

Lecture 1 - History of International Politics (Oriental) [E] -

Lecture Notes

Course Leader: Dr. Senan Fox

Telephone number: 264 -5764

Email Address: senanfox@staff.kanazawa-u.ac.jp

Room: Room 309 (General Education Hall - GEH)

NOTE: The following lecture notes are largely based on the class textbook – Warren Cohen (2000), 'East Asia at the Center – Four Thousand Years of Engagement with the World', New York: Columbia University Press.

Lecture Title : Western States Reinforce their Presence (from the 1800s onwards)

At the start of the 1800s, Europeans had been present on the coasts and the coastal waters of East Asia for about 300 years. We discussed the reasons for earlier European exploration and trade in the region in the historical background notes sent to you by email by Dr. Senan Fox last week. A key point from those notes is that states such as Portugal, Spain, Holland, and England traded mainly with the powerful states of East Asia via **designated** ports such as Macao and Nagasaki only, and sent missionaries to all the lands they visited (in the case of Portugal and Spain). With weaker and **politically fragmented** areas such as modern day Indonesia and the modern day Philippines, first Portugal, and then Holland, and Spain were able to establish larger **footholds** and to begin to gradually dominate the political system and economy of these areas. However, up until the early 1800s, European states did not have the power to seriously challenge Japan or China or to **overcome** the resistance of other organized societies on mainland South-East Asia such as Vietnam, Siam (modern day Thailand) and Burma.

After the early 1800s however, **technological advances** in Europe and North America (also referred to as '**the West**') now permitted 'Western' states to have a much more

superior technological advantage over the nations of East Asia, even the most powerful ones such as Japan and China. Examples included the development of **iron-clad** steam ships which were stronger, faster, and tougher than other ships in all weather conditions, and could travel across **virtually** any sea or ocean area despite the currents or the wind conditions. Other later examples of Western technological **superiority** would include - modern **rifles** and machine guns, **cannons**, railways, **telegraphs**, media communications (journalism), photography, and medical techniques.

The technological capabilities of Western states changed dramatically during the 1800s (the nineteenth century). Countries such as Great Britain (England, Scotland, and Wales united after the 'Act of Union' of 1707) and Holland also used European skills and methods in army training **honed** after decades of warfare in Europe to train highly disciplined armies from local soldiers (i.e. non-European soldiers) in places like Indonesia and India. These military forces played a **crucial** role in giving the Europeans a superior position over the **less well-organized** and **technologically inferior** armies in places such as China and Vietnam. As Cohen states '*Advanced military technology and dependable local forces enabled a handful of Europeans to control a vast amount of Asian territory – and to threaten the region's two greatest powers, China and Japan*' (Cohen, 2000:245).

The Rise of British Power in India and East Asia

British interests in India gradually developed out of the rising influence of the British East India Company (BEIC) (**founded** in 1600), one of the largest European-controlled trading 'companies' in the world and the main tool of British power in Asia. This 'company' was very powerful and **political influential** due to its size and huge profits. British political and military involvement in India (and **consequently** East Asia) evolved from defending British trading interests in the region. This often occurred whenever the BEIC requested money, army personnel, or other forms of assistance to protect the company's profits and operations.

Anglo-French naval and economic competition for control of India in the 1700s and the **near-loss** of control of trading interests by the BEIC to France forced the British government to look more carefully at its military and **strategic position** in the region. The threat posed by France in the 1700s was a top security concern for Great Britain (Anglo-French relations **fluctuated** between rivalry and co-operation in the 1800s). To

address its naval and trade **vulnerabilities** in India, and in the **sea-lanes** between India and China, the British occupied and took control a number of important strategic locations. At this stage, tea was the most valuable export out of China. Imports of British and European products into China were relatively low so a major **balance of trade deficit** between Chinese exports (out of China) and Western-controlled imports (into China) existed. In 1781, the British attacked and took over Dutch-controlled areas in Sumatra (in modern day Indonesia) Holland was an ally of the US during the American War of Independence (1775-1783). The British withdrew in 1783 but captured Sumatra again in 1795. In 1811, they added Java (in modern day Indonesia) to their list of 'British' territories. After the Napoleonic Wars in Europe (1803-1815) and France's defeat, the UK could now focus again on Asia. The British gave Sumatra and Java back to Holland after 1815 (to prevent the French from ever taking them) but later received control over Melaka following negotiations in 1824. Great Britain was also careful about **over-expanding** or taking more territory than it could **effectively** control. By 1824, the British possessed key strategic locations at Penang, Singapore, and Melaka, which allowed them to defend vital sea-lanes between China and India.

The British Appeal to China to Increase Mutually Beneficial Trade Relations

In 1793, the British had unsuccessfully **appealed via** a letter from the UK's King George III to the Chinese Emperor for Qing China (1644 -1912) to increase its trading links with Great Britain and to establish formal and regular diplomatic relations between the two countries. In 1816, the British tried again but failed again. The British, as representatives of the British King, and of the most powerful **industrial** country in the world (especially after 1815), viewed themselves as equal to the Chinese and their Emperor. The Qing Chinese however did not accept this view and wanted the foreigners to show their **inferior** position to the Emperor by '**kow-tow**ing' in front of him.

It is important to remember at this stage in history (after 1815) that Great Britain was the world's number one military, political, and economic power. The **Industrial Revolution** had transformed Great Britain into the most advanced technological country in the world, and victory in the **Napoleonic Wars** against France (the UK's number one rival) meant that the British were in a very strong position all over the world in the decades after 1815. In next week's class (Week 4), we will discuss in more detail the UK's relationship with China after the 1830s (the First and Second Opium Wars, the 'Unequal Treaties' and so forth). For this week, it is important to note how the balance

of power had changed dramatically between Great Britain and China by the 1830s when the **First Opium War** took place (1839 – 1842).

There were a number of key reasons why Qing China could no longer successfully defend itself against British pressure and demands after the 1820s. These reasons include:

1. The Qing Chinese were badly organized in terms of military defence.
2. The Qing Chinese had neglected their coastal and maritime defence capabilities.
3. China's military and technological capabilities were not up to date or modern.
4. Qing China was further weakened by serious domestic problems (**rebellions**, **corruption**, political **inefficiency**, and **famine**).
5. By the early 1800s, the UK possessed the world's most powerful navy.
6. By the early 1800s, after the Napoleonic Wars (1792 – 1815), the British had further improved their military and strategic skills and tactics.
7. By the early 1800s and as a result of the **Industrial Revolution** (from the mid 1700s to the mid 1800s), industrial European nations such as Great Britain developed a strong technological advantage and superiority over non-industrial nations in East Asia such as China. Note for example the steam-powered iron-clad warships, and more modern cannons and guns.

The United States Gradually Rises as a Pacific power

American interests in East Asia slowly developed out of business interests and **entrepreneurial** adventures in the region that increased after the late 1700s when former British **colonies** became the independent United States after the War of Independence (1775 to 1783) with Great Britain. In the first three or four decades after independence, the US government's ties to the area were **minimal**. This began to gradually change after the 1830s. In 1832 for example the Americans succeeded in reaching a trade agreement with Siam (modern Thailand). However they failed to reach a similar agreement with Vietnam. US Christian missionaries also began to arrive in places such as Guangzhou even though missionary work was an illegal activity in China at that time and **carried with it severe punishment** including death if a missionary was caught trying to convert local Chinese. The American Christian movement in China was a key reason for the increase in American interest and influence in the country, particularly in the areas of education and medicine.

From the start of the **treaty-system** between Western states and China in the early 1840s until the end of the American civil war in 1865, the US government generally allowed the British to lead the way in terms of foreign interests and rights in China. In the West's relationship with Japan in the 1800s however the Americans were at the front. As the United States grew in size in the 1800s so too did the number of merchant ships and whaling ships that were involved in trans-Pacific maritime voyages between North America and Asia. US involvement in, and the first stage in eventual American control of Hawaii in the mid-Pacific also began in the early 1800s via Christian missionaries and American and European business interests on the islands.

Initial contacts with Japan for example involved reaching agreement on how to deal with **shipwrecked** American sailors. As with China, Protestant Christian missionaries were also interested in developing links with the Japanese. By the mid-1840s however the US was expanding in all directions at home and at sea including in the Pacific (note also the impact of the concept of '**Manifest Destiny**' on American thinking). It also began to show signs of greater **assertiveness** in its foreign policy. In 1846 for example a US warship fired **shells** upon the city of Tourane (present-day Danang) in Vietnam in order to pressure the local authorities to release a Christian missionary who was being held prisoner there.

In the same year (1846), the Americans sent their first official naval **expedition** to Japan. This soft diplomatic effort however was a **humiliating failure** for the US officials who tried to open Japan to foreign trade and diplomatic relations. The Japanese were fully aware of what was happening in China and were very careful not to allow the Western states to repeat the process in Japan. In 1849, the US tried again but this time they intended to show a strong and **belligerent** position towards the Japanese. Their mission was to **retrieve** shipwrecked American sailors. The mission was a success, and proved to America that Japan responded more **favourably** to displays of strength rather than gentle and polite diplomacy. By 1852, the US felt confident enough to press the Japanese more. The Americans now hoped that to secure **way-stations** and coaling facilities (for steam ships). As Cohen notes, '*Commodore Matthew Perry accepted the assignment to open Japan, by diplomatic effort if possible, with cannon if necessary.*' (Cohen, 2000:263). In Week 5 we will discuss how and why Japan opened up to foreign trade and diplomatic relations after nearly more than two hundred and fifty years of **virtual isolation** from the outside world.

France becomes a Major Power in Mainland South-east Asia

Despite the fact that France had been defeated in the Napoleonic Wars (1803 – 1815), it had a long history over many centuries as one of Europe's most powerful countries. As such, in the years and decades after 1815, France naturally continued to think like a great power and to desire all the characteristics of a great power. In East Asia after 1815, French activities sometimes involved co-operation with states such as Great Britain (for example in China) and it sometimes involved competition with other states such as Great Britain (for example in South-east Asia).

In the 1820s, the French unsuccessfully tried to open up trade links with Vietnam. Not only did the Vietnamese refuse to sign a trade treaty with France but also **went as far as cutting formal relations** with France in 1826. In 1820, a new person had become Emperor of Vietnam. **Fiercely** anti-Christian, the new emperor **implemented** a policy of **persecution** against foreign Christian missionaries and their new Vietnamese converts. This policy only served to increase European and French **ill feeling** toward the Vietnamese. When the First Opium War (1839-1841) broke out in China, the Vietnamese Emperor began to appreciate the extent of rising Western power in East Asia and began to think again about his policies towards Christian. However he died in 1841 and the new emperor (his **successor**) persisted in the policy of **ill-treatment** towards Christians as well as the **harassment** of foreign traders in Vietnam. At times, the French responded with a show of French naval strength off the Vietnamese coast. In 1847, Vietnamese forces attacked two French ships.

By the 1850s, ill feeling between the French and the Vietnamese was at a high level, usually **due to** how Christians in Vietnam were being treated. A French missionary was **tortured** and **executed** by the Vietnamese in 1856. In the following year (1857), the Emperor ordered the execution of the top Spanish missionary in the country. The Philippines at this time was a Spanish colony. For powerful states like France and Spain, this attack on Christianity (as they saw it) was too much to accept or to forgive, particularly following years of **friction** with Vietnam. At first, the French demanded that Vietnam **guarantee** religious freedom, an opening of trade, and a diplomatic presence in the **imperial** Vietnamese capital, Hue. The Vietnamese however refused and did not seem concerned by the threat of French and Spanish force being used against them. In mid-1858, a joint French-Spanish army arrived in Tourane (Danang)

and then moved on to Saigon. By late 1861, the French occupied and controlled a large section of southern Vietnam. The military successes of the French forced the Vietnamese to make major concessions to them. For example, in addition to the loss of a number of southern Vietnamese provinces, they had to pay France a large sum of money as **compensation**, guarantee religious freedom for Christians, and open a number of Vietnamese ports to French trade. In 1864, Cambodia **reluctantly** became a French **protectorate**. In 1866 they added three more southern Vietnamese provinces to their possessions and began seeking ways to expand toward northern Vietnam. In the same year (1866), France attacked Korea in response to the execution of Catholic priests there but they were **held off** and thus did not succeed in opening trade or diplomatic relations with the Koreans.

Russia Expands its Interests Eastward

The Russian presence in East Asia was **confined** to lands **straddling** and directly north and west of the Qing Empire. Trade was mostly overland but was very **profitable** for Russia. In the 1700s, traders, explorers, and government officials helped to expand the Russian area of interest across **the Bering Straits** and as far as Alaska in North America. By the late 1700s, they had established the Russian-American Company (similar in **purpose** to the British East India Company) and were eager to **safeguard** and expand their business interests in the Pacific. Attempts at building relations with Japan, and securing maritime trading rights with the Chinese in places like Guangzhou however were unsuccessful due to Japan's **closed door policy** and **treaty restrictions** with Peking that **permitted** only overland trade with Russia.

The First Opium War (1839-41) however **brought about** a change in **Sino-Russian** relations. The war showed Russia that China was not as strong as they thought. However the war's **consequences** also now meant that states such as the UK, France, and the USA, had a huge advantage over Russia in terms of profits by trade via maritime routes. By the 1850s, the Russians had become more determined to have access to the profitable **treaty ports** used by the other Western states. They were however **distracted** by the Crimean War (1853-56) and by Russia's defeat by France and Great Britain in that war. In the late 1850s, Russia **refocused** its efforts to secure greater access to Chinese trade. At first, they tried to represent themselves as friendly to China and also different from the British and the French. Russia therefore adopted a diplomatic approach aimed at gaining **favourable** border agreements, new trade

benefits, and rights of residence in the treaty ports. However when this strategy failed, they joined up with the UK, France, and the USA in demanding revised treaty rules in the '**Treaty of Tianjin**' (also **Tientsin**) in 1858. The Qing Chinese believed that if they agreed to favourable border agreements with Russia then they might be able to divide the foreign powers. In May 1858, they signed the Sino-Russian '**Treaty of Aigun**' which dealt with their border problems. However the Chinese strategy failed to split up the foreign powers and soon afterwards the Russians returned to the **negotiating table** to demand a '**most-favored-nation**' right to equal access to the treaty ports. A few months afterwards, the Russians also secured a treaty with the newly opened Japan.

The Dutch Presence in East Asia in the 1800s

Following the **disruptive** Napoleonic Wars (1792 – 1815), the Dutch were no longer the major global power that they had once been in the 1600s. The main reason why Holland was able to regain control of its territories in modern day Indonesia after the 1803 to 1815 period was that Great Britain did not want their former long-time rivals, the French, to ever control the area or its valuable trade. However the Dutch faced some serious challenges when they returned to governing the area. One was that the Dutch **administrative** personnel in the area were short of money, had no naval forces, and only possessed a small army over a large area with which to protect their political and business interests. In 1825, a rebellion **broke out** following growing **discontent** over Dutch land policies, taxes, and hatred of the Chinese Indonesians who were employed by the Dutch to collect taxes. Large numbers of Chinese and Europeans were murdered by angry locals on the island of Java. Five years passed before the rebels were defeated. To prevent a rebellion happening again, Holland took over more islands around Java, and introduced an economic 'culture system' to help pay for Dutch control and administration over the areas. The short-lived post-Napoleonic Wars emphasis on the welfare of the natives ended and was replaced by a system where the local people were forced to grow export crops and then these were **monopolized** by Holland to trade elsewhere. Foreign 'non-Dutch' imports were not allowed in the area. Only imports from the Netherlands were accepted. In addition, around the same time, the Holland-Belgium alliance (i.e. the Dutch-dominated 'Kingdom of the Netherlands') created after the Napoleonic Wars split up in 1830 after a revolt by the **Belgians**. The revolt and loss of money created by the split put greater pressure on the Dutch to find more money from trade. They therefore decided to exploit and tax the people of Java even more. A consequence of these actions was the forced planting of **inedible** export

crops (spice, sugar, coffee, tea, tobacco and so forth) instead of rice, a food crop. This resulted in regular **famines** in the area and the loss of many **innocent** lives. Over the next few decades, the Dutch expanded their control over the whole of Indonesia in order to keep other foreigners and **competitors** out.

Key Points

- By the mid-1800s, the **nominally China-dominated** international system in East Asia had been destroyed and replaced by a **Western-dominated** international system.
- Superior Western technological capabilities, and military skills and experience, had allowed a **relatively** small number of Westerners to defeat and control hundreds of millions of East Asians.
- The use of native Asian soldiers (in particular from India) had been **decisive** to helping Western states to win wars and defend interests far away from Europe and North America.
- By 1870, virtually all of East Asia had been forced open to trade ‘unequally’ with the West, and to develop diplomatic links.
- Most of South-east Asia, except Siam, was **colonised** by Western states.
- Korea however had successfully **resisted** outside pressures, Qing China despite having weakened control of its sovereignty still remained largely **intact** in terms of territory, and Japan adopted a realistic **delaying** tactic with the West.
- Western power in East Asia since the early 1800s had become more **extensive** and **imperial** but it was not **absolute** or completely dominant.