

Hindu-Buddhist States
AP World History
Kienast

To the south of China lies the region called Southeast Asia. It includes the modern countries of Myanmar (Burma), Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore, Brunei, and the Philippines. In the shadow of powerful China, many small but prosperous kingdoms rose and fell in Southeast Asia and Korea.

In Southeast Asia's river valleys and deltas and on its islands, many kingdoms had centuries of glory and left monuments of lasting beauty. Southeast Asia lies between the Indian and Pacific oceans and stretches from Asia almost to Australia. It consists of two main parts: (1) Indochina, the mainland peninsula that borders China to the north and India to the west, and (2) the islands, the largest of which include Sumatra, Borneo, and Java. All of Southeast Asia lies within the warm, humid tropics. Monsoon winds bring the region heavy seasonal rains. Seas and straits separate the islands of Southeast Asia. On the mainland, five great rivers flow from the north and cut valleys to the sea. Between the valleys rise hills and mountains, making travel and communication difficult. Over time, many different peoples settled the region, so it was home to many cultures.

Throughout Southeast Asia's history, the key to political power often has been control of trade routes and harbors. This is because Southeast Asia lies on the most direct sea route between the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea. Two important waterways connect the two seas: the Strait of Malacca, between the Malay Peninsula and Sumatra, and the Sunda Strait, between Sumatra and Java. Influence of India and China Indian merchant ships, taking advantage of the monsoon winds, began arriving in Southeast Asia by the first century A.D. In the period that followed, Hindu and Buddhist missionaries spread their faiths to the region. In time, kingdoms arose that followed these religions and were modeled on Indian political ideas. Gradually, Indian influence shaped many aspects of the region's culture. This early Indian influence on Southeast Asia is evident today in the region's religions, languages, and art forms.

Chinese ideas and culture spread southward in the region through migration and trade. At different times, the Chinese also exerted political influence over parts of mainland Southeast Asia, either through direct rule or by demanding tribute from local rulers. The Khmer Empire The Khmer (kmair) Empire, in what is now Cambodia, was for centuries the main power on the Southeast Asian mainland. By the 800s, the Khmer had conquered neighboring kingdoms and created an empire. This empire reached the peak of its power around 1200. Improved rice cultivation helped the Khmer become prosperous. The Khmer built elaborate irrigation systems and waterways. These advances made it possible to grow three or four crops of rice a year in an area that had previously produced only one. At their capital, Angkor, Khmer rulers built extensive city-and-temple complexes. One of these, called Angkor Wat, is one of the world's greatest architectural achievements. The complex, which covers nearly a square mile, was built as a symbolic mountain dedicated to the Hindu god Vishnu. The Khmer also used it as an observatory.

Powerful kingdoms also developed on Southeast Asia's islands. For example, a dynasty called Sailendra, also called the Kingdom of Majapahit, ruled an agricultural kingdom on the island of Java. The Sailendra kings left behind another of the world's great architectural monuments, the Buddhist temple at Borobudur. Built around 800, this temple—like Angkor Wat—reflects strong Indian influence. The massive complex has nine terraced levels like a stepped pyramid. The Sailendra Dynasty eventually fell under the domination of the powerful island empire of Srivijaya. At its height from the 7th to the 13th centuries, Srivijaya ruled the Strait of Malacca and other waters around the islands of Sumatra, Borneo, and Java. It grew wealthy by taxing the trade that passed through its waters. The