (independence-2000), it becomes necessary to ask then *why* some forms of government lasted longer than others
- We can begin to start unravelling parts of this puzzle as we delve deep into the colonial past of Southeast Asia and try to understand how this period impacted the decisions made by post-independence Southeast Asian governments.

2. [Background knowledge] When and how SEA become colonised?

2.1 Colonial SEA (1900-1942)

- **British colonies:** Burma, Malaya + Straits Settlements [Penang, Malacca and Singapore], Brunei.
- **French colonies:** Laos + Cambodia + Vietnam = French Indochina.
- **Dutch colonies:** the sprawling span of islands called Dutch East Indies [Indonesia].
- **American colony:** The Philippines



2.2 British Colonies

- **British rule in Burma** lasted from 1824 to 1948, from the Anglo-Burmese Wars through the creation of Burma as a province of British India in 1897 to the establishment of an independently administered colony in 1937, and finally independence in 1948.
- **British Malaya** composed of the Straits Settlements (1826), the Federated Malay States (1895), Unfederated Malay States (1914). Singapore was one of the three Straits Settlements, which was ruled directly by the British, unlike the Federated Malay States (FMS) and the Unfederated Malay States (UFMS)¹.

¹ The other Straits Settlements were Malacca and Penang.

- **Comparison between Burma and Malaya:**

- In Malaya, the British generally adhered to the more moral definition of colonialism as “the white man’s burden”² to help ‘civilise’ other peoples. Malaya was generally valued as an economic asset to the British, thus the British authorities in Malaya generally upheld the indigenous status of the Malays, respected local and non-Western cultures and maintained racial harmony among the myriad local communities in Malaya and Singapore, and provided reasonable standards of living and welfare for the locals, all calculated to maintain British rule in Malaya. A prosperous and stable colonial society was created, so much so that anticolonial, nationalist movements were particularly weak in Malaya before WW2.
- However, in Burma, the British had no original intent to colonise it: British had no economic reasons to interest them in it, and only conquered it in the 19th century in order to protect the British colony of India from Burmese expansionism under the aggressive Konbaung dynasty. Thus the British in Burma were far more exploitative and more ruthless in their divide-and-rule treatment of the various Burmese ethnic groups than the British were in Malaya.

British rule in Burma	British Malaya
Acquired through annexation and conquest	Acquired through treaty negotiations with either the Malay Sultans, the Thai monarch and other colonial powers like the Dutch
Burma was under Direct Rule and was even administered directly as a province of India, which angered Burmese nationalists who resented	With the exception of the Straits Settlements, the FMS and UFMS were administered under Indirect Rule

² "The White Man's Burden" was the title of a poem published in 1899, which proposes that the white man has a moral obligation to rule the non-white peoples of the Earth, whilst encouraging their economic, cultural, and social progress through colonialism.

Burma's reduction in status as a country in its own right	
Motivations were more for strategic reasons, as control of Burma was necessary in the interest of protecting the southern flank of India	Primarily motivated by economic interests, namely in the primary industries like rubber and tin
Outcome: Psychologically traumatised, politically humiliated, became even more socially divided than before, and economically restructured to benefit Britain's colonial system	Outcome: Relatively more positive and benign experience of British colonialism

2.3 French Indochina

- Formed in 1863, **French Indochina** was made up of a federation of the three Vietnamese regions, Tonkin (North Vietnam), Annam (Central Vietnam), and Cochinchina (South Vietnam), plus Cambodia and Laos.
- French colonisation of the Vietnamese territories was through a long period of annexation, defeating the Nguyen Dynasty in stages. The Cambodian King Norodom had requested the establishment of a French protectorate over his country. Laos became ceded to the French as a result of French victory in the Franco-Siamese War 1893.
- Officially the French administered only Cochinchina under direct rule, due to the strategic and economic importance of Saigon, and the other four under Indirect Rule. However, in practice, French rule was the most centralised and intrusive amongst the colonial powers, even in the indirectly ruled territories.

2.4 Dutch East Indies

- The **Dutch East Indies** became modern Indonesia following World War II. It was formed from the nationalised colonies of the former Dutch East India Company that came under the administration of the Netherlands in 1800.

During the 19th century, Dutch possessions in the archipelago and its hegemony were expanded, reaching their greatest extent in the early 20th century.

- Dutch rule was initially exploitative, but late in the 19th century liberal attitudes in the Netherlands caused a change in policy that advocated improving the lives of Indonesians, with an emphasis on education.
- Ironically, this exposure to liberal Western thought encouraged anti-colonial and nationalistic ideologies to arise in Indonesians.



2.5 Philippines under American Rule

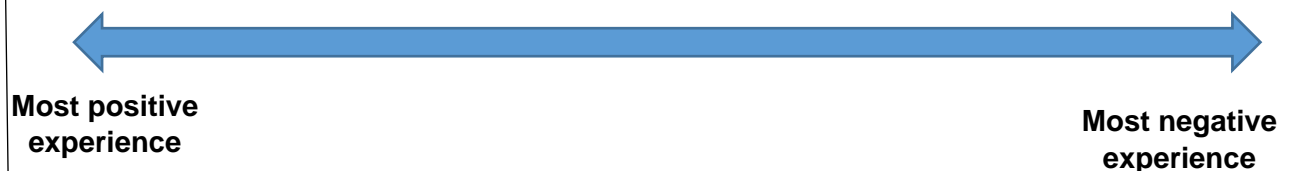
- For **American-occupied Philippines**, control of the colony was transferred from the Spanish (who colonised the Philippines from 1521 to 1898) to the USA as a result of Spanish defeat in the Spanish-American War in 1898.
- The US had to suppress a rebellion by the Filipino nationalists (who had expected the US to hand over the Philippines to them once the Spanish were defeated) from 1899 to 1902 but once opposition was suppressed, America then defined its mission as one of political tutelage, not colonialism, preparing the Philippines for eventual independence.
- Note however, that the Moros in the southern Philippines continued their anti-US resistance until 1913 when they were defeated by US forces.
- Once resistance was quelled, the US did the most of any colonial government to give the locals self-governance, building up the Filipino state and giving them a foundation in modern political statecraft based on the US pattern of liberal democracy.
- The Philippines was the first SEA country to have attained full self-govt status in 1934 by virtue of the Tydings-Mcduffie Act which also provided for independence after 10 years.

- Hence the Philippines was the most advanced in terms of constitutional developments. In addition, local nationalist leaders were also most prepared to take over the reins of governance by the eve of WWII.

2.6 Consolidation

- Thus in each colony, the nature of colonial rule as well as colonial response to nationalist activities largely determined the dominant character and nature of the local nationalism.

Consolidation exercise: In the spectrum provided below, place all the SEA countries relative to each other in terms of their colonial experience.



3. [Background knowledge] The Development of Nationalism

'Nationalism is that deeply rooted feeling of oneness and belonging to common society and culture that accords the nation the loyalty of the men and women who inhabit it. It is the result of a gradual process which begins with an awareness of shared destiny and of ethnic or cultural distinctiveness (compared to neighbouring peoples). Only gradually does national consciousness expand into an awareness of the modern concept of nationhood, rooted in the mass of the population.'

William J. Duiker, The Rise of Nationalism in Vietnam (1976).

3.1 Impact of Colonial Rule on Development of Nationalism

Nature of colonial rule and colonial response to nationalist activities	Outcome: Type of nationalism
French Vietnam and Dutch East Indies: Repressive, authoritarian, intolerant of any form of political activity	<u>Radical/anti-colonial nationalism</u> The most extreme form of nationalism – communism – observed in French Vietnam and Dutch East Indies.
US Philippines and British Burma: Relatively more enlightened and more sincere in political tutelage (note: <i>relatively</i> more enlightened – Burmese nationalists certainly were <i>not</i> satisfied with the pace or apparent sincerity of British political reforms.)	<u>Moderate nationalism</u> But in British Burma, there existed a wide range of nationalist movements as the British favoured 'divide and rule' approach, providing concessions to the moderates and at the same time persecuting the radicals.
Cambodia, Laos, British Malaya: Minimal colonial impact due to Indirect Rule	Slow development of nationalism in these countries, at most <u>cultural nationalism</u> that was largely elitist in nature.
Thailand: Exceptional case study- which has never been colonised.	Even though Thailand was never colonised, the Thai monarchs embarked on modernisation programme and in the process developed national awareness as well. Nationalism manifested in the following ways: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Economic nationalism</u>: Started by King Vajiravudh, who adopted an anti-immigrant stance against the Chinese who were increasingly

	<p>resented by the Thais due to economic competition.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Anti-state nationalism</u>: A civilian and military coalition of Western-educated nationalists launched a bloodless coup in 1932, hence replacing absolute monarchy with constitutional monarchy.
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4. [Background knowledge] Japanese Occupation in SEA (1941-45)

4.1 General Impact of Japanese Occupation on development of nationalism in SEA

- The Japanese Occupation had the most significant impact on regional nationalism in accelerating, consolidating and empowering local nationalists who were previously either repressed by the colonial powers or overwhelmed by their power during the interwar period.
- WW2 had varying impacts on different parts of SEA, but generally, Japanese Occupation brought about a power vacuum that the locals, having been empowered by the Japanese would attempt to fill. This also spelt the end of Western imperialism in SEA due to its profound and fundamental impact on SEA.

General Impact of Japanese Occupation on SEA nationalism	Degree of significance
Psychological impact At the <u>start</u> of the Occupation: Use of Japanese propaganda.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start of JO: Shattered myth of white supremacy

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By the <u>end</u> of the Occupation: Wartime atrocities/shared suffering.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • End of JO: Disillusionment with Japanese propaganda + unifying experience of suffering under Japanese rule → greater determination for independence.
Provided support for key nationalist leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acceleration of nationalist desires through the administrative experience of political power: esp for radical nationalist leaders, for the 1st time they became truly national figures.
Promoted mass organisations (political, religious, youth)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Popularisation of nationalist ideas among the people: the emergence of mass politics.
Sponsored local armies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empowerment: shattered colonial monopoly on physical power as now the SEA nationalists had a realistic means of resisting colonial power.
Sponsored 'independence'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gave masses a taste of symbolic independence. • Gave nationalist leaders legitimacy on their negotiation with returning colonial powers
Anti-Japanese movements became identified with nationalist movements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Radicalisation, empowerment and consolidation of these groups thanks to the Occupation (albeit with Allied support): Many received military arms and training. • Communist groups were able to build broad-based movements (except MPAJA) based on anti-Japanese sentiments. Communist leaders like Ho Chi Minh became national figures as well.

- Hence, the four direct effects of the Japanese Occupation were:
 - The **psychological impact** (pervasive throughout SEA) ensured that the colonial status quo could never be re-imposed.
 - **Key nationalist leaders** were given critical boost to their legitimacy and capability.
 - The emergence of **local armies** shattered the previous colonial monopoly of physical power. SEA nationalists now had the capacity to put up credible resistance against returning colonial powers.
 - However, **alternative power centres** that would be potential future competitors to the key nationalist leaders also arose, in particular, the anti-Japanese Communist groups.

4.2 By Case Study: Impact of the Japanese Occupation on Nationalism

- Nationalist movements changed from being elite-based to broad-based
 - The strength of the colonial governments even after WW2 forced the nationalist movements of Indonesia, Burma & Vietnam to widen their political appeal and seek the loyalties of ethnic minorities & peripheral regions, instead of just focusing on the majority groups.
 - This strengthened the move away from ethnic-dominated nationalism towards an all-embracing vision of the nation that would include all minorities, religious & ideological tendencies.
- Although the Japanese Occupation did not prevent colonial restoration of power after the war, its impact would lead to different paths towards independence during the decolonisation period.

Extent of impact of the Japanese Occupation on SEA nationalism	Case Study
Empowerment, radicalisation and popularisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Indonesia• Burma• Vietnam (esp. among the anti-Japanese movements)

Maintenance of status quo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cambodia • Laos • Malaya
Regression and retardation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Philippines (independence was delayed by the Japanese occupation)
Exceptional case study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thailand (not invaded by Japanese)

4.2.1 Dutch East Indies [Indonesia]

- **Flames of nationalism were fanned** when the Japanese permitted the **use of national symbols** such as the national flag and anthem, and the use of Bahasa Indonesia in the Japanese administration.
- **Mass organisations** such as **PUTERA** (Pusat Tenaga Rakyat) **were formed** and religious associations were expanded under the **Japanese as they hoped to reduce Western influence in Indonesia.**
- **Local leaders** like **Sukarno** and **Hatta** **gained opportunities** to project their political legitimacy and capability e.g. **Sukarno** was given opportunities to **make public speeches to the Indonesia** to rally support for the Japanese. However, he skillfully used these opportunities to **spread the anti-colonial message.**
- Also saw the **formation of an army**, with Japanese help. This would later form the nucleus of the Indonesian Republican army which would be used to fight the Dutch for independence.

4.2.2 Burma

- Japanese were initially **seen by many Burmese as liberators** who were freeing Burma from British rule. The **Thakins**, who were **leaders of the Burmese Independence Army (BIA)** and included an influential group of military men that would come to be known as the 'Thirty Comrades', were seen as national heroes.
- In the **longer run**, Japanese policy **gave the Burmese**, and especially the **Thakins**, **the administrative experience and access to govern the masses.**

4.2.3 Vietnam

- Japanese and Vichy France were in alliance with each other during World War II → Vietnam did not benefit from Japanese concessions as much as other Southeast Asian countries.
- Despite this, the Vietminh [a broad coalition of nationalists groups led by communist inspired leader, Ho Chi Minh] maintained strong support among the people due to widespread anti-French and anti-Japanese sentiments.
- The Vietminh also received military aid from the Allies.

4.2.4 Malaya

- The divide-and-rule policy that the Japanese practised towards the ethnic groups meant that ethnic distinctions plausibly compounded the pre-existing divisions that existed under the British.
- The Malays received preferential treatment as the Japanese required their collaboration to administer the country. The harsh treatment that the Chinese received from the Japanese fueled communist-led resistance.
- Formation of the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army [MPAJA]: mainly Chinese supporters with communist ideology. From 1945, it would pose as a competing center of power to the British and moderate local nationalists.

4.2.5 The Philippines

- On December 1942, the Japanese established a united front in the Philippines, the Association for the Service of the New Philippines (or Kalibapi) to unify Filipinos behind the Japanese war effort.
- The Hukbalahap ('Huk' for short) was formed as the People's Anti-Japanese Army and was a guerilla movement that targeted the Philippine landlords as much as it sought to undermine the influence of the Japanese.

4.2.6 Thailand

- Political participation was considerably more limited in Thailand compared to other Southeast Asian countries.
- During World War II, General Phibun Songkhram was opportunistic and his government was a voluntary ally to the Japanese because from the Thai point of view, cooperating with the strongest power meant the surest path towards maintaining their independence.