The Cultural Geography of Southeast Asia
Chapter Objectives

• Recognize the various ethnic and religious influences on Southeast Asia’s population and cultures.
• Understand the historical development of Southeast Asia.
• Describe the diverse languages, arts and lifestyles of Southeast Asia.
Population Patterns

Section 1
Objectives

- Identify the various ethnic roots of Southeast Asia’s peoples.
- Explain why the majority of Southeast Asians live in river valley lowlands or on coastal plains.
- Specify how population movements and settlement patterns have affected the region.
Terms to Know

- Urbanization
- Primate city
A Geographic View

Hotel in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
Geographic Literacy

- In most Southeast Asian countries, women have an average of two or three children each. The birthrate in Laos is more than double this number, at 5.6 children per woman. In 2000, the population of Laos was 5.2 million. If current population growth rates continue, the population will double in 26 years.
Human Characteristics

- Southeast Asia’s 520 million people include descendants of indigenous peoples, Indians, Chinese, Arabs, and European colonists.

- **Indigenous Peoples**  Many Southeast Asians are descended from migrants who came to the region from China and Tibet about 2,500 years ago.

- Khmers and Mons settled on the Southeast Asian mainland.

- The Malays moved into the Malay Peninsula and the islands that today form Indonesia.
Human Characteristics
Human Characteristics

- **Indian and Chinese Influences** Outsiders came to the region to trade for spices.
- Beginning in the A.D. 100s, Indian traders introduced Hinduism and Buddhism.
- The Chinese ruled Vietnam for a thousand years and had a strong cultural influence there.
- The region today is home to many Chinese and Indian ethnic communities.
- **Islamic Influence** In the A.D. 800s, Muslim traders arrived in Southeast Asia, setting up trade routes and introducing Islam to the region.
- Today, Muslims live in most Southeast Asian countries, forming the majority of the population in Brunei, Malaysia, and Indonesia.
Human Characteristics

- **Western Colonization**  European explorers seeking spices and other rich resources arrived in Southeast Asia in the 1400s and 1500s.

- Their voyages eventually brought nearly all of the region, except for Thailand, under European control.
Population Growth

- Many of Southeast Asia’s fertile valleys and coastal areas are densely populated. Highlands areas usually have fewer people than lowlands areas.

- **Population Density** Indonesia’s 212 million people live on more than 13,500 scattered islands; the overall population density is 286 people per square mile (110 people per sq. km).

- Singapore, the region’s smallest country in land area, has the greatest population density—17,320 people per square mile (6,687 people per sq. km).
Population Growth

- **Population Growth Rates** Southeast Asia’s population is growing at a rate faster than the world average.
- Some countries have worked to slow their population growth; Singapore succeeded so well that it is now encouraging people to have more children.
- **Cambodia: Population Decline** Between 1975 and 1979, Cambodia lost 38 percent of its people as a result of harsh rule by the Khmer Rouge communist government.
- Many people died as a result of starvation, torture, and executions.
Movement to the Cities

- Southeast Asia has experienced a major population shift as large numbers of people move from rural villages to urban areas.

- As in many other local regions, public services have not kept up with urban growth.

- Some Southeast Asian countries have primate cities which lead all other cities in attracting people, resources, and commerce.

- Bangkok, Thailand, and Jakarta, Indonesia, are examples of primate cities.
Movement to the Cities

- Thailand’s government has offered people financial incentives to leave overcrowded Bangkok and return to rural areas.
- The Indonesian government has relocated 3 million people to the country’s less densely populated outer islands.
Outward Migrations

- From the 1970s to the 1990s, thousands of people left Southeast Asia to escape economic distress and political oppression.
- Many of those Southeast Asian migrants came to the United States.
- One effect of these outward migrations is that Southeast Asian countries have lost many skilled and educated workers.
History and Government

Section 2
Objectives

- Describe how location influenced the development of empires in Southeast Asia.
- Name cultural influences that have affected the region’s people.
- Chart events that led to the independence of Southeast Asian countries.
Terms to Know

- Maritime
- sphere of influence
- buffer state
A Geographic View

Boat traffic, Mekong River, Vietnam
Geographic Literacy

- Thailand traces its origins to the A.D. 1300s when several small Buddhist states united as the kingdom of Ayutthaya, later called Siam. From the late 1700s to the early 1900s, Siam’s kings took steps to modernize the country and successfully kept away European colonizers. During the 1930s, military officials reduced royal powers, and the country was renamed Thailand, meaning “Land of the Free.” Since then, kings have reigned in Thailand, but real power has been held by either elected or military leaders.
Early Civilizations

- Early people in Southeast Asia were rice farmers.
- Artisans skilled in metalwork were casting bronze in 3000 B.C., nearly 1,000 years before the Chinese developed the skill.
- Early Southeast Asian societies were matriarchal, and people worshiped ancestors and animal and nature spirits.
Kingdoms and Empires

- **Maritime** civilizations gained power by controlling shipping and trade. Land-based empires gained wealth from crops grown in fertile soil.
- **Funan** Influenced by Indian traders during the A.D. 100s, people of Funan adopted Hinduism and Indian forms of government.
- They excelled in farming and metalworking, and traded with surrounding areas.
- **Khmer** In the 1100s and 1200s, the Khmer set up an empire along the Mekong River that eventually covered most of the Indochina Peninsula.
Kingdoms and Empires

- The Khmer were skilled in irrigation and grew four rice crops each year.
- They are also noted for their magnificent architecture, especially the temple of Angkor Wat, which features elements of Indian and local styles.
- **Srivijaya Empire** Based on Sumatra, the Srivijaya Empire from A.D. 600 to 1300 controlled Southeast Asian seas, especially the Strait of Malacca and the Sunda Straits.
- Today, Singapore owes its prosperity to these same trade routes.
- **Vietnam** The Vietnamese people fought off Chinese invaders until 111 B.C., when the Chinese finally conquered them.
Kingdoms and Empires

- **Islam** Beginning in the 800s, Muslim Arab merchants and missionaries converted many coastal Southeast Asians to Islam.
- In the 1400s, Islam spread throughout the Malay Peninsula and nearby islands.
- Malacca, on the Malay Peninsula, became an important center for Islamic culture.
Kingdoms and Empires
By the 1500s, European traders arrived in Southeast Asia to control trade, spread Christianity, and claim territory. By the early 1900s, various European lands and the United States controlled Southeast Asia. The Kingdom of Siam served as an independent buffer state between rival powers.

- **Western Holdings** The Netherlands controlled most of the islands that today make up Indonesia.
- Great Britain ruled Myanmar, Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei.
- France governed territories in Indochina that later became Cambodia, Vietnam, and Laos.
- The United States won control of the Philippines from Spain in 1898.
Western Colonization

- **Effects of Western Rule** Westerners established rail systems, improved harbors, and built paved roads in Southeast Asia.
- They expanded mining and set up large commercial plantations.
- Little of the resulting wealth benefited Southeast Asians.
- Immigrants from China and India came to work in Western-owned mines, businesses, and farms.
Struggle for Freedom

- During World War II, Japan forced Western countries out of Southeast Asia. After Japan’s defeat in 1945, Westerners tried to regain control. By 1965, anti-colonial struggles had brought independence to the region’s lands.

- **Regional Conflicts**
  - After independence, political conflicts and wars engulfed Southeast Asia.
  - In 1954, communist forces defeated the French in Vietnam, which then divided into communist and non-communist areas.
  - In the 1960s and 1970s, the United States intervened in Southeast Asian conflicts to halt the spread of communism in the region.
  - By the mid-1970s, all of Vietnam was under communist rule.
Forms of Government

- Indonesia, the Philippines, and Singapore are democratic republics.
- In 1998, Indonesia moved toward democracy after years of dictatorship.
- The military government in Myanmar has tried to crush the opposition that wants to bring democracy to the country.
- Brunei, Cambodia, Malaysia, and Thailand are constitutional monarchies.
- Laos and Vietnam have communist governments.
Forms of Government
Cultures and Lifestyles

Section 3
Objectives

- Consider what makes Southeast Asia such an ethnically diverse region.
- Describe how outside influences affected the region’s arts.
- Examine how people’s lifestyles reflect the region’s diversity.
Terms to Know

- Wat
- Batik
- longhouse
A Geographic View

Shrimp farm outside Bangkok, Thailand
Geographic Literacy

- The Petronas Towers in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, are twin buildings connected about halfway up by a covered bridge. The bridge is fastened to the towers in such a way that it slides on the towers as they sway. The tower structure is the tallest building in the world at 1,483 feet (453 m).
Cultural Diversity

- Southeast Asia is home to many native ethnic groups. Indonesia, for example, has about 300 ethnic groups with more than 250 distinct languages.

- **Languages**
  - People in the region speak hundreds of languages and dialects, most belonging to three major language families—Malayo-Polynesian, Sino-Tibetan, and Mon-Khmer.
  - Many of the languages spoken in Southeast Asia are the result of migration or colonization.
  - Chinese, French, English, and Spanish are widely spoken.
Cultural Diversity

- **Religions** Nearly all the world’s major religions are represented in the area.
- Buddhism is the major religion of Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam.
- Islam is the major religion of Malaysia and Indonesia.
- Roman Catholicism is the major religion in the Philippines.
- Daoism or Confucianism are also practiced in the region.
The Arts

- Early Chinese and Indian civilizations had major effects on the arts of Southeast Asia. Western art styles began to influence the region’s arts during the colonial period.

- **Architecture**
  - Many Chinese-style pagodas and Indian-style wats are found on the Indochina Peninsula.
  - The Indonesian Buddhist shrine of Borobudur is larger than Europe’s cathedrals and was built around A.D. 800.
  - Roman Catholic churches are common in the Philippines. Islamic mosques are found in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei.
  - Southeast Asia has much striking modern architecture, including some of the world’s tallest buildings.
The Arts
The Arts

- **Crafts** Southeast Asia is famous for lacquerware, which is wood covered with layers of sumac resin and colored with powders.

- **Batik** is a method of printing designs on cloth.

- **Literature** Early literature in the region included folktales and legends passed down orally.

- Later, writers were influenced by Indian, Chinese, and Islamic literature.

- **Modern writers sometimes use Western themes.**

- **Dance and Drama** Traditional dances are based on works of classic literature or on religious ceremonies. Puppet plays are traditionally popular in the region.
Lifestyles

- **Health and Education** Since achieving independence, many Southeast Asian countries have enjoyed an improved quality of life.
- The level of health care and the literacy rate in the region continue to rise, although in some countries there is much room for improvement.
- **Singapore** is a wealthy country; Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam, however, are poor.
- **Housing** Urban Southeast Asians generally live in high-rise apartments or in brick or wooden houses.
- In some rural areas of Indonesia and Malaysia, people live in **longhouses**—dwellings that are elevated on poles and that can accommodate up to 100 people.
Lifestyles
Lifestyles

- **Food, Recreation, and Celebrations**
  - Many Southeast Asians live on food they raise themselves.
  - Rice is the staple food and is often served with fish, chicken, vegetables, and sauces.
  - In their leisure time, Southeast Asian city dwellers have many of the same entertainment options as city dwellers elsewhere in the world.
  - Sports, such as soccer, basketball, and badminton, are popular in the region.
  - Southeast Asians celebrate a variety of religious holidays.
  - For example, Thailand celebrates the Water Festival during the Buddhist New Year.
  - Vietnam celebrates its New Year, called Tet, in January or February.
Lifestyles
Section 1 – Summary

- Southeast Asia has a diversity of ethnic and cultural groups.
- Most Southeast Asians live either in river valley lowlands or on coastal plains.
- Southeast Asian cities are growing rapidly as a result of migration from rural to urban areas.
- Since the 1970s, large numbers of Southeast Asians have migrated to escape political oppression and economic distress.
Section 2 – Summary

- Southeast Asia’s early empires and kingdoms controlled shipping and trade that linked East Asia, South Asia, and Southwest Asia.
- European countries colonized all of Southeast Asia except Thailand (Siam). All of the region’s countries are now independent.
- During the late 1900s, political conflict between communist and noncommunist forces divided much of Southeast Asia.
Section 3 - Summary

- Southeast Asian culture reflects the ways of life of peoples who migrated from other regions as well as those of indigenous peoples.
- Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam greatly influenced Southeast Asian art, architecture, drama, and celebrations.
- In spite of rapid population growth, Southeast Asia’s economic development has led to many improvements in the region’s quality of life.