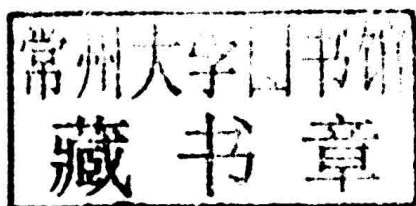


BRITAIN'S RETREAT FROM EMPIRE IN EAST ASIA, 1905–1980

Edited by Antony Best

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Britain's Retreat from Empire in East Asia, 1905–80

The decline of British power in Asia, from a high point in 1905, when Britain's ally Japan vanquished the Russian Empire, apparently reducing the perceived threat that Russia posed to British interests in India and China, to the end of the twentieth century, when its influence had dwindled to virtually nothing, is one of the most important themes in understanding the modern history of East and South-East Asia. This book considers a range of issues that illustrate the significance and influence of the British Empire in Asia and the nature of Britain's imperial decline. Subjects covered include the challenges posed by Germany and Japan during the First World War, British efforts at international co-operation in the interwar period, the British relationship with Korea and Japan in the wake of the Second World War and the complicated path of decolonization in South-East Asia and Hong Kong.

Antony Best is an Associate Professor in International History at the London School of Economics, UK.

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Britains's Retreat from Empire in East Asia, 1905–80

Edited by Antony Best

This book is dedicated to the memory of our friend, colleague and mentor Peter Lowe

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Second, I would like to thank the staff at Routledge for their usual efficient support for this volume, and especially the work of the commissioning editor, Peter Sowden, who does so much to contribute to the study of East Asian history and politics.

The major figure, though, who all of the contributors would like to acknowledge is Peter Lowe. For those who have written a chapter for this volume, Peter represented many things. He was a colleague, a supervisor, a teacher and an examiner, but for all of us he was someone whose keen intelligence we could admire and whose helpfulness, friendliness and enthusiasm we will never forget. For myself, I first met Peter in late 1986 when I had just moved on from an undergraduate degree at Leeds to start a doctorate at the LSE under Professor Ian Nish. In my first conversation with Peter he told me, much to his amusement, that he had been the external examiner for my Leeds degree and that he had enjoyed reading my dissertation on British relations with Japan in 1941 (a subject that Peter knew rather a lot about!) From that point on, I got to know Peter well both as a mentor and a friend. In 1992 he acted as my external examiner once again, this time for my thesis. I well remember the broad smile he had on his face when I walked into the 'lion's den', because it struck me as an immediate assurance that I had, thank goodness, passed. Peter typically gave me a good grilling that day and pushed me to make more of the recent intelligence releases that were by then reaching

the Public Record Office at Kew. This was most useful advice and my subsequent publications owe much to his guidance and example. Since Peter passed away in January 2012 I have missed bouncing ideas off him, telling him of recent archival discoveries and most of all regret that I can no longer share his companionship. I know that I am not alone in this, because I was much struck by the speed with which those who were his colleagues, students and admirers offered chapters for this volume. Peter's family in Wales, and especially his niece, Alison McDuffy, were very keen to see a volume come out in his memory, and I hope that they see this book as a suitable testament to the esteem in which he was held and the warmth with which he is remembered.

Note

This book follows the Japanese style of putting the family name first (except in the acknowledgements and when referring to the Japanese authors of work in English); Chinese names are given in Pinyin, except in cases where other contemporary usages continue to be familiar, such as Kwantung and Manchukuo. The following abbreviations appear in the text and endnotes:

Abbreviations

AMSH	Association for Moral and Social Hygiene
BCOF	British Commonwealth Occupation Force
BDEE	British Documents on the End of Empire
BDOFA	British Documents on Foreign Affairs
BIOT	British Indian Ocean Territories
BL	British Library
CER	Chinese Eastern Railway
CET	common external tariff
CID	Committee of Imperial Defence
CUL	Cambridge University Library
DBFP	Documents on British Foreign Policy
DDEL	Dwight David Eisenhower Library
DPRK	Democratic People's Republic of Korea
DRC	Defence Requirements Sub-Committee
EEC	European Economic Community
FED	Federation of Hong Kong Industries
FRUS	Foreign Relations of the United States
GATT	General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs
GCCS	Government Code and Cypher School
GFM	German Foreign Microfilms
GHQ	General Headquarters
HC	House of Commons
HKA	Hong Kong Association
HKGCC	Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce
IJA	Imperial Japanese Army
IOLR	India Office Library and Records
LNA	League of Nations Archive
LNd	League of Nations documents
MG	<i>Manchester Guardian</i>
NAA	National Archive of Australia
NARA	National Archives and Records Administration
NCNA	New China News Agency
NLA	National Library of Australia

NMR	North Manchurian Railway
NNRC	Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission
NYT	<i>New York Times</i>
OSA	Office of Systems Analysis
PID	Political Intelligence Department
POW	Prisoner of war
PRC	People's Republic of China
PUL	Princeton University Library
R&R	rest and recreation
ROK	Republic of Korea
SCAP	Supreme Commander Allied Powers
SACSEA	Supreme Allied Commander South-East Asia
SEAC	South-East Asia Command
SIS	Secret Intelligence Service
SOAS	School of African and Oriental Studies
SORO	United Russian Public Organization
TNA	The National Archives, Kew
TSR	Trans-Siberian Railway
TWC	League of Nations Advisory Committee on Traffic in Women and Children
UN	United Nations
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
VER	voluntary export restraint

Contents

<i>List of tables</i>	ix
<i>List of contributors</i>	x
<i>Acknowledgement</i>	xii
<i>Note</i>	xiv
<i>Abbreviations</i>	xv

Introduction: Peter Lowe and the history of the British presence in East Asia and South-East Asia	1
--	---

ANTONY BEST

1 Early retirement: Britain's retreat from Asia, 1905–23	8
--	---

IAN NISH

2 Imperial Germany's strategy in East and South-East Asia: The campaign against British India	21
--	----

T.G. FRASER

3 Japan's Twenty-One Demands and Anglo-Japanese relations	35
---	----

SOCHI NARAOKA

4 Britain, intelligence and the Japanese intervention in Siberia, 1918–22	57
--	----

ANTONY BEST

5 Britain, the League of Nations and Russian women refugees in China in the interwar period	71
--	----

HARUMI GOTO-SHIBATA

6 Defending the 'Singapore strategy': Hankey's Dominions tour, 1934	87
--	----

ANN TROTTER

7	Conquering press: coverage by the <i>New York Times</i> and the <i>Manchester Guardian</i> on the Allied occupation of Japan, 1945–52	100
	ROGER BUCKLEY	
8	In search of regional authority in South-East Asia: The improbable partnership of Lord Killearn and Malcolm MacDonald, 1946–8	117
	A.J. STOCKWELL	
9	Anglo-American relations and the making and breaking of the Korean phase of the 1954 Geneva Conference	135
	ROBERT BARNES	
10	A withdrawal from Empire: Hong Kong–UK relations during the European Economic Community enlargement negotiations, 1960–3	152
	DAVID CLAYTON	
11	From Vietnam to Hong Kong: Britain, China and the everyday Cold War, 1965–7	171
	CHI-KWAN MARK	
12	Towards ‘a new Okinawa’ in the Indian Ocean: Diego Garcia and Anglo-American relations in the 1960s	190
	YOICHI KIBATA	
	<i>Index</i>	204

List of tables

10.1	Destination of exports from Hong Kong, 1936–8 to 1960 (%)	156
10.2	Hong Kong's exports and re-exports as a relative share of UK and German import classes, 1965–7	157
10.3	Average per unit import price of 'drills, jeans and gaberdines' into the UK, and market share of imports by country of origin, 1959–62.	158
10.4	Average per unit import price and import market share in the UK of Hong Kong and Japanese underwear, 1959–62	158

Introduction

Peter Lowe and the history of the British presence in East Asia and South-East Asia

Antony Best

When the British Empire reached its zenith in the early-twentieth century, the most distant of its significant possessions, aside from the settler states in the antipodes, were those in East and South-East Asia. Within the former of these two regions, Britain's formal territorial presence was extremely limited, consisting only of the Crown Colony of Hong Kong, a number of leased concessions in some of the major Chinese cities and a lease over the small naval base at Weihaiwei. It was, however, the first among equals within the quasi-imperial treaty-port regime that the West as a whole had established and it dominated both the Chinese Maritime Customs Service and the most flourishing of China's ports, the idiosyncratically-governed International Settlement in Shanghai. This rather minimalist formal presence provided a number of safe havens from which Britons could indulge, in the primary reason to come so far from home – trade.

The facts that commerce was the only real interest and that the region was so distant from Europe always raised questions about Britain's willingness to defend its stake. One should recall, for example, that it only occupied the Korean port of Geomondo for two years (1885–7), that it agreed in 1894 to end the treaty-port regime in Japan in the face of concern about Japanese unilateral action, and between 1898–1900 failed to prevent Russian encroachment into southern Manchuria. This then was the British Empire's furthest and most fragile shore. It is therefore no surprise that the twentieth century was marked by a series of retreats, in terms of both territory and outlook, from this imperial high tide. At first these shifts were almost intangible and not necessarily irrevocable, but as the challenges to British power grew more varied and serious, with the rise of Chinese nationalism, Bolshevik infiltration and Japanese expansionism, the retreat steadily gathered pace until, after the Second World War, only Hong Kong remained.

In South-East Asia British interests were more substantial. Its territorial possessions consisted of formal colonies such as Burma and the Straits Settlements, the protectorates of North Borneo, Brunei, the Federated and Unfederated Malay States, and another nebulous entity, the kingdom of Sarawak, which was personally ruled by the Brooke family. In addition, it benefited from the free trade regime that it had established in Thailand [Siam]