Opening to the World:
Japan, Korea and Thailand

Min Shu
Waseda University
Outline of the Lecture

• East Asia in the second half of the 19th century
• Opening to the world: rationale, challenges and obstacles
• Japan’s path towards a modern state
• Thailand’s struggle to maintain independence
• Korea’s response to the changing order in East Asia
• Opening to the world: past and present
East Asia in the second half of the 19th century

• Western powers’ aggression in East Asia
  • Britain fought the second Anglo-Burmese war in 1852
  • Perry’s black ships arrived at Japan in 1853
  • The second opium war with Qing China (1856 -1860)
  • France led the Cochinchina Campaign against Vietnam in 1858

• East Asian countries in treat
  • Thailand concluded the Bowring Treaty with Britain in 1855
  • Qing signed the Tianjing Treaties (1858), the Beijing Convention (1860)
  • Japan agreed to Treaty of Amity and Commerce with the US in 1858
Opening to the world: rationale

• Forced opening to the international trade
  • Meeting the demand for Asian products and markets
  • The sovereign right to regulate trade lost

• Adopting the Western approaches to diplomacy and law
  • Practical needs to deal with the Western powers
  • Imposed extraterritoriality necessitated a Westernized legal system

• Active learning of Western economy, politics and public governance
  • The West as a model and a source of inspiration
  • Learning from the West for self-strengthening
  • Using the Western model to fight domestic competitor(s)
Opening to the world: challenges and obstacles

• From a traditional to a modern state
  • Re-organizing domestic political power and economic policy
  • Re-positioning in the emerging international system of East Asia

• Domestic opposition to opening-up
  • Losers in the opening-up process
  • Anti-Western sentiment

• The influences of/on neighboring countries
  • Pro-reform vs. anti-reform neighbor(s)
  • Suzerainty vs. vassaldom
Japan’s path towards a modern state

- Perry’s Black Ships arrived (1853)
- The Harris Treaty (1958)
- From Tokugawa Bakufu to imperial restoration (1868)
- Reforms during the Meiji Restoration (1868~1912)
- Renegotiating the unequal treaties (1890s)
- The Meiji Constitution (1889/1890)
- First Sino-Japanese war (1895) and the Russo-Japanese war (1904-05)
- Japan colonialized the Korean peninsular (1910)
The Meiji Restoration

• An era of major political, economic, and social changes that led to the modernization and Westernization of Japan

• Key Meiji reforms
  • The centralization of state power, with the feudal domains officially abolished and replaced by a prefecture system
  • All feudal class privileges were abolished; a national army based on universal conscription law was formed
  • Unifying the monetary and tax systems, with the land-owners being the basic sources of government taxation
  • Promoting universal education to gradually cover the whole population

• Main objectives: Enrich the state, strengthen the military (富国強兵)
Thailand’s struggle to maintain independence

• King Mongkut (Rama IV) enthroned in 1851
  • Bowring Treaty with Britain in 1855, allowing tariff controls, the most-favored-nation principle, and judicial extraterritoriality
  • Similar treaties with other Western powers, including the US, France, Belgium, Italy, Norway and Sweden
  • Thailand reluctantly gave up suzerainty over Cambodia in 1867

• Changing court customs to allow easy contacts with foreigners
• Appointing foreign advisers
• Constructing roads and canals, introducing printing press and shipbuilding, laying foundation for education, healthcare, and public welfare
Thailand’s struggle to maintain independence

• King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) enthroned in 1868
  • A series of modernization reforms were introduced after 1873
    • abolition of slavery, the improvement of judicial and financial institutions, and the institution of appointed legislative councils
  • Later reforms included the creation of 12 offices of ministries (dealing with provincial administration, defense, foreign affairs, justice, education, and public works); ending the autonomy of outlying provinces; developing the Thai legal system and instituting the rule of law; and introducing compulsory primary education and universal military conscription

• Under French pressures, Thailand gave up suzerainty over the Laos in 1893
• To renegotiate the unequal treaties, esp. judicial extraterritoriality, several some bordering territories were ceded to France and Britain in the 1900s
Korea’s response to the changing order in East Asia

• Unlike Japan and Thailand, Chosŏn Korea did not face the immediate pressures from the Western powers in the mid-19th century
  • Small-scale expeditions by France (1866) and the US (1871) ended in failure
• China and Japan signed the Treaty of Amity (1871), equalizing the relationship between the two countries – leaving Chosŏn Korea in a diplomatic dilemma
• Japan’s effort to open Korea
  • The Ganghwa Island incident ended with Treaty of Ganghwa (1876): three ports opened for trade, plus extraterritoriality to Japanese citizens in Korea
Korea’s response to the changing order in East Asia

• China’s effort to bring Korea into the treaty system
  • Li Hongzhang’s ‘treaty strategy’ to balance Japan and Russia’s threat to Korea
  • Korean eventually signed treaties with the US, Britain and Germany in 1882

• However, the solider riots in 1882 led to China’s military intervention and Japan’s military presence in Korea – a precursor to the first Sino-Japanese war in 1895

• The modernization Gwangmu Reform adopted only after the proclamation of the Korean Empire in 1897
Opening to the world: past and present

• Opening to the world in the past
  • A strategy to deal with the challenges of western colonialism in the late 19th century
  • From the traditional to the modern: a project of state building
  • From the hierarchical superiority/subordination to self-strengthening of the ethnic core: a process of nation formation

• Opening to the world today
  • Embracing or rejecting globalization
  • Rewriting the rules of international trade and development
  • Nation-state being redefined