



Understanding Southeast Asia

Syncretism in Commonalities

Lindsay Falvey

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if you would know me ... *xviii*

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Overview

*Where the scholar sees differences
the sage sees commonalities*

This book argues that a focus on commonalities in history, culture and worldviews facilitates **Understanding Southeast Asia**. Thus this work is unlike histories that define national differences or the works of specialist scholars. It begins with the common origins of its peoples and languages, and regards uniting factors through agricultural, archeological, cultural, geographical, historical, linguistic, religious and technological perspectives. As a globally important region today, Southeast Asia's driving forces remain the same as for millennia – agriculture, stability and trade. Early trading depots of 2,000 years ago evolved with the great trading eras of China and India to portray Southeast Asia as a Golden Land of inspiration and wealth. It adapted cultural elements from trading partners to define its civilization in terms of commercial etiquette, world religions, governance and much more. Thus historically contextualized, the short European colonial interlude serves to highlight both the resilience and openness of the culture. That confidence arises from traditions and beliefs that long predate European influence and persist in the adopted religions as in all aspects of life. Hence narrow Western worldviews easily clash with the region's deep integrative understandings. Far from the superficial values once popularized in political journals, this worldview imbues all aspects of life and the environment. Understanding such regional commonalities helps explain political actions, group decision-making, tolerance, the machinations of ASEAN, and even periodic inertia. The consistency of traits that logically flow from such awareness is the message of this important contribution to Understanding Southeast Asia.

Bahasa Indonesia

Buku ini, **Memahami Asia Tenggara**, memperlihatkan pelbagai persamaan dalam sejarah kawasan, budaya dan pandangan dunia. Oleh karena itu ia berbeda dengan sejarah yang mendefinisikan perbedaan-perbedaan nasional atau karya-karya cendekiawan spesialis. Buku ini diawali dengan penjelasan mengenai asal-usul yang sama dari penduduk kawasan dan bahasa-bahasa, dan mempertimbangkan faktor-faktor pemersatu dari sudut pandang arkeologi, bahasa, sejarah, pertanian, teknologi, geografi, budaya dan agama. Kini sebagai kawasan yang penting di dunia, daya pemacunya tetap sama selama ribuan tahun – pertanian, kestabilan dan perdagangan. Pusat-pusat perdagangan sejak 2000 tahun silam berkembang seiring dengan era perdagangan Cina dan India, dan melukiskan kawasan itu sebagai Kawasan Emas inspirasi dan kekayaan. Ia mengadopsi unsur-unsur budaya dari mitra dagang untuk mendefinisikan peradabannya dari segi etiket perdagangan, agama-agama dunia, pemerintahan, dan lain-lain. Dalam konteks sejarah, selingan pendek dari masa penjajahan Eropa menunjukkan daya tahan dan keterbukaan budaya tersebut. Keyakinan yang timbul dari tradisi dan kepercayaan justru mendahului perkembangan-perkembangan ini dan berkanjang dalam agama-agama yang diadopsi seperti tercermin dalam semua aspek kehidupan. Oleh karena itu pandangan sempit dunia Barat mudah bertentangan dengan pemahaman kawasan yang mendalam dan utuh. Jauh dari nilai-nilai dangkal yang pernah dipopularkan dalam jurnal-jurnal politik, pandangan dunia ini menjiwai segala sesuatu. Memahami kesamaan kawasan membantu untuk menjelaskan tindakan-tindakan politik, keputusan bersama, toleransi, kasak-kusuk ASEAN, bahkan kelembaman periodik. Konsistensi dari ciri-ciri yang mengalir secara logis dari kesadaran demikian adalah pesan sumbangan penting untuk **Memahami Asia Tenggara**.

Bahasa Malaysia

Buku ini, **Memahami Asia Tenggara**, menunjukkan pelbagai persamaan di rantau ini dalam sejarah, budaya dan pandangan dunia. Justeru, buku ini berbeza dengan sejarah yang menyerlahkan kelainan antara negara-negara atau karya cendekiawan pakar. Ia bermula dengan asal-usul bersama penduduk dan bahasa di rantau tersebut, dan mengiktiraf beberapa faktor penyatuan dari sudut —perspektif arkeologi, bahasa, sejarah, pertanian, teknologi, geografi, budaya dan agama. Kini sebagai rantau yang penting diperingkat global, kuasa—pemacu kekal sama sejak beribu tahun - pertanian, kestabilan dan perdagangan. Pusat dagangan sejak 2,000 tahun lalu telah menyusup seiring dengan era perdagangan Cina dan India yang mengiktiraf rantau ini sebagai Wilayah Emas yang memberi inspirasi dan kekayaan. Ia menerima pakai unsur-unsur budaya daripada rakan dagang untuk mentakrifkan tamadunnya dari segi etiket dagangan, agama-agama dunia, tadbir urus dan banyak lagi. Justeru dalam konteks sejarah, selingan sekejap penjajahan Eropah menunjukkan daya tahan dan keterbukaan budaya tersebut. Keyakinan berasaskan dari tradisi dan kepercayaan yang wujud sebelum perkembangan ini dan berterusan dalam agama-agama yang anuti dalam semua aspek kehidupan. Oleh itu pandangan sempit dunia Barat mudah bertembung dengan pemahaman yang syumul dan mendalam di rantau ini. Jauh dari nilai-nilai cetek yang pernah dipopularkan dalam jurnal politik, pandangan dunia ini meletakkan roh dalam segala sesuatu. Memahami persamaan serantau boleh memberi penjelasan kepada tindakan politik, kebersamaan dalam membuat keputusan, toleransi, komplot ASEAN, bahkan kelesuan dari masa ke semasa. Ketekalan sifat-sifat yang secara logik mengalir daripada kesedaran itu adalah intipati sumbangan penting dalam **Memahami Asia Tenggara**.

အရှေ့တောင်အာရှကိုနားလည်ခြင်း
တူညီသည့် အကြောင်းအရာများကို စုစည်း၊ လေ့လာ၊ သုံးသပ်၊ တင်ပြခြင်း

ဤ “အရှေ့တောင်အာရှကို နားလည်ခြင်း” ဆိုသည့်စာအုပ်သည် ဒေသတွင်းရှိ သမိုင်းကြောင်း၊ ယဉ်ကျေးမှု နှင့် ဤဒေသအပေါ် ကမ္ဘာ့အသိုင်းအဝိုင်းတို့၏အမြင် စသည့် အချက်များစွာထဲမှ တူညီသည့်အချက်အလက်များကို ထုတ်နှုတ်တင်ပြထားခြင်းဖြစ်သည်။ သို့ဖြစ်ရာ ဤစာအုပ်သည် အခြားစာအုပ်များတွင် ဖော်ပြလေ့ရှိသည့် နိုင်ငံများအကြား ကွဲပြားခြားနားမှုများ သို့မဟုတ် ဒေသတွင်းပညာရှင်တို့၏ အကြောင်းအရာများကို စုစည်း ရေးသားထားသည့် စာအုပ်များကဲ့သို့ မဟုတ်ပါ။ စာအုပ်၏အစတွင် အရှေ့တောင်အာရှဒေသတွင်းရှိ လူမျိုးများ၏ မူလအရင်း အမြစ်များ၊ ဘာသာစကားများ နှင့် ရှေးဟောင်းယဉ်ကျေးမှုများ၊ ဘာသာစကားလေ့လာမှု၊ သမိုင်းကြောင်း၊ စိုက်ပျိုးရေး၊ နည်းပညာ၊ ပထဝီဝင်အနေအထား၊ အနုပညာ နှင့် ဘာသာရေး ဆိုင်ရာရှုထောင့်များမှတစ်ဆင့် တူညီသည့်အချက်များကို တင်ပြထားပါသည်။ ယနေ့ကာလတွင် ဤဒေသသည် အရေးပါသည့်ဒေသတစ်ခုဖြစ်လာပြီး ဒေသတွင်းမောင်းနှင်အားများသည် ထောင်စုနှစ်ပေါင်းများစွာ စိုက်ပျိုးရေး၊ တည်ငြိမ်ရေးနှင့် ကုန်သွယ်မှုများအပေါ် အလေးထားရဆဲ ဖြစ်သည်ကို တွေ့ရပါသည်။ အစောဆုံး ကုန်သွယ်မှုဆိပ်ကမ်းအနေဖြင့် တရုတ် နှင့်အိန္ဒိယကုန်သွယ်မှုခေတ်တို့နှင့်အပြိုင် လွန်ခဲ့သည့် နှစ်ပေါင်း ၂၀၀၀ ခန့်က ပေါ်ထွက်လာခဲ့ခြင်းက အရှေ့တောင်အာရှဒေသ၏ ကြွယ်ဝချမ်းသာမှုနှင့် ဩဇာလွှမ်းမိုးမှုတို့ကို အထင်အရှားဖော်ပြနေခြင်းပင် ဖြစ်သည်။ ကုန်သွယ်ဖက်နိုင်ငံများမှတစ်ဆင့် စီးပွားရေးဆိုင်ရာ ကျင့်ဝတ်စည်းကမ်းများ၊ ကမ္ဘာတစ်ဝန်းရှိ ဘာသာရေးများ၊ အုပ်ချုပ်မှုစနစ်များနှင့် အခြားအကြောင်းအရာ များစွာတို့ကို လက်ခံကျင့်သုံးခဲ့ပြီး မြို့ပြယဉ်ကျေးမှုများ ထွန်းကား လာခဲ့ပါသည်။ သမိုင်းကြောင်းအရ ဆက်စပ်မှုအခြေအနေများနှင့် ဥရောပနိုင်ငံများ၏ ကိုလိုနီအုပ်ချုပ်ခဲ့မှုများကြောင့် ဒေသတွင်း တိုးတက်မှု နှင့် ယဉ်ကျေးမှုဆိုင်ရာ ပွင့်လင်းမှုများအား မီးမောင်း ထိုးပြလျက်ရှိသည်။ မိမိ ကိုယ်ကို အားကိုးသည့် စိတ်ဓါတ်များသည် ဖွင့်ဖြိုးမှုများ မစတင်ကတည်းက လက်ခံကျင့်သုံး လာခဲ့သည့် ဘာသာရေးဆိုင်ရာ အတွေးအခေါ် ယုံကြည်မှုများမှ ထွက်ပေါ်လာခဲ့ခြင်းဖြစ်ပေသည်။ သို့ဖြစ်ရာ အနောက်တိုင်းနိုင်ငံများ၏ ကျဉ်းမြောင်းသည့်အမြင်များသည် အရှေ့တောင်အာရှဒေသတွင်း နက်ရှိုင်းစွာ ဖြစ်တည်လာခဲ့သည့်

နားလည်မှုများနှင့် ကွဲလွဲနေခြင်းဖြစ်ပေတော့သည်။ နိုင်ငံရေးဂျာနယ်များတွင် တစ်ချိန်က ခေတ်စားခဲ့သည့် အပေါ်ယံအမြင်များနှင့်ကွဲပြားလျက်၊ ဤစာအုပ်သည် အရှေ့တောင် အာရှ ဒေသအကြောင်း အနှစ်သာရပြည့်ဝစွာ ပုံဖော်ရေးသားထားပါသည်။ ဒေသတွင်း တူညီသည့် အချက်များအပေါ် နားလည်ခြင်းက နိုင်ငံရေးဆောင်ရွက်မှုများ၊ အသင်းအဖွဲ့ဖြင့် ဆုံးဖြတ် ချက်ချ ဆောင်ရွက်တတ်မှုများ၊ သည်းခံခြင်းတရားများ၊ အာဆီယံ အသင်း အဖွဲ့ကြီး၏ ရှေ့ရေး အစီအစဉ်များ၊ မပြောင်းလဲသည့် စနစ်များနှင့်ပတ်သက်၍ ကောင်းစွာ ရှင်းပြနိုင်ပါလိမ့်မည်။ ဤသိမြင်နားလည်မှုများမှ မြစ်ဖျားခံစီးဆင်းလာသည့် သရုပ်သကန်တို့သည် ဤ “အရှေ့ တောင်အာရှကိုနားလည်ခြင်း” ဆိုသည့် စာအုပ်၏ အရေးကြီးသည့်အချက် ဖြစ်ပြီး စာဖတ် သူများအား ပေးချင်သည့် မက်ဆေ့ဂျ်ပင် ဖြစ်ပါတော့သည်။



Sagaing marble Buddha image with other icons

Filipino

Ang aklat na ito ay nangangatwiran na ang pokus sa mga pagkapareho ng kasaysayan, kultura at worldviews ay magpapadali ng “Pag-unawa sa Timog Silangang Asya”. Kaya ang akdang ito ay hindi katulad ng mga kasaysayan na tumutukuy sa pagkakaiba nang mga bansa o mga gawa ng espesyalistang iskolar. Ang pangangatwiran dito ay nagsisimula sa mga karaniwang pinanggalingan ng mga tao at mga wika, at tungkol sa nagbubuklod na kadahilanan sa pamamagitan ng pananaw sa agrikultura, arkeolohiko, kultura, heograpiya, kasaysayan, wika, relihiyon at teknolohiya. Bilang isang mahalagang rehiyon sa buong mundo, ang pagmamanehong pwersa ng Timog Silangang Asya ay mananatiling pareho, para sa millennia – para sa agrikultura, katatagan at pangangalakal. Ang sinaunang kalakalang depot ng 2,000 taong nakalilipas, ay nagsimula sa mga dakilang kalakalang panahon ng Tsina at Indya para iguhit and Timog-silangang Asya bilang maging Ginintuang Lupain ng inspirasyon at yaman. Uma-angkop ito ng mga elementong pangkulturang galling sa mga kasosyo sa kalakalan upang tukuyin and sibilisasyon nito sa pamamagitan ng magandang asal na pakikitungong komersyal, relihiyong mundo, pamamahala at marami pang iba. Para ma contextualized tungkul sa kasaysayan, ang maikling patlang ng European kolonyal ay nagsisilbi upang i-highlight ang mga kabanatan at pagkakalantad ng kultura. Ang pagtitiwala ay nang-galing sa mga tradisyon at paniniwala mula pa sa nakarang panahon, bago ang empluwensiya ng Europe, at nanatili pa rin sa pinagtibay na relihiyon pati na sa lahat ng aspeto ng buhay. Kaya ang makitid na Western worldviews ay madaling magsagupaan tungkol sa malalim at buong pag-unawa ng rehiyon. Malayo mula sa mababaw na mga halaga kapag napabantog na sa mga journal na pampulitika, itong worldview ay nag i-imbues sa lahat ng aspeto ng buhay at sa kapaligiran. Ang pag-unawa sa pagkakapareho ng mga reheyon ay tumutulong na ipaliwanag ang aksyong pampulitika, grupong paggawa ng desisyon, pagpapaubaya, ang machinations ng ASEAN, at kahit na panaka-pagkawalang-galaw. Ang pagbabago ng mga katangian na lohikal na dumadaloy mula sa naturang kamalayan ay ang mensahe ng itong mahalagang mga kontribusyon para sa Pag-unawa sa Timog Silangang Asya.

ការយល់ដឹងអំពីការរួមរស់ជាសម្បទ់នៃលក្ខណសាមញ្ញក្នុងតំបន់អាស៊ីអាគ្នេយ៍ សៀវភៅនេះ មានចំណងជើងថា ការយល់ដឹងអំពីតំបន់អាស៊ីអាគ្នេយ៍ ហើយផ្ដើមដោយ អធិប្បាយអំពី លក្ខណសាមញ្ញរួមគ្នា ជាច្រើនប្រការក្នុងតំបន់ ទាក់ទងដល់ប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រ វប្បធម៌និង ទស្សនស្តីពីលោក នេះ។ អាស្រ័យហេតុនេះ សៀវភៅនេះ មិនដូចជាសៀវភៅប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រច្រើនទៀត ដែលអធិប្បាយតែ អំពីសភាពខុសគ្នា រវាងជាតិសាស្ត្រផ្សេងៗ ឬជាស្នាដៃនិពន្ធ របស់អ្នកឯកទេសនោះទេ។ សៀវភៅនេះ ផ្ដើមអធិប្បាយឫសគល់របស់ ជាតិ សាសន៍ទាំងនោះ ព្រមទាំងកាសាកំណើត ហើយសញ្ជឹងគិតដល់ កត្តារូបរមន្ត ដោយសំអាង ទៅលើទិន្នន័យបានមកអំពីកំណាយ កាសាវិទ្យា ប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រ កសិកម្ម បច្ចេកទេស ភូមិសាស្ត្រ វប្បធម៌ និងទិដ្ឋភាពជាច្រើនខាងផ្នែកសាសនា។ សព្វថ្ងៃនេះភូមិភាគ តំបន់ នេះ សំខាន់ណាស់ កម្លាំងរុញច្រាន ទៅមុខរបស់វា មានតាំងពីច្រើនសតវត្សរ៍មកហើយ គឺនៅតែមាន អនុភាពដដែល គឺផ្នែកកសិកម្ម ស្ថេរភាព ព្រមទាំងពាណិជ្ជកម្មផង។ ឃ្នាំងផ្ទុកផលិតពាណិជ្ជកម្ម ជា ច្រើន តាំងពី២,០០០ឆ្នាំកន្លងទៅ កកើតវិវឌ្ឍនភាពឡើង ដោយមាន តំបន់ពាណិជ្ជកម្មយ៉ាងធំធេង នៃ ប្រទេសចិននិងឥណ្ឌា ដើម្បីពិព័ណ្ណនាថា ជាតំបន់សុវណ្ណភូមិ ដែលផ្តល់នូវសេចក្តីសង្ឃឹម ព្រមទាំង ភោគទ្រព្យផង។ តំបន់ដ៏ធំធេងនេះ បានទទួលយកសម្បត្តិវប្បធម៌ ពីអ្នកដៃគូជំនួញផងគ្នា ដើម្បីកែលំអ អរិយធម៌របស់ខ្លួន ឲ្យសមស្របទៅតាមគោលសីលធម៌ពាណិជ្ជកម្ម សាសនាសកលរបៀបរៀបរយក្នុង ការគ្រប់គ្រង ព្រមទាំងក្នុងវិស័យដទៃជាច្រើនទៀតផង។ ដូច្នេះក្នុងបរិបទប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រ តំបន់ធំធេងនេះ បានត្រូវត្រួតត្រា ដោយក្រុមអាណានិគមន៍អឺរ៉ុប ក្នុងមួយរយៈពេល អាចប្រើប្រាស់ ជាទីកណ្តាប់ ឆ្លុះ បញ្ចាំងរឿងពីរគឺ ការភ្ញាក់រលឹកនៃជាតិនិយម និងការបើកចំហរ ទទួលនូវវប្បធម៌ថ្មី។ ទំនុកចិត្តនោះ កើតឡើងអំពីប្រពៃណី និងជំនឿ ដែលមានពីមុនមក មុនពេលដែលអភិវឌ្ឍនកម្មទាំងនោះកើតឡើង ទៅទៀត ហើយនៅមានជានិច្ចជាបន្ត ក្នុងការទទួលយកសាសនាផ្សេងៗ មកធ្វើជាបញ្ហាជីវិតប្រចាំថ្ងៃ។ ក្នុងន័យនេះហើយ ដែលទិដ្ឋិវិស័យសកលយ៉ាងចង្អៀត របស់លោកខាងលិច អាចបង្កើតឲ្យមានឡើង យ៉ាងងាយៗបាន នូវទំនាស់ជាមួយនឹងការយល់ដឹង ប្រកបទៅដោយសមាហរណកម្ម ដ៏ស៊ីជម្រៅ ក្នុងភូមិភាគដ៏ធំនេះ។ គុណធម៌ដែលពុំមានន័យជ្រៅជ្រះ ថ្វីបើមានការនិយមតាមរយៈមតិក្នុងទស្សនាវដ្តី នយោបាយក៏ដោយ មតិនេះ គឺនៅឆ្ងាយអំពីគ្នាយ៉ាងឆ្ងាយ បើប្រៀបទៅនឹង លោកទស្សនវិស័យ ប្រចាំ តំបន់ដ៏ធំនេះ ដែលធ្វើឲ្យអ្វីៗទាំងអស់ ជ្រួតជ្រាបយ៉ាងជិតស្និទ្ធ ទៅនឹងដួងព្រលឹងដ៏រី ភាពរបស់គេ។ ការយល់ដឹង អំពីការរួមរស់ជាសម្បទ់ នៃលក្ខណសាមញ្ញក្នុងតំបន់ នឹងបានជា ជំនួយឲ្យយល់អំពី សកម្មភាពនយោបាយ ការសំរេចចិត្តជាក្រុម សេចក្តីសន្តោស យន្តការរបស់សហគមន៍អាស៊ាន និង សម័យកាលខ្លះ ដែលតំបន់នេះ ពុំមានការលូតលាស់ទាល់តែសោះ។ និរន្តរភាពនៃលក្ខណៈសំគាល់ ដែលកើតឡើង អំពីការមានស្មារតី បែបនេះ គឺជាវិភាគទាន ដ៏មានន័យយ៉ាងសំខាន់ ដែលបានជា ជំនួយ ដល់ការយល់ដឹងអំពីសហគមន៍អាស៊ីអាគ្នេយ៍។

**ຄວາມເຂົ້າໃຈກ່ຽວກັບອາຊີຕາເວັນອອກສ່ຽງໃຕ້: ສາຍກ່ຽວພັນ
ຂອງລະບົບທີ່ແຕກຕ່າງກັນທາງດ້ານຄວາມຄິດ-ຄວາມເຊື່ອຖື
ໃນກຸ່ມຄົນທົ່ວໄປ**

ປຶ້ມ “ຄວາມເຂົ້າໃຈກ່ຽວກັບອາຊີຕາເວັນອອກສ່ຽງໃຕ້” ໄດ້ຮິບໂຮມເອົາປະຫວັດສາດ, ວັດທະນາທຳ ແລະແນວຄວາມຄິດ-ຄວາມເຂົ້າໃຈ ຂອງຫຼາຍກຸ່ມຄົນໃນທົ່ວພາກພື້ນ ແລະໃນໂລກ. ສະນັ້ນ ປຶ້ມເຫຼົ່ານີ້ ຈະແຕກຕ່າງຈາກປະຫວັດສາດທີ່ໄດ້ກຳນົດຄວາມ ແຕກຕ່າງລະດັບຊາດ ຫຼືຜົນງານການຄົ້ນຄວ້າຂອງນັກວິຊາການສະເພາະດ້ານ. ມັນ ເລີ່ມຕົ້ນດ້ວຍແບບງ່າຍດາຍ ເຊັ່ນ ທີ່ມາຂອງຄົນ ແລະພາສາ ເຊິ່ງກ່ຽວພັນກັບປັດໃຈ ການລວມຕົວກັນຂອງກຸ່ມຄົນໂດຍຜ່ານມຸມມອງແນວຄວາມຄິດ ທາງດ້ານບູຮານນະ ຄະດີ, ພາສາສາດ, ປະຫວັດສາດ, ກະສິກຳ, ເຕັກໂນໂລຢີ, ພູມສາດ, ວັດທະນາທຳ ແລະສາດສະໜາ. ພາກພື້ນທີ່ສຳຄັນສຳລັບໂລກປະຈຸບັນ, ແຮງພັກດັນຂອງມັນຍັງຄົງຄື ກັນກັບຫຼາຍພັນປີທີ່ຜ່ານມາ ເຊັ່ນໃນດ້ານກະສິກຳ, ດ້ານການຄົງຕົວ ແລະດ້ານການ ຄ້າ. ຈຸດເລີ່ມຕົ້ນການຄ້າໃນ 2000 ປີຜ່ານມາ ໄດ້ພັດທະນາໄປພ້ອມກັບຍຸກສະໄໝ ການຄ້າທີ່ຍິ່ງໃຫ່ຍຂອງຈີນ ແລະອິນເດຍ ເພື່ອຈະເຮັດໃຫ້ພາກພື້ນນີ້ກາຍເປັນດິນແດນ ທອງຄຳ ທີ່ເຕັມໄປດ້ວຍສິ່ງດົນບັນດານໃຈ ແລະຄວາມຮັ່ງມີ. ມັນໄດ້ໝູນໃຊ້ອົງ ປະກອບທາງດ້ານວັດທະນາທຳຈາກຄູ່ການຄ້າເພື່ອທີ່ຈະກຳນົດຄວາມສີວິໄລໃນດ້ານ ພຶດຕິກຳທາງດ້ານການຄ້າ, ສາສະໜາໃນທົ່ວໂລກ, ການຄຸ້ມຄອງ ແລະອື່ນໆ. ດັ່ງນັ້ນ ໃນຊ່ວງສຳຄັນຂອງປະຫວັດສາດ, ແມ່ນໃນໄລຍະສັ້ນທີ່ມີການຜັນແປງມາເປັນຫົວ ເມືອງຂຶ້ນຂອງເອີລົບນັ້ນ ໄດ້ສະແດງໃຫ້ເຫັນທັງການກັບຄືນສູ່ສະພາບເດີມ ຫຼັງຈາກ ການສູນເສຍ ແລະການເປີດກວ້າງກ່ຽວກັບວັດທະນາທຳ. ຄວາມເຊື່ອໜັ້ນທີ່ເກີດຂຶ້ນ ຈາກປະເພນີ ແລະຄວາມເຊື່ອຖືທີ່ຫຼາກຫຼາຍໄດ້ເກີດຂຶ້ນກ່ອນການພັດທະນາເຫຼົ່ານີ້ ແລະຍັງຄົງມີຢູ່ໃນເຊື່ອຖືທາງສາສະໜາ ເຊັ່ນດ່ຽວກັນກັບທຸກໆວິທີການຂອງການ ດຳລົງຊີວິດ. ເພາະສະນັ້ນ ແນວຄວາມຄິດ-ຄວາມເຂົ້າໃຈ/ມຸມມອງ ຂອງຊາວ ຕາເວັນຕົກແບບຜິວເຜີນຈຶ່ງບໍ່ກົງກັບ ຄວາມເຂົ້າໃຈທີ່ເລິກເຊິ່ງແບບເກົ່າແກ່ຂອງພາກ

ພື້ນ. ຖ້າວ່າ ຄຳນິຍົມແບບຜົວເຜີນຖືກນຳມາເຮັດໃຫ້ເປັນທີ່ເຂົ້າໃຈ ຢູ່ໃນວາລະສານ ການເມືອງ ມີໜ້ອຍລົງ, ຄວາມຄິດ-ຄວາມເຂົ້າໃຈ/ມຸມມອງ ຂອງທົ່ວໂລກຈະເຊື່ອມ ຊຶມເຂົ້າທຸກຢ່າງດ້ວຍຊີວິດຈິດໃຈ. ຄວາມເຂົ້າໃຈກ່ຽວກັບກຸ່ມຄົນຕ່າງໆໃນພາກພື້ນ ດັ່ງກ່າວ ຈະຊ່ວຍອະທິບາຍການປະຕິບັດງານທາງດ້ານການເມືອງ, ການຕັດສິນໃຈ ເປັນກຸ່ມ/ຄະນະ, ຄວາມອິດທິນ, ການວາງແຜນ ຂອງສະມາຄົມປະຊາຊາດແຫ່ງ ອາຊຽນຕາເວັນອອກສ່ຽງໃຕ້ (ASEAN), ລວມທັງຢູ່ໃນຊ່ວງໄລຍະບໍ່ມີ ການເຄື່ອນໄຫວ. ຄວາມເປັນເອກະສັນຂອງລັກສະນະທີ່ໄດ້ມາຈາກ ການຮັບຮູ້ ຢ່າງມີ ຫຼັກການດັ່ງກ່າວ ແມ່ນສານທີ່ບົ່ງບອກເຖິງການມີສ່ວນຮ່ວມ ທີ່ສຳຄັນໃນການສ້າງ ຄວາມເຂົ້າໃຈກ່ຽວກັບອາຊີຕາເວັນອອກສ່ຽງໃຕ້.



Angkor kingdom temple fragment (reproduction)

สองหล้าอุษาคเนย์ เจาะลึกสามัญลักษณ์หลากหลายของอาณาบริเวณข้ามกรอบประวัติศาสตร์ วัฒนธรรม และโลกทัศน์. ดังนั้น หนังสือเล่มนี้จึงไม่ใช่ประวัติศาสตร์ที่จำกัดอยู่เพียงความแตกต่างระหว่างชาติ หรือเป็นผลงานของนักวิชาการเฉพาะทาง. เริ่มต้นจากจุดกำเนิดร่วมของประชากรและภาษา โดยยึดถือปัจจัยผูกพันจากมุมมองด้านโบราณคดี ภาษาศาสตร์ ประวัติศาสตร์ กสิกรรม เทคโนโลยี ภูมิศาสตร์ วัฒนธรรม. อาณาบริเวณที่ยังคงมีความสำคัญระดับโลกจนถึงปัจจุบัน พลังขับเคลื่อนยังคงอยู่ดังเช่นเมื่อหลายสหัสวรรษ – เกษตรกรรม ภาวะสภาพ และพาณิชยกรรม. ศูนย์กลางพาณิชยกรรมตั้งแต่รุ่งอรุณแห่งช่วงสองสหัสวรรษ อันเป็นยุคพาณิชยกรรมอันยิ่งใหญ่ โดยมีคู่ค้าขาย คือ จีน และอินเดีย สะท้อนให้เห็นว่าอาณาบริเวณนี้เป็นสุวรรณภูมิแห่งแรงบันดาลใจและความมั่งคั่ง. จึงเกิดการปรับใช้วัฒนธรรมจากคู่ค้าอันนำไปสู่การกำหนดอารยธรรมของตนเอง ทั้งในเรื่องจริยธรรมด้านพาณิชย์ ศาสนาสากล ระบบการจัดการ และอื่น ๆ. ดังนั้น หากอรรถาธิบายในเชิงประวัติศาสตร์ การแสดงบทบาทของนักล่าอาณานิคมจากยุโรปช่วงระยะเวลาหนึ่ง ช่วยส่องให้เห็นถึงความยืดหยุ่น ความเปิดกว้างของวัฒนธรรม. ความเชื่อมั่น

เช่นนั้นเกิดจากประเพณีและความเชื่อที่มีมาก่อนการพัฒนา
และคงมั่นอยู่ในศาสนาที่ได้ยอมรับนับถือ และทุกแง่มุมของ
ชีวิต. ดังนั้น มุมมองอันคับแคบแห่งโลกจะวันตก จึงมักปะทะ
กับค่านิยมบูรณาการหยั่งลึกของอาณาบริเวณโดยง่าย.
ห่างไกลจากค่านิยมแบบผิวเผินที่เคยเผยแพร่ในวารสารด้าน
การเมือง โลกทัศน์นี้ซึมซับทุกสิ่งทุกอย่างด้วยจิตวิญญาณ.
ความเข้าใจถึงสามัญลักษณ์แห่งอาณาบริเวณเช่นนี้ช่วยอธิบาย
ถึงกิจกรรมทางการเมือง การตัดสินใจของกลุ่ม ความอดทนอด
กลั้น การขับเคลื่อนของอาเซียน รวมถึงความเฉื่อยเป็นพัก ๆ.
ความยึดมั่นในแนวลักษณะเฉพาะตัวดังกล่าว ซึ่งดำเนินไป
อย่างมีตรรกะด้วยความตระหนักเช่นนี้ คือ สารของนิพนธ์
สำคัญเรื่อง **ส่องหล้าอุษาคเนย์**.

Hiểu về khu vực Đông Nam Á: Những khác biệt trong sự tương đồng

Cuốn sách, **Hiểu về khu vực Đông Nam Á**, gợi mở vô số những điểm tương đồng trong khu vực về lịch sử, văn hóa và thế giới quan. Cuốn sách này không giống như lịch sử để xác định sự khác biệt giữa các quốc gia hay các tác phẩm của những học giả chuyên môn. Nó bắt đầu với nguồn gốc chung của các dân tộc và ngôn ngữ của họ, và xem xét các nhân tố thống nhất thông qua quan điểm khảo cổ học, ngôn ngữ, lịch sử, nông nghiệp, công nghệ, địa lý, văn hóa và tôn giáo. Là một khu vực quan trọng trong sự phát triển toàn cầu hiện nay, các động lực phát triển của khu vực này vẫn không hề thay đổi từ hàng nghìn năm nay – đó là nông nghiệp, sự ổn định và thương mại. Những cảng thương mại đầu tiên từ cách đây 2.000 năm đã phát triển cùng với kỷ nguyên thương mại lớn của Trung Quốc và Ấn Độ để khắc họa khu vực này như là một vùng đất vàng đầy cảm hứng và giàu có. Nó đã tiếp nhận những yếu tố văn hóa từ các đối tác thương mại trong tiến trình xây dựng nền văn minh khu vực về nghi thức thương mại, các tôn giáo trên thế giới, quản trị và những thứ khác. Như vậy, xét về mặt lịch sử, thời gian ngắn là thuộc địa của Châu Âu đã giúp nêu bật cả sự kiên cường và sự cởi mở về văn hóa của khu vực này. Sự tự tin đó xuất phát từ truyền thống và tín ngưỡng từ khi khu vực này chưa phát triển như hiện nay và vẫn còn nguyên giá trị ngay cả khi khu vực này du nhập những tôn giáo khác trên tất cả các khía cạnh của cuộc sống. Do đó, thế giới quan hạn hẹp của phương Tây dễ dàng va chạm với những hiểu biết sâu rộng của khu vực này. Khác xa với những giá trị bề mặt đã từng được phổ biến rộng rãi trên các tạp chí mang tính chính trị, thế giới quan này ngấm vào tất cả mọi thứ. Hiểu rõ những tương đồng đó trong khu vực giúp lý giải các hoạt động chính trị, việc ra quyết định, ngưỡng chịu đựng, chiến lược lâu dài của ASEAN, và thậm chí cả những thời điểm định kỳ mà khu vực này chậm lại. Sự nhất quán của những đặc điểm bắt nguồn logic từ nhận thức về khu vực chính là thông điệp của Hiểu về Khu vực Đông Nam Á.

了解东南亚：通性大融合

了解东南亚这本书囊括例举了整个地区的历史，文化和世界观的各种共性。因此，这本书不同于描述国家差异的历史或专家学者的著作。它从各种民族和语言的共同起源开始，并通过考古，语言，历史，农业，科技，地理，文化和宗教观点来探讨各种团聚因素。作为当今全球重要的区域，千年以来它仍保持同一驱动力 - 农业，稳定和贸易。起始于2000年前的交易点发展成为包括中国和印度的巨大贸易时代，使这一地区通常被描绘为灵感和财富的金土地。它采用了来自贸易伙伴的文化元素来规范商业礼仪，世界宗教，治理等方面的文明。从历史发展看，短期的欧洲殖民彰显了其应变能力和文化开放性。信心源于早于这些发展阶段的已有的传统和信念，并在生活的各个方面在采用的宗教中体现出来。因此，西方的狭隘世界观很容易与该地区的深厚的集体观念相冲突。远远不同于曾经普及于政治刊物的肤浅的价值观，这种世界观将精神灌输于一切事务。了解这些区域的共性有助于解释政治行为，群体决策，宽容，东盟的阴谋诡计，甚至是周期性的惯性。从这一认识在逻辑上的推理得到的这一特性的一致性是了解东南亚这本书所要表述的重要信息。



wang [king (n); to rule (v)] symbolizes heaven, man and earth unified by the king as the vertical line, one of the common themes of this book

if you would know me ...

*If you would know me, clear your eyes,
look past your conceptions, my view realize,
see despite deceptions, I've ne'er been surprised
of your world's inventions and take what applies
to my Golden Land home, as from Tang to Rome
I have long been renowned by those who me found.*

*My Edenic realm's long supplied stable rice
that made my trade strong, new markets enticed,
and from them I borrowed some language and trends,
their religious tableau with my old rite blends
to create one culture beneath my veneers
that colonies strictures sought to domineer,
yet I survived intact, surveyed globe's estates,
to emboldened enact and style my new States
founded resilient, retaining tolerance
for what's significant: tempered reverence.*

Author's Note

I have presented a syncretistic perspective more than new facts. In historical terms, I generally follow the wide scholarship contained in the Cambridge History of Southeast Asia. My concentration on commonalities owes little to other works. There are also minor terminological differences, such as my referring to Myanmar rather than debating the official name change in English in 1989.¹ On the other hand, I have followed the 1939 change from Siam to Thailand because it was part of a specific historical transition. The island of Kalimantan is preferred to Borneo following its roots in the Sanskrit allusion to 'burning-hot', as long-used in regional trading languages.

This work results from a lifetime's involvement across the region particularly in Thailand, which offers a rich example of the regional amalgam of traditional, Chinese and Indian culture, exemplified in Thai's use of an Indian script for a Chinese language. Years of reflection led me to appreciate the deep commonalities of the region, which in turn has made me wary of simplistic views of the region based on differences .

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1. One Common Region

'Forgetting ... is an essential factor in the creation of a nation'²

In this book, syncretism across Southeast Asia is expressed as commonalities among the region's nations. Far wider than theological definitions, syncretism here includes the merging of all essential beliefs that underpin worldviews. First employed in the English language in 1618, the word syncretism is derived through Latin from the Greek συγκρητισμός meaning 'Cretan federation'.³ The word thus carries within it references from Plutarch⁴ and Erasmus⁵ to the Cretans' preference for compromise to resolve differences and to unite against foreign threats. I hope to show that this is an apt and succinct description that assists us to Understand Southeast Asia.

Thus the purpose of this work is to show the important shared histories, beliefs, customs and origins of Southeast Asia as a basis for the current emergence of a new regional presence in the world. This approach of seeking commonality in human experience is less common than detailed arguments for differences, which often ignore overwhelmingly large areas of consistency. The work merits further research, to which end endnotes are predominantly a bibliography of suggestions for further readings on ideas indicated in the text.

While respecting the importance of differences, commonalities may provide an overall context useful in postulating the future. However, before accepting this approach we must acknowledge two major confounding factors:

- the invention of national histories as part of the ongoing process of nation-building;
- the nature of the historical record as studied by scholars in recent centuries.

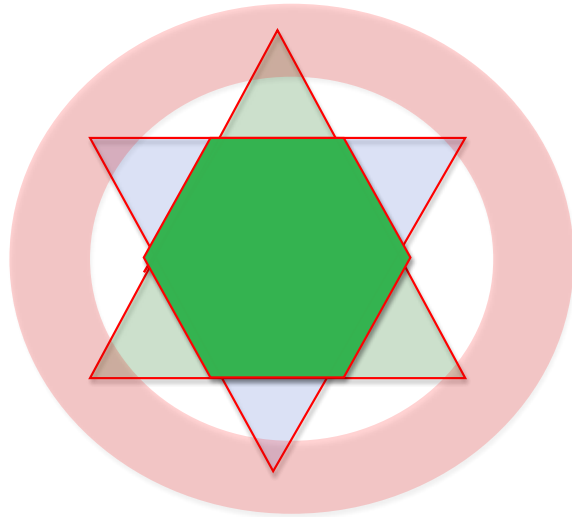
The first – the stories taught in national histories – requires us to acknowledge that all nations invent myths and histories as means of uniting their peoples. Where citizens comprise peoples previously identified with a local group, tribe or even another country, conforming to a new national mindset is imperative. All countries do this; the younger the nation the more likely it is that a national scholar might not challenge an official history.⁶ By contrast, the commonality drawn out in these chapters provides a context for those who wish to consider the subject objectively.




The second force that works against commonalities across the region – scholarly foci and specializations – often emphasizes the diversity of the region’s cultures, languages, histories and geographies. This then naturally justifies a scholar studying one culture or period in detail, sometimes to the exclusion of seeking parallels elsewhere in the region. This is easy to understand given that most scholars have had to invest in learning language and studying the culture of a tribe, valley, island or nation in order to conduct their research. And most such scholars until recently were Westerners.⁷ Assembling such random pieces as if completing a jigsaw provides less than a complete picture of the region. Missing parts have often been inferred, even invented.

The commonalities of the region are represented in the following conceptual diagram. The green hexagonal core, which is the largest area, is comprised of the base of larger triangles extending from each of the stars points, which represent individual states. The small light-coloured points of the triangles represent differences, the usual area of study. Thus a state is often compared with other states, as represented by the light pink circle, which while appearing to be all encompassing may be unwittingly divorced from the green core of commonality.

This book consolidates the green core that is the region’s common ground without ignoring differences. Differences are indeed real and include such obvious distinctions as: non-tonal

and tonal language groups; archipelagic/peninsula and mainland geographies; Confucian Chinese and Indian Islamic influences; wetland rice and highland agriculture, and so on. But an awareness of underlying commonalities can help explain these less fundamental differences.



-  Differences noted between states, cultures and histories in studies and national stories
-  Commonalities, represented as the core of all regional states, and larger than differences
-  Areas of difference exist, but rest on the core of regional commonalities

For example, differences between national and sub-national identities serve to alert scholars to the commonality of the region's nations as new constructs, the borders of which were not predictable from pre-colonial history. In fact, such intra-national variability is an important common feature that fuels the region's readiness to welcome and adapt foreign ideas. Even today's conservative organizations might be seen as a continuation of historical tolerances that do not demand

dissolution of past structures. And that may be another regional trait – the ability to live productively with uncertainty and apparently conflicting ideas.

Nation-building programs have extended state control into villages, a level never controlled by colonial powers. As a consequence village headmen have less communal authority at the same time as more institutional responsibility. In particular their moral role in maintaining cosmic harmony and balance with local spirits and deities has been greatly reduced. But elsewhere the resilience of such traditions has proven greater than expected, and villages remote from government seats continue to be repositories of traditional beliefs and rites. These take such forms as amulets, ancestor intercession, healings, magical powers and sacred sites – most of which can be readily traced to agricultural or rites-of-passage rituals. In this context it is also appropriate to recall the counterintuitive history of the marginalized minorities of the region.

In many cases, minorities have remained outside State control from pre-colonial times. In fact the colonial period may have reinforced distinctions, such as Christian missionaries categorizing differences between Karen, Lahu and other groups in Myanmar and elsewhere as tribes and sub-tribes. And their main integrative effect of education unintentionally perpetuated the myth of separateness. But such groups may well have been ethnically porous or perhaps owed their lack of integration to a desire to live separate from a kingdom's sphere of influence.

Since World War II as independent nations emerged, lowland majorities actively encouraged integration of 'tribal groups', sometimes forcefully. The common state approach to integration assumes the adoption of majority lowland cultures justified in terms of rights of access to health and education. Cultural heritage specialists on the other hand, often seek protection of 'unique cultural differences' while extending access to such civilized 'rights'. But if such marginalized groups had managed

themselves to remain uncontrolled by civilized society, both integration and solidifying cultural traits appear to undermine this freedom. This raises an important aspect of regional commonality, for if such marginalized minorities do not necessarily differ ethnically from the majority populations, then remnant pan-regional traditions might be sought within such groups. This would appear logical since marginalized groups have generally been subject to less external influence than majority populations that have adopted world religions and have been subjected to colonial forces and inundated by globalization.

Of course, shared values have been a theme of modern regional politics.⁸ But to see shared values as just a political outcome of global forces is to be blind to deep and enduring traits. Understanding of regional solidarity, just as for understanding of its nations and peoples, demands appreciation of its remarkable shared history. These commonalities may be appreciated through integrated consideration of; anthropology, archeology, climate change, colonial influence, geography, history, irrigation, maritime power, migration, political science, prehistory, religion, rice, technology, trade and multiple other factors.⁹ The region is far from being an outpost of Chinese and Indian cultures as recorded in earlier foreign histories, or from having spontaneously arisen as separate cultures as represented in nation-building projects.

These few words on the commonalities across the region explain why this book need not devote chapters to each nation, each colonial period or each religion. Commonalities overshadow such distinctions. Rather, major themes pervade the whole in the form of trade, agriculture and traditional beliefs, and it is through these that can be understood the shared traits of tolerance, trust, social cohesion and attitudes to religion. Well has it been observed that 'it is rare to seek commonalities', in history as in medicine¹⁰ and other fields. The uncommon chapters that follow aim to redress that deficiency for the Southeast Asian region.

2. Defining Southeast Asia

The early recorded history of the region is sparse, yet we do well to listen for its echoes through the more recent centuries, and today.¹¹ It is important in global history, and has much yet to reveal below its extensive coastlines. The 5,000 km wide region includes:

- archaeological indications of humanoid migration from Africa a million years ago;
- the first records of major ocean voyages more than 40,000 years ago;
- agronomic and technological innovations of rice domestication;
- domestication of yams, taro, bananas and chickens, and
- perhaps the world's most impressive spread of a language group.¹²

Today comprising mainland (Cambodia, Laos, peninsular Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam) and island states (Brunei, Indonesia, the Philippines, eastern Malaysia and Singapore), this geographical distinction is often used for political discussions. But this can be misleading since the islands of Bali, Java, Kalimantan/Borneo, Palawan and Sumatra were once geologically contiguous with the mainland when lower sea levels exposed the Sunda Shelf that is now under the Gulf of Thailand and the South China and Java Seas. Sequential sea level rises and falls affected early human history – an early common experience across the majority of the region.

The following diagram¹³ indicates the region, noting the important link to and beyond mainland China and Taiwan, by showing modern coastlines in darker grey colour and the lower sea level (pale grey) when many western islands were joined. The Sunda Shelf was last exposed about 16-19,000 years ago long after the sea-going ancestors of modern humans had been

settled across the region, although some volcanic activity is more recent. The deep oceans east of Bali and Kalimantan/Borneo, separated by Wallace's line based on faunal differences, include Maluku, Nusa Tenggara and Sulawesi. The sea surrounding the Philippines is also deep.



The mainland region of recent times is characterized by the south-draining rivers of the Chao Phraya, Irrawaddy, Mekong, Red and Salween rivers, and the mountain ranges of Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam. This has allowed ready interpretation of both geological and supposed ethnic differences between lowland, upland and highland regions. For the island region, volcanic origins and consequently fertile soils in a monsoonal climatic zone have long supported the highest global population densities until the advent of large cities.

Climate and volcanic variations from the earliest times up until about 10,000 years ago were significant. The subsequent environment was relatively benign, which allowed the blossoming of agriculture. The excesses of glacial periods in the middle latitudes were mainly confined to ice formations on Sabah's Mount Kinabalu. Then lower temperatures and reductions in rainfall probably stimulated the apparent expansion onto the land exposed by the sea falling more than 100 m below today's level. Within these major changes, population of the region from about one million years ago might perhaps have followed a common pattern. Areas closer to the equator dominated by rain-forests restricted to low-intensity hunting and gathering, while the more distant open-forests allowed hunting and grazing and adequate dry seasons for rice to ripen. Developments occurred slowly and probably included *Homo* species other than *Homo sapiens*.

Determining who were the first occupants of the region is conjectured from the discovery of Java Man, which was dated to more than 500,000 years ago. Other humanoid remains, with a possible exception of a specimen from a cave in Vietnam, are more recent and similar to *Homo sapiens*. Tool use overlaps with *Homo erectus* and *Homo floresiensis* in time but not sites of discovery. While today's populations may possibly include minor genetic traces from both of these early hominoids, the overwhelming majority of the region's peoples are classified as Mongoloid. Remnant non-Mongoloid groups continue to decline as they have done historically under the successive waves of migration.¹⁴

The flow of immigration in the last 7,000 years is another shared feature of the region. So is the common locale of origin of the majority of the current population being southern China. The absence of strong Mongoloid features in Neolithic skeletons in the region supports the timing of migrations as being during the current era, the Holocene. And dental and genetic information confirm the origin of these immigrants to be southern China

below the Yangtze. The pattern of settlement is summarized in the following table.

Years Ago	Peoples in Southeast Asia	Direction of Change
40,000	- Mainly Australo-Melanesian across the region - Minor Mongoloid features entering in the north	First Australo-Melanesian migrants descendants continue to move south beyond the region
10 - 40,000	- Continuing Australo-Melanesian in the south - Increasing Mongoloid features in the north.	Southward migrations spread Mongoloid influence and features
0 - 10,000	- Accelerated Mongoloid influence with the spread of agriculture across most of the region	Rapid coverage of Mongoloid influences in cultural and genetic terms

Drying rainforests, rising population and regional warming over the last 8,000 years coincide with the southward diffusion of agricultural technologies. Early remains suggest increased sophistication of hunting and gathering and perhaps domestication of dogs ahead of agriculture. The earliest plant remains appear to have been a luxury rather than essential food products and include betel nut and gourds. Agricultural plants such as millet and rice have not been dated beyond 5,500 years ago suggesting that hunting and gathering remained the easier occupation, with the extra effort of cultivation only being warranted for luxuries.

The region's farming began about 6,000 years ago, eventually supporting population densities in rice areas that were hundreds of times higher than those of hunter-gatherer societies. Initially rice cultivation was limited to opportunistic use of receding flood-waters conducted in parallel with shifting agriculture and livestock keeping. Such farming, while requiring more work than hunter-gathering lifestyles, may have become more reliable when climate change allowed planting of specific cereals and tubers.¹⁵

The marginalized hunting and gathering and shifting cultivation lifestyles that continue today in ever-smaller areas are now unsustainably small. Their disappearance from the region will be the final stage of this millennial agricultural expansion. The early crops and livestock of the region, including millet, sugarcane, taro, yams, tropical fruits, cats, cattle, chickens, dogs and pigs, represent both local domestication and adoption of imported technologies. Rice and millet were the most influential in this Regional Agricultural Revolution as their cultivation moved south with cooler periods.

This revolutionary change was most likely due to the suitability of rice to seasonally flooded billabongs and marshes. Dense forests and photoperiod sensitive rice varieties unsuited to ripening in humid conditions hindered expansion into equatorial latitudes. In the meantime, yams, banana, breadfruit, coconut and sago palm provided the carbohydrate fraction for the few sedentary residents of these areas. Supporting technologies from the north arrived in the region between 6,000 and 3000 years before present with the introduction of bronze, and about 2,500 years ago of iron.

In terms of social sophistication, pottery is probably a better indicator than metal, and it too was finer in the north of the region. Pottery from Vietnam dated to 7,000 years before present is associated with remains of domesticated dogs and pigs. Within the next 2,000 years, farming including cattle was already widespread on the Khorat Plateau where the once lakeside Ban Chiang site included remains of chicken, reptiles, shellfish, turtles and crocodiles as well as a range of hunted mammals such as deer. Malaria or other diseases possibly limited lifespans in swampy rice lands, which is indicated along with social stratification in burial plots. Pottery technologies then spread south through mainland peninsula in the subsequent millennium.

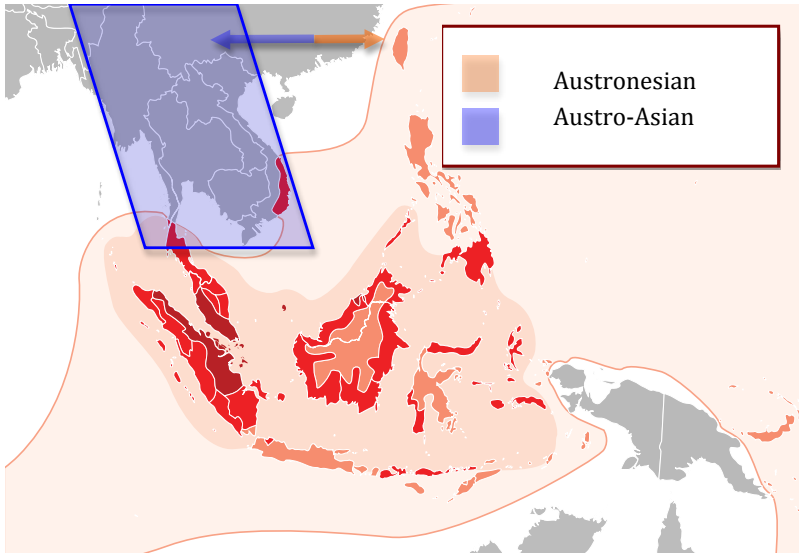
The timing of the southward movements of agricultural and other technologies across the region implies diffusion more than migration as farming Austronesian-speakers had already populated the islands. Remnants of their languages remaining in remote parts of Taiwan suggest that the island was one of the two major paths of migration. The two language families of the region, Austroasiatic and Austronesian, seem to share a common site of origin in southern China, and after divergence re-met in Southeast Asia about 5,000 years ago in association with the paths of technological expansion.¹⁶

A beneficial technology favours a population's expansion into new areas where co-existence with other groups leads to linguistic diversity. Adapting Vavilov's reasoning,¹⁷ it would seem that greater language diversity might indicate the source of an advantageous technology. This reasoning supports the origin of rice agriculture being Southern China where diverse language groups exist – notably, Austroasiatic, Tai-Kadai, Miao-Yao, and Tibeto-Burman. Northern Chinese languages arrived in the area later. Within the region, the most diverse language areas are the northern reaches of Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam.

Austroasiatic and Austronesian languages spread south with migration and may be seen in today's standardized languages. Thus Khmer, Thai and Vietnamese are Austroasiatic while Bahasa Indonesia, Bahasa Malaysia, Filipino languages and Javanese are Austronesian. Austroasiatic languages dominated the mainland, and in the modern era encountered Austronesian speakers when the Siamese kingdoms assumed dominance down the peninsula. The linguistic origin hypothesis, which accords with technological dispersal, settlement patterns and other aspects of the archeological record, is the foundation stone of commonality for the Southeast Asian region. The bifurcation and re-meeting of the speakers of the two groups is a remarkable phenomenon in itself. The language groups of the Southeast Asian region are summarized in the following table.

Language Group	Representative Languages	Commentary
Austroasiatic Tibeto-Burman Miao-Yao Tai-Kadai (Daic)	Burmese, Chin, Kachin, Naga Miao, Yao Lao, Shan, Thai, some languages of Guizhou and Guangxi provinces in southern China.	- Origin northwest of Austroasiatic centre of Southern China; possibly a more recent introduction to the region - Origin in southern China; continuing expansion into northern Laos, Myanmar and Thailand - Origin in southeastern China where once widespread
Austronesian	Some of Taiwan, South Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Indonesia (except far eastern islands)	- Origin southern China via Taiwan then to the Philippines, Borneo and Sulawesi onward.

The following map,¹⁸ which is only meant to be indicative, illustrates the common south China origin of the languages of the Southeast Asian region as two paths of migration. Austroasiatic languages are roughly represented in the blue parallelogram, and Austronesian languages in the very extensive orange area, which extends beyond the map in the west to Madagascar and the south to New Zealand. The shades of red in the Austronesian area are one estimate¹⁹ of different modern languages: for example, the standard Malay of Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei is darkest red; less dark is such modern languages as are still spoken in Aceh, Kedah, Kelantan, Cham, Southern Thailand Malay, Mindanao Malay, Minahasan Malay, Maluku Malay, Flores and the Moluccas; and light red is other Austronesian languages including Javanese, Sundanese, Balinese and Tagalog.



It is postulated that an Austroasiatic language was spoken widely in southern China prior to the expansion of rice cultivation. Austronesian languages are then assumed to have arisen after southern Chinese emigrants to Taiwan developed a separated society that later expanded south through the islands. One must still explain the loss of tonal components in Austronesian languages. This linguistic hypothesis of a common origin of the languages of the region may be unique in scale insofar as it involved language bifurcation and re-encountering over a millennium across a wide area. Combined with the commonality of rice, this common origin of peoples and language provides the foundation for the regional knowledge that developed over perhaps 5,000 years. Trends of further diversity through this period were then mediated somewhat by another common element, trade, as is discussed later. Other technologies accompanied trade more than migration, such as bronze manufacture.

As bronze is an alloy of copper and tin, the regional absence of earlier use of copper alone suggests that the technology was also

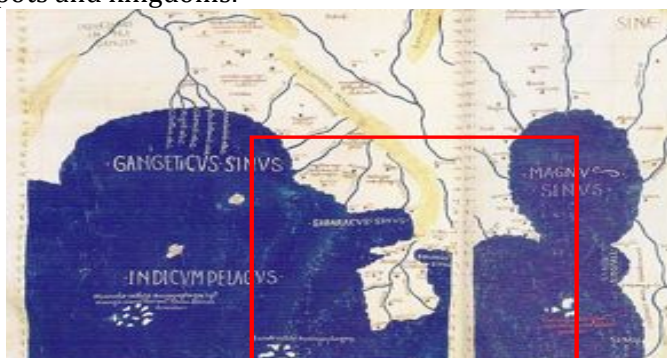
imported from China where it was in use some 3,000 years earlier, about 7,000 years ago. In addition, essential technologies do not seem to have changed with the arrival of metal probably because stone tools were by then highly adapted. Bronze was associated with status whereas iron technology, which arrived to the region only around 2,500 years ago, was simpler and hence used more for tools. For example, the Ban Chiang site in Thailand shows no sign of any major change in the way of life or rice production techniques with the arrival of bronze. On the other hand, changes in pottery artwork, social stratification and jewelry sophistication coincided with the arrival of iron technology.²⁰

By contrast, the Red River valley in Vietnam is the first regional site where the Dong Son bronze drums have been found, as illustrated below from a modern interpretation. The drums may have developed their sophistication in the absence of local iron ore sites, yet their designs indicate a Chinese origin. Spreading through Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia and the archipelagic region, perhaps as accoutrements of power, the presence of the drums in the Red River valley declined coincident with the arrival of new irrigation technologies under Chinese rule about 1,800 years ago.



The islands were still sparsely inhabited when metals first appeared in the mainland. Immigrants that had followed the Taiwan route found millet and rice were unsuited to the environment and relied on tubers, fruits and fish, supplemented by chickens, dogs and pigs. By the time bronze reached Bali and Java, rice had been adapted to the fertile tropical volcanic soils and low photoperiodicity. Wealthy island kingdoms demanded forging of ritual items in both iron and bronze using technologies imported via Kalimantan/Borneo from coastal Vietnam possibly through networks of Austronesian speakers. This was soon followed by increased trading influence from Indians connected to distant Roman markets; contact between Rome and China is recorded in 2nd century Chinese documents. Trade led to foreign influences including massive stone works and Sanskrit inscriptions.

The West's contact with the region was mainly via Indian and other merchants, although the region was known and shown in a now-lost map of Ptolemy's 2nd century 'Geographica'.²¹ Reconstructed in the early 14th century from textual descriptions in the 9th century Arabic translations of the original Greek, Ptolemy's map as presented below²² identifies Southeast Asia by its 'golden peninsula' below China ('Sinae'). However, Western influence was insignificant at this time of about 2,000 years ago. Rather, it was Chinese and Indian cultures that were to further influence the coasts and ports of the region as they emerged into entrepots and kingdoms.



3. From Trade to Civilization

The civilizations that emerged from the region’s prehistory are usually characterized as kingdoms more than as trading entrepots but their few remains indicate that civilizing controls were reliant on rice and trade. An approximate list in assumed chronological order and duration is presented in the following chart.

Civilization	Approximate Duration (century CE)																		
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Funan																			
Red River																			
Champa																			
Srivijaya																			
Angkor																			
Mataram																			
East Java																			
Majaphit																			
Bagan																			
Ayutthaya.																			

Of these, the best documented is the Red River or Thanglong civilization in Northern Vietnam, which owes this testimony to its need to differentiate itself from neighbouring China. But notwithstanding patchy information, the early civilizations of the region can be briefly summarized as in the following paragraphs. A map indicates the approximate locations by the highlighted red letters in the names of the centres, noting that each centre’s influence radiated beyond the point and that centres were not always contemporaneous.

Funan was located in the Mekong delta from the 1st century and served Chinese trade as far as Rome for products including silk. Goods were land-shipped across the Isthmus of Kra, which remained the preferred route for the next three centuries, and was to be later revived in colonial trade. With ample rice lands, it could sustain the two-way sea trade based on ships sheltering from the South China Sea until the annual reversal of winds allowed return voyages. Indian culture arriving with trade allowed the Funan elite to distinguish themselves from those they came to dominate in their expansion inland and across the Gulf of Siam. By the 3rd century, Funan was internationally known to traders from Persia to China, and was importing copper and tin from the Malay peninsula for its arts and crafts, and horses from India for leisure and status. It remained the principal entrepot until the 5th century by which time exchange of frankincense and myrrh for silk had been supplemented by local substitutes such as pine resin and benzoin, and other products such as camphor, sandalwood and cloves from within the region. When shipping technology allowed the longer sea route around the peninsula to dispense with the laborious Kra land-bridge, Funan lost its influence.²³

The **Red River** or Hong civilization of some 2,000 years ago was intermittently controlled by China through at least a tributary relationship until dominance waned under the Tang and Thanglong (Hanoi) emerged as the local centre around 1,000 years ago. Mahayana Buddhist monks and temples fostered learning and supported local rulers that soon expanded their maritime trade influence to dominate the southern Champa kingdom. Having withstood Sung attacks and established an agreed border, the combined Vietnam kingdom declined into warring factions about 850 years ago, reemerging later with an elite landlord and trading class educated in Confucianism. The Mongol invasion of 1258 destabilized the north sufficiently for the southern Vietnamese Chams to destroy Thanglong. Ming China then sought with varying success to reestablish Thanglong

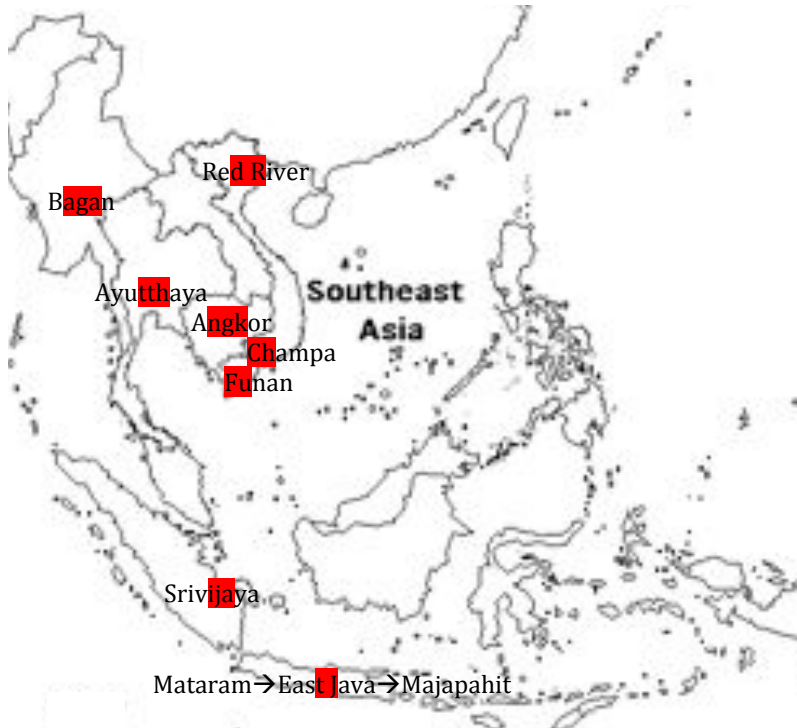
as its vassal. The sound Thanglong administrative system introduced in the 15th century survived subsequent civil wars and dominated the south.

Champa was a sophisticated coastal network of Austronesians in southern Vietnam that had earlier seeded Malay cultures. It lasted from its 2nd century origins until the 15th century, attacking Angkor from time to time. Based on rice cultivation using iron ploughs, coordinated irrigation and 100-day rice and 'floating' rice, its governance was based on irrigable units. Rice surpluses did not automatically accrue to the ruler whose role was military protection and expansion in return for a proportion of the rice harvest. Food secure and centred on Da Nang, Champa became a minor trader with China and Java from the 8th century, the latter leading to increased Indian influence in architecture and Mahayana Buddhism. Short season rice from Champa was introduced to the Red River kingdom by the 12th century, and relations with China led to exchanges of technologies and luxuries, land reform and settling of new lands by prisoners and soldiers. But the Chams were also pirates, whose interruption of trade stimulated the Red River and other trading centres to trounce Champa in the 15th century. By the 16th century, sea-based trade similar to other parts of the region underwrote the centre.

Srivijaya was a commercial network loosely governed from Palembang and the Straits of Melaka benefiting from exceptional local navigational skills documented from the 3rd century. Having settled Madagascar from the 1st century, the Malays were described by the Roman Pliny in their outrigger canoes, with which they introduced bananas around the world and a musical tuning scale to Africa; in the 16th century the first European explorer Magellan relied on a Malay navigator. The Srivijaya civilization served China-India trade from at least the 7th century consolidating goods from the hinterlands, islands and seas to replace the fading Funan entrepot. By the 9th century Srivijaya was serving Java and probably underwrote the great Buddhist

university at Nalanda in India. Increasingly cosmopolitan through Indian attacks and trade, its influence was slipping even before 13th century technology enabled ships to sail at a distance from coasts. After declining into disarray, the Chinese took control of Melaka in the 15th century to stabilize trade. This was coincidentally the period when Melaka's rulers replaced the Buddhism introduced in the 7th century with Islam and began its dissemination across the region. Relying on its functional ports, Srivijaya's Buddhist monarchical system had included trade agreements, anti-piracy action against Funan and intermarriage with other power bases including the rice-rich Mataram.

The **Angkor** civilization that arose from the 9th century around the Mekong River's Tonle Sap rice paddies was based on a religious duty of aggressive expansionism. Ethnically diverse and reliant on inspired leadership, it spread through such other river basins as the Mun and Chao Phraya. Secure rice and sea access down the Mekong with control of Funan and the Isthmus of Kra ensured trade with India, which informed its Hindu and Buddhist religions. Its metaphorical fifty million paddies irrigated by floodwaters and extensive storage and diversion works protected by deities and spirits were ceded to Hindu and Buddhist temples. Peasants worked the land in return for spiritual merit, temples served as granaries and kings adopted semi-divine status. Exemplifying the region's common origins of international trade and reliable rice, Angkor proved sustainable for six centuries until the ever-expanding temple culture succumbed in the 15th century. Crumbling from the centre as a result of over-extended waterways, reduced rainfall and weak leadership, outposts such as Sukhothai fell with little resistance to emergent Tais.²⁴



Mataram was located on the fertile volcanic soils of the Kedu Plain in central Java and from the 6th to the 10th century was the largest and most reliable rice growing centre of the region. Wealth from rice trade accrued to Mataram's nobles who invested in the erection of monuments such as Borobudur and Prambanan. Their sophisticated irrigation system integrated rivers and canals and included timed water rights and water reuse. Water managers acting under the power of nobles were propitiators of spirits to influence seasons and work calendars. Expressing their divine power in monuments and higher learning, skills of bookkeeping, administration and fundraising were entrusted to Sanskrit-literate priests who offered spiritual rewards to the populace. Rice served as a trading currency in exchange for gold, silver and cotton. Linkages to Srivijaya

allowed Mataram to maintain influence for four centuries until the direct sourcing of trade items by Chinese fragmented the regional system. The rice-based civilization of the East Java kingdom proved more adaptable to these changes in commerce and assumed Mataram's role, again by strategic management of the rice trade.²⁵

The **East Java** civilization that arose in the 10th century lasted until the 13th despite being off the main India-China trade route. Competent administration allowed regional control of spices, rice and other valuables through a single well-managed port as favoured by foreign traders. At this time, the most valuable spices were cloves and nutmeg, which came from a few small Maluku islands where unfavourable winds discouraged international traders. Ruling from the port, the East Java kings imported farmers and taxed traders as distant as Myanmar and Sri Lanka. It had dominated Srivijaya by the 11th century and in annexing Mataram after a poor rice crop, became one of the world's most wealthy realms of the 13th century. Together with effective taxation and focused attention on stable rice production, it invested in major flood control works, harbour development at Surabaya and direct trade with China that included intellectual and cultural refinements. At its height, Mataram's control of gold, silver, silk, porcelain, lacquerware, forest-products, jewelry and metal fabrication caused China to ban East Java traders from its ports, with little effect.

Majapahit built on the Mataram and East Java networks as it rose to power in the 13th to the 16th century, cleverly diverting a 1,000 warships attack from Mongol China towards its continuing rival group in East Java. Moving its centre to flooding plains to produce additional rice and gain better sea access, the kingdom formed a commercial alliance with China when Europe was emerging as a market for spice and preserved fruits. This allowed Majapahit to extend its influence to span the islands from Sumatra to New Guinea and Mindanao, briefly even controlling the Straits of Melaka in the 14th century. Residents

from around the region fostered a sophisticated civilization with fine craftsmen and elaborate Brahmin and Buddhist ceremonies. Following the emerging regional commonality of supporting farmers and the military to ensure food and stability in order to facilitate trade, Majapahit invested in roads, waterworks, bridges, market places and plantations. Vassal states managed their own resources and paid taxes in rice. Rising wealth brought increased demand for luxuries and status in such forms as ceramics, merit-making rites, copper coins and jewelry, which led the kingdom to grow beyond its governance capabilities. Vassals then ceased to pay tax and began to trade direct with China and India, and as Islam spread in the 16th century its common set of values were less onerous than old rites and so further reduced their orientation to Majapahit.²⁶

Bagan was a temple-based rice growing political system on the Irrawaddy River in which Mon, Burman and Pyu cultures thrived under hierarchical Sarvastivada and Theravada Buddhist rule and trade from the 11th century. Earlier Pyu city kingdoms probably formed the basis for Bagan's development. Its hot zone centre was accessible by river, suited to storage of rice from the north and south and was protected by mountains. Burman immigrants built on the Mon culture's script and seaport of Thaton to form this inland civilization with extensive religious constructions. Trade and religious exchange with India and Sri Lanka was mainly stable until 13th century disputes about land, taxes and temple wealth pitted monks against rulers. Monks insisted that semi-divine kings should remain unattached to material possessions, and claimed that the tradition had descended into cronyism. Reforms were only effective for short periods and Mon rebellions ensued, but when the Tai group of the Shan defeated invading Mongols they assumed power through the 14th century and established their capital at Ava on the Irrawaddy River close to irrigated rice lands. Thereafter, other entrepots at Arakan, Pegu and Prome rose to compete with Ava as maritime trade expanded.²⁷

The 13th century Tai kingdom of **Ayutthaya** grew from the Suphanburi and Lopburi outposts of Angkor to challenge that whole kingdom, incidentally absorbing the Angkor site of Sukothai that other Tai had earlier taken over. At the same time, another Tai group overran the Mon centre of Haripunjaya at Lamphun to establish the northern kingdom of Lanna that successfully defended itself against the Ming and Ayutthaya despite being periodically dominated by the Burmans. Ayutthaya expanded using a balance of Mon-Khmer governance, Tai military skill and Chinese traders. For example, vassalizing rather than integrating the Tai kingdom of Lanxang, Ayutthaya allowed Lanxang's dry remoteness to act as a buffer to an expansionist Vietnam. This was in contrast to the Lanna kingdom, which was eventually integrated into Ayutthaya's successor kingdom Bangkok in the 19th century. In outlasting Angkor and Bagan, Ayutthaya cobbled a pan-Tai identity from traditions and elements of Theravada Buddhism.²⁸

These civilizations that emerged and declined reveal enduring common elements of rice, trade and values. Some emerged from well-husbanded rice surpluses and then entered trade, while others excelled at trade and eventually found the need to control rice supply. By the 16th century the region shared its common elements of a secure rice surplus underpinning and relying on sound governance, regional and foreign trade and interpreting cultural accretions through traditional belief systems. Of these, it was trade that accelerated change. Trade had led to the region being referred to internationally from pre-history up until the 18th century as Golden; it was known as Suvarnabhumi or Golden Land by the ancient Indians and Arabs, Golden Chersonese or peninsula by the ancient Greeks and Kin-Lin with its golden associations by the ancient Chinese.²⁹ Almost the whole region enjoyed further commonality through this trade, which incidentally brought the enduring element of Indian religions, which in turn adapted to the traditional religion, rites and rituals.

4. Trade & Technology

As a general unifying element in history, trade in the region created regional civilizations from at least the 2nd century with accompanying Chinese and Indian influences. From the 16th century, European searches for the source of spices led to a colonial era, which had diverse effects on culture, demographics, governance, race relations, and the mode of trade. Technologies in agriculture, building, shipping, weaponry and other fields were all part of the exchanges with Europe as it asserted control of the networks linking China, India and Europe. But the trade ethic of the region is perhaps best understood as evolving from Chinese and Indian influence, with European influence being short-lived, power-based and reliant on the Chinese and Indian models.

Although some histories make much of the official closure of Chinese trade in the 15th century, southern China coastal traders persisted in their centuries-old métier. They became the region's continuing source of Chinese cultural influence. Regional Chinese cut off from China in this period integrated into expanding local kingdoms becoming, for example, quasi-noble agri-businessmen in Java. Such entrepreneurs attracted waves of Chinese immigrants through the 16th century to service the mining and food industries and trade, which soon expanded into a Chinese trading network throughout the region. As European colonial powers rose in the region, they relegated Chinese to regional trading, even though their numbers in Manila and Batavia outnumbered Spaniards and Dutch by more than a hundred times. Where the European population was negligible such as Siam, Chinese numbers were also high and were well integrated in such occupations as; farmers, foreign trade agents, mine managers, physicians, royal tax collectors and ship owners. One son of a Chinese father and Thai mother rose to become king and founded Thonburi after the demise of Ayutthaya. Across the

region their diligence, in general, earned local Chinese much respect and tolerance.³⁰ Tolerance across the region might be explained as a 'live and let live' approach provided there was no excessive encroachment on established social hierarchies and rights.

India had plied trade across the region for a millennium. Its shared-risk approach had operated successfully for centuries before European stock exchanges were developed for colonial trade. This Indian innovation allowed ship space to be allocated to investors and traders without requiring a large resident Indian population in the region. Yet, despite their small numbers up until the 19th century, it was Indian religions, myths and scripts that were adapted to the majority of the region.³¹ Other Asian foreigners included the short-lived silver-trading Japanese of Ayutthaya, remnants of which eventually integrated into the local population. But it was Europeans who were to have the larger influence on the region from the 16th century.

The region that the Europeans entered had evolved from the trading centres of the past 15 centuries and now focused on the major kingdoms shown in the following schema.³² It had enjoyed a relatively respectful trade that characterized the region as both a source of exotics and a transshipment route between China and India that incidentally linked to the West. Of course, it was not always peaceful, but can appear so when compared to the power that arrived with the Europeans. The map omits the Red River kingdom at this point of European entry because at the time it had been weakened by Chinese incursions in the north and operated from the Champa site, which is shown.

Cosmopolitan Melaka developed as a strategic trading location for all shipping as an adjunct to the remnants of Srivijaya. Today Melaka serves as a convenient symbol of the region's international interactions from the 15th century. This was the time when the Chinese commander Zheng based his giant trading ships and their crews of thousands in Melaka until China

ceased international trade from 1433. In a few short decades the Portuguese arrived and razed the city to gain control of trade. The experience emboldened the Portuguese Magellan to transfer allegiance to Spain, in which name he pioneered the Pacific route to China, annexing the Philippines in the process. Melaka was next violently taken by the Dutch in 1641, and later in 1819, the somewhat reluctant British claimed it. Today, the city may no longer be the regional trading centre, yet the utility of the route is indicated today by a third of the world's annual shipped oil passing Melaka in more than 70,000 ships.³³



The Portuguese and Spanish first dominated European trade in the region when they sought control of trade in cinnamon, cloves, mace, nutmeg and pepper in the 16th century. Following a

supposedly secret route, they used Melaka as their regional centre. The Portuguese quickly shifted to private rather than crown business to become deeply involved in inter-island trade managed through their major entrepots in Goa, India and Macao, China. Private merchants were spread from Timor to Pattani thus making the Portuguese more part of the region than any other Europeans were to ever become. In contrast, the Spanish limited themselves mainly to their use of the Philippines, which in their early days they viewed as an insignificant staging post between Mexico and China.

Trade and Christian missionary objectives later clashed to confuse any grand Spanish visions, especially as their main spice source was the Muslim island of Mindanao. Chinese traders entered the Spanish trade to exchange silk and other Chinese luxuries for silver from the Spanish American colonies across the 17th and 18th centuries. However from the Spanish viewpoint, the Philippines trade was far less lucrative than their American gold and silver mines. Thus missionary endeavours became Spain's major enduring cultural influence.

The British and Dutch entered regional trade ventures from the 17th century. They had observed the low returns of the Portuguese and Spanish and the successful shared-risk system of Indian traders and so developed joint-stock companies. Beginning conservatively, the Dutch and British East India companies sourced products widely as they sought market dominance. They established factories at Ayutthaya, Bandar and Pattani where canny local rulers fostered competition between the British and the Dutch, especially in Ayutthaya. Rivalries between the two companies led to Dutch dominance across Indonesia while the British initially managed regional trade from their more profitable base in India. The Dutch grew wealthy from trade with the region, which at a time of rising religious intolerance in Europe contributed to the Netherlands transitioning from a Spanish colony to an independent commercial hub.

European trade across the region, and a common regional tolerance of foreigners and their trade led to foreign enclaves in major entrepôts. From there, European governance and technologies influenced urban agglomerations, spreading mainly from Portuguese-then-Dutch controlled Melaka, Spanish controlled Manila and Dutch controlled Batavia. All had long been active trading centres and so were easily enhanced with fortifications, military installations, monumental churches, roads and canals. A byproduct of this disestablishment of local governance structures among racially diverse populations was to be an increasing reliance on Chinese traders to service urban demand.

Skilled Chinese craftsmen produced European products and became major middlemen and bankers, which generally ensured their protection. Indians occupied parallel roles in Melaka while in Batavia and Manila it was mainly Chinese, and later a new class made up from progeny of mixed marriages. In the Spanish Philippines, Chinese men were often required to become Christian in order to marry local women. Likewise single Portuguese men in Melaka were encouraged to seek Christians among local women, often Indians. As the children of mixed backgrounds integrated more readily with local culture than their fathers, they came to control aspects of commerce. Racial purist policies generally failed, such as an attempt to import women from Dutch orphanages. Intermarriage between Malays, Chinese, Europeans and others led to a sophisticated and influential trading class often linked to traditional rulers. Natives were at the bottom of the urban social order and their numbers inside the European-governed cities were relatively small.³⁴

The European colonial era continued the region's common trend of exchanging ideas through trade. For example, Europeans were to learn improved shipwrighting skills from the Malays whose vessels were sophisticated and held up to 300 men on trips to Africa and back. Early European arrivals marveled at the diverse

designs suited to different maritime and riparian environments including Chinese-influenced designs of 50m ships that could carry up to 1,000 persons and 1,000 tonnes of cargo. Exceeding the capacity of any European ships of the time, local shipyards with access to durable timbers in Java, Kalimantan/Borneo and Pegu were soon adapting European and local ships for riverine, coast-hugging, ocean-going and military purposes. The region's metallurgy shifted from ornaments to iron braces and bronze cannons for ships. Such regional skills built ships for Europe into the 18th century, and one such vessel continued in service as a British war and cargo ship that incidentally transported convicts back through the region to Australia.³⁵

Weapon technology transfer allowed Ayutthaya to produce cannon by the 16th century, and by the 17th it was exporting firearms to Japan. Around the same time, a gift of a silver inlaid cast iron cannon was made to Louis XIV; it was to be used by a later Louis in the 1789 Revolution. Foundries in Pegu equipped the Burmese to expel the Portuguese from coastal cities forcing their integration into local communities where their descendents became fusiliers. The same technologies allowed casting of large temple bells, thus symbolically linking to the ancient bronze refinements of Vietnam, which too became a weapons manufacturing site. In the islands, religious connections brought weapon techniques from Turkey to Aceh blended with artistic skills that remain valued in amulet kris and highly decorative cannon.

However this was not free trade, for by the 18th century the Europeans were more protective of their technologies, which led to their guns being far superior to the earlier versions copied in the region. Sufficient for local battles so long as neither party involved Europeans, most regional warfare followed traditions of limited contact. Firearms were used until ammunition was exhausted followed by pikes, swords and kris. The latter remained the preferred weapons across the islands while on the mainland, the Burmese-Thai battles for example, evolved to a

routine of showy cannon fire followed by gunfire and arrows. Closer large-scale combat seems to have been rare, with royal leaders cumbersomely mounted on elephants and matters being settled through a contest or duel between selected representatives. By contrast, the Vietnamese gained considerable skill in the use of large and small firearms in their civil wars, which later served them well in colonial battles.

In addition to the regional commonality of absorbing new technologies, weapons also allowed continuation of traditions of honouring protective spirits. Large cannons that were never destined to be used were forged for symbolic public roles, often outside public buildings where they were mounted upright in the form of the *linga*. And as the abode of guardian spirits, cannon were recipients of offerings in a similar manner as sacred trees, Buddha images, Christian icons and Islamic utilitarian items. Traditional beliefs persisted within adopted religions throughout the colonial period, representing an essential and common regional trait. Evangelizing programs that sought to exorcise traditional traits had little effect. As is amplified later, a fundamental belief in the benefit of cosmic harmony, obligations of leaders and legal processes pervaded worldviews. Changes in governance with the arrival of the Europeans as new overlords unwittingly accommodated such worldviews.



Indian temple bell with dancing Ganapati image

5. Adapting to New Overlords

The small principalities that relied on tribute and tax farming more than political oversight were faced with unprecedented pressures from the Europeans. Extant worldviews saw portentous omens in changes of leadership, and in the safety of civilization overseen by deities and spirits in the natural topography. The influence of such beliefs might have appeared to decline in the face of European influence, but in fact continued as a common regional worldview.

In Ayutthaya, Indo-Persian expertise that arrived earlier with trading had risen to court levels and strengthened the entrenched power, and incidentally assisted in managing Europeans. Other centres such as Manila grew under European dominance from once insignificant ports. Christianization efforts in Manila merged temporal and spiritual powers, using baptism rituals to wrest trade loyalties from Muslim leaders. But as ever, the resulting tensions grew less from dogma than from access to commercial opportunities. Beginning in the spice islands, intensive European trade soon expanded to the mainland where at least Ayutthaya and Myanmar flirted with the Portuguese to obtain firearms.

Changes in leadership had characterized the region's kingdoms with tenuous interregnums and men were used to being routinely drafted into military service. Manpower was the main prize of war and defeat of a kingdom led to it paying tribute to its conqueror. Two examples suffice: the 17th century Ayutthaya triumph over Myanmar reversed tributary flows;³⁶ and the Red River kingdom sent tribute to China at times when it was also demanding tribute from the Champas. Throughout leadership changes, globally-linked trade was almost continuous and among the elite was commonly accepted as a self-evident essence of civilized life. The populace accepted leadership changes within a

worldview of natural hierarchy in which leaders were semi-divine so long as they ruled well. In these terms, the change to European influence was almost revolutionary.

The divinity of kings, to whom minor potentates paid tribute, was the region's adaptation of governance systems that dated from the beginnings of the world's agrarian cities. The first of these seems to date from 2330BCE, when Sargon created the first agrarian empire in Mesopotamia by conquering others' cities, and styled himself as the ruler of all lands under heaven.³⁷ The tradition was ingrained, in Europe as in Asia, so when the region's semi-divine leaders were challenged by foreign forces, those who could not collaborate with the new power were seen to have lost heaven's blessing and thus the right to rule. Power therefore shifted to accessible and resource-rich trading centres in the 17th century while the less favoured kingdoms fell and minor potentates transferred their allegiances.

The separation between states and religion is sometimes mistaken as a long-held virtue of the West. But in fact it applied universally until recent times. 'Until the modern period, religion permeated all aspects of life, including politics and warfare, not because ambitious churchmen had mixed up two essentially distinct activities, but because people wanted to endow everything they did with significance. Every state ideology was religious.'³⁸ Combining these two persistently human traits – assuming divine rights to govern and seeing religious meaning in all things – practical aspects of life such as agriculture became sacred. In Southeast Asia, agriculture and trade require stability, which was a confirmation of heaven's pleasure.

In the region, a return to stability had long indicated that the deities and spirits were appeased and thus confirmed the centrality of rice, military strength and trade relations. With stability essential to agriculture, coastal Pegu yielded to Ava with its extensive irrigated rice fields, and Mataram consolidated itself around fertile rice fields. Such rice fields not only sustained

larger populations, but also tied peasants to the paddies and canals that they had constructed. Rice re-emerged as a common theme of power, appearing in the names of kingdoms such as Lanna and Sipsongphanna. The actions of the Europeans confirmed this logic by using rice to feed the armies that were expanding their territory and enforcing their power bases from Myanmar to the Dutch East Indies.

Where two opposing kingdoms were secure in rice, cultural integration appears to have been relatively smooth, for example when Lanna lost to Ava their shared versions of local Buddhism and Tai languages favoured a practical unity. In contrast, another Tai kingdom in Ayutthaya experienced constant difficulties with southern Malays, successively failing to defeat the smaller Pattani kingdom. Ultimate Tai success relied on the French for weapons and strategists, which decisively de-populated the port city of Singora (Songkhla). Cultural distance appears to have determined the levels of aggression in such confrontations, and the distance between the incoming Europeans and the region's peoples was even greater than any previously experienced. Thus Spain assassinated leaders and burnt defiant villages in Manila and the Dutch East India Company followed suit on the Malay peninsula and islands.³⁹

While such actions may offend modern values, it is possible that the populace of the time regarded the success of an incoming leader as proof that he was blessed and had the right to rule. And with the blessing came the stability essential for crops and peace, as it had ever been everywhere; as Ovid noted 'peace is the nurse of Ceres, and Ceres the foster-child of Peace'.⁴⁰ Peace was also essential to trade, that longtime common regional interest that had attracted the Europeans. This explains why savvy local rulers formed pacts with the new powers seeking stable and low-cost trading networks. Rulers profited from ship berthing licences, commercial contracts, taxes and gifts. In such arrangements, local rulers remained the focus of the urban populace, and if rulers became distracted by greed and wealth,

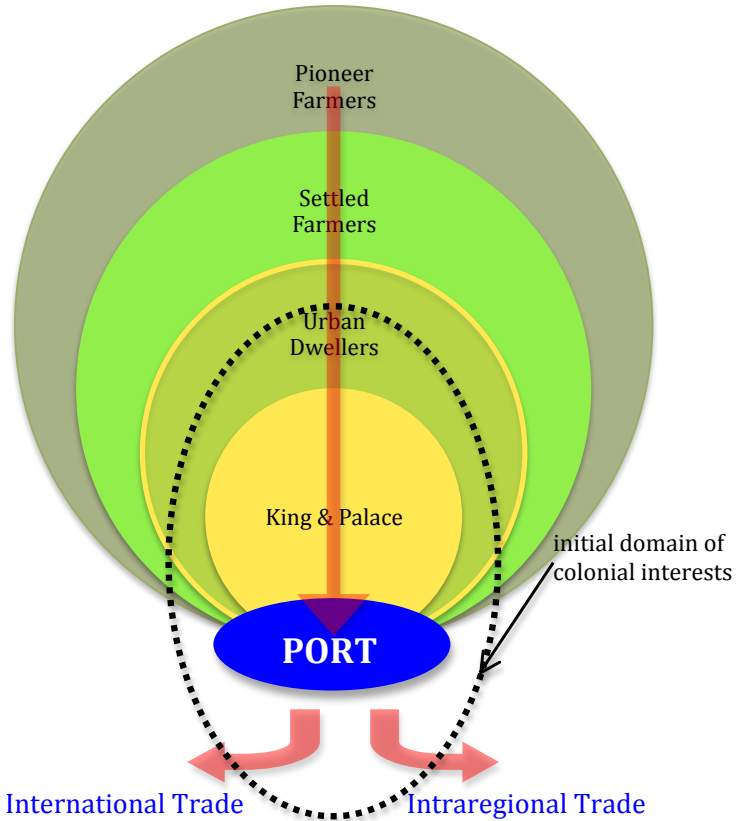
local coups were seen as inevitable. Common to the region, the mechanism continues in modern forms today.

Managing a power base was therefore a ruler's constant task. Competitors were controlled by keeping them in the central palace and by appointing trusted administrators to govern provinces. In Ayutthaya, Chinese immigrants were engaged as tax farmers-cum-governors, while in Vietnam a mandarin-style examination was adopted to select candidates. These centralized systems evolved into a hierarchy from village leaders up to the king and accommodated such common practices as encouraging ordinary young men to pioneer new rice lands in a continuation of the migration process. Growing into settlements, rice-farming expanded, particularly on the mainland; in the islands the centrality of rice production on volcanic soils also explains the expansion of Java ahead of other islands.

The model of expansion to serve the increasingly foreign-controlled trade is illustrated in the following diagram. The inner realm of the ruler and the urban population (shown in yellow) had little connection to the farming communities that radiated from the port cities. Yet the tax agents and flow of trade ensured that even distant pioneer settlers were aware of the city's power. Rice and forest products flowed to the port and onwards as indicated by the pink arrows. But the Europeans' interest was limited to cost-efficient trade, which meant that they initially took little interest and had virtually no involvement beyond the black dotted line. Thus the long extant hierarchical system continued across the region, with the addition of European trade overlords working in contractual partnership with local rulers.⁴¹

By the dawn of the 18th century, powerful rulers supported by colonial powers formed the kernels of future nation-states. These civilized bases regarded outsiders as barbarians with different religions and traditions. The adopted interpretations of Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism and Islam evolved into belief systems that retained many traditional elements, including

a common irenic tolerance of the religions of trading partners. As the century progressed, imperial expansion to capture manpower was replaced by demand for expertise and technology. These two new assets then defined several power shifts, such as the sacking of Ayutthaya by a mixed Burman-Shan army and peasant revolts in Vietnam.



European powers played a minor direct role, their small numbers working through local rulers. Initially such vicarious influence allowed the Dutch and the Spanish to avoid strife, but they were soon drawn in to decisively use their stratagems and weapons. Choosing their battles to increase access to precious

commodities, the Europeans installed new rulers and in some cases effectively created parallel hierarchies. Thus old loyalties were fragmented and one local group was pitted against another, which for a time forestalled coordinated efforts against colonial overlords. But the superior technological power of the Europeans meant that they mostly achieved their objectives. In perhaps the most successful example of managing estates with minimal foreign manpower, it was observed that in British Myanmar by the mid 1800s the general public continued in the delusion 'that the English have only a foothold in Burma through the clemency of a gracious king'.⁴²

The parallel system of the Dutch East India Company rewarded obliging officials, sometimes styling them as rajas, with authority to force peasants to grow specified export crops. In the Philippines the Spanish approach used forced labour, which evoked old resentments that encouraged some to react as they had for centuries by moving away from the civilized rice land and adopting highland or maritime lifestyles. Such dissenters represent another regional commonality that views those beyond the pale as primitive tribes. But it may well be that these risk-taking émigrés were less different than suggested in the lowland propaganda spread among their taxed and indentured cousins who remained under rulers and foreigners into the 20th century.⁴³ This phenomenon of choosing to live in the hills long predated the Europeans, but it suited them to support local prejudices against those who had fled the wet-rice culture. This was due in part to the need for cohesion during the socioeconomic changes that accompanied population growth in civilized centres and demand for increased rice production. However, notwithstanding such popular viewpoints, rice remained a unifying element for both those in civilized areas and its escapees through its centrality in the traditional regional culture.

6. Rice and Culture

The great regional commonality of rice cultivation has been speculated to influence the psychological outlook of its producers.⁴⁴ Reliance on cooperative labour to farm rice is said to have produced a common worldview. Cooperation instills cultural mores of constant interaction with one's group as distinct from the more individualistic nature of wheat production. This observation has been used to posit an explanation of China's 11th century industrial revolution being stillborn after climate change forced populations south from wheat to rice lands. Rice growers' cooperative attitudes, clan loyalties, patron-client relationships and reticence to engage with foreigners who do not join the ethic is said to define rice societies' psyche, a phenomenon that persists across generations even after migration to wheat-growing societies. Wheat growers described as 'Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic (Weird)⁴⁵ by contrast demonstrate unusually high individualistic and analytical approaches to life. They share characteristics of readiness to engage beyond family and cultural groups. Despite such anomalies as cooperative wheat growing Chinese, the interrelationships and holistic worldviews do seem to be associated with rice cultivation. As such the theory lends support to our thesis that common historical origins and cultural legacies have defined regional socioeconomic systems.

The socioeconomic systems of the region up until the 15th century were clearly the products of traditional systems influenced by the Ming dynasty's period of expansion and by Indian traders. But that influence was limited to the rice-sufficient trading centres that were separated by extensive and very sparsely populated areas of inhospitable jungle. It is estimated that the population of the whole region was then less than 20 million, compared to today's 800 million. The need for manpower drove economic expansion of the trading centres and

provided a reason for warfare – both factors that influenced population distribution and growth.

Such stable governance had followed the general processes known the world over, such as in wheat-growing Persia when in 540 Khusrow the First created that region's largest agrarian state, stating that 'the monarch depends on the army, the army on money; money comes from the land tax; the land tax comes from agriculture. Agriculture depends on justice; justice on the integrity of officials, and integrity and reliability on the ever-watchfulness of the king.'⁴⁶ Once kings were discouraged from war to gain manpower and were beholden to the European powers that maintained peace and expanded trade, population grew exponentially.

Population growth was correlated with the volume of trade, which in turn was roughly associated with the rate of exposure to international ideas. Being influenced by the trends of China and India remained a common theme as the 15th century saw increased trade that stimulated demand for luxuries. Thus, when China halted its export trade during this period, the region managed to continue its exports to China and thus continue its accumulation of wealth. Next, European demand for cloves and nutmeg, and their desire to eliminate middlemen in India and the Middle East, stimulated even more trade.

Spice trading from the islands to China had begun modestly centuries earlier, but by the 16th century it had grown to service European markets. Spices soon replaced the forest products of camphor and sandalwood that had earlier displaced ocean products as the region's main export items. Transported either by Portuguese ships direct to Europe or via Indian and Middle Eastern trade routes, pepper emerged as the main spice export, totaling several thousands of tonnes per year in the mid 17th century. By then, pepper represented half of the cargo of Dutch and British ships. The region's wealth increased, and was soon to boom with additional European demand.⁴⁷

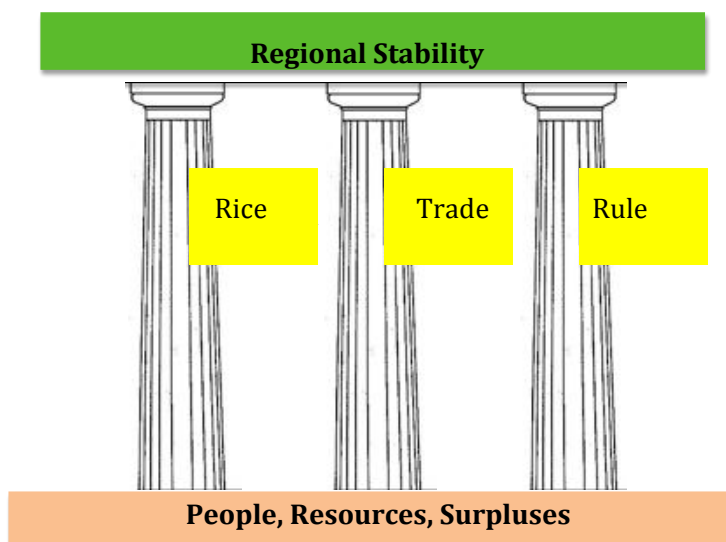
Accelerating demand stimulated intensive agricultural development of cloves, cotton, pepper and sugar. Immigrants provided sedentary plantation labour for nobles and wealthy families. Exports remained underpinned by spices while rising global wealth led to other high value products also being produced for export, including benzoin, ceramics, cotton, sugar, worked metal and some textiles. Cotton serviced Asian markets, sugar fed China's milling and crystallizing technology and benzoin for incense resin spread widely as wealth led to increasingly elaborate rituals.

The region's export wealth was spent on imported luxuries, such as processed cotton products from India. Wealth stimulated clothing fashions, which defined status across the region even to the most distant cities. By now, the European currency of silver had been adopted in trade, and the peak annual importation of dyed and patterned cloth from India was valued at more than 10 tonnes of silver by the early 17th century.

As imported products increasingly defined lifestyles, the staple food products that had once underpinned the region's economy and power bases seemed less critical. Trade seemed to provide all that was wanted; self-sufficiency was passé. Some trading centres outgrew their own food resources and relied on imported rice, as illustrated in the following table. And this rice trade sourced from the Chaophraya, Irrawaddy and Mekong flood plains and the irrigated paddies of Java ensured that wealth from both rice and luxury exports flowed to these centres. Well-governed rice storage facilities served the trade, raising rice production from an essential activity of a civilization to again being a second form of currency.

Importer	Exporter
Melaka	Java, Pegu, Ayutthaya
Aceh	India, Pegu, Tenasserim,
Pattani	Ayutthaya, Cambodia, Nakhorn Srithammarat, Songkhla

In this new order, trade and governance was stable as long as trading centres controlled rice supplies. Now cities with rice-producing hinterlands were best placed. The pillars of regional stability as shown in the following diagram were thus, as ever, rice, trade and rule. In modern terms the last term is often interpreted as meaning 'rule of law', which is appropriate if understood to include the absolute rule by monarchs and the complex power-sharing arrangements that evolved as colonial powers developed monopolies over international trade. Cities with unreliable rice supplies were to fade, especially in times when trade declined with global economic recessions, and when governance proved inept. So some centres grew while other shrank.



The major centres grew to become the cities that define today's nations. Populations of the cities swelled in concert with ship arrivals and shrank with seasonal agricultural demands. Within these vagaries, urban populations in the 16th century are generally thought to have been similar to those of European

centres, perhaps 100,000 on the mainland and 50,000 for island cities. By the 17th century, six of the region's cities were said to exceed 100,000: Aceh (Sumatra), Ayutthaya (Siam), Banten (Java), Makassar (Sulawesi), Mataram (Java) and Thanglong (Hanoi).⁴⁸

The urbanization trend, which probably peaked at this time, was common across the region and greater than elsewhere in the world. But this rank was soon to be lost as the Europeans gained more control of the major regional cities. Urban populations then stagnated or fell as indigents were expelled, and numbers did not reach their 17th century levels again until the end of the 19th century. These cities then became even more focused trading hubs, little caring about the countryside. And notwithstanding persistent missionary activity, the Europeans as the new *de facto* rulers were largely uninterested in local religious and cultural affairs as they focused the state more on trade and commerce. Yet the traditions that they ignored had evolved in concert with commerce over the preceding centuries and were sophisticated, efficient and underpinned regional unity.



Rosewood figurines of Hok, Lok and Siu (Fu, Lu and Shou)

7. United by Commerce

Before the Europeans, the life of the trading cities had annually cycled with the reliable winds that brought north Asian ships early each year and allowed them to return after August. The intervening six or 18 months were spent transiting between regional ports to collect produce or to profit from regional trade. Commerce followed waterways to the major centres up rivers – the Chao Phraya, Irrawaddy, Mekong and Red. While Chinese and Indian traders were largely unaffected by regional traditions, their presence had benignly influenced culture in the prevailing atmosphere of tolerance surrounding trade.

Commerce had been egalitarian to an extent that was soon to change with the arrival of Europeans. Before then, even deck hands were allowed space to carry a few goods to trade, this right being seen as a fairer way of their engagement than wages. This had swelled the population of the trading cities and instilled a culture of participation in transactions and within hierarchies. Trading systems had matured into codified securities in which investors shared profits and risks on a ship's cargo, and pirates were controlled. This stable trading environment had fostered continued technological development and exchange in shipbuilding, producing among other innovations, the capacious Asian hybrid, the junk. When aggressive European competitiveness upset this peaceful commercial stability, the vulnerability of ponderous junks to attack led to their demise through the 16th century. This new situation was to stimulate the innovation of faster small ships that shared the risk of losing cargo among more vessels.

Regional trade had long operated under transferable letters of credit that were honoured beyond the region and through India. And while seeking to maintain the reliability of the region's trade the early European arrivals were slow to learn local mores.

Rulers were accustomed to privileged participation in commerce as investors and bankers, while the strict rules that were a legacy of Tamil and Islamic law provided a ready supply of labour from commoners working off unpaid debts. Such debt-labourers, sometimes inaccurately described as slaves, returned to their routine lives after their indenture expired.⁴⁹

Another regional commonality that had favoured infusion of foreign ideas was the reliance of much commerce on women. Regional women traders often travelled with their goods to distant ports. Such emancipated attitudes also included acceptance of liaisons between foreign men and local women, with some becoming indispensable negotiators between rulers and foreign representatives. Thus a common network of regional trading centres was connected to markets through regional cultural traits blending with elements of Islamic commerce, Chinese monetized trade and Indian financial systems. This was the base on which European technology and capital sought to build, and it was a base that had long experience in interaction with foreigners.

Foreign influence extended beyond trade into the courts, for example Ayutthaya and its successor came to rely on the Persian Bunnag family for fiscal and governance advice. Ethnic diversity among foreign commoners had been managed by separating nationalities in different quarters in the region's trading centres. With trade defining so much of regional culture from the 15th century, other elements of governance lagged, including security of private assets from grasping rulers. Such insecurity coupled with trade being elevated above self-sufficiency in rice rendered many kingdoms vulnerable to food crises, the northern Vietnamese kingdom's vigilance in the face of the constant threat of Chinese invasion being an exception.⁵⁰

Governance innovations aimed to counter the emerging risks of foreign domination by linking trading rights to gifts or payment, by palaces expanding their direct involvement in trade

themselves and by imposing inheritance taxes. And as the monopolistic power of European groups further revealed itself, some rulers enhanced administrative systems that increased their local independence and control. Beginning in the Red River and Ayutthaya kingdoms, this process led to the replacement of hereditary positions by senior administrators who served entirely at a ruler's pleasure. So it was that by the last decades of the 17th century regional cities were either authoritarian or open-traders, both of which were vulnerable to foreign manipulation.

Contrary to popular tales, the region's golden age of trade was already in slow decline by the time the Europeans arrived. The disruption of the Portuguese was able to be absorbed within the malleable regional cultures, but the powerful Dutch East India Company soon replaced it. In monopolizing trade in spices, slaves, tin and minerals, the Company stifled intra-regional trade from the 17th century and linked regional fortunes more directly to global economies. Thus political disruptions in Europe and the demise of the Ming dynasty were felt in the region's markets. Both events coincided with a period of reduced global temperatures and rainfall that brought famines, epidemics and conflicts to those continents. These combined events served to highlight the region's strong food production capability as an essential pillar of trade. Kingdoms primarily reliant on trading fell, international contact decreased and economies stagnated through this global downturn.⁵¹

As a result of this 17th century recession, the Dutch East India Company's dominance of trade in spices and cloth was challenged when the Manchu dynasty reasserted China's maritime influence through the 18th century. At the same time, Ayutthaya expelled the French for fomenting intrigues in trade politics. Overall the region experienced a decline in European and a rise in Chinese influence. Chinese middlemen handled most trade. Their industry, craftsmanship and social integration through local wives led to them soon becoming indispensable.

This was another period of common regional advance through Chinese influence – one sometimes unduly coloured by later resentments and European-assisted propaganda associated with 18th century pogroms in Batavia and Manila.

Chinese immigration rose with demand for their services and in response to limited opportunities in China. Far from a new phenomenon such migration was a continuation of a centuries-long process, albeit for peoples from different parts of China. The first waves of migration to Southeast Asia had been people from below the Yangtze who were politically marginalized and affected by changing climates and wars. Those arriving through the great trading era were more likely from coastal regions as the following figure⁵² illustrates. Land migrations at that time were by different Chinese groups from those of the coast, and they entered the north of Myanmar, Thailand, Laos and Vietnam in less significant numbers than those who arrived by sea. In modern terminology, the early migrants were climate or political refugees while their later compatriots were economic refugees. And many were to find fortune in the region they knew as the golden land.

Despite being oppressed by the Europeans, the Chinese were now essential to trade. Thus Chinese identity was maintained in ports. When the Dutch recognized the benefits of the tax farming that had emerged independently in the region they saw both a role and a means of controlling the regional Chinese. Using a system of competitive bidding for rights to collect fees, taxes, tolls and fines, they ensured a high return to the Company and a lucrative business for Chinese entrepreneurs. The practice became widespread through the islands, and the British were likewise to adopt it as a low cost alternative to employee-based administrative systems.



Rulers aloofly benefiting from involvement in trade facilitated the rising influence of the region’s Chinese. Accepted in the palaces, local Chinese adopted the dress, language and customs of the courts without challenging power structures, thus demonstrating an awareness of common regional values that had escaped the Europeans. A hierarchy developed that widened social divisions and discouraged indigenous entrepreneurs, producing distinctions that still echo today. Regional trade in traditional products that had not interested the Europeans continued under Chinese management and included such luxuries as betel. Thus critical to key aspects of both regional and international trade, the Chinese were a logical resource for the next stage of the region’s agribusiness development, cash crop

monopolies. The small farmer plots of tobacco that had served local revenues through taxes and European markets through consolidation of product had expanded with demand and were proving more difficult to tax effectively. Tobacco monopolies were therefore declared and the product grew to become a major export of the 19th century. Monopolies farmed out to Chinese and others created the foundations of wealthy corporate dynasties.⁵³

If betel and tobacco are viewed as socially harmful today, the social effects of opium through the colonial period must be regarded as catastrophic. Opium had barely been used in the region until the late 1600s when it was introduced from India. The two East India Companies used opium to replace their luxury Indian cloth revenues as the region's wealth declined with lower returns from pepper in Europe. With its small volume, high margins and addictive demand opium was promoted for mass usage to soon generate huge profits from the Companies' thousand-fold price mark-ups.

As old-style rulers became more distant from their people and the Europeans became more aggressive in their trade, the Chinese agents became locally more trusted. The bloated administrative and privilege systems of palaces soon exceeded governance capacities leading to food shortages and starvation. New and smaller centres emerged through this period in the 18th century in areas where food supply was assured and European and centralized powers were weak, such as in Sulawesi. New small traders from Armenia, Europe and India worked through the Chinese regional traders and undercut company monopolies. It was such durable Chinese connections that led to increased trade with China, such as its importation of rice from Ayutthaya.

Agricultural trade rose as European presence contracted. Rice dominated at first. But luxury crops such as sugar from Chinese-managed plantations and mills around Batavia and elsewhere now became the region's major export crop, replacing pepper.

Coffee boomed, briefly making Java the largest global producer, until the European price bubble burst. While trade defined the changes of this period up to the 18th century, it mainly involved nobles, Chinese traders and Europeans. Life for the common people continued much as it always had, which was on average probably healthier than that of their contemporaries in Europe. But declining global trade had reduced the rate of capital investment, technological exchange and institutional development, and these factors defined the region as it entered the 19th century.



Sandstone Vishnu image from Angkor period lintel (reproduction)

8. 18th Century Consolidation

Colonial presence and industrious immigrants accelerated the rate of change across the region, despite economic recessions elsewhere. Rights to rule continued to rely on regal righteousness, which meant that power oscillated, such as between Myanmar and Siam. When Ayutthaya fell, the new Tai capital that became Bangkok arose under a half-Chinese king and came to rely on Teochiu Chinese labour to drain flood plains for rice production. On the other hand, Myanmar was yet to be constrained by a colonial master, but already local power was diverted into conflicts and rituals while drought prevailed. As the buffer between Myanmar and French Indochina, Siam began to define itself as it expanded, opening new lands along river valleys and down the peninsula. In so doing, it came to behave in a manner akin to a colonial power in the 18th century, albeit with deeper ambitions than trade alone.

The Siamese colonial model used Chinese immigrants to govern southern centres such as Nakhon Srithammarat and Songkhla, eventually subduing the powerful Pattani realm. In the north, Siam took Chiangmai from a weakened Myanmar and likewise envassaled Laos and Cambodia as buffer states with Vietnam within a hierarchical administrative system based on a city's distance from the throne. Distant loyalties proved difficult to manage, and by the early 19th century, Khmer kings were paying tribute to both Siam and Vietnam.⁵⁴

Through these centuries, Vietnam's conflicting influences from China and France fueled its expansion into Khmer food lands to compensate for poor management of land and irrigation, including its neglect of the Mekong delta. Indigenous values united the north and south in opposition to Chinese influence, resulting in the new name, Vietnam. The late 18th and early 19th century were defined by divided alliances between the Chinese

and the French, annexation of lands by nobles and peasant rebellions against taxes and military service. The Vietnamese economy stagnated, as it had in Myanmar while Siam's expanded.

This was the period of the Siamese king embellishing his status by meritorious deeds such as large religious translation projects, liberal commerce and regulating land development. At the same time, Siam levied higher taxes on Europeans than on Chinese, which had the effect of increasing export prices for rice, sugar, forest products, spices, tin and porcelain. Chinese immigration increased along the lines indicated in the diagram of the previous chapter. The expanding industries absorbed the new Chinese immigrants, who were granted equal rights in the mid 19th century. Such measures encouraged intermarriage and integration of the trade ethic into that segment of Siamese culture. Shipbuilding boomed, markets became freer and Siam became the most modern kingdom in the region.

Meanwhile in the islands, the population of Java and near islands rose three-fold and the Dutch enforced cash cropping in place of food production, which spurred insurrection. Chinese managers and traders became essential to the Dutch enterprise and rose to replace some of the past economic roles of local rulers. As the century changed, Dutch authority was eroded by harsh suppression of peasant conflicts after poor harvests and cholera epidemics. It declined further when the British surpassed the Dutch in promoting opium, and began using Penang rather than Dutch ports as its entrepot. Then the British strategically created Singapore by rewarding entrepreneurs unaligned with past Malay and Dutch power.

As wealth spread more widely, consumption of imported goods increased, including weapons and opium. Erosion of local values prompted religious purges, such as the Dutch Islamic colonies periodically banning alcohol, betel, cockfights, gambling and tobacco.⁵⁵ Yet suppression of common and deep traditions proved almost impossible; in the Christian Philippines and

Buddhist mainland nations such attempts were even less successful. Trade meant wealth and rising aspirations, which suited both locals and foreign traders. So Spanish influence in the Philippines shifted from Christianizing to trading, accelerated by changing value systems in Europe and Spain's loss of Mexico in the second decade of the 19th century. The Philippines' exports grew under the influence of expatriate Spanish and mestizo family connections to British and American capital. Meanwhile, rising resentment against the Chinese culminated in race riots. These factors combined to sow the seeds of Philippines' self-governance, well ahead of the Dutch controlled islands. But in all cases, the overriding commonality of global forces was evident in demand for new technologies, capital and knowledge – and also in more accurately defining the extent of the hinterlands from which a realm could exploit the resources that produced its export wealth.



Dancing Hindu Apsara – celestial nymph (reproduction)

9. British-led Resurgence

Colonial maps frequently redrew interim borders, but these began to firm with such innovations of the industrial revolution as steamships, railways, the Suez Canal, telegraphic communications and sophisticated weapons. Fixed borders were good for commerce, as they ultimately reduced conflict. However, colonial borders neglected historic, economic, ethno-cultural and geographical factors as well as embedded traditions across the region. This last oversight meant that old patronage lines continued as a powerful force in trade, and included not only local hierarchies but also complex networks across Chinese and Indian immigrants, the latter especially in British colonies.

At this time Britain's industrialization had made it the world's major producer of coal, iron, steel and cloth while also controlling more global commerce than any other nation. Exports servicing the new economic force offered its colonies great trade opportunities, which in 1870 anomalously led to Australia ranking ahead of Britain in some economic estimates while enjoying the world's highest human development rank.⁵⁶ Britain's Indian and Southeast Asian colonies also benefitted greatly as Britain enjoyed a five-fold increase in economic activity between 1870-1900. Espousing a free trade ethic enforced by the largest navy in history, Britain's dominance continued even with the rise of the US and Germany after 1870. Its fate was to be sealed in the 20th century's World Wars I & II when Britain respectively lost 20 and 25 percent of its wealth, although its output in 1950 still exceeded that of any European nation. By that time Britain continued its strong regional influence by forming a permanent alliance with the US, which had incidentally acquired the Philippines in the 1898 Spanish-American War.⁵⁷

While Britain enjoyed preeminent global status it had managed

regional trade from India, effectively limiting other European colonies to their past niches. Indigenous dreams elsewhere in the region of British assistance to overthrow Dutch, French or Spanish yokes ended uniformly in disappointment. Even the independence of Siam was mostly at the discretion of Britain. The activities of the French in Indochina and of the Dutch in Indonesia continued largely for the pleasure of British merchants. Notwithstanding Dutch-French regional collusion after the Napoleonic Wars, Britain adhered to its policy of stability in order to maintain its tea and opium trade between India and China. Trade was a primary element of the region's worldview, and the British system was closer to the centuries-long tradition of the region in its accommodation of the variations of local politics unless they interfered with trade.

Thus Britain realized that not only was intra-regional and export trade a regional commonality, but that the region continued to be a critical highway between the major trade empires. When Kalimantan/Borneo, located on the China-India trade route, was found to have coal reserves essential to the steam ships and mills, the British took an interest. Freelance Britons took control in Brunei and Sarawak, one styling himself Raja of Sarawak. Just as discovery of oil in Brunei was to later assure it of special treatment, so the last decades of the 19th century saw the British North Borneo Company wresting control of coal in Kalimantan/Borneo from the Dutch.

Valuing stability for trade above cultural objectives, Britain had earlier forced Spain from Manila. It then ceded it back to Spain in the late 18th century subject to conditions of improved administration that favoured Britain's trade in rice from Luzon and sugar from the Visayas. The same policy served to maintain acceptable relations with the French, for it was Britain that kept trade routes free of pirates, which incidentally reduced the island slave trade. Britain's dominance continued until the close of the 19th century despite its failures with the Islamic Sulu, Spanish reprisals against Filipinos and German expansionism. This was

when the USA, having taken control of the Philippines from Spain took an interest in forestalling Japanese expansionism in the region. Thus arose the regional commonality of a strong influence of Anglo-American culture in modern interpretations of regional values, and in the globalizing of regional and national systems.

Meanwhile on the Malay peninsula, Britain had expanded to control the Straits by taking over Melaka and Singapore to service hinterland tin mining and plantation rubber. The focus on stability for export trade and for the India-China trade route is further indicated from the 1820s invasion of Kedah by Siam, which despite local agents urging reprisals led to no actions by Britain. It also viewed contemporaneous altercations in Myanmar as a distraction and preferred to simply negotiate with Siam for stability in the peninsula states of Pattani, Kelantan and Terengganu. A fuzzy border resulted in which Malay rulers were reliant on the British yet also paid tribute to Siam. This is the period of the colonial era that probably came closest to the region's common trading ethic defining peace and interactions. But it changed after 1870 when fear of German expansionism forced Britain to govern locally, leading to the creation of the Federated Malay States at the close of the 19th century. Siam was forced to accept British advisers, when it declined to enter into the Federation.⁵⁸

Problems in Myanmar were a continuous nuisance to British, mainly because it bordered India. Fractious local rulers, French exiled from India, Arakan refugees, incursions from Assam and local delusions of military strength were crushed in the brief Anglo-Burman wars. By 1850, British trade to inland China was possible along the Irrawaddy route, although a French-Burman intrigue induced confrontation and lingering resentment. The Chinese continued to expect tribute from Myanmar and Vietnam, the latter upsetting the French whose battles created a convenient buffer with an expanding Russia. But when France invested in Siam's sphere of Laos, Britain became concerned.

Siam's capacity to compromise with the British and to respect its focus on trade with China facilitated its continued independence. Such accommodation allowed Siam to modernize with British, Dutch and French advice under a stable agreement with Britain, at the cost of losing territory to Cambodia, Laos and Malaysia. As the Suez Canal and the telegraph accelerated commerce, Siam was better able to adapt than its neighbours. Free trade was espoused, but when Chinese and local traders expanded their trading realm, colonial powers used their steamship dominance to attack such 'pirates'.

With US power rising in the late 19th century and Britain forced to focus on domestic affairs and India, some local histories overstate the influence of indigenous rulers. For example, Brunei's survival may in fact owe more to its earlier British protectorate status than local machinations, and Siam owed smooth continuation of its independent status to Britain's view of it as a benign buffer-state.⁵⁹

The following diagram⁶⁰ indicates the areas of operation of Western powers in the period between 1870 and World War I; Germany's interest lies outside the region in Kaiser-Wilhelmsland, as German New Guinea was known at the time. It also indicates the submarine telegraph cables that complemented steam shipping in consolidating the resurgence of Western influence in the region. The map is useful for the purposes indicated, but cannot indicate the power relationships that allowed the apparent claims implied by the term 'possessions' or the emerging Anglo-American rapprochement and pact.



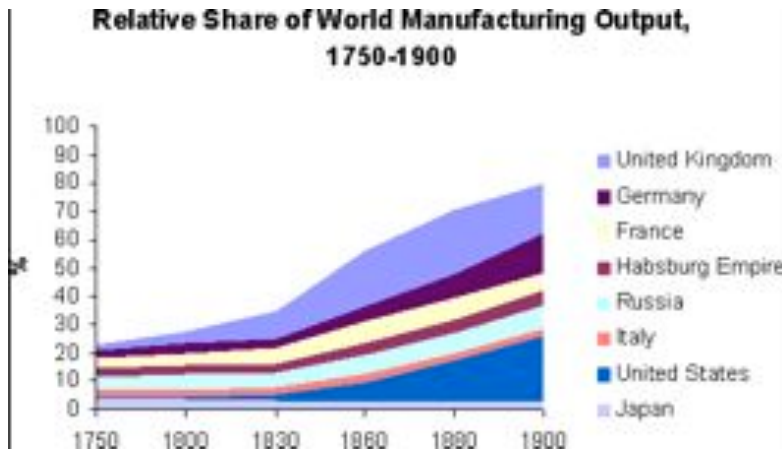
Thus contrary to histories that divide European influence according to such colonial maps as that above, an economic map of the 19th century would show an overwhelming British influence. In fact, the region's colonial period simply mirrored relative power in Europe and was characterized by enforced stability to facilitate trade, and sometimes to proselytize. Each of the Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch and British colonizers left their marks, which include factors beyond the usually noted architectural, language and religious legacies. But it was the British, with their Indian base and commercial focus that most closely approached the continuing historical commonality of the region. As the dominant world power of the time, Britain had set the agenda just as it had previously been set by China or India. This role was to soon be yielded to the USA in the transition to the 20th century.



Wayang beber canvas

10. Transition to 20th Century

A remarkable regional commonality arose from the colonial period in the form of practical governance systems that modernized and allowed greater stability than the older kingdom systems could now provide. Slavery, piracy and witch-hunts had been outlawed, future national borders were drawn and provinces were connected to capital cities by rail, road, post, telegraph, taxation, law and increasingly religion and language. Sometimes referred to as the 'high imperial (or colonial) period',⁶¹ this gives rise to such maps as that of the previous chapter. The period was underpinned by the industrialization that had begun in Britain and which had allowed it to dominate since the early 1880s through the large cycles of economic adjustment until the turn of the century. The following graph⁶² illustrates Britain's early dominance in terms of manufactured output and the rise of Germany and particularly the US, which took the lead from around the turn of the century. These nations had no doubts about their continuing rights to rule their colonies.



But now a colonially educated local elite that could appeal to local passions and new power bases were increasingly challenging such governance. Political change oriented to independence extended even to uncolonized Siam reducing the monarchy to a constitutional role. New power bases became evident in recalcitrant Chinese tax-farmers and Eurasian elites that proved impossible to replace with Europeans who were now costly career men with family and lifestyle demands. Thus by the close of the 19th century, the British employed Indians in Myanmar, the French employed Vietnamese in Laos and Cambodia and the Dutch relied on Javanese in Kalimantan/Borneo and Sumatra. Strikes, political subversion and networks based on ethnicity, language and status inevitably led to more forceful colonial policing.

Europe soon entered real economic depression, which exacerbated colonial use of crude force where in the past diplomacy had sufficed. And so the region's common belief in the rights and obligations of moral rulers fostered rebellions against perceived immoral colonial actions. Protests were easily quelled, until persons educated about European mores and problems began to meld traditional beliefs with political ambition. This rising alignment of commercial and political power by the educated elite produced chaos in British, Dutch and French colonies. Superior weaponry was now insufficient to control widespread riots, and persistent resistance grew in such less controllable areas as Aceh, Laos and the southern Philippines.

Despite economic decline the colonial machines persisted. Their instruments of standardization of official languages to consolidate new nations necessarily tolerated diverse dialects at first. Regional *lingue franche* for intra-regional communication emerged as English and a few Chinese languages replacing the Malay that once dominated coastal communication. Within the increasingly Westernized urban milieu, ethnic and religious groups mixed economically if not socially. This facilitated acceptance of even more immigrants from China's early 20th

century structural changes, and more Indians imported to Malaya and Myanmar by Britain. Some immigrants became owners of plantations and processing facilities, which was apparently tolerated by the indigenous population, which was less connected to globalized commerce.

The region's relative tolerance compared to other parts of the world continued through this period. Non-Muslim Chinese and Indians traded normally with Malays. Islamic opposition was almost unknown in British Malaya and that in Mindanao derived from Spain's prejudicial treatment of Muslims. Preferential treatment may also have been the cause of violent clashes between Christianized groups and Buddhists in Myanmar in the 1930s; French emphasis on Christianity in Vietnam produced a similar backlash. Strife was to rise through the 1900s, increasingly influenced by global events.⁶³

Such reactions were more frequent among the populace than the elite educated in foreign ways; private schools included those that taught in English and French, Muslim pondoks, and Chinese and Tamil schools. Colonial trends in secularizing schools before the 1930s influenced Siam to follow suit, and to create a single administrative link from government ministers to village level. Nationalistic sentiments, while perhaps expressed by the elite in the languages of colonial interests, supported moves to standardize a national language. So by the early 20th century, while a small regional elite spoke English or French and even smaller numbers Dutch or Spanish, national language programs were poised to emerge into the modern tongues as Bahasa Malay, Bahasa Indonesia, Central Thai, Vientiane Lao, Modern Khmer, Tagalog/Filipino and Modern Vietnamese.

The nations that were yet to be born had inherited systems and aspirations from their British, Dutch, French, Spanish and American governance experiences. Siam, having maintained independence albeit at the cost of prejudicial treaties and half-a-million km², eventually enjoyed a relatively smooth transition to

modernization. It was a slow path made tedious by extant franchises over taxation, labour and resources and limited administrative skills. Foreign assistance for the army and legal reforms mixed Napoleonic and British codes to produce the strange hybrid of today's Thailand. Rebellions arose, ranging from Muslim Pattani, to a millenarian Buddhist monk in Ubon, to a Burmese Shan working in Phrae. And even though Siam's Chinese immigration had risen to about ten percent of the population by the early 20th century and dominated labour and trade, racial confrontations usually dissipated in a common quest for trading profits. Such unity and an absence of European authority allowed a new elite with idealistic political theories to later introduce a nominal parliamentary constitutional monarchy in 1932.

In contrast, neighbouring Myanmar under British influence endured quasi-military control from the late 19th century until World War II. British policies aimed to contain rising Burman influence through education and military training of Karen, Kachin and other groups.⁶⁴ This was but one a sign of the end of an era. Rising costs were also nagging at the Dutch and French portending a waning of influence through the late 19th and early 20th centuries. And in the Philippines, US idealism pumped effort into a new colonial approach. Meanwhile, across all future nations, Chinese entrepreneurs seized opportunities that the Europeans overlooked while making themselves indispensable to the declining colonial machine.

Across the region, European powers were in fact losing regional influence faster than they realized. Shifts in regional education, technology and Europe's economic stagnation and drift toward World War 1 combined to create power vacuums. Yet commerce continued to be very profitable in the region especially where colonial monopolies were fracturing, which included the islands, peninsula and mainland – the whole region. Thus the balance of commercial power was oscillating with increasing frequency as the region became more globally aware and capable.

11. Pendulum of Commerce

From Confucian-influenced Vietnam, through such cities as Ava, Bangkok, Hue and Yogyakarta, monarchical systems in common were subject to major adjustments. Some crumbled while others adapted as the industrial revolution arrived piecemeal through the late 19th century. Colonial reliance on forced or indentured labour for coffee, indigo and sugar plantations in Indonesia and enforced tobacco cropping in the Philippines was quickly made redundant. At the same time, Chinese labour, as well as organisation and investment particularly in the Philippines and Siam, proved to be more efficient and more adaptable to the new demands. Soon raw materials such as tin for canned food and rubber for tyres became the source of super profits, and colonial control over such production was weakening.

Of course the region's binding commonality of rice remained central to local stability. Rice demand rose while supply faltered when unrest threatened Indian and US rice exports. This led Britain to develop the sparsely populated Irrawaddy delta into the world's major rice exporter. The French similarly invested in development of the Mekong delta, and Siam followed suit in the Chaophraya Plain with Dutch and British advisors, whose efforts were capitalized on by Chinese rice millers and exporters linked to the palace.⁶⁵

Chinese networks also coordinated smallholder production of smoked-rubber sheets in Sumatra, Malaya and later southern Siam. Their expansion to manage sugar and rope abaca from the Philippines and more than half the world's tin from Malaya stimulated immigration of an additional five million or so Chinese, again following the sea routes indicated earlier. Governments sought to regain lost monopoly revenues through revisions to taxation and the appointment of tax collection agents, and again found that they had to rely on Chinese

middlemen. A commonality evolved across the region of commission-based tax systems aligned to profits, although at times they were compromised by parallel government franchises for opium and gambling.

By the end of the 19th century, trading networks had extended into remote hinterlands where agents collected tax for government. Often Chinese, agents were tentatively replaced by officials, although old patronage systems persisted. Rising costs of governance caused tax farming to be nationalized and states to seek new monopolies, such as opium and banking. And again entrepreneurial Chinese were often the logical franchisees. In such an environment Singapore quickly established itself as the regional banking leader. But the Europeans had access to newer technologies for rail, road and shipping, which enhanced their larger plantations and mines to continue producing the bulk of colonial revenue by the early 20th century. Technology then pushed the pendulum of commerce back towards colonial enterprises such as tin mining in Malaya, although coal in Vietnam remained a Chinese franchise. New oil industries in Kalimantan, Myanmar, Sarawak and Sumatra thus became oligopolies of such companies as Burmah Oil, Royal Dutch Shell and Standard Oil, and valuable timber consolidated around the Bombay-Burmah Trading Corporation and the Borneo Company.

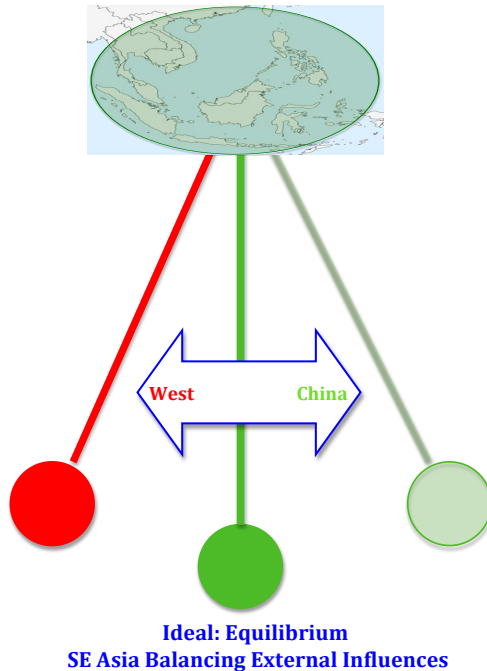
The world had changed, and the region was catching up. Populations and wealth rose, and labour that was once an objective of wars was now sedentary. Land and capital replaced labour as the economic prize. Colonial powers had capital and nobles and palace-associates had land. The landless and subsistence classes grew and revolts against authority increased, but were easily put down by the increasingly powerful urban states. Government was consolidating in the urban commercial agglomerations that had grown from past regal cities and trading centres, as shown in the following table.

Origin of City	Examples
Historical local centres	Ayutthaya/Bangkok, Hanoi, Mandalay, Mataram (Surakarta and Yogyakarta)
Early colonial trading centres	Batavia, Manila, Penang, Semarang, Singapore, Surabaya
Later colonial commercial centres	Bandung, Kuala Lumpur, Palembang, Yangon, Saigon

As funnels through which all exports passed, these cities grew rapidly to produce a regional commonality of one major city per state. Bangkok was the largest by far at this time. Its early 20th century society was roughly stratified as nobles, Europeans, large landholders and wealthy Chinese above a small middle class and government functionaries, traders, businessmen and professionals, with peasants and labourers at the bottom. Chinese traders communicated across the strata from palaces to village shops, their travelling agents unified through language and family groups to provide credit and capital, some evolving into today's major regional and global companies.⁶⁶

The region's common origins and destiny in trading meant that it had always been influenced by foreign ideas. In earlier history the dual influences were India and China. Now India was the British base. While relatively uninterested in committing major resources to cultural hegemony, Britain was more aggressive in enforcing trade than India had been. On the other hand, the influence of local Chinese came without demands from China, and so local leaders increasingly chose this option. When colonial powers saw profits ebbing towards Chinese networks they fomented anti-Chinese actions, possibly accelerating their own demise in the region. But rather than being a simple Chinese versus the West contest, this was an important step towards regional self-governance. By relying on competent individuals and networks of Chinese origin that could integrate with the region's traditions, leaders were unwittingly laying foundations for the intricate commerce of the future. The pendulum metaphor presented diagrammatically below also highlights the

region's ideal of a balance with trading partners that allowed regional hierarchies to feel in control of their destiny. Colonial governments had quashed this feeling, while local Chinese networks accorded with familiar traditions and minimized external influences.⁶⁷



By the first decades of the 20th century, the pendulum was swinging away from colonial trade with its remote European administration. Its reliance on minimal inputs for maximum gain subverted its own technological advantages. With under-capitalized and under-maintained facilities, narrow product and market bases and distracted management, colonial industries quickly proved vulnerable to the economic decline and wars in Europe. Thus when prices for rice, rubber, sugar, tin and all other major income earners plummeted in the 1930s, colonial costs in the region could not quickly be reduced further, resulting in price gouging and a fall in regional wealth of about 50 percent.⁶⁸

The structural adjustment necessitated by these changed terms of trade in the 1930s provided a fertile ground for the political ideologies absorbed by the region's educated elite from their studies in Europe. Many enterprises failed in this period. Chinese and Indian workers were deported and indebtedness rose while large landowners opportunistically expanded their holdings. At the same time, the economic success of Japan provided a strong contrast with this apparent failure of the Western free trade model. Thus gripped with separation anxiety from ever more distant colonial masters and markets, the increasingly globalized region found itself flirting with political notions of independence.



Weathered teak carving of Thai folk story

12. Emerging 1930s States

As visions of independence reified across the region, ideas of governance assumed the apparatus of colonial powers. Common across the region, this phenomenon was a natural result of independence leaders having been educated in Western politics, and civil servants being familiar with colonial administration. Great Asian intellectuals were influencing others around their region⁶⁹ and schools complemented nationalist sentiments. Global contacts including hajj pilgrimages, scholarships, radio programs and missionaries tended to reinforce existing forms of governance. The process was a continuation of modernization processes more than of revolution, with innovations from the West now complemented with those from Japan and China. Japan's defeat of Russia in an early 20th century skirmish reinforced regional perceptions of the demise of Western influence, and the value of Asian traditions within a modern approach.⁷⁰

Colonial powers lost further influence as wars at home demanded all their resources. Low global prices and increasing regional rebellion encouraged ideas of self-governance. States began to be conceived following the colonial borders that mixed ethnicities and religions, and so national myths and traditions began to be cobbled together. Old rivalries resurfaced as colonial power declined, for example in south of the Philippines where the social ethics of Islam combined with persisting local traditions and conflicted with the US ideal of secular governance. In Indonesia, Dutch suppression of rebellions stimulated graduates returning from the Netherlands to engage disaffected groups under proposals for a single flag, anthem and language. Widespread independence appeared imminent, but was delayed by forceful colonial suppression followed by the destruction and confusion inflicted in Asia by World War II. But independence was still a dream for this economically undeveloped region.

In the late 1930s there was little indication of the economic future of the Southeast Asian region, or of wider Asia. The following table provides some rough comparisons of development indicators, which suggest similarities in per capita wealth between Indonesia, Malaya and the Philippines, and outside the region to Korea and Taiwan. Social indicators imply greater levels of development in the Philippines and Thailand. Without reading too much into such crude statistics, it has been observed that colonies of Continental-European powers showed the lowest levels of educational enrolments. Behind such figures lay a pervasive tradition that united peoples in a network mostly divorced from colonial activities.

Development: Late 1930s Southeast Asia & Korea and Taiwan⁷¹

Country	GDP/Capita (1990 dollars)	Infant Mortality/'000	% Enrolled in Education
Indonesia	1175	225-250	4.0
Myanmar	749	232	5.5
Philippines	1522	139	11.5
Malaya	1361	147	7.8
Thailand	826	n.a.	10.7
Vietnam/Laos/Cambodia	n.a.	190	2.5
Korea	1459	n.a.	5.8
Taiwan	1302	142	7.8

The common persistence of traditions across the region also informed the evolution of the region's systems of governance. For example, the French-educated Vietnamese leaders merged anti-colonial Confucian thought with Marxism. With the 1930s depression fanning communist expansion, Russia's siding with the World War II Allies and Germany and Italy forming the Axis alliance with Japan, Japan had assumed the role of Vietnam's master. The genius of Ho Chi Min blended traditional beliefs with anti-colonial and anti-Japanese sentiment that created the

ultimately successful nationalist movement. Resistance in Cambodia and Laos used Buddhist rather than Confucian rallying cries against a disinterested France.

Local values in Myanmar had long been offended by Britain's importation of Indians and British-Indian administrative systems. Divisions that had been promoted between lowland Burmans and highland groups persisted within notions of independence while thwarting nationalist visions. Early 20th century rebellions dissipated as religious and cultural divisions played out aided by British agreement to allow token Burmese participation in the colonial government. A Burman attempt to define independence and nationalism through their language, literature, religion and culture being applied to all groups was advanced in the 1930s, achieving little. British efforts to create a federal system to accommodate non-Burman groups such as the Shan, Karen, Indians and many others failed with the arrival of World War II to Asia.

In Malaya, export industries based on Chinese labour served Britain while Malay independence movements arose around the purification of Islam. The arrival of Indonesians fleeing harsh Dutch repression added urgency to the movement. Resentment created by British reliance on Indians and Chinese led to an affirmative action policy favouring Malays and repatriation of many Chinese and Indians. The policy was reversed when willing labour became harder to find in the 1930s and during World War II by which time Malay independence emerged as the United Malays National Organization, which confronted Britain's post-war colonial aspirations.

Neighbouring Siam followed the same path without the complications of a Western power. Changes in governance included incorporation of traditional beliefs into modernized systems including the religion, imposition of the majority culture and creation of unifying nation-building stories. The concerns of foreign-educated Siamese from the mid 19th century evolved to

coalesce around Thai values being defined as 'king, nation and religion'. This culminated in the 1932 introduction of parliamentary democracy and a constitutional monarchy. Excessive ideals including abandonment of the monarchy were quickly modulated in a military coup. The military government then effectively defined modern Thai culture in terms of State Buddhism, manners, clothing, ethnicity, music and theatre, and by changing the country's name from Siam to Thailand in 1939. The military reclaimed territories previously lost to France in Cambodia and Laos, and in 1943 pressed occupying Japan to transfer back 'lost' states from Malaya and Myanmar. Enforced on such groups as the Pattani Muslims, whose realm was divided into seven administrative units to be administered by Buddhist public servants, ongoing resentments were to hamper progress of the nation-building dream in the south.

The rise of independence in the Philippines followed the path common across the region, although it is often presented differently simply because it appeared to coincide with its change from being a Spanish to a US colony. Ceded to the US after the 1898 Spanish-American War, a more benign colonial relationship aimed to prepare the country for independence. This was the first instance of a modern form of Western influence in the region, one that arrived with political ideals and an initially less avaricious intent. However, the US knew as little, or perhaps even less, about the region's history and traditions than its European colonial counterparts. Thus well-intended support for the formation of indigenous governments led to the Philippines becoming unruly under successive self-styled revolutionary governments. In the mid 1930s a more stable government arose with the objective of leading the country towards full independence. The process was interrupted by Japanese occupation during World War II, which occasioned massive US inputs that facilitated a formal declaration of independence post-war.⁷²

Among groups marginalized by independence and nationalistic action, Chinese and others that had benefited from colonial rule opposed independence. Of these groups, the Chinese had integrated more into regional cultures in Siam and the Philippines than in Muslim Malay areas and had proved adept in acquiring the manners and languages of power – Dutch, English, French, Spanish and Thai. Their proportion of populations varied across the region, as indicated in the table below. Rising nationalist sentiment, building on past colonial actions, led to pogroms against Chinese fueled by questions of divided loyalties at a time when the Kuomintang and the Chinese Communist Party sought support from regional Chinese organizations. This resulted in discriminatory laws in the Philippines and Siam, violent riots in Indonesia and movement of many Straits-born Chinese to create Singapore. In contrast, immigrant Indians in Malaya and Myanmar, while less assimilated, were relatively unaffected by the nationalist movements in India.⁷³

Country	Chinese % of Pre-WWII Population
Cambodia	10
Laos	10
Indonesia	3
Malaya	40
Myanmar	1.8
Siam	25
Vietnam	1

Another way of viewing this history is to see the region having evolved with an unhindered free market operated within a kind of royalty taxation system on cargo. Controlled by rulers and inland by their proxies, a general tolerance pervaded so that the region had relatively little conflict. Once Europe applied its monopolistic tendencies, more of a dog-eat-dog attitude arose that was exacerbated by a focus on race. With such a viewpoint of history, the commonalities being drawn out in this discussion are those from the past that persisted as a countervailing force to the foreign monopolies.



Interpretation of Hindu deity

13. War and Independence

World War II prompted a resurgence of independence movements founded on dreams of modern industrialization. Japan's invasion of the region in 1941, abetted by reduced colonial resistance from Western nations distracted by the European war, met with less local resistance than some revisionists claim. Japan was an Asian nation, understood the importance of acknowledging local mores and came with a message of regional economic independence.

Thailand quickly acquiesced after Japan annexed Vietnamese coal, ports, rice and rubber while the West's only response was sanctions and an oil embargo. Such relative apathy emboldened coordinated Japanese attacks on Hong Kong, Malaya, the Philippines and Hawaii, which began the Pacific War at the close of 1941.⁷⁴ By this strategy Japan became supreme across the region within six months. It was slowly repelled to eventual defeat by the 1945 US nuclear bombs.

The region's independence groups had welcomed Japan's eviction of colonial powers. Initially espousing a 'bloc of Asian nations led by the Japanese and free of Western powers',⁷⁵ the Japanese planned a sphere wider than the Southeast Asian states contained within the white rectangle in the map below.⁷⁶ Initially proposed as economic expansion for Japan and compensating for the slight of meagre allocations from World War I spoils, it later shifted to military expansionism. A grand vision of a 'Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere' supported by an 'Asia for the Asians' slogan appealed widely. Japan intimated independence for Indonesia, Malaya, Myanmar and Vietnam, continued the self-rule progress of the Philippines and allowed Thailand to reclaim its lost territories. But despite such informed tactics, the plan ultimately failed to deliver the expected benefits after retreating colonial staff and armies destroyed key economic assets.



During their brief tenure, Japan had maintained colonial-trained civil servants in function, a practice that would be followed by subsequent independence parties. Factional interests including communist groups arose, many supported by the Allies, which in combination with the war damage to assets and trust soon confronted unrealistic expectations. The US was now the world power and saw regional stability as essential to trade and this influenced past colonial powers to support modernization in parallel with seeking new commercial benefits. But this did not mean immediate independence, even though Britain quickly began to plan local governance for Myanmar after strikes confounded its trade interests, and suggested something similar for Malaya. The Netherlands proposed a Commonwealth of all Dutch lands while France sought to again control Indochina with non-specific allusions to increased autonomy. Only the US clearly indicated that it would grant independence to its colony, the Philippines.

Myanmar declared independence in 1948 after inadequate preparation that further fractured the loyalties of highland states. The resulting unrest cost Britain much subsequent trade access. In contrast, Britain's management of Malaya from a Singapore base supported by a military administration allowed the creation of the Malayan Union. Deftly orchestrated amidst widespread communist actions, Britain's focus on Malaya's rubber, tin and other export earnings led to the uniting of the peninsula, Sabah, Sarawak and Singapore. Despite objections, a compromise to exclude non-Malays from citizenship proved necessary to create the Federation of Malaya in 1948.⁷⁷

In Indonesia, the Dutch resisted self-governance until the US threatened withholding reconstruction loans to the Netherlands, which led to the UN finally acknowledging Indonesian independence in 1949. The Vietnamese, while wary of China seeking advantage in the post-war void, repelled the returning French through seven debilitating years of war.

Rising militancy of communist regimes provoked deeper US interest in the region, which was to incidentally spur the final stages of independence of states from Britain, France and the Netherlands. Regarding Vietnam as the vulnerable domino, the US supported anti-communist Indonesian nationalists, and later anti-communist Thai groups. However, the US disagreed with France's continuing colonial objectives and hence refrained from assisting the French until they faced imminent defeat in their Vietnam war. Recasting the conflict as an anti-communist cause, the US influenced Geneva agreements to end the French Indochinese empire, and within a few years sent US troops to Vietnam.⁷⁸

The commonality of the communist uprisings across the region inspired the US to support British forces in Malaya and Myanmar to safeguard foreign-exchange earnings. Enjoying more US support than the Netherlands or France, Britain appeared to obtain the best financial outcomes, but in effect the region

became increasingly viewed as a buffer to communism. Nationalist sentiments had matured further through this period. In each emerging State means of unifying disparate groups through old customs, traditions and values were becoming clearer. There was a common regional need for educated and informed leaders to emerge.



Detail of Burmese laquerwork

14. Marching to Statehood

States emerged with such historical figures as Lee Kuan Yew in Singapore, Ne Win in Burma, Abdul Rahman in Malaysia and Norodom Sihanouk in Cambodia among other dominant characters. Demand for change was common across the region, even in Siam where it took the form of reactions against the monarchical system. Leaders shared a remarkably common Western ideology, particularly French ideals of overthrowing overlords. These later spawned national mythologies in revolutionary terms, as in Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam. Governments in common centralized power in a period of post-war global growth. While the official histories of the emerging nations differ, in fact underlying commonalities continued, as can be detected by considering each nation's journey. In an apparently dynamic period many things did not change.⁷⁹

Post-1932 Thailand gained stability from the military and the constitutionally marginalized monarchy. From 1946, King Bhumiphon slowly reshaped the monarchy as a moral force to command a popular loyalty. The military government cultivated relationships with the US, gaining significant concessions against British demands to punish the Thai military for assisting Japan during World War II. And so Thailand modernized as new fertile lands were opened while the majority Buddhist religion tacitly supported the political status quo. The regional commonality of loyalty to a strong responsible leader, as embedded in social hierarchies, languages and customs, was exhibited in Thailand's version of democracy based on king, religion and nation. This paternalistic structure functioned well for its time with the military ensuring the domestic stability that later was to allow an expansion of US influence to host some 50,000 US soldiers by 1968. This product of the Vietnam conflict effectively underwrote Thailand's later economic boom.⁸⁰

Boom times brought rapacious speculation, and a communist backlash among indebted and marginalized minorities and students. Violence in 1973 led to the constitutional monarch testing his now powerful moral authority to install an elected parliament of influential elites. When the US withdrew from Vietnam in 1976 and communists controlled Cambodia and Laos, insecurity in Thailand required a return to military leadership sanctioned by the King. A factional dispute in 1981 led the military Prime Minister to remove his government from Bangkok in the company of the King and the royal family to counter a coup attempt, thus further substantiating the King as a fulcrum of power. Many of these monarchical aspects are claimed to be uniquely Thai, but may also be seen as one expression of the common mechanisms to effect increasingly massive central governance.

Vietnam's nominal 1945 independence was defined by continuous war until the 1980s, first against the French, then the US, China and Cambodia. A 1960s' Constitution established an elected National Assembly with a powerful presidential and party system that recognized the north's dependency on the south's rice. However, commitment in the south was variable, and ultimately the north's Ho Chi Minh was able to make villages the political foundation for war with a communist flavour that was not reliant on class conflicts. Less brilliant leadership in the south relied on US military support to the local elite concentrated in the military and the church after the 1954 partition of the country by the French. The disenchanted populace in the south was attracted by the north-inspired National Liberation Front, which styled itself as the protector of villages from the rapacious government of the south. As US support increased in the south, so NLF policies matured to advocate property rights, religious toleration, women's rights, social welfare and national unification. The fall of Saigon, US withdrawal, the Paris Peace Agreement and excessive corruption in the south facilitated unification under a large centralized government with a new Constitution in 1976. Faced by the

challenges of widespread poverty, reliance on Russia and separation from global markets, the newly united Vietnam was then faced with countering the excessive Pol Pot regime in Cambodia.⁸¹

Cambodia's attempt at an elected National Assembly was initially thwarted by the return of the French, which prompted moves towards the 1953 independence date with Prince Sihanouk abdicating in his father's favour. Sihanouk then created a successful political party that progressively absorbed opposition groups until it finally fractured and the communist People's Revolutionary Party backed by Vietnam gained power over much of the country. After a Geneva Conference shifted power back to conservatives with US support, the new communist leader of Kampuchea, Pol Pot, planned revolution and armed rebellion that led to atrocities until eventually suppressed by Vietnam's invasion a decade and half later. Thereafter disparate philosophies mired local coalitions while governments progressively consolidated power in the centre.⁸²

Laos emerged with two overlapping governing systems, the elitist Royal Lao Government supported by the US and the communist Pathet Lao supported by the rural populations motivated by a 1949 Geneva Conference that impotently re-confirmed French sovereignty. The influence of Vietnam and election of a Pathet Lao government drew the US into a complex undeclared war in which it supported forces in Vientiane and the south against the Pathet Lao's stronghold in north. Despite US opposition, Russian support of Vientiane and a trade blockade from Thailand, the hardened Pathet Lao prevailed. A further 1962 Geneva Conference failed to agree on a coalition government and battles continued until the Pathet Lao established the Lao People's Democratic Republic in 1975 and nationalized assets.⁸³

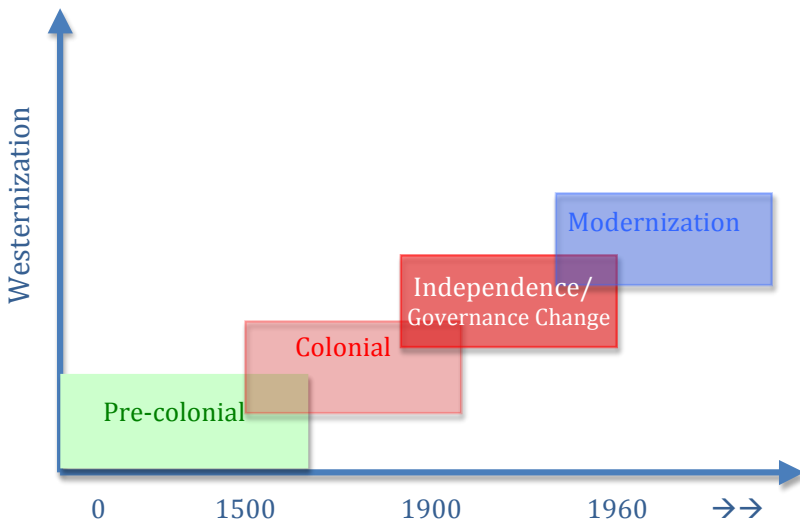
The Indonesian Republic declared in 1945 acknowledged wartime realities and the cultural differences of major islands.

The Dutch later violently opposed the declaration but failed in the face of increasingly organized leadership. A viable federation accommodating disparate cultures became the Republic of Indonesia in 1950 based on the constitutional concept of Pancasila that acknowledged the five major religions of the new nation. Cultural polarization of potential leaders threatened implementation until 1960 when Sukarno's Guided Democracy was enforced by the military. Extreme communist and Muslim groups, populist parties and military factions then clashed with more than 500,000 killed. Militarily reestablishing law and order in 1967, Suharto emerged as President. He then centralized power under a New Order program, and managed aggression against Malaysia and Dutch Irian while suppressing student and independent political groups. By the late 1980s, social stability was valued above ideology, Pancasila was reconfirmed and the military evolved to share power by allocating key government posts in an echo of the traditional patron-client models common to the region.⁸⁴

For Indonesia as across the region, the common pattern illustrated in the diagram below emerged as a continuum. The continuum from pre-colonial times, progresses through the colonial period and governmental changes to enter the current period of modernization; the diagram is indicative rather than drawn to an arithmetic time scale. The vertical scale is depicted as increased Westernization over time rather than economic development since some social goods are argued to have decreased with increased development and modernization. The diagram also applies to Thailand with its 1930s changes towards a form of democracy, and even to nations at early stages of modernization, such as Myanmar.

In Myanmar, independence began in 1948 with a Burman-Chin-Kachin federated Union that the Shan soon joined, each expecting local autonomy. Almost immediately, such ideals fell victim to border, language and cultural disputes that descended into civil war until a dominant socialist-influenced party

emerged. This led to militarily enforced stability for elections in 1960. After two years, Ne Win's military took over the disarray caused by political attempts to promulgate Buddhism as the national religion and lowland Burmans as the superior group. Imposing his Burmese Way to Socialism, bans of traditional rites and cattle slaughter were relaxed, monks were banned from politics and ethnic leaders were suppressed in an attempt to unite the highland states with the lowlands. Self-reliance replaced external trade as foreign contact waned and the black-market reigned until the 1988 student rebellion. Ne Win then officially and voluntarily handed power to the heavily centralized Council for the Restoration of Law and Order. It now seems to be following the region's path of evolving local versions of modern governance systems that retain traditional values and beliefs in strong leadership.⁸⁵



The Federation of Malaysia declared in 1961, with Britain's influence, incorporated the diverse ethnicities of Sabah, Sarawak and Singapore in 1963. A process of respectfully out-waiting powerful heads of some states while quashing revolts, such as those of the Chinese-dominated Malayan Communist Party,

established a norm of opaque governance. But it was moves to give a privileged status to Islam, Bahasa language and Malays that convincingly alienated resident Chinese and Indians as well as such indigenous groups as the Kalimantan/Borneo Iban. Such policies and bias in government allocations led to Singapore's secession in 1965 and Brunei's refusal to join the Federation. On the peninsula, race riots in 1969 partly fueled by inequitable wealth distribution, led to the National Security Council taking control until Parliament could resume. Non-peninsula Malaysia was less affected because it had negotiated a delay in its full integration into the Federal governance system. Rewriting legislation to balance income and occupational differences between races under the guise of national security created the Bumiputra middle class and allowed state sultans to share the head of state role. In 1981 the educated commoner Mahathir assumed the Prime Ministerial role and power was centralized, with the effect that the patronage system began to recognize talent of a certain kind.⁸⁶

Singapore's autonomy within the Malaysian Federation included practical equality for all races, and hastened its separation from Malaysia in 1965. As an independent city-state, Singapore's centralized governance forged a more Chinese identity while curbing communist sympathies and corruption. Marginalization of Chinese in Malaysia and repression in Indonesia empowered the authoritarian leadership of Lee Kuan Yew that streamlined management oriented to international trade. Practical politics produced more equitable wage rates, ministerial meetings with constituents, penalties for corruption, higher salaries of well-educated public servants and public service integration measures for Malays and Indians.

Brunei, never having been more than a Protectorate under the British, extracted an offer of special conditions from the original Federation of Malaya, which the Sultan of Brunei ultimately rejected. Brunei's 1959 Constitution vested power in the Sultan's house in another form of centralized governance. A legislative

council existed by grace of the Sultan, state treasury disbursements were at the Sultan's discretion and the military served the Sultan as national leader in a paternal Islamic state that ensured some equity between citizens.⁸⁷

The Philippines had claimed independence from Spain prematurely in 1896, but languished under elite families and social hierarchies that were subsequently further entrenched by the US. Rebellions in the late 1940s, through the 1946 declaration of independence into the early 1950s were sparked by the breakdown of the traditional patron-client model that resulted from absentee landlordism weakening patron obligations in hard times. Agrarian reform, often promised and consistently thwarted, reflected landlord power supported by the wealthy church that manipulated intellectuals, landowners, merchants and peasants alike. But the link between government and the church weakened as popular support for the elite waned and the church eventually reacted against dictatorial rule when President Marcos declared martial law in 1972. Various responses ensued including Libyan support to Muslim Mindanao, revolts by peasants in Luzon, establishment of private armies, urban bombings, land grabs and political assassinations. The US having long supported the Philippines lost interest as the church fomented the People's Revolution of 1986 that drove Marcos from power. Long centralized around the powerful elite, aspirations of devolution were seldom accompanied by authority or budgetary support.⁸⁸

These potted histories omit many facts and even more of the nation-building fictions. Nevertheless, they serve to illustrate the marginal relevance of specific dates of independence such as listed in the table below. For most states, the actual date of independence was embedded in an ongoing political modernization project that often involved violence as power vacuums arose. Notwithstanding the different paths followed across the region, three overriding observations are relevant to this discussion. First, there was a common drift to large and

strong centralized government systems following past experience; second, compared to other parts of the world, there were relatively brief periods of disruption in the transition from colonial or equivalent governance to statehood, and third, commerce continued almost uninterrupted as the critical underpinning of economies.

Official Dates of Independence for Southeast Asian Countries⁸⁹

Country	Date of Independence	Comment
Brunei	1984: 1 January	From UK
Cambodia	1953: 9 November	From France
Indonesia	1945: 17 August	Declared
Laos	1949: 19 July	From France
Malaysia	1957: 31 August	From UK
Myanmar	1948: 4 January	From UK
Philippines	1946: 4 July	From USA
Singapore	1965: 9 August	From Malaysian Federation
Thailand	1238	By tradition; never colonized
Vietnam	1945: 2 September	From France

With each state arriving at its own form of centralized governance, the new nations continued to rely on international trade as always, and despite the apparent political mayhem, commerce continued throughout – even in marginalized states. As states of the region stabilized at varying rates, a common pattern emerged in economic development.

15. Emerging Leadership

Regional trade declined from the late 1940s as colonial economies faltered in the post-World War II depression of the West. Alternative markets could not be pursued since advancing and retreating armies had destroyed many of the region's production assets. For example, post-World War II Myanmar was left with only about ten percent of its oil refineries, ships and trains. Other hardships had created longer-term setbacks, such as rice requisitioned for Japan from south Vietnam coincident with the 1944 north Vietnam famine, which resulted in more than one million additional deaths. Such disruptions portended instability, which prompted increased vigilance from the new regional force, the USA. Independence movements had yet to understand the demands of economic and social policy, even though the US had made some preparations in the Philippines. The region was in need of a revival in trade and sound international relations.

Industrialization was constrained by attempts to instill Western ideals and systems through Western aid for state central planning focused on government assets and action. Public sector investment pervaded. For example, the first central bank of the region was created in Thailand in 1942, but export income was not addressed in development planning until the Third Five-Year National Economic Development Plan in 1972. A stark contrast followed Singapore's independence and its necessity to adopt a more free market approach, which with its rule of law soon led it to dominate regional economic growth rates. But overall, colonial enterprises still represented at least 20 percent of the region's economy into the 1980s. The approach of central planning was used in all states, both socialist and capitalist.⁹⁰

Initially in the early post-World War II years, Western economic models were rejected, foreigners resented and in some cases,

foreign aid refused. The colonial legacy of Chinese and Indian residents was similarly unwanted, but these were the traders that produced the wealth needed for economic and social development. Pragmatism won out and Western aid and credit was soon allowed by amenable nations, while Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam associated with Russia or China. Cronyism and corruption emerged in a warped patron-client culture with overt trade in opium and other disruptive goods, at times sanctioned by Western forces. Occasional expulsions of foreign companies, discrimination against Chinese and Indians and expansion of government and military enterprises was common to the region through to the late 1980s.

The influence of China and Russia inspired the US to link trade to anti-communist activities, including support of military coups. Thus US development and military aid defined national budgets in Cambodia, Laos and Thailand and influenced those of Indonesia and the Philippines. Parallel private linkages and Western university education facilitated continuing US influence in Thailand, Indonesia and especially the Philippines.

By the end of the 1970s, Japanese aid exceeded that of the US after the Vietnam conflict had ended. Tied to Japanese suppliers and not demanding political changes, it was widely welcomed. Foreign investment was further encouraged by such influence and by the power of budget veto now accruing to the major lenders, the US-influenced World Bank and the Japanese-influenced Asian Development Bank. But the price of once valuable tropical crops and minerals declined as oil prices rose. Foreign investment drifted towards low-wage manufacturing of export goods such as clothes, electrical components, processed food and toys. Regional oil and gas reserves were developed but benefits were not widespread, and tourism contributed increasingly to foreign exchange earnings. With the Green Revolution supporting population growth and economic stability through to the 1980s, purists questioned whether these nations were truly independent while they relied on foreign aid,

investments, technologies and low-wages. But looking back over three decades, the differences between the economic and social stagnation of Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar and the Western-oriented states is usually accepted as an indication of successful independence.

In Western oriented states, average per capita wealth increased across the rising populations. Efficient administration, reliable banking and strategic location allowed Singapore to become a major exporter, which compensated for its limited agricultural land and small domestic market. The other tiny state, Brunei, grew wealthy from oil, a resource that would later benefit the Malaysian and Indonesian economies. Malaysia became the regions' wealthiest sizeable state followed by the agricultural powerhouse of Thailand. Thailand's agricultural expansion and new export crops led to the export value of cassava, kenaf and maize surpassing rice income even while Thailand remained the world's largest rice exporter. Stable governance under military rule in Thailand attracted Japanese and other investment for export of computer components, tiger prawns, gems and myriad other products. A successful population control program supported Thailand's economic growth while the Philippines' economy languished with high birth rates and remained hampered by vested interests. Indonesia remained reliant on foreign aid through the 1980s, partially as a result of private appropriation of oil revenues.⁹¹

Among the non-Western oriented states, Myanmar was not to regain pre-war economic levels for decades despite a short-lived post-war boom. Nationalizing of businesses, ethnic discrimination and reduced foreign investment forced reliance on a black market. Japanese, Australian and other aid through the late 1970s and early 1980s had a minor effect that was quickly reversed by poor debt management, domestic instability and repressive measures that led to Western aid being withdrawn, despite Myanmar remaining on the list of the world's poorest countries. In Vietnam, the post-World War II economy

was defined by wars with France, the US, China and civilly. Growth from agricultural development was quickly stifled when collectivization was introduced. US expenditures and budget support assisted the growth in south Vietnam, but overall that conflict and its successors negated most gains, as was also the case in Cambodia and Laos. After the exit of the US, socialist policies hampered growth until private incentives were introduced in the late 1980s, by which time high debt loads to Russia further delayed recovery.

Overall, the region's growth into the 1990s relied on manufacturing and mining rising from below 10 percent of GDP to around 30 percent for Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam, with Indonesia close behind. Only Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar languished with unimproved agriculture engaging most of the populace. The wages offered by new export-oriented industries attracted rural migrants and underwrote sustained improvements in individual and family wellbeing. Labour productivity in manufacturing rose continuously, while for agriculture it rose more slowly and for the service sector remained stagnant so long as government dominated it. Non-socialist economies enjoyed conspicuous improvements in wealth that were to only come to others decades later, incidentally highlighting the criticality of capital inflows.⁹²

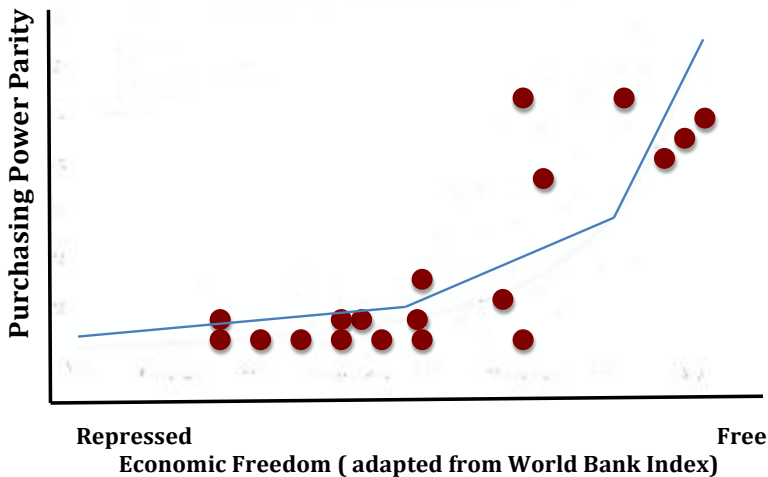
The source of capital also determined the rate of expansion. Repatriated earnings were applied to family needs and aid was commonly tied in idealist strings. This made capital from taxation and state functionaries disproportionately important. Cultural behaviours also affected capital-raising, for example resident Chinese practiced thrift and pooling of capital for investments while indigenous groups tended to follow a tradition of sharing good-fortune. But the common large public sector involvement in economies was also an incentive for private wealth to focus on rent-seeking through cozy arrangements with government.

Idealistic governments under foreign influence applied loans and aid to unsustainable social development. On the other hand, economies that focused on productive sectors and earned revenue surpluses to fund social services reaped sustained benefits from literacy, disease and birth control, and indigenous technological innovation. Women benefitted from farm mechanization, urban employment and education while health advanced at record levels, at least for the ethnic majorities. The economic plans of development agencies and in particular the later 5-year plans supported by major loans guided development, but there remained characteristics specific to the region. With the continuing centralized power the region had evolved economic understanding foreign to routine discourse, as the outcomes of 1997 Asian financial crisis were to show when the region ultimately offered lessons to the global development finance community.

Southeast Asia provides an interesting laboratory for economic theorists. Normalized curves for an index of objectively assessed economic freedom for a state against purchasing power usually present reasonably high correlations (~ 0.65) for global statistics, as approximated by the blue line in the figure below. However, within the dots for 19 unspecified states are Southeast Asian nations where high purchasing power is not necessarily associated with economic freedom. This factor may suggest a benefit in maintaining strong centralized governance and possibly lower production costs while continuing to modernize. Without reading too much into such presentations, it is worth noting that development in the region is often said to continue to need strong central governance associated with commerce, and that may be suggested in the graph. In such situations, it is the type of government restrictions that seem to be important.⁹³

Until recent times, restrictions in employment, access to official credit and university entrance excluded minority ethnicities and many progeny of immigrants from the mainstream. Yet ironically, it was the entrepreneurialism of the well-integrated

local Chinese that assisted the region's return to its common economic base of trade. Particularly in Thailand and the Philippines success led to assimilation, which produced the side benefit of reduced outflows of profits. Longer-term foreign investment from Germany, Hong Kong, Japan and Taiwan increased, but bizarre regulations meant that entrepreneurial Chinese and other groups could better take up new opportunities. Demand for foreign capital, technologies and market access whittled away nationalistic policies after the 1970s as trade became more international.



Rising wealth benefitted the majority despite increased income disparities. Idealistic observations of less wealth disparity in socialist nations consistently overlooked the hardships caused by stagnant economies, capital flight and poverty. In fact urban-rural disparities were more important, fueling fears of 'communist' disruptions and rural population growth. Improved infant survival and longevity resulting from education and health services favoured cities. Beginning in Thailand, family planning then led to a common tapering-off of reproductive rates across the region as wealth rose from the 1970s. Large enough to command world attention, the region had experienced

population growth from about 150 million when World War II ended to 400 million in 1990 and more than 600 million in 2014. Notwithstanding a veneer of modernity it retained many of its traditional features.

Traditions included the common belief in a natural hierarchy that had weathered the colonial period and World War II and continued into independence. Political leaders today are more usually from educated or elite backgrounds with the new nobility being products of certain universities, families or the military. The military remains a continuing stabilizing force in much of the region. But the rate of integration of entrepreneurial Chinese is the social change most closely correlated with economic progress. In non-government sectors, this has led to such changes as: a decline in patron-client relationships to ensure productivity and quality control in factories; acceptance of fixed pricing in place of the pastime of bargaining; the replacement of local markets with seductive department stores; a reduction in compensatory traditions of benevolence to bridge wealth, and status disparities – and most significantly, the emergence of an urban middle class with regular incomes, mortgages and aspirations. Urban poverty has resulted. In rural areas, traditional values gave way slowly as modern technologies replaced collective work and festival periods. Thus the regional commonality of economic development has eroded some but not all traditions.⁹⁴

Today, new leaders assume the responsibilities of modern iterations of the mandate of heaven presented variously through filters of Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Islam and so on. Community values are expressed through dialect groups, trade unions and student societies within nation-building projects that reinforce beliefs in hierarchy and community. Thus psychological stability has been transferred to the amorphous idea of state as nation. Patron-client traditions continue in gifts and favours that foreign cultures sometimes mislabel as corruption and nepotism. Within such a milieu, public protests may be understood as being

more about changing leadership that has lost the right to govern – the mandate of heaven – than about demands for Western-style democracy.



Detail of Lao weaving

16. States to Nations to Region

The recent decades have seen the formation of governed states develop into nations around local histories and values, and a growth of confidence that facilitates cooperation as a region. The process has been rapid in world historical terms, and is easily confused by partial understandings of actions in one part of the region or another. For example, the 1960s were dominated for four mainland countries by both the US support for south Vietnam and the reactionaries that became the Viet Cong and the Pathet Lao. Cambodia deftly managed neutrality yet was affected through these years while Thailand wallowed in US largesse that had been politically captured by consistent military governance. Myanmar remained cut-off and in each of Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Thailand, Buddhism became an overt tool of governance. In the peninsula and the islands, Malaysia adopted a form of democracy but lost the pragmatic trading culture of Singapore, while Indonesia's Guided Democracy initially leant towards Russia and China while maintaining anti-colonial aggression and territorial expansion until turning to the US.

The region's common heritage of trade mollified some ideological excesses of independence. At the same time, the old colonial powers, as well as the USA, Russia and China influenced regional trade and politics. The Cold War polarized the region's communists and non-communists, yet ethnic, family and trade networks persisted. Organizations such as the United Nations' Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East (ECAFE) based in Bangkok and a Britain-Australia-New Zealand Commonwealth interest based in Singapore were established from 1947. In 1954 the South-East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) was created, involving Australia, France, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand, Britain and the USA in a 'Collective Defence Treaty' to promote regional nation-building. Criticized by China, Thailand housed SEATO in exchange for additional aid

at the same time that the successful education scheme, the Colombo Plan engaged most nations of the region.⁹⁵

The most effective of multinational organizations in the region was the 1967 creation of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) by Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. This occurred after the stillborn Southeast Asian Friendship and Economic Treaty in a period marked by declining US involvement in Vietnam. At the same time, increased contact with China foretold the next phase of the region's development. This encapsulated longstanding common values of the region, exhibited by its promotion of regional interaction based on long-term tolerance that extended to China's emerging Open Door policy. In this respect, ASEAN may be more a successor to the World War II Japanese Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere than to specific Western inspired initiatives.

Sharing long extant common values and experiences of both colonization and World War II, ASEAN was much more than a convenient political grouping. Those states not ready to join were extended an offer of membership when they could subscribe to the general aim of accelerated 'economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region'. A shared vision of peace without foreign military action accommodated authoritarian governance if economies remained open to trade. This meant welcoming investment capital, encouraging enhancements in regional trade, communications, tourism, and cultural, scientific and educational understanding, while remaining mostly tolerant of others' political ideals. The pace of such regional political development, often criticized as slow and indecisive, in fact reflected common regional decision-making values and allowed the vision to be attained in spite of external meddling and fearmongering.

Fears of a 'communist domino' effect through the region garnered support in the USA, Australia, Britain and New Zealand

and influenced aid allocations. But in retrospect, it can be seen that the urban-based communist ideology was poorly matched to the traditional societal values of the region. Its foothold against excessive Western influence and marginalization of minorities gained some Russian support, but Chinese communism failed to gel with the region's Chinese who had long settled into the culture. Different states in the region managed politics to access foreign investment and aid – socialist for Russian favour, democratic for the West, although US Military expenditure largely defined the development of the Philippines and Thailand through the 1960s.⁹⁶

As the Vietnam conflict scaled down in the late 1960s, regional decision-making developed more quickly, maturing into an agreement of regional cooperation with a permanent ASEAN secretariat. Subsequent national developments encouraged tighter governance with an anti-communist stance, such as in Thailand after the 1976 student riots that precipitated a military coup. Thereafter economic growth became decidedly capitalist in nature with reductions in regional tariffs and increased administrative efficiencies. Australia, New Zealand and especially Japan took a deeper interest in the region within an ethic of peace underpinning trade, including ASEAN's rejection of Pol Pot's regime. Buoyed by economic progress, the public of the 1970s accepted authoritarian governments that maintained stability.

The region's emergence as one with unity on an increasing number of issues offers a means of highlighting some simple aspects of commonalities and continuity. The following illustration brings together elements that indicate the region's historical base in trade, initially with India and China with the influences that these brought in the forms of religions and languages. The arrival of European trading houses that developed into monopolies led to the region being a source of traded goods when it was treated more as a mine or repository than a major trading participant. As independent states emerged

from colonial powers, nations were formed with the standardization of languages, myths and stories, as occurs in all nation-building programs. And once confident in nationhood, regional cooperation based in trade could be advanced. This is the phase that the Southeast Asian region has entered, and it is a curious coincidence that China is again emerging as the most important trading partner. Although not quite an historical circle, a rapprochement to the region's origins can nevertheless be seen.



Independence of the most recent ASEAN member Brunei eventuated in 1984, bringing membership to the current ten nations. Portuguese Timor, not yet a full member, continued in benign colonial neglect until an Indonesian invasion stimulated declaration of an independent Timor Leste. Having adopted the arbitrary colonial borders, new nations included frontier conflicts coloured by ethnic, language and religious differences. But apart from US involvement in Indochina, the region has been relatively free of major disputes. Common attitudes to dispute resolution and the challenges of nation-building were augmented by regional trade networks supporting the development of regional politics. Thus ideological differences were largely subordinated to commerce. Foreign predictions of fractured regional relations that assumed similar reprisals as had occurred in Europe misread the region. This partly accounts for the surprise expressed about ASEAN's relatively smooth transition

into tolerant regional communication. It was also a belated global recognition of common regional values, as the region's native historians now observe.

The region's open economies continued to develop through the 1980s, with Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand gaining wealth while the Philippines languished with corrupt governance, high population growth, entrenched class disparities, increasing foreign debt and unrealistic expectations. Once seen as the regional success story, the Philippines had suffered from its continuing reliance on US support until popular sentiments of the early 1990s eschewed such remnants of colonialism. Meanwhile Myanmar continued its regressive policies and suffered under trade embargoes, ultimately relying on Chinese largesse to function. Vietnam slowly emerged under continuing central control, while the small Lao and Cambodian economies expanded spasmodically.⁹⁷ Vietnam joined ASEAN in 1995, Laos and Myanmar in 1997 and Cambodia in 1999.⁹⁸

Capacity across the region increased as Colombo Plan scholars from participating countries returned from abroad. Colonial influence in the region was said to be past when Timor Leste declared independence in 2002 and was admitted with Papua New Guinea to candidate-observer status of ASEAN, effectively stretching the definition of Southeast Asia. By the 2000s Southeast Asia was a rising political force representing 700 million persons at a maritime crossroads, harbouring diverse primary resources. In many ways, today's Southeast Asia is an expression of the region's common traditions and values based on wealth derived from commerce underpinned by firm governance and surplus food. With such confidence and economic development, ever improving governance could finally be extended to include those who were excluded from civilization in remote areas.⁹⁹

Those excluded over the centuries have often evaded attempts of integration by pre-colonial, colonial, foreign aid and until

recently modern governments. Whether marginalized by the majority or by having rejected the onerous authority of civilized life by retreat to the hills, islands or seas, these minorities had developed a lifestyle over generations. If the integration that is now occurring continues smoothly, notwithstanding localized altercations, the region may well become the next hallmark in social development. In some ways, the means of integration based on the general flexibility of regional mores may be seen as another indication of the processes that have allowed the region to have the fastest economic growth in world history over the past six decades. The common belief systems of such a large and successful region therefore becomes important in understanding its functioning. And within the region's penchant for inclusivity, current assimilation processes offer a means of testing the persistence of traditions and beliefs. The following chapters consider beliefs from this viewpoint, beginning with a consideration of the marginalized peoples who retain elements of the region's traditions.



Inlay of Guanyin on rosewood

17. Remote Peoples

Consistent with the theme of commonalities in this book, the region's remote peoples are also considered according to their common characteristics. The approach is not unique,¹⁰⁰ but is unusual insofar as it considers a different perspective from the normal nation-building histories that focus on kingdoms, cities and colonies. It is from those histories that remote groups were sometimes defined, even where they may have once not differed from their lowland cousins.

The common histories discussed in the preceding chapters relate how kingdoms accessible to the coast grew into international entrepôts influenced by traders from the near west and north long before Europeans arrived. These sites were in most cases the same ones that became major cities in the nations that eventually emerged after World War II. Early histories generally portray inland princedoms ceding power to these dominant kingdoms, with civilizing influence declining with distance from royal cities. Remote peoples were of little consequence to the trading kingdoms except for supply of forest products through intermediaries. Where their lifestyles were seen they were considered to be primitive. Today, modern nation-states are actively assimilating these groups into national tongues, laws and mores.

A modern nation-state rapidly industrializes and soon imposes a uniform culture over a larger area than an agrarian empire could ever do. Before today, the region's pre-modern kingdoms were therefore, as elsewhere, a mix of overlapping and ever-changing loyalties. Europe was the same until recent centuries when borders firmed up with industrialization, and literacy was used to connect people to the newly defined community – the nation. Out of this came Lord Acton's reservation: 'By making the State and the nation commensurate with each other in theory,

[nationality] reduces practically to subject condition all other nationalities that may be within the boundary. ... According, therefore, to the degree of humanity and civilization in that dominant body which claims all the rights of the community, the inferior races are exterminated or outlawed or reduced to servitude, or put in a condition of dependence'.¹⁰¹ In the region marginalized persons were viewed in various ways, sometimes as barbarians by their civilized (that is, city-influenced) cousins. and each party adopted its own version of history.

Many minorities had adapted to a mobile lifestyle in the highlands or small islands. They lived beyond civilization, did not cultivate large wet rice fields, eschewed courtly hierarchies and had no desire to emulate the sedentary majority. They became labeled as different tribes across the remote areas of the highlands of Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam – and extending through Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines. The sea gypsies' history is similar. It was therefore an easy assumption that these remote dwellers were either aboriginal to the area, or immigrants from elsewhere. Their apparent diversity of languages and practices was sufficient to affirm such notions politically. In part the classifications seem correct, but a significant component of the remote populations may not have been alien at all, but simply those who opted out of citified economies. Even it is somehow shown to be true, this thesis may not have much practical impact on today's integration programs.

For the highland areas populated by minorities, the term Zomia has been adapted from a word used by highlanders in Myanmar's borderlands to describe themselves. The term is useful in defining an area in which Southeast Asia's highlanders reside, and the first observation is that the area extends beyond the bounds of Southeast Asia itself. The diagram below¹⁰² indicates a first attempt to define the area where highlanders dwelt in 2002, with a subsequent redefinition in 2007, both by the originator of the term.¹⁰³ Across the region, especially where a major

agricultural civilization dominates a state, such highlanders are seen as something akin to less-advanced 'hilltribes'.



The 'tribes' of Southeast Asia include the various 'hilltribes' as well as the 'sea gypsies'. Sea gypsies, for example, comprise groups known as Bajau, Chaoley, Chaonam, Moken, Orang Laut, Salone, Selung, or Urak Lawoi – all sea dwellers that remain wary of strangers as they subsist from the sea and trading while moving between remote landings around the region's 100,000+ km coastline. Conveniently classified as immigrant groups from the southern China coast, this worldview ignored the possibility that they could simply be descendants of persons who once opted out of civilizing states. It also obscured the fact that the vast majority of the region's inhabitants can in any case be traced to southern China. Now it is claimed the languages themselves may also reflect variations within a simple lingua franca that spans wide areas. And it may be that views of the last century are influenced by the imperatives of trade that needed to either civilize outlanders or to cast them as pirates and brigands.

As with other global pirate traditions, an alternative explanation is that minorities may be self-governing under systems used to differentiate themselves from majority civilizations across the centuries. In addition to simply opting out, they might also be refugees from climate change or from the enslavement, forced military service, crop tithes, corvée labor, diseases and warfare that accompany civilization. Once free from such burdens, they may then have developed means of avoiding re-integration, such as non-sedentary agriculture, demountable dwellings, unwritten and malleable oral histories and residing in inaccessible regions. If this is indeed true, these people represent both an adaptation to new environments and a possible reservoir of traditions lost among majorities that adopted foreign religions and manners as hallmarks of civilization.

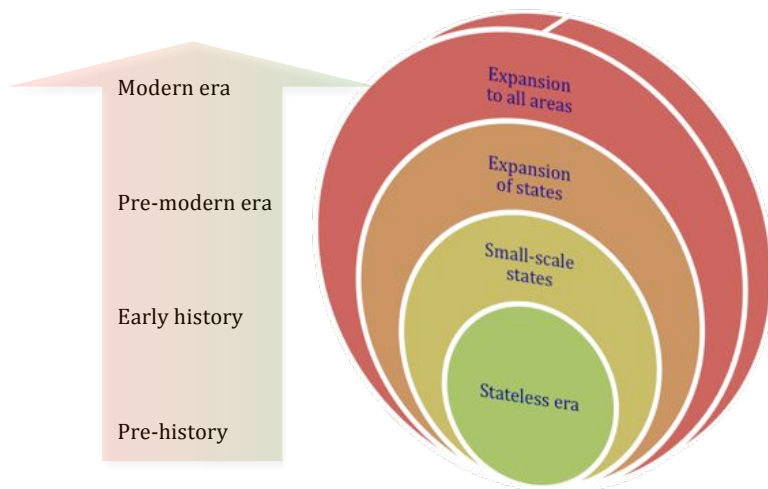
Referred to as barbarians yet to be civilized in the southern Chinese highlands that are contiguous with those of the region, they are noted in the reliable Chinese recording systems from the 1600s. As modern communication technologies make once remote areas accessible to information and contact, the remote groups themselves have become advocates of their separateness in a curious alliance of logic with nation-building historians. These minority groups now cling to their myths and traditions as their last vestige of support of identity within the amorphous civilized world. Orthodox histories are also being challenged in other ways, such as entertaining the possibility that aboriginal groups like the orang asli of Malaysia and the phitongluang of Thailand and Laos having practiced agriculture just a few centuries ago, and having abandoned it in order to maintain their independence.¹⁰⁴

During the colonial period, minorities were categorized into distinct tribes. In some cases, it seems that the groups themselves may not even have known the names initially allocated to them. In any case, most names seemed more politically correct than such common euphemisms as 'dog-eaters' or 'those who don't wash'. The logical academic identifier of

different groups was language, although the extent of multilingualism was later suggested to undermine distinct classifications of separate groups. Rites and cultural elements such as dress and music also appeared to be shared across language classifications. Regardless of such details, these minorities were to be periodically viewed as threats or challenges to unifying nations.

By the 1970s, increased sedentarization led to tribal labels being reinforced by geographic classifications, based largely on altitude for highlanders. Some once mobile shifting cultivators began to own accept their appellation as a defence against government intrusions, while others benefitted commercially from tourism based on enhanced tribal accoutrements. Others integrated with the mainstream culture, an ongoing process across the majority of the minorities' areas. Policing of opium production coupled with educational opportunities for diligent children next set the scene for final integration.

Classifications assist foreign understanding and allow us to see the process more globally. Applying this within the region, we can view the history as four phases of a continuum, as presented in the diagram below. In pre-history the absence of states may be assumed to be a pre-agricultural era of long duration, from which emerged agriculture and its agrarian cities to mark the beginning of history. With time, these city-states expanded to include the hinterlands adjacent to the cities through pre-modern times. Now the modern era is characterized by the absorption of all remaining areas into the state. And so the descendants of those peoples outside the mainstream inevitably become part of it.



Remnant groups are disappearing everywhere, particularly in the region, in the face of civilization's integrative demands through national schools with mainstream teachers, acceptable cash cropping and foreign-supported development programs.¹⁰⁵ If there is some truth in the idea that remote peoples could have been refuges from kingdoms, today's integration would constitute a return to the successor systems from which their ancestors fled. And this could then suggest that their remnant rites and beliefs might be those that have disappeared over time with civilization. In that case, it would seem to be a poetic irony if mainstream societies sought their roots in remote peoples' traditions to fill the ennui of middle-class modernity. Perhaps this is an explanation of the fervour with which modern Thais sought out their long-forgotten Tai cousins in Yunnan when borders opened, little thinking that the status of those Tai in China was the equivalent of 'hilltribes' in Thailand.

It matters little here whether the region's remote peoples actually originated from refugees from civilized oppression or lost wars, or simply chose to live away from the majority. Highlanders grouped around fertile plateaus where they practiced dryland agriculture within egalitarian communities

loosely connected by a lingua franca. If there were refugees, they could have been absorbed into these communities, which grew and spun off groups that inevitably moved to steeper regions, adapting agricultural techniques accordingly. Controlled trade with lowland dwellers supplemented their limited economies, with each party respecting the others' domain. For example, the lowland peoples of northern Thailand – the Khon Muang – share various words with hill groups derived from trading while Lahu adopt Tai names for old spirits, as below. Likewise, lower altitude highlanders used the traditional Tai muang-fai irrigation system on small upland streams. This is one explanation of adoption of that irrigation technology including propitiatory rites that share words with modern lowland languages.¹⁰⁶

Highlander communities appear to be as ethnically mixed and porous as their agriculture, rites, rituals and languages. Their characteristics of mobility, family decision-making, oral rather than written histories and suspicion of dominant headmen within such groups as the Akha, Lahu, Lisu and Wa are seen as supporting the notion of origins as refugees. Likewise, dispersed mobile settlements at high altitudes might be seen as deliberately chosen to provide no central target for coordinated attack. And their hunting, foraging and shifting cultivation might be seen as less vulnerable to pillage than sedentary agriculture. Whether accurate or not, it is evident that minorities that adopted paddy cultivation in valleys were some of most easily assimilated groups.

One reason for assimilation being relatively straightforward is the commonality of belief systems. Labels such Animist ignore its ongoing role within the region's adopted religions, and tend to inappropriately denigrate it as primitive and inadequate. On the contrary, '... animism describes a worldview premised on the supposition that all culturally significant phenomena in the visible world comprise material form and non-material 'spirit essence' ... mountains, valleys, waterways, forests, wild and domestic animals, farming tools, etc., all of these, were culturally

significant phenomena related, in one way or another, to the farming enterprise. As such the spirits or spirit essences of these phenomena frequently required propitiation and, less frequently, exorcism, to ensure farming, husbandry, gathering and hunting success. Spirit 'owners' of wilderness, following suitable propitiation, became 'lords of the places' (these Lahu had borrowed their term for them, *cao ti*, from their Tai neighbours), the spirit guardians of villages, houses and swiddens.¹⁰⁷

It is consistent with normal behaviour of nations to eventually integrate minorities. It matters little whether they were once refugees from the mainstream culture or not. In the case of the region's highlanders, a lack of reliance on intensive irrigated rice cultivation, towns and cities, foreign religions and written histories may not necessarily have been a sign of not understanding civilization; on the other hand it could have been. And anyone who has worked with these peoples comes to know that labels of primitive and uncivilized are without meaning. Today's difficulty in accepting this appears in environmental treatises that criticize shifting cultivation as destructive and irresponsible while failing to acknowledge that has long been sustainable – longer than can be said of many of the modern replacements.¹⁰⁸ And embedded in the embracing viewpoint of remote persons having once possibly been part of majority is the idea that their rites and beliefs may balance the homogenized rites and majority religions promoted by nation-building histories. As noted, minorities could be repositories of rites forgotten by the majority and perhaps even maintained with greater purity than was possible within the adopted religions. Parts of those belief systems may derive from periods before the 1500s.

18. Beliefs Systems

The distinction between the civilized and others used herein is based on the words etymology; thus civilized lifestyles are those related to cities. Returning to consider the majority civilized cultures of the region, the following chapters point out how the cultures and religions of the region remain unified as a result of their common Austronesian and Austroasiatic origins. Later language fragmentation and religious differences, amplified by migration and trade produced a region that contains languages that are highly tonal through to atonal, and belief systems that range through Animism, Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam to others. It is the first of these religious classifications – Animism – that defines much that continues to be common across the region. However, since much commentary on religions in the region projects assumptions about world religions, it is necessary to reconsider Animism in association with the regional interpretations of adopted religions.

Religious and scholarly studies about the region often reflect a narrow Western understanding that imagines religion to be separable from other aspects of life. Such a concept of secularity in personal life or politics is alien to regional worldviews, just as it is for most of the world and indeed was for the West until recently. For example, Western works continue to define Confucianism as a moral philosophy, yet its origins and its continuing serious practice treat the secular as sacred. Confucius was clear about the unity of these matters, while also noting such practicalities as the priority of government being food and weapons; food was the highest priority and weapons were to maintain discipline. A further example that is now closer to home is an apparent Western refusal to acknowledge the indissolubility of religion and governance in Islam where it may be considered idolatrous – the sin of ‘shirk’ – to assign a political ideal a level akin to Allah. Similar explications can be made for

Buddhism and non-Western Christianity. As such understandings of civilized spiritual integration have been denied to many modern Western students, the following chapters may pose a mind-stretching demand to some readers.¹⁰⁹

Perhaps the easiest way to introduce the subject within the theme of this work is first to take a Western perspective, in which introduced religions can be seen to provide commonalities. Thus Islam pervades Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia and Mindanao in the southern Philippines, while the later arrival Christianity defines most of the remainder of the Philippines, and Theravada Buddhism informs Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Thailand while providing understanding with the integrated Mahayana Buddhism and Confucianism of Vietnam. Hinduism in Bali provides a continuing reminder of its prior influence across much of the trading region. And underlying and integrated into all imported belief systems is the ancient common belief system simply referred to as nature religion or Animism. Animism continues to pervade the region, in official ceremonies, everyday agricultural rituals, city shrines and the myriad references to deities and spirits, which influence social and political affairs to a greater extent than is often acknowledged.

If we limit the discussion to history, we find that we are often reduced to material remains, such as imported religious texts, architecture, carved edicts, gold plates and palm leaf and lacquered timber writings. Ancient writings are better preserved from the Chinese-influenced Red River civilization in Vietnam and from East Java and Bagan, than from Angkor, Champa or Philippines' civilizations. Those from Thailand down the Malay peninsula to Sumatra are younger, dating only from the late 15th century. Eighth century religious texts from Bagan mix Buddhist commentary with legal treatises and we know that long before the 14th century Java embedded financial references in its poetic literature. These early writings in Chinese, Mon, Pali and Sanskrit languages, unlike India's Vedas, share a common paucity of

insight into everyday regional life and beliefs. Little more is offered by the Indian-influenced architecture of Angkor and the Chinese-influenced ceramics of the Suwankolok or the Red River civilization.

The common traditions that have survived the adopted religions are thus not always evident in texts and monuments but in such vibrant forms as worship of ancestors, deities and spirits of sacred places, mediation by spiritual leaders and protective rites and amulets associated with food crops, death, war and feasts. Creation, decedence and invention myths may superficially appear to differ across the region, yet in fact share such common origins and intention, as well as persisting within and altering the incoming world religions.¹¹⁰

Before the 5th century, Chinese influence was mainly limited to Vietnam while India influenced much of the remainder of the region. Without deliberate policy, major migration or aggression, local elites became Indianized in displays of status learned from Indian traders. Continuing until the entry of European colonizers, Indian rites and beliefs percolated through society and blended with existing Animism. For example, local fertility rites easily morphed into the linga symbol of Shiva over which water more than milk was poured to flow into a yoni. Similarly the burial mounds of rulers became Buddhist stupas housing relics, and the sacred Bodhi tree of enlightenment melded with ancient tree-spirit beliefs. Mountain spirits became part of the myths of sacred mountains in Hindu and Buddhist cosmology. The Indian custom of cremations infiltrated the region, even to Vietnam, yet pre-existing burial customs continued in the form of returning remains to the soil after cremation. Some forms of ancestor worship, on the other hand, may be more associated with Chinese influence.

On the mainland, the spirits of Animism found ready homes within the suite of deities in the Brahmanized Buddhism that had developed over a millennium in India. Shiva and Vishnu were the

most popular forms of deities as indicated by the architecture of Angkor. Periodic attempts to purify Buddhism led to state-supported education of Theravada monks, thereby concentrating the power of orthodoxy in the king, who substantiated his elite status by retaining some Brahman rites. Local Brahmins were engaged as priests, teachers, administrators, advisors and protectors of Sanskrit texts. Inherited roles maintained interregnum stability in Angkor, Bagan, Sukhothai and elsewhere. As custodians of ritual and ceremony associated with kingly power, Brahmins were accepted as above mainstream Buddhism with its retained Animist elements. Thus Shiva, Vishnu and other Hindu incarnations became mixed with Buddhism and served political and religious purposes, such as the Shiva cult in Angkor and Champa, and the linga as the symbol of royal power. Vishnu images continue to portray his creation role, his consort Lakshmi remains a portent of fortune and his mount Garuda continues to feature officially on letterheads across the region.

All of these cults that once existed separately became interwoven with Buddhism, from Danang to the Korat plateau to the Malay peninsular, and across the islands from Sulawesi to Java. Buddha images dating from the 5th century arrived with peripatetic evangelizers in Funan and were followed in each century by others emphasizing the Theravada Buddhism that came to dominate the mainland. Where earlier contact had entrenched Mahayana Buddhism, notably in Vietnam, it persisted with scriptures translated into Chinese that catered to the elite. Pali script served the spread of Theravada Buddhism from at least the 9th century when Chinese travellers' diaries indicate that boys and girls spent time as novices in monasteries across the settled regions. This means that the early adopters were Pyu and Mon rather than the later Burmans, Tai or the builders of Angkor.¹¹¹

Buddhism was used to purify corrupt rulers, purge enemies and indoctrinate war captives with periodic renewals from Sri Lanka, which was believed to have maintained the purest form of

Buddhism after it had died out in India. Myanmar was the secondary base from which the Theravada message was disseminated. But Mahayana Buddhism had also entered the peninsula and coasts in an earlier period, and in some regions emerged in a unified belief. In that conception, Maitreya, Manjusri and Avalokitesvara were accepted as models for the king while ascetic regulations applied to forest monks; even Tantric practices began to be accepted. Kings of the post-Angkor period sent monks to Sri Lanka, overbuilt temples, oversaw the Sangha, dispensed robes and appointed senior monks as political advisers.

Invoking themselves as Bodhisattvas, kings inspired commoner beliefs in reincarnation to higher social levels as a reward for meritorious behaviour. Thus merit could be earned, which encouraged other beliefs in remedial possibilities for illness and poor crops in much the same manner that offended spirits had traditionally been appeased. Merit-making donations extended to currying royal favour in traditional patron-client relations, thus tying Buddhism to traditional social practices. And when such practices allowed the Sangha to gain more power than the palace, tensions between state and temple were resolved through religious purges. This was especially evident in the Mahayana realm of Vietnam where the great influences of India mixed with those of Confucian tradition.

A similar process of religious integration occurred throughout the islands where Indian influence had entered from the west through to Kalimantan from the 2nd century. Nobles adopted Indian modes of Brahmanism, Mahayana Buddhism, Shivaism and Vishnuism; unlike the mainland Theravada Buddhism never gained a major base. Brahmins conducting court rituals and accumulated wealth as they blended Animistic beliefs into stylized footprints of divine kings, white elephants, Sanskrit terminology and transmigration of souls ceremonies associated with remnant rites akin to potlatch.

In 11th century Java, syncretism of Brahmanism and Indian deities with earlier Austronesian spirits was evident, in such forms as the sacred crocodile of the river deities critical to rice cultures. Austronesian cosmology fused with that of Brahmanism so that sacred mountains were inhabited by powerful deities, and Vishnu's consort Laksami morphed into the fertility rice goddess. While less is known of the early Buddhism of Java despite the didactic Buddhist monument of Borobudur, both Buddhism and Brahmanism appear to have been in decline from the 14th century. The absorption of these Indian traditions into traditional practices was later blended with some Muslim beliefs as an influence on the continuing complex Javanese mysticism.

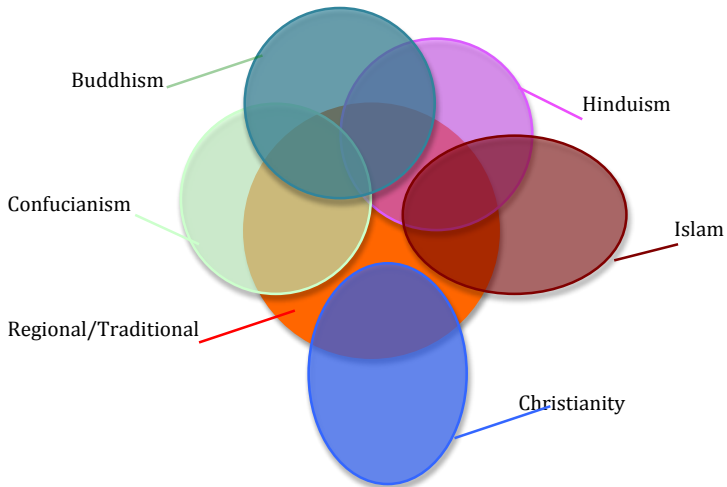
Islam was to dominate much of the archipelago just as Theravada Buddhism became the dominant religion of the mainland. The Christianized parts of the Philippines were the main exceptions. Adopted by rulers in northern Aceh before the 14th century, Islam gained momentum when the ruler of Melaka adopted it early in the 15th century in conjunction with widening trade. Sultanates spread with trading centres along the Malay peninsula into modern day Thailand where Pattani developed a particularly strong mixture of local and Islamic cultures.¹¹²

The common regional trait of absorbing foreign ideas may be seen in Java in the blending of traditional mystical traditions with Islam in mosque design and animal images possibly derived from cockfighting. The process continues in the pondok school system that is today exclusively Islamic but which possibly evolved from the scriptural schools of earlier Indian traditions. Other examples of integration include interpretations of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana as well as local stories using cowhide shadow puppets, such as those shown below, throughout the Muslim Malay regions to southern Thailand, with total unconcern of their human representations.



The insinuation of elements of one religion into another to become shared beliefs and practices is usually labeled as syncretism, and is rigorously eschewed by religious purists. However, the concept of syncretism has shifted from its positive social meanings in ancient Greece to a general Western religious worldview that beliefs can be a separable part of life. This is not part of the past or continuing worldview in the region. Thus consideration of the influences of one belief system on others is critical to understanding the nature of Southeast Asia.¹¹³ The following diagram illustrates the influence of the region's traditional belief systems on the major adopted religions, and in turn the influence of earlier introduced religions on later ones. From this perspective, traditional religion influenced all incoming religions beginning with Hinduism, which influenced both Buddhism and Islam; Buddhism was also affected by the

earlier Confucianism in Vietnam. Christianity is shown as only influenced by traditional beliefs, mainly because it is the most recent introduction to the region, and its main concentration is in the Philippines. Chinese influence in the Philippines means that Confucianism has also affected Christianity.



When differences between the region's adopted religions are assumed to mimic those of elsewhere, the region's commonalities are missed. It is the fusion of these religions with traditional beliefs that maintains a regional commonality of worldview. The 16th century statement from Java of the oneness of spiritual insight across traditions is emblematic of the region's general tolerance, and a possible precursor to the modern Indonesia policy of Pancasila. Added to these is a ready regional acceptance of new knowledge, including science, that elsewhere in the world seems limited by opposing beliefs. These common traditions in belief systems, tolerance and trade, allowed Islamic sultanates and their equivalents to maintain maritime stability. And stability was essential for trade, and was reinforced by the peaceful Chinese explorations during the 15th century, until the arrival of the Portuguese in the early 16th century.

19. Evolving Syncretism

The common regional understanding of omnipresent deities and spirits in rivers, forests, trees, crops, climate and natural events has continued until today. Inadequate rains, for example, are an expression of a deity's or spirit's displeasure that requires ceremonial appeasement expressed in various quotidian forms, from *bunbangfai* rockets¹¹⁴ to silver-iodide cloud seeding. In some cases in the islands, ancestor spirits morphed into idols or native animals. All required propitiatory offerings and rituals involving food and other consumables, and some that once involved sacrifices of enemies or slaves are now limited to livestock. Spirits interpreted through mediums, often women and sometimes transvestites, are still courted through rituals specific to an illness, a lover or an enemy. To ward off such spells, amulets have emerged as potent religious art using such mystical items as calcareous stones from wild animals, sacred knives, cloths, religious images, paladkhik and replicas of body parts. The Animist beliefs that comingled with Buddhism, Confucianism and Hinduism followed the same pattern through the 16th to 19th centuries for Islam and Christianity.

Such merged beliefs systems spanning all aspects of life provide psychological resilience, and in promoting environmental morality also ensure the protection of resources essential to life. For example, the crop fertility goddess of the mainland that was sometimes co-represented as creating rivers from wringing her long wet hair has been absorbed into regional Buddhism and is still depicted in temples. Perhaps more pragmatically, the 37 official spirits of Bagan morphed into Catholic saints on churches in Myanmar. Although it is often assumed that such accommodations evolve more readily in folk Buddhism and Hinduism than in monotheistic religions, multiple spirits also easily joined the entourages serving monotheistic godheads.

The first monotheism to enter the region was an early Islam, probably in Myanmar and possibly into the islands from China. But its benign expansion was to mainly spread from the island trading centres during the 16th century. Adoption by local rulers may have been as simple as Islamic interpretations of trading agreements according with local honest brokerage, combined with a desire to emulate the richer culture. Islam also increased with the 15th century Chinese Muslim ruler and traders along the coasts of Vietnam, Cambodia and Java. Today, the region's Islam is almost uniformly of Sunni origin, a legacy of its adoption by the ruler of Melaka in the early 15th century.¹¹⁵

Islam enhanced the region's trade as part of the world's dominant unifying culture of commerce at the time, the Byzantine Empire, which had accorded Malay rulers a similar status to China. Spread by adoption to access benefits and conversion in order to marry, Java was quite Islamized by the 16th century. Further expansion through other island ports was unwittingly spurred by the 17th century Portuguese exclusion of Muslim traders from Melaka. By this time, the Majaphit empire in Java was under the Muslim Sulawesi throne and conversions were coerced and supported by scholarly exchanges with the Arab world. Such learning brought new technologies, particularly in weaponry that could withstand expansionist Portuguese attacks. But forced conversions meant that the old spirits remained within folk interpretations of the new observances.

It was the mystical Sufi practices of Islam that overtly overlapped with the extant mystical practices in Java, including omnipresent spirits. In addition, Sufi practices were similar to those of the region in terms of rites of singing, dancing, recitation, patron-client learning and meditation. To many, Allah became the supreme god above the deities and spirits and thus wielding power over their whimsical moods that were experienced in natural events. And so traditional stories were adapted throughout the islands with past miraculous events now oriented to great Muslim saints in the same manner as occurred

on the mainland for local Buddhist heroes. In the main, the expansion of Islam in the region proceeded as peacefully as that of earlier Buddhism.

When the Europeans arrived, they brought with them a dislike of Islam. From the early 17th century, the Portuguese burned mosques in Melaka and Brunei, the Dutch East India Company sought to contain expansion of Islam from Batavia, and the Spanish challenged Islam in the southern Philippines. Islam expanded regardless, with a Champa and a Khmer ruler adopting the religion. However, it did not penetrate far into the mainland where Theravada Buddhism had already accommodated local beliefs.

The last world religion to take hold in the region was Christianity through a confusion of proselytizing zeal and trade objectives. Inspired by tensions with Islam in southern Europe and the rise of Protestantism in the north, Catholic Portugal and Spain signed the Treaty of Tordesillas that divided the globe along the 129th east longitude. Thus this form of Christianity entered the region as an instrument of foreign power. Tolerating Islam in Melaka in order to gain access to the spice trade, the Portuguese began Christianizing with the unsuccessful mission of Francis Xavier. When the Dutch East India Company took Melaka in the mid 17th century they destroyed Catholic assets and favoured Protestants, which proved more effective than missionaries when conversion became a means of escaping Muslim overlords.¹¹⁶

The Spanish introduced Catholicism to the Philippines in the early 16th century in an alliance with the Cebu ruler sealed in a curious hybrid of traditional and Christian ceremonies in which he and Magellan drank each other's blood. After false starts, conversion success picked up with music, icons and rituals that accommodated local beliefs. Franciscan, Jesuit and Dominican monks arrived to support the earlier Augustinians once Manila had been conquered, and claimed some 300,000 converts by the end of the 17th century. Taxation and resettlement programs

supported missionary activity, and local chiefs who converted were integrated into the colonial hierarchy.

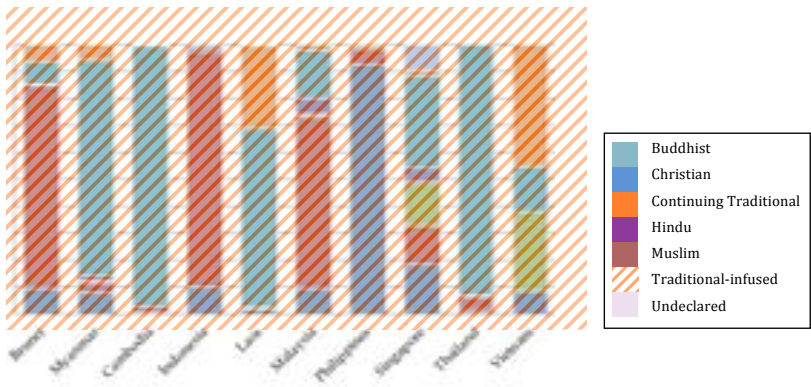
The region's Christianity thus absorbed traditional rites including, in the Philippines: the Eucharist substituting for sacrificial feasts; baptism for water-pouring rituals; holy water for magic potions; spirits and ancestors for saints. Amulets morphed into crosses, rosary beads and medallions. Although Catholic priests trashed local idols, they blessed rice seeds and so in local minds acknowledged the traditional rice goddess, which tacitly licenced continuation of thanksgiving sacrifices of chickens and pigs to ancestor spirits.¹¹⁷

Meanwhile in Vietnam, the Jesuits built on their earlier work in Melaka. Their diligence in local languages produced a Romanized script for Vietnamese and their emphasis on education trained capable local catechists. Confrontations with the traditional systems embedded within the long-established co-existence of Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism forced the French Jesuits to transfer to Ayutthaya where a regional seminary was opened in the 17th century. However, while respected for their inclusion of scientific and technical education, a penchant for power and intrigue led to expulsions that left few missionaries on the mainland by the mid 18th century.

An attempt to portray the continuing influence of traditional belief systems across adopted religions is presented in the following diagram.¹¹⁸ The crosshatched orange line depicts the infusion of traditional belief systems into adopted religions as overwhelmingly pervasive, while those persons overtly continuing with traditional belief systems are represented in solid orange. The adopted religions that form the common external classification of the region are represented in the other solid colours beneath their traditional-infusion.

The official religious map of the region today was thus established by the 17th century. Theravada Buddhism dominated

from Myanmar through Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia, while Mahayana Buddhism was intermingled with Confucianism and Taoism in Vietnam. And Islam dominated from Sumatra through the Malay world, except for the majority Christian islands of the Philippines. But all religions exist in each of the region’s modern nations and are often falsely used as a proxy for what is better described as tension arising from migration and language differences. Regardless of border and other incidents, the overriding commonality of the region is its incorporation of indigenous beliefs into global religions. Nation-building excesses periodically encourage ‘national religions’, even where constitutions explicitly protect multiple belief systems. And in addition to the assimilation of traditional beliefs into the major religions, millennia-old beliefs also populate modern superstitions of auspicious times, oracles and fortune-tellers. The Western idea of religion as separate from secular or worldly matters is a pale shadow compared to the integrated worldview that remains common across the region.



Conflicts between introduced religions drew on old rivalries. In Melaka, the Portuguese encouraged strife with Muslim traders, and in Mindanao the Dutch were accused of proselytizing Muslims to gain trade access. Thus as ever, the element common to shifts in power was trade, which Christian colonials now

dominated while they insinuated their religion through such means as Jesuits in Vietnam adopting traditional scholarly dress. Buddhism seemed less confrontational, possibly as it had less foreign trading force behind it, or perhaps as a function of the same tolerance that misled a century of Christian missionaries to believe that regal conversions were ever imminent.¹¹⁹

The common moral exemplar role of rulers as spiritually advanced persons suited hierarchical understandings in Buddhism and Islam. They accommodated such trappings of holiness as collecting and translating sacred texts, receiving auguries like white elephants and holy relics, and performing acts of piety. Demonstrating their right to rule through such means, rulers and learned priests and imams administered the power base. Commoners also gained from tax exemptions, official leave for ordination and rites, and in some cases special privileges limited to full citizens. But continuing indigenous beliefs also catered for changes in power when rulers forfeited their rights by immoral acts or incompetence, permitting sometimes obscure yet gifted leaders to arise in their place. Such *phumibun*, as they were known in Tai languages, variously accumulated reputations of special powers, invulnerability, supernatural insight and divine rights to leadership. Although quashed by European colonial powers, such grassroots movements for change developed within adopted religions. Today's rebellions involving monks and priests confirm the resilience of such traditions.

Another example of the resilience of inclusive traditions is the integrated role of women in the region. For the times, the region's women enjoyed greater freedoms than the foreign religions offered elsewhere in the world. This value had been maintained from past religious intrusions, possibly assisted by Hinduism as the first introduction with its traditions of gender realism and roles for divinities with human proclivities. Later, women continued to assume powerful roles, for example within Islam where a Pattani queen withstood the military onslaughts of

Ayutthaya. And even in Buddhism and Christianity, the priestly prerogatives of celibate males had less impact on women's role compared to other regions of the world. Meanwhile, common matrilineal traditions continued with European commentators noting the authority of women in home, village and trading life and as spirit mediums. By comparison, one European colonial response to rebellion was to introduce witch dunking to the region.¹²⁰

The colonial 18th century was a period of consolidation of foreign influences and of rising social issues. Ruling elites understood the need to integrate social hierarchy within introduced religions. Nevertheless, instances of Buddhist, Christian and Confucian militia rebelling against inadequate rulers became more common. Periodic attempts to purge local beliefs from world religions had little enduring impact. Integrated worldviews were as much part of the region as trade, and trade had benignly brought or strengthened these religions – except in the case of Christianity where commerce was backed by state-sanctioned violence. Adopted widely in the Philippines, less in Vietnam and even less elsewhere, Christianity was a ready proxy for European power, which led to confrontation with Islam. This complex confrontation of power, trade and tradition was easily portrayed as religious, labeled as Buddhist or Christian conflict with Islam on the peninsula and in the southern Philippines.

As the 18th century progressed, reforms in Europe inspired Catholic sanctions against Animist practices in the Philippines implemented through taxation, forced labour for the church-state and ceasing the ordination of local priests. For a period Portugal took over Sri Lanka, the bastion of Theravada Buddhism on which the Tai states relied for reference. After the Portuguese left, Ayutthaya repaid its debt to Sri Lanka through Pali language, scriptures and rites from a realm that had meanwhile outlawed Christian books, promoted reverence to monks, reinforced the Sangha and expected regal piety. But in an era of change, neither meritorious deeds nor piety could offset public resentment to a

purist Ayutthaya king disciplining liberal monks whom the people saw as their traditions' custodians. The rebellion was resolved in the traditional manner of compromise and substantiated Siam's version of Buddhism as resiliently protected by ancient indigenous spirits. Ongoing rebellions against colonial governance across the region now routinely invoked religion, and in doing so further revealed the depth of traditional cosmology.



Silver Vietnamese figurine

20. Religious Rebellions

As the 19th century drew to a close, unconnected rebellions from Aceh to Java to Vietnam demonstrated a common resistance to the power structures. Religious leaders inspired followers with hybrid interpretations of rights to leadership. For example in Siam, Buddhism was used to revive traditions of holy or extraordinary men (*phumibun*, *phuwiset*) who would reassert rule according to the Dharma. In this case, attempts to channel such beliefs into the king being styled as the righteous ruler, the Sangha becoming a branch of government and 'authorized' scriptures being published, tended to further entrench divisions between popular and State Buddhism. Likewise, in colonial Myanmar, moves to represent kings as future Buddhas were thwarted by traditional beliefs that righteous men of common birth may also have that moral right. Since British interests had weakened royal authority in Myanmar, rebellious groups formed around local religious leaders. With rebellions against rulers becoming common across the region, they easily expanded into anti-colonial protests.¹²¹

Vietnam under Confucian rule showed the same rebellious pattern, which weakened the north-south unity of rulers maintained by the French. Attempts to mollify divergent ethnicities and beliefs between the north and south were based on absorbing spirit guardians into local Confucianism and sequestering Buddhist monks in monasteries. A widening distance of rulers from the populace led to hundreds of rebellions often inspired by natural disasters that were interpreted to mean that the ruler had lost the mandate of heaven. This common regional conception of leadership was further confused in Vietnam by the threat that Christian evangelization posed to the ruling Confucian class. Successive 19th century attempts to unite the south and the Khmer lands were likewise subverted by apocalyptic Buddhist sects.

Rebellions were exacerbated by changes in the terms of global trade from the middle of the 19th century. Marginalized rulers, religious figures and charismatic peasants challenged colonial actions, even in Bangkok where rulers acted in a colonial manner. Led by religious figures, violence was usually contained in Siam whereas in religiously and ethnically similar Laos, the French violently suppressed rebellion. Such colonial action in Vietnam confirmed to locals that the French no longer held the mandate of heaven to rule. When the French invasion of Da Nang and other Confucian strongholds produced widespread resistance, the French responded by violently imposing their will. This united the previously divided Confucians and Buddhists against colonial power. Executions had little effect.¹²²

In Myanmar apocalyptic Buddhist movements against British control similarly emerged in ever-stronger rebellions. British exile of the king, moving the capital and harsh suppression fueled the beliefs in a cataclysm and spawned leaders that hailed a coming Buddhist golden age. Monks engaged in rebellion, inspiring a resurgence of traditional magical beliefs in protection from harm. The British confined monks to religious roles at the same time as they sought to reduce the operating costs of trade and government by training Burmese to replace British colonial functionaries. Such educated classes were to later mount the next wave of rebellion.

Within the islands, pre-Indic traditions of wise men deciding a king's right to rule continued in much the same way with Hindu and then Islamic overlays. Volcanic activity and crop failures became local Islamic portents of a new righteous ruler possibly arising, which now encouraged rebellion against the Dutch. Dutch attempts to institutionalize Islam exacerbated such rebellion when it included a hierarchy from rulers to commoners that excluded spirits and leader-saviors. Wahabism and Hajj pilgrimages facilitated by the opening of the Suez Canal encouraged reinterpretation of the overthrow of unrighteous

leaders to be styled as jihad ushering in a new paradisiacal era. Coincident with wider Islamic contact, traditional beliefs also strengthened around the same themes of local leaders arising with special powers, such as rain-making and resurrection.¹²³

As introduced in Chapter 3, the divine association of rulers is as old as the region's history. In this, India probably had greater influence than China although for our purposes the Chinese mantle of heaven can be seen as the same concept. The Indian principle has been explained as the ruler's city being an earthly representation of the divine, such that it is 'an image of the universe on a smaller scale – and the natural embodiment of political order ... not just the nucleus, the engine, or the pivot of the state, it is the state.'¹²⁴ This description is of Bali, of which it has also been noted that minimal contact with India itself led to the local Hinduism varying from that of India. The sophisticated culture that then developed in Bali was severely interrupted by Dutch destruction of temples, libraries and leaders. Yet the traditions embodied in myths and beliefs persisted, aided by the essential cosmology continuing in the design, layout and rituals of the ubiquitous temples. More than just edifices for worship, temples were integral to rituals that impinged on all aspects of life. Water-user groups shared sources, canals, planting dates and rituals coordinated communally through temples that ensured also that sufficient water flowed on to the next temple and farmer group, as indicated in the figure.¹²⁵ Temples performed life cycles ceremonies for the people and their crops such that birth ceremonies, for example, were performed when rice grains began to fill.

In the Christianized islands, the same message was cast as the oppressed inheriting the earth upon Christ's imminent return. Typhoons, crop failures and comets indicated end-times for breakaway sects inspired by rebel Filipino priests who gathered dissatisfied peasants together. When such priests were revered as local saints, the Spanish denounced them as traitors. Severely suppressed, these groups fled to remote areas with deepened

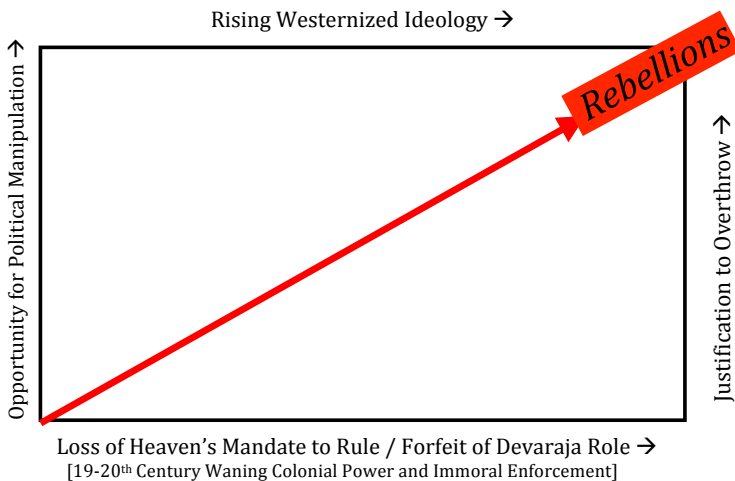
conviction in the divine overthrow of Spain as its power waned through the late 19th century. Such escapees from civilization were quickly labeled as the troublesome primitives even though they shared common origins, as described in an earlier chapter.



There was a common pattern of rebellions across the region, from French Indochina, to Myanmar after the British subdued Mandalay, to the Philippines after the US overran Manila, and throughout the Dutch islands. Conflict was less where Islamized revival of traditions favoured righteous leaders and there was a degree of colonial tolerance, such as in British Malaya. However, a less tolerant Siam fueled ongoing conflict when it annexed Muslim Pattani. The difference in outcomes between the British and Siamese experiences is attributed to a general British desire for low-overhead influence through local leaders rather than total governance. Notwithstanding such an approach, the experience of the British North Borneo Company in Sabah was as checkered as that of the Spanish in the Islamized southern Philippines. Styled as Christian-Muslim confrontation, Muslims invoked a paradise for their martyrs while Christians invoked

heavenly rewards with Jesus or Mary for theirs.

Interpreted by colonial powers as unacceptable insurrections, the above explanations indicated alternative interpretations around two principal factors, one traditional and the other a modern political development. The following diagram illustrates these factors and their effects leading to increasing rebellion. The traditional factor was the regional interpretation that the waning of colonial power indicated the loss of their right to rule. Such indications were directly reinforced by colonial use of excessive force to subdue rebellions, enforcing peasants to grow commercial crops, falling prices and incidentally by portentous natural events. The modern development was a critical mass of a Western-educated elite enamoured of political ideologies oriented to overthrowing foreign dominance. This second factor quickly evolved to link its ideals with traditional unease, and so increased the opportunity for politically inspired resistance. This in turn conformed with regional justifications to overthrow leadership that had demonstrably forfeited its right to rule. The result was a continuing rise in rebellions as the 19th century progressed.



By the late 19th century, widespread fatal epidemics convinced the urban masses of imminent leadership change. Meanwhile, ideas from the European Enlightenment were further influencing the new educated local elite as they began to be taught locally. Informed leaders built local resistance into nationalist causes in the early 20th century. Intelligent and educated, leaders such as the Philippines' Rizal could blend the hybrid folk-Christianity with ideals that inspired the urban elite. Thus resistance to colonial rule became outright rebellion across the region. Often overstated in Western-influenced worldviews as an assertion of peoples' democratic rights, the Darwinian regional explanation resting on the natural right to be rid of unrighteous rulers perhaps offers greater insight into local understanding.¹²⁶

Rebellions across the region may be understood as traditional cosmology interpreted through adopted religions. Thus signs and wonders were seen in such events as Halley's Comet, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, floods, plague, cholera and typhoid. Through the late 19th to early 20th century, all were used to inspire revolution by would-be leaders to attract peasants, overthrow rulers and restore the natural order. Messages infused with nationalism spread through folk music, shadow puppet theatre and word of mouth. Siam's rulers maintained authority by styling themselves as protectors of the religion, but their cousins in Laos were led to attack their king as a French puppet who had forfeited his right to reign. Similarly in Cambodia, French exploitation of labour undermined the king's claim as protector. As the Europeans became distracted with the advent of World War I, nationalist sentiment grew into independence movements that even Siam's monarchs eventually had to accommodate.¹²⁷

Long since emasculated by colonial power, local rulers had few resources in the face of urban nationalist movements that used modern media and mass gatherings. Within two decades when the weakened European powers later sought to reassert post-World War II colonial control they were all compelled, except in

Malaya, to yield to such independence movements. Traditional beliefs that had been skillfully interwoven with Enlightenment philosophy to produce idealistic proposals were then decried by colonial powers as communist. Marxist utopianism sat comfortably with traditional beliefs in a new age, the coming of Jesus, Maitreya, Paradise or the Mandate of Heaven – until ideals were implemented. Then the same continuing traditional beliefs were to undermine communist practice when it failed to observe the natural order. Western accounts often treat these events as an extension of global politics and so can omit the critical common influence of traditional cosmology across the region, in politics as in all other aspects of life.



Heddles from Lao weaving looms

21. Religion in Politics

Religions absorbed the common enduring ethic of trade and have remained imbued with earlier Animism even within Westernized middle classes. These continue to govern personal, social and political life today. Commentaries of reduced interest in some religions or of increased strictness in others could well be modulated by the influence of these enduring indigenous beliefs. It should not then be surprising that these syncretic values of the region's Buddhism, Confucian-Taoism, Christianity, Islam and even Hinduism share commonalities that underpin political expression.

The nation-building myths necessitated by post-colonial independence build on traditional understandings. For example, government taxation and regulation continue to be understood by many as modern forms of tribute, tithes and *corvée*. Just as foreign religions were blended with old beliefs, the adoption of the modern Western ethic of consumerism across the region has been mollified by traditional values of sharing. So too, modern communication employed by foreign attempts to purify adopted religions of traditional practices have mainly been ineffectual. Attempts to purge politics of traditional beliefs of patronage, rights to govern and even superstitions follows a similar path. Will this persist? It is too soon to tell. But it is worth recalling that events surrounding World War II were taken as a clear indication that colonial powers had forfeited their rights to rule, and that for a brief period, the mantle passed to Japan until it too forfeited the right. The same is evident across the region in the role played by *coup d'états* in national politics, notwithstanding Western interpretations of such events.

While it may be anathema to Western ideals,¹²⁸ these common regional traditions span all aspects of life including the seen and unseen environment, which axiomatically includes governance.

Religion and state are indissolubly joined. Frequent attempts by a few to prescribe national religions in revised constitutions partially reflect those long-standing values, although the attempts usually fail as part of the embedded value of tolerance and avoidance of conflict, and because it usually involves a purified foreign and elite version of the adopted religion.

A Vietnamese example of continuing beliefs, which was missed by many outsiders including colonial and 'liberating' powers, was the persistence of belief in auspicious places and times for spirits to commune such as at new year, Tết Nguyên Đán. These sites and times survived French colonial suppression and continued in the form of the obligation for rulers to supplicate ancestors to assist harvests by ensuring that the people remained connected to their land. The belief in such spiritually powerful days was demonstrated politically in the 1968 Tết Offensive, which owed at least part of its success to lack of US strategic understanding of the culture, just as had occurred with the French on earlier occasions.¹²⁹

Elsewhere in the region, Animist, Buddhist and Christian rebellions were recorded as criminal insurrection by colonial governments. In fact they were sometimes indigenous millenarian beliefs in leaders who felt divinely anointed to overthrow corrupt authorities. Such associations remain important – and overlooked. Wrapped in such adopted religious terms as heaven, nirvana, paradise or socialism, the old beliefs persisted in such forms as the Buddhist-Marxism of Ne Win's Myanmar, Phutathat's Dhammic Socialism in Thailand, spiritual Jihad in Indonesia¹³⁰ and Confucian cosmology in Vietnamese politics.

Ancient symbols pervade modern political rituals, such as the festive atmosphere of serious protests, the assumption of traditional holy days as government holidays and the respect inspired by royalty. Power in Thailand remains related to the military showing more than respect to the King who in turn

shows more than respect to State Buddhism, notwithstanding constitutional statements to the contrary expressed in Western terms of parliamentary power. This common phenomenon of deeply held worldviews that pervade the Buddhist, Christian, Confucian and Muslim majorities of the region explains why leaders do not just show religious respect as an expedient, but as an expression of their role in a continuing cosmology.

This perspective adds nuance to interpretations of the region's conflicts reported variously as Buddhist-Muslim in Myanmar and Thailand, Buddhist-Christian in Vietnam, Christian-Muslim in the Philippines, Muslim-other religions in Indonesia and Malaysia, and even interpretations of Communism. In addition, the elite positions of Javanese mysticism and Thai Brahmanic practices may be seen as old hierarchical understandings. The Indonesian philosophy of Pancasila may be also interpreted as a modern amalgam that staved off pressures to adopt Islam as a national religion. Most of the region's governments regulate religion to some extent, sometimes creating state religious departments that define roles, constructions and rituals, but usually without defining an official national religion. The State's involvement in religion is seen as part of leadership's responsibility for the people's welfare, which cannot conceive a separation of the material and spiritual aspects of life.¹³¹

Hierarchies continue today, supported by religion as much as social convention. Codified hierarchies of status and time persist in language in Bali for example where realms and eras are ritually expressed in different languages in temple performances. Indonesian for the modern world; low Balinese for traditional villages; high Balinese for recent Balinese courts; Middle Javanese for Medieval Javanese Kingdoms; Old Javanese for the heroic past and Sanskrit for the timeless realm of the gods.¹³² A semblance may be seen in the Brahman rituals associated with King in Thailand conducted on behalf of the Buddhist populace, such as the ploughing ceremony, or in the use of Royal Thai language if a commoner must address the King. Implicitly

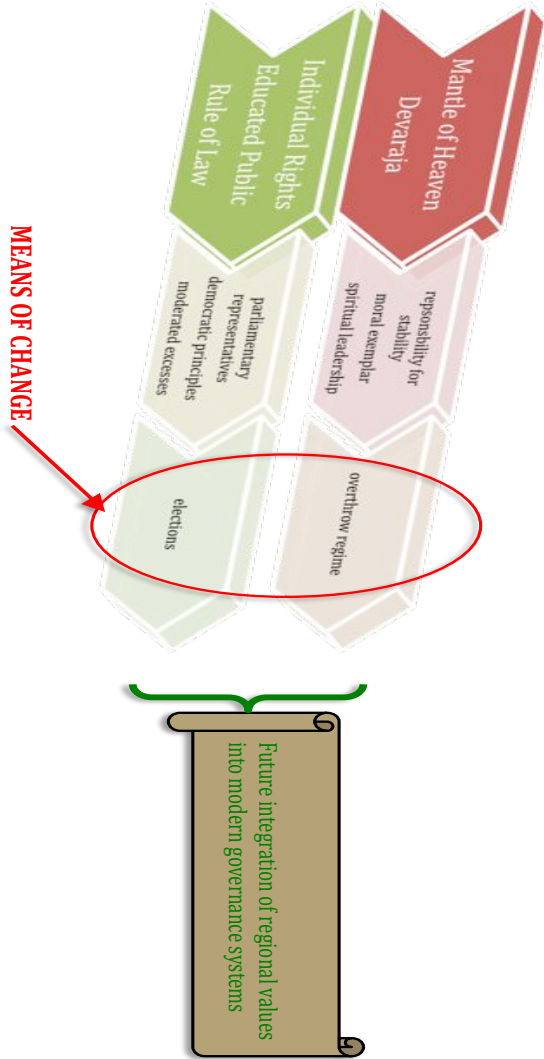
assumed as part of the majority religion and culture in Thailand's case, rituals assume tolerance from the minority religions.

State support of the majority religion can exacerbate conflicts coded as religious, such as the southern areas of the Philippines and Thailand or the Rakhine in Myanmar. Religious symbolism is similarly used to reinforce national values, such as Buddhist monks blessing official Thai ceremonies in Muslim-dominant areas. Such integrated governance has already proved durable in modern times, as Singapore found when it had to reverse its secular policy and accept Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism and Christianity rather than enforced Confucianism. Even in Singapore, one can find traditions of spirits of place and nature, agricultural festivals, auspicious days, patron-client relationships, amulets, astrology, magic and tattoos. And they are often found in association with meditation practices that are remarkably similar across the region's Christianity, Confucianism, Buddhism, Javanese mysticism, Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism and Taoism.

Fears of fundamentalism, particularly Christian and Muslim, may simply be an echo from events elsewhere.¹³³ Locally, great store is placed in deep beliefs in the integrated nature of life, often expressed in regional conversations in everyday terms. Within world religions these traditional understandings may appear as such translations as connectedness, insha'allah, karma, harmony, natural law, God's will or retribution. But this does make them as different as the nuances between such English language terms might suggest. Spiritual beliefs that have always been as naturally inseparable from life as food inevitably influence states as they continue to define themselves within a common culture across the region.

Recognition of the particularities of the region in the continuing evolution of governance systems therefore necessitates a more holistic worldview than has become the norm in common Western thought.¹³⁴ This applies to the past and current

interpretations. Predictions of the future shape of regional governance systems may prove as foolish as expecting copies of Western governance systems to function effectively in the region. As the diagram below indicates, the means of changing leadership – overthrowing a regime versus elections – is a common focus for foreign interpretations of political actions in the region. But behind these different approaches lie some common objectives, which represent the region's consistent interests of trade, stability and, relative to events elsewhere, less conflict than might otherwise be expected. It bears repeating that persistently ignoring belief systems within governance produces a warped view of the region's modus operandi. Religion that encompasses all aspects of life including governance systems is a majority worldview in the world, one that the West is currently confronting. It is possible that Southeast Asia will evolve its own equitable and workable systems of governance that take elements from the West while retaining traditions that rely on an holistic view of life. This is the reality of globalization – a modification of existing actions rather than wholesale importation of foreign ideas.

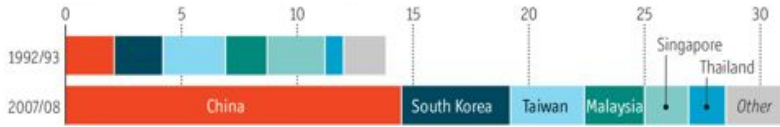


22. Trade and Worldviews

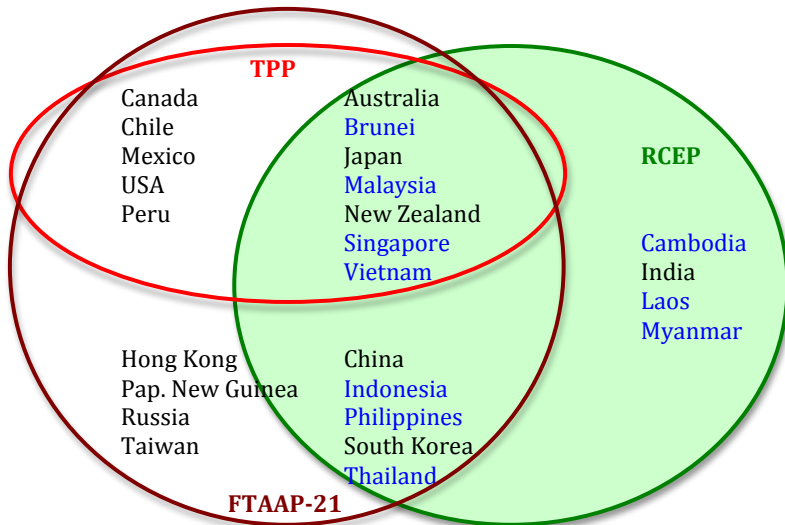
With a regional worldview that encompasses the beliefs and traditions discussed in preceding chapters, all endeavours from politics to trade to international relations can result in outcomes that do not necessarily accord with Western pragmatism. Negotiations may result in compromise regardless of relative power, prices may vary from world prices at times, loyalties may override pragmatic profiteering – and so on. The region that began as a loose-knit unit may still be beneficially viewed from that perspective – not just in shared values and views, but even in means of managing trade, for example.

Trade today is often discussed in terms of unskilled low-wage manufacturing, and indeed this continues to assist such nations as Vietnam and Cambodia. But such manufacturing may also be seen as part of a strategic trend that has been followed by other regional nations. As wages rise with economic growth, so the products manufactured must become more sophisticated to obtain higher value. For example, Malaysia and Thailand were once seen as low-wage producers but now manufacture sophisticated electronic components. For much of its history, diversity of manufacture and trade has maintained a regional global interaction of a higher order than most other global regions.¹³⁵ This is one explanation for the next logical creation of an integrated marketing network, which is already attracting foreign investment partly to balance China's expansion. The trend has recently encouraged Myanmar to reopen to the world, and Japan to double its regional investments to \$24 billion. Trade has thus remained paramount with the region's exports exceeding China's until the recent decade, as indicated in the following chart.¹³⁶

Percentages of World Exports (including components for manufacturers elsewhere)



The Southeast Asian region's means of unifying common interests and values is now attracting global attention, as indicated in the following diagram.¹³⁷ ASEAN is accepted as a regional forum for diverse matters, foremost among which is trade. Through ASEAN, the region is promoting wider global interaction by leading a Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP – green; ASEAN members – blue) to improve market and supply-chain efficiencies. This proposal has stimulated the US to propose leadership of a Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP - red) that excludes some ASEAN nations and China. The TPP, combined with the failure of global trade initiatives, has caused China to revive an older and wider proposal for a Free-Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific (FTAAP-21 - brown).



These examples are mentioned to illustrate global interest in the region. It is unproductive here to guess which model may eventuate; one interpretation is that all three could be agreed to within the region while retaining other networks to serve regional values. In any case it is instructive to recall that regional commonalities have governed decisions in the region for centuries. It is also instructive to recall this influence may again be underappreciated outside the region. One example may be seen in trade agreements based on the region's traditions that sea passages should be free and suitable for trade, with the larger powers accepting a policing role when required. This tradition had applied across long early centuries when regional trade was influenced by China and India. It spread globally after being formalized in the early 17th century by colonial interests and more recently informed agreements for freedom of passage within 12 nautical miles of coasts as distinct from the 200-mile Exclusive Economic Zones applicable to resource exploitation.¹³⁸

The maritime example provides a current reminder of differing worldviews. Freedom on the seas may be agreed and desired by all, and the laws governing it are seen as logically immutable within the region. However, Western views of maritime law by definition include the possibility of legal arguments for variations. The region's worldview has served it well, and might well be expected to continue doing so into its next phase of development. Having contributed to global development in such forms as free trade, freedom of the seas, navigation skills for colonial powers, fashions to the Americas and Europe, and language and culture as far away as Madagascar, the region has also gained much from global interaction. The colonial era brought cashews, chillies, maize, tobacco and bull fighting to the region's peninsula and islands, producing today's interpretations of regional cuisines. But rather than accepting such details as indications of globalization, the inherent commonalities of the region are what have defined it in the past, and which continue to define it.



Detail from wayang beber canvas

23. Conclusion: Uniting Commonalities

Today, Southeast Asia might be seen as a second China as it grows to become a major global manufacturing centre. Indicators supporting this contention include annual rates of growth average six per cent, and the evolving integration of ASEAN with its young labour force and strategic trading location. By 2020 the region is projected to rank as world's fifth-largest economy. At present investing in infrastructure and regulatory commonalities to enhance the efficiencies of integration, the region is expected to function with nations providing complementary strengths. Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar will rely on their young labour resource, while Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam will concentrate on manufacturing and Malaysia and Singapore on technology and financial services.¹³⁹ Such a region warrants wider understanding.

Understanding of the region begins with acknowledging that its significant commonalities are of primary importance. From such knowledge, differences may be discussed, and that is the realm of many fine academic works. However as in any field, discussions of common elements can be seen as dilettantish and attract lazy thinkers. By tracing commercial, cultural and chronological commonalities through these chapters, that criticism has been addressed. But there remain some superficial commentaries that we should finally set aside.

Dismissing the Asian Values Debate

First let us dismiss the intellectual trap of falling back on old dichotomies. In this instance this means that commonalities across Southeast Asia should not be confused with the now passé

discussion of Asian values. No doubt there are shared values across Southeast Asia, and some of these are shared more widely across populous Asia, and indeed some are shared with the West. Many are mentioned in this work. However, the primary theme of the work is to elicit commonalities separate from such modern political arguments. In order to put the Asian values arguments to rest let us briefly review the debate, and by so doing provide a context that was lacking through the 1980s and 1990s.

Asian values have been variously listed as: family or group loyalty; social stability and prosperity put before individual freedom; academic and technological diligence; work ethic; thrift; harmony; connectedness; shame and respect for leaders. While most are mentioned in the preceding chapters, popular arguments about the values have omitted such context.¹⁴⁰

The discussion was confused by conflicting definitions of the extent of Asia and by the inclusion of authoritarian governance as an Asian value. The Western argument revived the orientalism¹⁴¹ that defined Asia through Western romance and ignorance. The debate was made less relevant to our current study when Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew, a leading proponent of the uniqueness of Asian values, specifically excluded most of Southeast Asia, and oriented values to Confucianism. It then deteriorated further as Western proponents ignored their own history and claimed political freedom and democracy as the West's unique value that would be adopted universally. But objective scholars found it hard to see Confucius as more authoritarian than Plato or Augustine. Today, a more constructive view may be tendered as having been a need for Southeast Asian leaders to consolidate their nation-states through anti-colonial rhetoric to build cohesion among the disparate groups thrust together by colonially-defined borders. All of which indicates that authoritarian governance is not particularly Asian.¹⁴²

That the values are not unique to Asia did not hinder their use in Western criticisms, such as those of ASEAN being indecisive and ineffectual. In fact, these traits may reflect historical mores of incorporating different views while respecting roles and protecting commerce. In addition, common factors as described through this book, such as support of commerce being a role of government and religion being inseparable from any aspect of life, create a different worldview. The values debate through the 1990s dealt more with recent trends than historical and cultural understanding of the region. As was observed at a point in the debate, then quickly ignored, interest in such historical matters surged among Southeast Asians as part of developing national identities and the new generation's pride that replaced past subservience. In any event, the victory claims of Western universalists after the 1997 Asian financial crisis, today seem to have been both immature and premature. Southeast Asia recovered more quickly from that crisis than predicted by Western economic models, and in Malaysia's case provided the IMF with refinements to its strategic adjustment model.¹⁴³

The regional concept of harmony or conflict avoidance may also be interpreted in practical terms, such as avoidance of possible personal harm from taking a contentious position. This observation is supported by the distinction between Southeast Asian societies continuing to operate according to customary law, while Westernized societies rely on statutory law. In the latter, a person may take a confrontational attitude as they feel protected from personal harm by statutory law, and do not expect to be cut-off from society simply for causing offence. In addition, they may choose to live in another society while in traditional societies such an option is largely closed.¹⁴⁴ The difference is often described in terms of face in regional languages. While such a viewpoint must acknowledge the impact of accelerated globalization, it affords a more balanced perspective on a continuing common value across the region.

Commonalities

The Asian values debate highlighted the search for differences to define nations and the region after the colonial period, but it was not focused on Southeast Asia. Nor did it investigate the commonalities that produced real common values. From the perspective of this book, that debate serves to highlight the need to understand Southeast Asia through an appreciation of syncretisms. Like other global regions, it has its own regional specificities – and among these is a commonality of experience and values. The experiences are described as syncretic to capture the breadth of the term beyond religious contexts, which necessarily involves politics and economy.

Commonalities from the preceding chapters are summarized below. The process continues today as a result of shared influences, two somewhat petty instances of which can be briefly mentioned – a new regional lingua franca and sinification. The first is the evolution of a new form of English across the region. This is more than the colloquial hybrids of Cantonese/Mandarin and English in Singapore as *Singlish* or Tagalog and English in the Philippines as *Taglish*. It is a growing dialect of the region that is now influencing other nations where simplified tenses and parsing aids communication. Unconscious in its development, Southeast Asian English is seen as a local version of a global language – a glocal language,¹⁴⁵ and one that is also having an impact on colloquial expression in nearby English-speaking nations such as Australia. Its growth seems to be accelerated by modern social media and its abbreviations.

The second current example is sinification of the region. While it may be argued that the process began in the earliest times with the origin of regional languages and peoples, the process is more readily associated today with China's resurgence in world trade, science and other fields. The trend is evident in each country of the region and conspicuous in such places as northern Myanmar, Thailand and Laos. Simplistically it might be seen that the

minorities who fled China to escape an advancing Han civilization centuries ago created Southeast Asia, and thus today's sinification might be specified by some as an insidious Han-ification. We can see the poetic cycle that defines much of the region's philosophy in this occurrence, one that also mirrors the experience of such marginalized groups as refugee highlanders who are simultaneously being integrated into national mainstreams even as they sinify.

These two examples may seem trite, but in fact result from the long list of Southeast Asian commonalities that follows. My old Thai friend Charan, a respected international scientist and Thai cultural observer has noted the similarities to how colleagues come together to engage in meaningful work because they share common values, common beliefs, common interests and see a common good.¹⁴⁶ The bond of trust that develops from such commonalities is akin to what the region shares through common origins, histories, influences and traditions over a millennium. Some of the commonalities mentioned through this work are summarized in the following box.

To understand these is to begin to understand Southeast Asia. Listed commonalities could have been enhanced by critical consideration of anthropology, archeology, climate change, colonial influence, geography, history, irrigation, maritime power, migration, political science, prehistory, religion, rice, technology, trade and multiple other factors. But the point has been made. The region shares many commonalities now as it always has. And these commonalities must inform any consideration of the region's past and future.

The preceding arguments might also have been presented in a more conventional historical reconstruction. This would reference the development of rice and religion and the development of the trade that enabled leaders to emerge. Controlling trade in their sphere of influence, leaders then used religious ideas from outside to authenticate their power to rule

Commonalities Across Southeast Asia

Continued openness to foreign ideas	Trade destination and global corridor
Tolerance of diverse beliefs and worldviews	Anglo-American influence
Integration into lowland nation-state cultures	Colonial rule helped modernization & stability
Centuries-old identity as a trading region	National borders defined by colonials
Climate change immigration from China	Monarchies changed from about 1900
Chinese and Indian cultural influence	19 th century colonial expansion of rielands
Early history defined by climate changes	Improved governance taxed profits
Last 7,000 years define today's cultures	Major city per state for last two centuries
Both language families from southern China	Western-educated independence leaders
Unique bifurcated linguistic re-encountering,	Specific versions of capitalism and Marxism
Rice adaptability defined settlement & culture	A global buffer to communism
Joined by trade where rice was secure	Old-style rulers ousted in early 20 th century
Rulers required rice, defence & trade	National governments centralized power
World religions infused with traditional beliefs	Pervasive patron-client relationships
<i>Golden</i> to Arabs, Chinese, Indians & Romans	Central planning
Animism persists in adopted religions	Post WWII independence
Neglect of rice correlated to loss of power	Foreign capital for economic development
Loss if trust in ruler justifying coups d'état	Cozy rent-seeking from governments
Irenic Buddhism, Christianity and Islam	Entrepreneurial Chinese underpin economies
Minority lifestyles styled as primitive	Reproductive rates reduced as wealth rose
Communality arising from rice cultivation	Individuals slowly identifying with nations
Cities were once the world's largest	ASEAN echoes Japanese Asia Co-prosperity
Women's equality exceeding colonizers'	Ideological differences subordinated to trade
Women moguls & ship commanders	Traditions support reliable food and trade
Integrated Chinese essential to development	Spirit propitiation, protective rites, amulets etc
International traders for a millennium	Spirits and Deities omnipresent in nature
Purges of traditional beliefs usually failed	Religion inseparable from the secular
Trade in technology, capital & knowledge	Inshaallah, karma, harmony, God's law
Patronage as a preferred practice	Trade central to politics and ASEAN
Intra-regional and export trade continuous	Current foci on markets and efficiencies

while interpreting their status through local religious ideas of relationships with the gods, deities and spirits. Acquiring new technologies by right, firearms was the preserve of the powerful rulers and so the local population was kept in awe, a relationship that links to today's power of the military. The balance was upset when colonialism imposed new values that were not a natural development of those in existence. Thus today foreign systems of government maintain control in concert with the military. Dignified by ritual and religions, the centrality of rice as currency has only been partly replaced by money. Yet the expectation that

leaders need to demonstrate wealth continues along with acceptance of both wealth and power being passed down through the generations. Such a more historical line produces, in my view, the same conclusions of commonalities.

Before closing, it behooves me to answer anticipated criticisms that I have presented the nostalgic view of an old Asia-hand – that I have dwelt on the past and neglected the impact of modern technologies, wealth and globalization.¹⁴⁷ In fact, I have acknowledged these and other forces of change on and in the region, just as I have noted differences within the region without dwelling on them. The major changes in attitudes, interests and even in values, and the differences between nations are real. That is self-evident. But the point made through this book remains that underlying common influences have been underappreciated by each of Western hegemonic, nation-building and academic approaches. I have presented an overview spanning many fields; it is now for specialists to trace regional commonalities according to their own interests. Unifying factors across the region might be studied in specific fields as diverse as cooking methods, fabrics, folk tales, jewelry, sport and tattoos, to name a few. Elucidating commonalities is far from esoteric, and it tells us much more about the region than can studies of differences or comparisons with Western ideologies

These uniting regional factors themselves may be brought together by the earlier mentioned concept of syncretism to describe the regional penchant for merging traditional and introduced worldviews. With increased influence from China, Southeast Asian nations continue to refine their variants of Western systems of government in a manner that is faithful to the pure meanings of syncretism. This means that the region acts in accord with the 17th century description of the ancient Cretan's preference for compromise to resolve differences and to unite against foreign threats.¹⁴⁸ In this way, I submit that to take a syncretic approach to the region is to begin to Understand Southeast Asia.



Northern Thai weaving

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