



SOUTHEAST ASIA

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Officer Block 2 and Enlisted Block 3

# An Introduction to the Southeast Asia Region

CENTER FOR ADVANCED OPERATIONAL CULTURE LEARNING

# **Regional, Culture, and Language Familiarization (RCLF) Program**

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## Introduction

One must distinguish between the study of regions, countries, and cultures. Chapters 1 through 6 in this document introduce a region and provide some information about its countries and their relationships. They do not introduce a culture or cultures. Those chapters simply provide knowledge about the region and the environment in which people with different cultures live.

Regions and states do not have a single culture; instead they have multiple, diverse cultures. Cultures are not necessarily bound by national borders. There may be multiple cultures in a single state, while people sharing a single culture may live in more than one state.

The case study in Chapter 7 is about one specific culture in the region. Building upon the information provided in chapters 1 through 6, Chapter 7 introduces one of the many cultures in the Southeast Asia region, using concepts discussed in the Operational Culture General document.

## Why This Region is Relevant to You as a Marine

According to Admiral Samuel J. Locklear, USPACOM's actions in the nation's rebalance toward the Asia-Pacific region are a visible and enduring demonstration of U.S. commitment to the region. Actions are reflected in a continued and steady investment in forces, infrastructure, and engagement in the Indo-Asia-Pacific and are designed to defend the homeland, strengthen and modernize our alliances and partnerships, maintain our access to the global commons, deter aggression, and prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.<sup>1</sup>

Southeast Asia is one of the most populous regions on earth, with a population over 600 million that has doubled since the early 1970s. Due to scarce land area, urbanization is moving at a rapid pace, with rural space being swallowed up into large cities.



Philippine Special Operations Forces Soldiers conduct a close air support tactics, techniques and procedures exchange with U.S. Marines during Balikatan 2014 (Source: USPACOM)

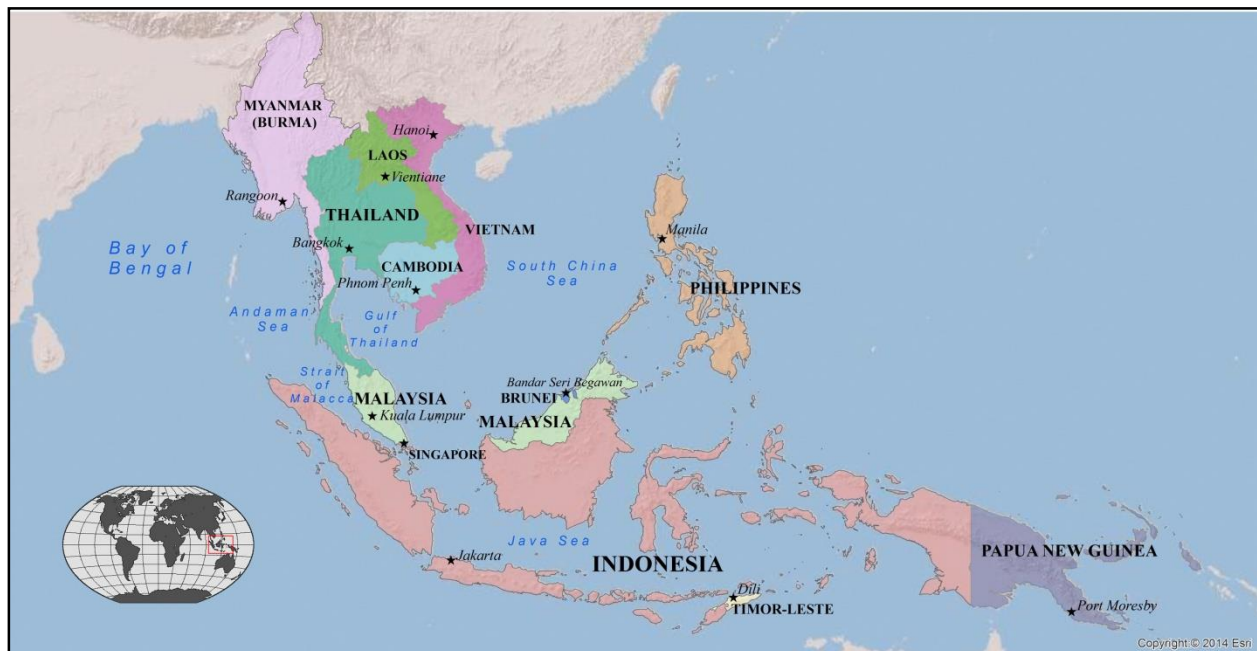
The impacts of natural disasters in the region affect the United States directly and significantly. The U.S. has a large economic investment in the region, particularly in Indonesia, Singapore, and Malaysia. In addition to massive human casualties, natural disasters affect the U.S. economy. Furthermore, due to extensive bilateral cooperation with the region's militaries, when disaster strikes, the U.S. military is often a first responder to these catastrophes and frequently remains at the disaster scene to support the recovery, clean-up, and reconstruction. As a Marine assigned to the Southeast Asia region, your growing understanding of the cultural and security-related aspects of this particular region can give you the tools to help you better navigate should you be deployed to the region.

## Geographic Overview

### Why a Geographic Overview Matters to You as a Marine

Geographic features include physical and biological factors tied to location, topography, climate, soil, environmental hazards, flora, and fauna. These features influence human and social characteristics such as beliefs, behaviors, social organization, economy, and politics, to name a few. This is not to say that geography determines how people and societies behave, but rather that it has varying effects on what they believe and do.

The locations of rivers, mountains, deserts, and coasts have great influence on where people live, what crops can be raised, and what modes of transportation are suitable. Climate and weather influence how people dress, work, and earn a living. Natural disasters like hurricanes, flooding, and earthquakes can devastate a region, and dislocate a great number of people.



Source: CAOCL

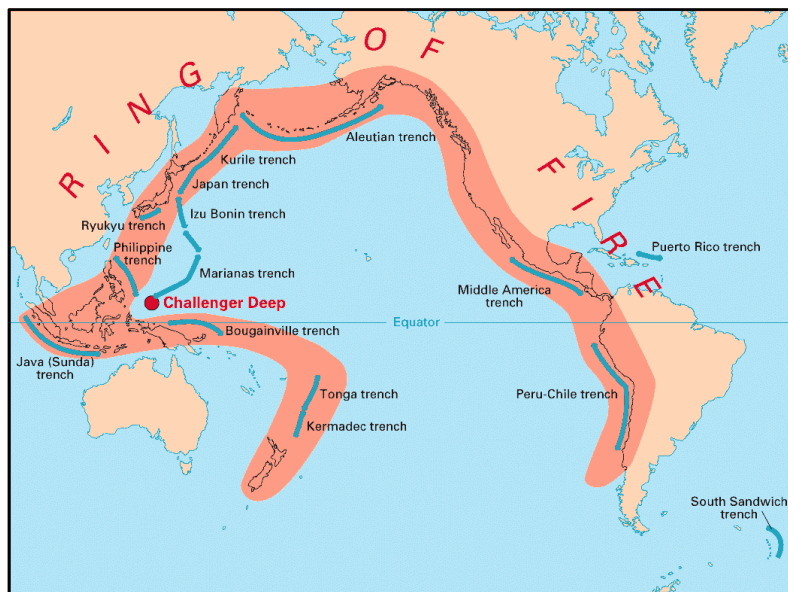
The Southeast Asia region encompasses more than 4 million kilometers and is bordered by India to the west, China to the north, the Pacific Ocean to the east, and Australia to the south. The region includes the countries of Brunei, Burma/Myanmar, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Timor-Leste.

The military government of Burma changed the country's name to Myanmar in 1989. Because the U.S. does not recognize the legitimacy of the military regime, the U.S. never officially accepted the name change. As of 2013, the official U.S. stance has also changed slightly; while the U.S. State Department's website lists the country as Burma, President Barack Obama has used the name Myanmar.

The region is characterized by long rivers that separate Southeast Asia from China and northwest India. Lowland plains separate hills and mountain ranges. The islands of maritime Southeast Asia range from very large to dots on the map.

Apart from a few deep underwater trenches, the oceans are shallow, warm, with low salt content. While the waters in some areas are rough, most countries, with the exception of the Philippines, are mostly spared from hurricanes and typhoons. However, there are many active volcanoes and most of the region is vulnerable to earthquake activity.

## Topography



Ring of Fire map (Source: USGS)

The entire Southeast Asia region is located within the Ring of Fire. This geographic region stretches from Christchurch, New Zealand up to the Bering Strait, down the Pacific Coast of the United States and to the southern tip of Chile, and is disproportionately prone to natural disasters. The numerous active fault line areas are likely to experience volcanic eruptions above and below the sea and earthquakes that can generate tsunamis. These natural events come from seas shifting as a result of the ocean floor rising or falling.

## Lowlands

Deltas situated along the coast or near large rivers are often flooded by seasonal rains (monsoons), typhoons, and high rising tides from the ocean. People in these areas use river water to irrigate rice paddies. This natural irrigation has allowed human settlements to develop and thrive on wet rice cultivation. For example, the Mekong River flows through six countries, forms the borders between Burma, Laos, and Thailand, and provides necessities of life for over 65 million people. Its waters are used for drinking, fishing, farming, industry, and the generation of electricity for some of Southeast Asia's emerging economies.

## Mountains and Hills

Mainland Southeast Asia is dissected by mountain ranges with both inactive and active volcanoes. The highest point in the region is *Hkakabo Razi* in northern Burma, one of the easternmost peaks of the Himalayas. Temperatures are much cooler and the humidity much lower at higher altitudes. Mountain slopes in the northern mainland receive heavy snowfall two months out of the year. As mountain ranges extend toward coastlines, they become increasingly susceptible to seasonal monsoons. Some slopes facing the water receive as much as 508 centimeters (200 inches) of rain a year. Slopes that do not face the sea are usually much drier. Mountains are a major part of the terrain in Maritime Southeast Asia as well. The Greater Sunda Islands all have peaks that rise over 2,743 meters (8,999 feet). Expect high elevations close to the coast to be subjected to high winds and heavy rains.

## Islands

Maritime Southeast Asia is made up of thousands of islands, some as large and as populous as the state of California. Most of the thousands of islands are uninhabited. Small, low elevation islands surrounded by coral are called atolls. Once mountainous islands, atolls have been worn down by wind and rain over the millennia. Winds and rains are one aspect of the region's climate, which also impacts life and military operations there.

## Rainforests

Tropical and subtropical rainforests can be found throughout the mainland and maritime countries of Southeast Asia in both lowland and mountainous areas. Rainforests are extremely dense, hot, humid, multi-layered forests. They are home to tens of thousands of species of animals, insects, and plant life. The vegetation lasts year round and is thick enough to interfere with line of sight and satellite radio communications.



Taman-Negara Rainforest in Malaysia (Source: Wikipedia)

## Weather

Weather poses some of the most dangerous environmental hazards in the region. This is especially true in maritime Southeast Asia. Because weather systems travel more easily across water, rain and high winds tend to have a greater impact on both civilian life and military operations in the islands of Southeast Asia than on the mainland areas.

## Monsoons

Monsoon winds are formed by the difference in temperatures between the Asian Continent and vast Indian Ocean that lies to the east of the Southeast Asia region. As air temperature rises, it creates an area of low pressure. This area of low pressure draws in cooler, wetter air from the south; hence the creation of the wet monsoon. During the Southern Hemisphere summer that lasts from December to March, the opposite occurs and the monsoon, now dry, reverses direction to come from the north.



The northern Philippines and northern mainland area of Southeast Asia – Thailand, Vietnam, and Cambodia – receive rain from the monsoon. Summers for these countries are wet and hot. Their winters are mild and dry. Daily high temperatures in late spring and summer sometimes soar upwards of 100 degrees Fahrenheit. An accompanying high level of humidity, especially along coastal lowland areas and valleys, can make conditions very uncomfortable. Monsoons also play an important role in the region's economy. Rice and tea farmers throughout the region rely on the monsoons for watering their crops, whether directly through rainfall, or indirectly through replenishing local water sources such as rivers, lakes and reservoirs.

### **Tropical Cyclones and Typhoons**

Unlike in North America where tropical storms are called hurricanes, the Southeast Asia region is subjected to cyclones and typhoons. Cyclones and typhoons regularly strike Southeast Asia. The names “cyclone,” “hurricane,” and “typhoon” all refer to the same weather phenomenon. The same type of disturbance in the Northwest Pacific is called a typhoon while cyclones occur in the South Pacific and Indian Ocean. In Southeast Asia, typhoons usually occur from east of the Malay Peninsula to the Philippines. Tropical cyclones typically are generated in the Indian Ocean. Cyclones can impact the western area of the region near Burma, Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia.

Like the annual North Atlantic Ocean's hurricane season, the North Pacific Ocean typhoon season heats up from July through October, the months when the oceans of the Northern Hemisphere are the hottest. These cyclones form in the tropics around areas of low pressure, usually in the deep sea and track westward. No part of the region is safe from a tropical cyclone, but the Philippines is particularly vulnerable. In November 2013, Typhoon Haiyan struck the southeastern portion of the Philippines, resulting in nearly 7,000 casualties, and was the largest typhoon on record ever to hit the country.

### **Natural Disasters**

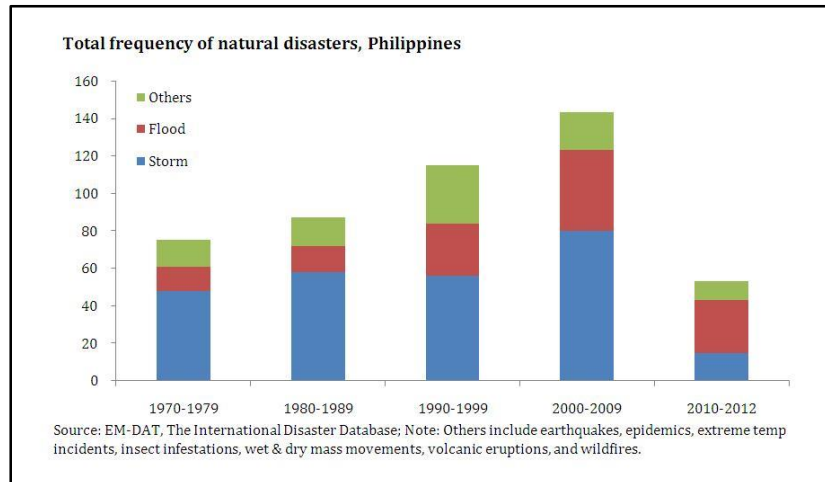
Earthquakes and tsunamis cause significant damage to homes and infrastructure and loss of life. In 2004, a 9.0 magnitude earthquake that occurred off the coast of the Indonesian island of Sumatra caused a tremendously powerful tsunami. This happened again in 2006, when another earthquake of 6.3 magnitude occurred on Java. Earthquakes themselves are destructive, but the resulting tsunamis can sweep away entire coastal villages and even inland villages, thus adding to the dangers nature imposes.

Landslides and flooding that devastate villages across the region are also frequent occurrences during the heavy rain falls in the coastal and mountain areas. The Ring of Fire has 452 volcanoes and accounts for over 75 percent of the world's active and dormant volcanoes.<sup>2</sup> While volcanic ash periodically replenishes the soil, as on the volcanically active and fertile island of Java, explosive eruptions can bring calamity and interrupt daily life for millions of people across the region.

### **Government Response to Natural Disasters**

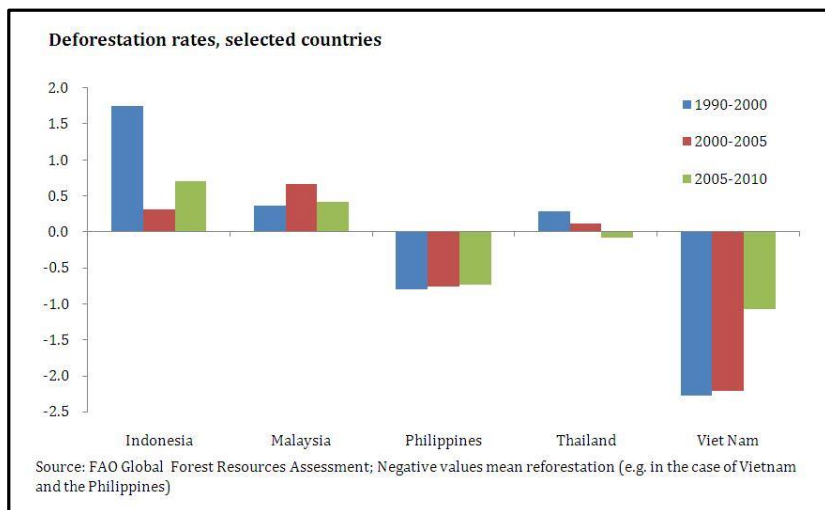
Southeast Asian governments have struggled in the past to respond adequately to natural disasters, especially in regions that are far from a country's capital or served by poor transportation networks. As a result, badly needed resources often do not reach their intended recipients.

United States Marines were the first responders to both the 2004 tsunami in Aceh Indonesia and the 2013 Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines. U.S. Navy ships and Marine and Navy aircraft were capable of providing immediate logistical support to these areas. Despite joint exercises with the U.S. and other militaries in the region, these countries still do not have adequate preparedness or assets to handle these types of disasters.



## Environmental Degradation

Many countries in the region also face the issue of environmental degradation. In addition to underdeveloped rural areas that rely on wood fuels for cooking and heating, increased industrialization throughout Asia as a whole has increased the demand for natural resources, contributing to deforestation and air pollution. Thai forests have been cut by two-thirds,<sup>3</sup> but efforts have been made in the last decade to reforest the



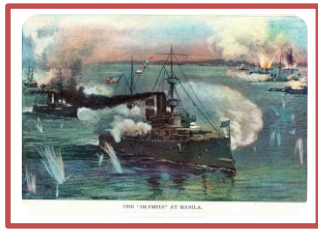
country, and the government of Thailand is encouraging the logging industry to engage in sustainable cutting. However, countries like Malaysia and Indonesia, which are rich in timber resources, continue to export these materials to larger, increasingly consumer-driven countries, like China.

## **Historical Overview**

### **Why History Matters to You as a Marine**

History provides a knowledge of how people, institutions, and states in a region evolved into what they are today. It also provides insights into people's collective memory about their group and others. In other words, history not only shapes a region's current affairs, but also tells us something about the historical roots of the individual and group identities of its inhabitants.

History does not predict how groups, institutions, and states in a region may behave in the future. Instead, it provides insights into what is possible and probable.



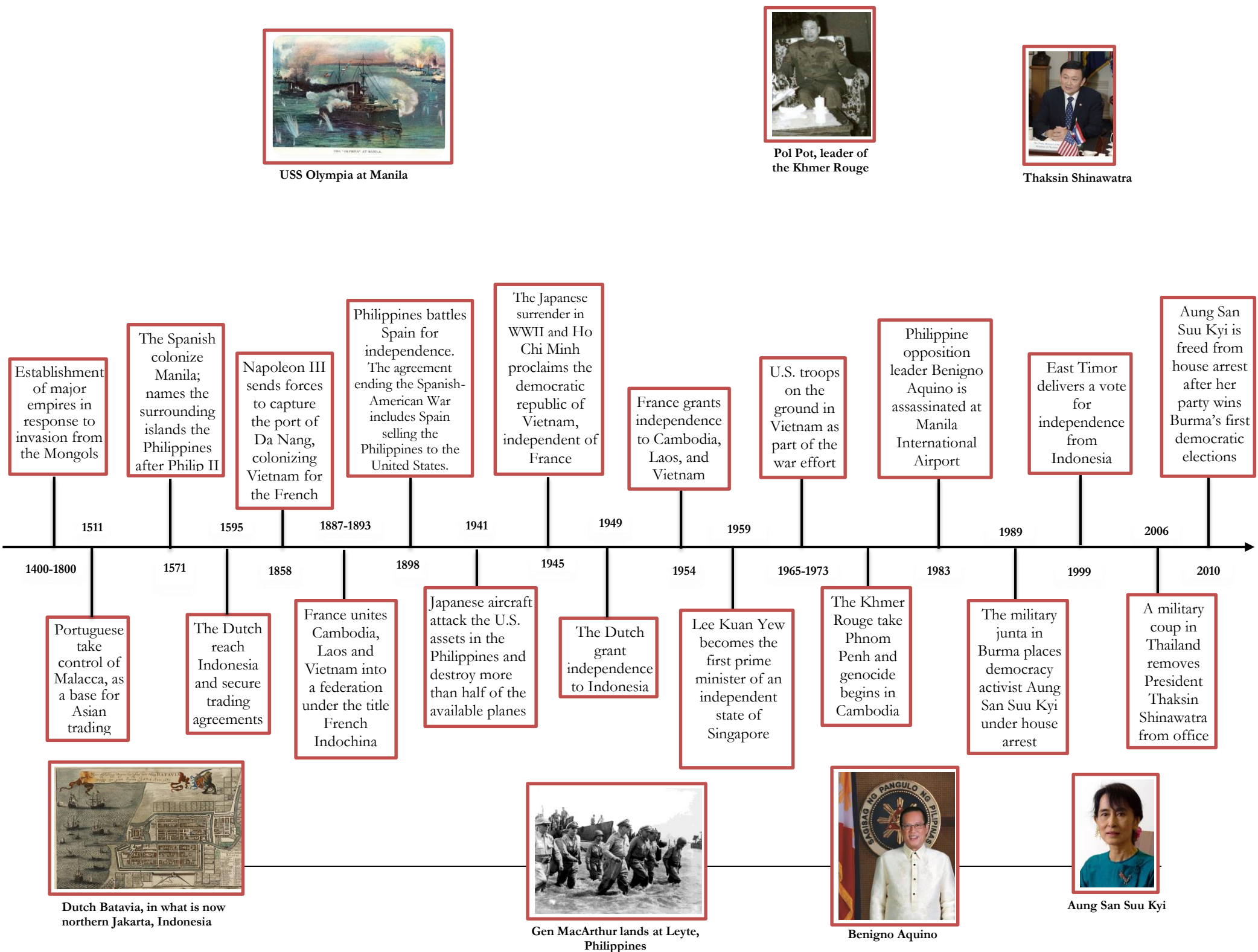
USS Olympia at Manila



Pol Pot, leader of the Khmer Rouge



Thaksin Shinawatra



## **The Golden Age 1400s-1800s**

The history of Southeast Asia has been heavily influenced by China and India over the centuries. The Chinese Han Dynasty annexed what is today Vietnam in 111 BC and ruled it for over a thousand years. China had an immense cultural impact on religion, art, government, and more. Although India never ruled nor had any formal authority in the region, it has had enormous religious and cultural influence through the spread and adoption of Hinduism and eventually Buddhism. Additional Indian influences include concepts of social hierarchy, writing, literature, art, theater, dance, and government.

During the Golden Age in Southeast Asia stable major empires developed and established the basic makeup of contemporary Southeast Asia. These concentrations of power developed from a need to defend the region from Mongol invasion. Additionally, these areas were home to economically complex and densely populated societies that had developed strong governmental organization. The spread of empires during the Golden Age brought about changes in language and culture that would later help to unite lowland peoples into large ethnic groups: the Burmans, Javanese, Khmer, Thai, and Vietnamese.

## **Trade and Colonialism**

The opening of trade between Europe and Asia was a major historical event for both regions, and had a significant role in shaping the modern global economic system. Before trading with Asia, European economies had been mostly modest and self-sufficient, but with increased shipbuilding capacity and improved navigation skills, Western countries began to explore and expand eastward. Initially, the indigenous kingdoms of Southeast Asia were too strong to be overcome. Europeans had little political control in the region and only controlled small territories until the late 1700s. Nevertheless, from that point onward, the dominant powers within the region began their decline as European power grew.

During the 1800s, Britain acquired Burma, Malaya (now mainland Malaysia and Singapore), and Borneo (now Brunei and maritime Malaysia); France acquired Indochina (now Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam); the Dutch, the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia); Spain, the Philippines (which was later ceded to the United States); and Portugal, East Timor (now Timor-Leste). Palau, Papua New Guinea, and the Solomon Islands have complex colonial histories that include rule by Britain, Germany, the Hawaiian Kingdom, Spain, the United States and Japan.

The Spanish ruled the Philippines from 1521 until the Spanish-American War and the defeat of their fleet in Manila Bay by the U.S. in 1898. The islands were then ceded to the U.S., which immediately inherited an ongoing insurgency that lasted in most parts of the islands until 1902. The Great Depression in the U.S. and collapse of stock markets in the 1930s had a great impact on colonial rule. American industry could no longer afford rubber and other natural resources from Southeast Asia. This plunged the colonial industrialists into financial difficulties. As a result, Burma, Vietnam, and the Philippines rose up in rebellion in the 1930s. Although unsuccessful, these rebellions publicly demonstrated not only widespread resentment, but the populations' growing dissatisfaction with Western control.

## World War II and Japanese Occupation

The Imperial Japanese occupation of Southeast Asia in World War II had a profound effect on European control of the region. By defeating the colonial Western powers, the Japanese opened the door for hopes of eventual independent Asian states. Local leaders with Western educations assumed positions of power, either within the Japanese administration, or in groups that took up arms against the Japanese as rebel insurgents. The harshness of Japan's policies in Southeast Asia quickly created resentment and distrust towards the Japanese. After the war, local populations took control of large stocks of weapons left over from Japan's defeat. These developments set the stage for post-war independence struggles.



Japanese Peso, issued in Philippines during the Occupation (Source: Wikipedia)

The end of World War II brought about the dissolution of colonial rule. Southeast Asians began to press for their independence. There were many motives for the push for independence that included heavy taxation, lack of representation, and resentment for real and perceived exploitation of their country and resources by foreign powers. At the end of the war, all of the region's large colonies demanded independence. With the exception of the U.S., which had promised Filipinos their

independence before the war, other Western governments were reluctant to give up their territories. Nevertheless, Indonesia and Vietnam declared their independence, resulting in armed conflicts in both countries. The war in Indonesia lasted until 1949. The protracted war in Vietnam lasted until 1975.

Cambodia and Laos also declared independence, and, despite initial reluctance, France eventually acceded in both countries. Britain too initially resisted calls for independence, but granted it to Burma, Malaysia, and Singapore in the 1950s and 1960s. None of these transfers of power required violent rebellions, and the British in particular spent several years before each handover to establish constitutions, bureaucracies, and electoral systems. The smaller island states in the eastern part of the region received independence during the same process of decolonization, with the exception of the Portuguese colony of East Timor (now Timor-Leste), which was invaded by Indonesia after the Portuguese abandoned it in 1975. Timor-Leste did not become a fully independent country until 2001.

## The Cold War Era

In 1941, Ho Chi Minh organized the Viet Minh, who were an anti-Japanese, anti-French, nationalist, and Communist resistance movement. Following the defeat of Japan, Ho Chi Minh established a provisional government in Hanoi and declared Vietnam's independence. After the Japanese had been driven out, the French refused to recognize the new government and with U.S. backing, fought back, in the First Indochina War.



At about the same time, after the end of World War II, China and Eastern Europe fell to Communism, followed by North Korea and Cuba. The U.S. and Soviet Union, and their respective allies, became engaged in a Cold War which would last until the fall of the Soviet Union in late 1991. The West believed that the Communists aimed to establish a political foothold in one country, and then expand that influence. Like falling dominos, neighboring states would eventually be swayed to Communist ideology. In fact, there were well-funded, organized Communist parties in all major Southeast Asian countries, and both China and the

The **domino theory** was prominent in the 1950s to the 1980s, and was used by successive United States administrations during the Cold War to justify the need for American intervention around the world. President Eisenhower put the theory into words during an April 7, 1954 news conference, when referring to communism in Indochina.

Soviet Union provided major support to



U.S. Marines in Operation Allen (Source: USPACOM)

Eisenhower became involved in the conflict now known as the Vietnam War, or, less commonly, the Second Indochina War.

The French eventually conceded defeat at the Battle of Dien Bien Phu, and the 1954 Geneva conference dissolved the colony of Indochina. Vietnam was divided temporarily into a Communist north and a non-Communist south. Cambodia and Laos also became independent countries. The North and the South were both supposed to hold national elections that would unite the two regions, but in fact, never did. In keeping with the Cold War perspective of the time, the United States viewed the wars in Indochina, and then Vietnam, as wars against Communist expansion. In order to resist this Communist advance, President Dwight D.

President Richard Nixon negotiated a peace agreement with North Vietnam and withdrew the remaining American forces in 1972. In 1975, a well-organized, well-funded North Vietnamese army stormed Saigon, seized control of the country, and united both countries as the communist ruled, Socialist Republic of Vietnam. While resentment of U.S. military activities and material destruction may still exist in Vietnam, the official Vietnamese relationship with the United States has improved significantly since the end of the Vietnam War.

### **The Khmer Rouge and the Killing Fields**

The Khmer Rouge took power in Cambodia in 1975 and was one of the most savage regimes in history. Their leader, Pol Pot, sought a radical reform of society, converting Cambodians into a single working class, killing more than a million people in the process and displacing hundreds of thousands more.

The Khmer Rouge outlawed all religion, private property, banking, finance, and money. They instituted a massive forced relocation of all urban dwellers to collective labor camps. Hundreds of thousands died of exhaustion or starvation. In 1978, the now Socialist Republic of Vietnam eventually invaded and overthrew the Khmer Rouge regime. The Vietnamese occupied that country until 1991 and finally agreed on their shared national border in 2012.

The Killing Fields refers to a number of sites in Cambodia where collectively more than a million people were killed and buried by the Khmer Rouge regime during its rule of the country. The term was originally coined by journalist, Dith Pran, after his escape from the regime.

### Post-Independence Era

Most of the countries in Southeast Asia held free elections immediately after independence. However, by the end of the 1960s, no functioning democracy existed in the region: most countries held elections, but the ruling party always won. This matched the general pattern seen in other countries that emerged from colonial rule in the 1950s and 1960s, in North Africa and the Middle East.

Beginning with the Philippines in 1986, the countries of the region have moved away from authoritarianism and towards democracy. Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand have all implemented democratic systems and procedures of some form or another, as have some of the smaller countries in the region. In 2010, Burma held its first democratic elections in nearly 50



Redshirt Demonstrators (Photo: Wikimedia)

years, taking promising steps away from military dictatorship, and opening up to international trade and increased bilateral relationships with other countries.



## **People and Society**

### **Why People and Society Matter to You as a Marine**

Missions across the range of military operations require Marines to understand, and work with, foreign populations. Knowing the people in the region, including their ethnicities, languages, and religions, as well as the way they live in social entities, enables Marines to create a mental picture of the human dimension of the region.

The region encompasses an area of approximately four million square kilometers (1.5 million square miles) and is home to over a half billion people. More than a fifth of them (138 million) live on the Indonesian island of Java, the world's most populous island, and the region continues to grow.<sup>4</sup>

### **Population Growth / Demography**

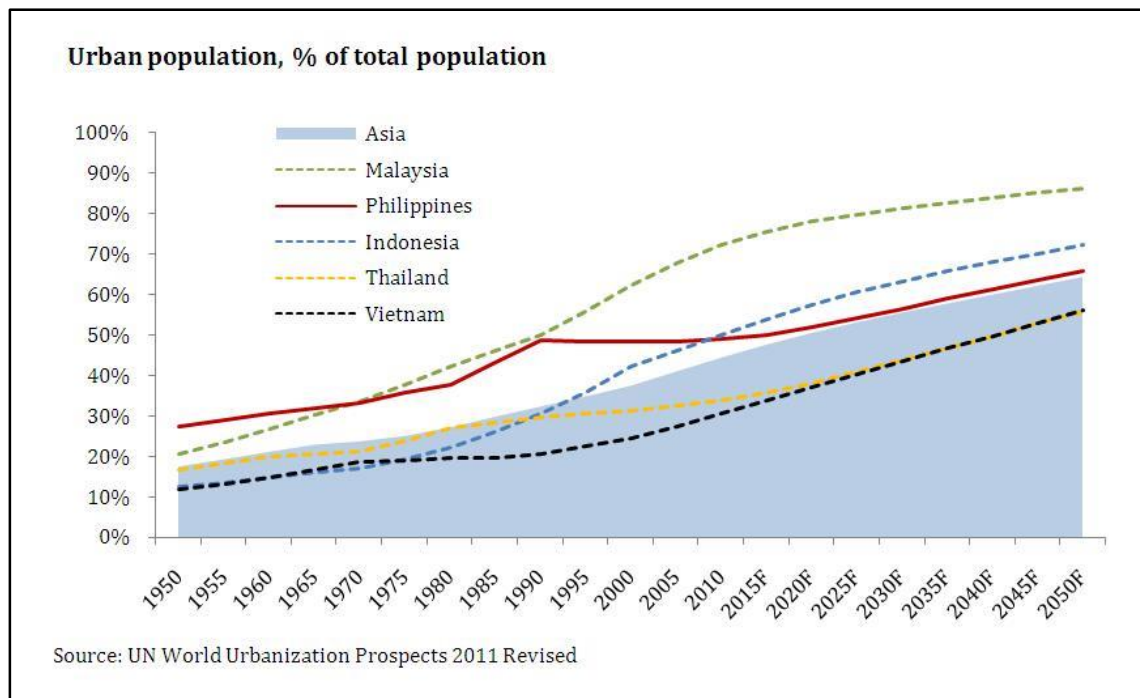
The Philippines, Laos, Malaysia, Vietnam, and Brunei tend to have higher growth rates, while Singapore, Thailand, and Indonesia have considerably lower rates primarily because they implement effective family planning programs in their countries. The child mortality rate in the Southeast Asia has dropped by nearly 50 percent in the last two decades.<sup>5</sup> In the more developed nations, such as Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand, health care programs for infants and children that are being administered by international organizations and NGOs have contributed significantly to this drop. However, the absence of these health care programs in countries like Cambodia and Laos has accounted for higher mortality rates in those countries.

### **Population Distribution**

River valleys, deltas, and major maritime trading ports positioned along trading routes between India and China are areas where early population centers, major kingdoms, and great temples first took shape in this region. Agriculture and maritime trade led to the development of two different kinds of classical Southeast Asian states: mainland states based on rice agriculture, and maritime states based on trade.

According to the United Nations' latest biennial review of world urbanization, Southeast Asia is one of the world's least urbanized regions.<sup>6</sup> However, the region is urbanizing at a relatively fast pace. Singapore's population density is nearly three times higher than the next population dense country Vietnam. Indonesia is the fifth most populous country on earth, with a population of over 250,000,000.<sup>7</sup> Singapore has the densest population on earth at 7,540 people per square mile.<sup>8</sup> In

comparison, the population density in the United States is 34 people per square mile. Conversely, the entire country of Brunei has a population of just over 420,000 people.<sup>9</sup>



\*F = forecasted

With so many areas of such high population density, combined with the fact that many of these countries share a land-based or maritime border with the China, the world's fastest-growing economy, competition for finite resources have increased dramatically in the last decade. This creates the potential for environmental crises, civil unrest, and/or military conflicts.

## Population and Ethnic Groups

Upland or higher elevation areas have lower population densities, greater variability in languages, cultures, and ethnicity. Because of this, there is also greater political fragmentation. Lowland or lower elevation areas of Southeast Asia, where the people engage primarily in wet rice farming, generally have much larger areas of language similarity, higher population densities, and greater or larger forms of political integration than do cultures at the higher elevation areas.

National borders and border disputes in the mainland portion of Southeast Asia affect the population distribution in the region. Ethnic groups are dispersed in locations in the hills and mountains throughout the higher elevations of this peninsular region. Generally speaking, all groups are keenly aware of each other's territories, but they do not always adhere to national boundaries as drawn today in those less populated areas.

Mainland and Maritime Southeast Asia each have different settlement and migration patterns. Cambodia, Laos, Burma, Thailand, and Vietnam share borders that have not been clearly delineated

in some places and have a history of fighting each other over territory. This is reflected in population distribution. Minority populations are often made up of refugees and people in migration.

In Cambodia, the largest ethnic minority population is Vietnamese, who account for approximately five percent of the population.<sup>10</sup> Malaysia and Singapore are multiethnic societies consisting primarily of Chinese, Malays, and Indians. Malay is the majority group in Singapore, but many ethnic Chinese have married into the Malay group and though a minority, ethnic Chinese have a significant role in Singapore's economy. Indonesia is also a multiethnic country and its more than 200 million people are divided into hundreds of distinct cultural groups living in homelands spread across nearly 4,000 miles of archipelago, from Aceh on the northern tip of Sumatra to Irian Jaya, in Maluku Province on the island of Seram, west of the island of New Guinea.<sup>11</sup>

## Languages

Southeast Asia's colonial legacy can be seen in the numbers of people who speak European languages. Cambodia and Laos are home to numerous French speakers. In Timor-Leste, a former colony of Portugal, Portuguese is still an official language. People speak Dutch on the islands of Indonesia that were at one time part of the Dutch East Indies colonies. As the last generations of those who lived under colonial rule expire, the use of these European languages is declining. English is the international language of business, and is spoken by growing numbers of Southeast Asians. In Papua New Guinea alone, some 800 indigenous languages have been identified, more than one-tenth of the world's total.<sup>12</sup>

Language unifies and also divides a country's population. In addition to an official language, referred to as the *lingua franca*, English is often spoken in urban areas, especially while conducting business. In Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, Melanesian **Pidgin** is the official language. The linguistic influence of Chinese has spread via immigrants into many parts of Southeast Asia, especially to Singapore where majorities of peoples are of Chinese descent and speak mostly Mandarin or Yue Chinese. Indian influence is also evident in the region, as there are also significant numbers of Tamil and Hindi speakers.

**Pidgin:** (Loosely) any simplified or broken form of language, especially when used for communication between speakers of different languages.

## Healthcare

Most governments in the region have passed laws to establish national health insurance systems and mandated universal coverage, but equity issues and poor infrastructure make implementation difficult<sup>13</sup>. Rural areas are served by local infirmaries, which are limited to the prescription of over-the-counter medicines and inoculations, in addition to traditional healers, herbalists, and midwives. In cities, public clinics have modern equipment and formally-trained staffs. Private healthcare



USS Mercy arrives off the coast of Timor-Leste  
(Source: USPACOM)

facilities are staffed by predominantly Western-educated physicians who perform complex procedures and require payment for services.

Southeast Asia's subtropical and tropical climates facilitate the development of parasites in soil and water and threaten the survival of their hosts (insects, animals, and humans that carry the parasites). The climate is also ideal for breeding mosquitoes, which carry life-threatening diseases.

Streams throughout the region are often used for sewage disposal. When these same streams are used for drinking and bathing water, chronic infections are promulgated. Sanitary conditions are improving, however, especially in cities. This has largely been the result of international aid programs targeting the health problems caused by unsanitary conditions. Poor sanitation makes diarrhea the most likely food and waterborne threat.

Avian influenza type A, also known as bird flu and avian flu, is a disease causing death in more than half of all people who become infected. The virus H5N1 is common in birds, but often does not make them appear ill. Risk factors for infection include close contact with caged birds or poultry.

HIV/AIDS is a problem, particularly in countries with thriving sex industries. While new infection rates in Cambodia, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, and Thailand declined by 25 percent between 2001 and 2011, those in Indonesia and the Philippines rose by more than 25 percent in the same period.<sup>14</sup> Hundreds of NGOs, such as the Thai Red Cross Society, provide education and financial support to clinics, and training for healthcare workers.

In Indonesia, rural clinics called *puskesmas* are run jointly by the government and religious groups. Services focus on disease prevention, children's and mothers' health, and nursing. In 2014, the government of Indonesia established an online network for *puskesmas* to offer better services to patients, and to provide referrals to both public and private hospitals.<sup>15</sup>

## Education

Most countries in Southeast Asia require that children attend school for a minimum number of years. The cost of an education from elementary school through high school is generally free. School enrollment is low in rural areas of countries like Cambodia, but high in urbanized countries like Malaysia. Many children drop out of school after the minimum number of years to support their families.

Many Southeast Asian students learn English and in Malaysia, learning English is compulsory. Muslim students in Indonesia learn Arabic in *agama* (religion) classes. Children in the Philippines are instructed in three languages, and in Singapore, two. After completing the minimum number of years of compulsory education, children usually have to pass difficult examinations in order to continue their education. Competition to get into high school and beyond is challenging because the rapidly



Rural school in Laos (Source: Wikipedia)

expanding population is underserved by a relatively static number of colleges and vocational schools. Military service is conscripted in some Southeast Asian countries. Two years of military service is required of Singaporean and Thai men when they turn 18 and 21, respectively. They are allowed to pursue post-secondary education once they complete their required time in uniform.

Burma's higher education infrastructure withered under a military junta in 1996. Junta leader Than Shwe closed all institutions of higher learning because he thought universities and colleges had become breeding grounds for dissent. More recently, things have been changing. Following democratic elections in 2010, the country has made significant progress in the area of education reform. In 2014, with support from the World Bank, the government provided grants to schools nationwide to supplement and improve the country's free compulsory education system.<sup>16</sup>

Madrassas are the traditional Muslim schools of instruction in Malaysia. Attendance at these schools is higher in the more traditional rural areas. Accredited universities in the region generally do not accept academic results from madrassas, so college-bound madrassa students will simultaneously attend public school. In Mindanao in the Philippines, there are over one thousand madrassas. Other religious groups provide instruction to their populations as well. In mainland Southeast Asia, Buddhist monasteries often provide the traditional form of education for boys, who begin receiving their instruction at age ten. Throughout the region, Buddhist instructors emphasize strict discipline and hard work.

Malaysia has the largest minority population in Southeast Asia. All public school students are required to be instructed in Malay, while Mandarin Chinese and Tamil are optional courses. Chinese and Tamil students are also required to take a full additional year of elementary school to acquire a proficiency in *Bahasa Melayu*, the main language of instruction in secondary schools.<sup>17</sup> Malays also disproportionately dominate national universities, which have been accused of heavily favoring Islamist principles. As a result, many minority students attend private schools and universities, and are instructed in their own language.

## Religion

Religion is an important feature of the cultural topography of Southeast Asia. It is more than just a set of rules and regulations; religion extends into social norms and traditions, including how people dress, marry, conduct funerals, raise their children, etc. The people in the region of Southeast Asia practice many types of religions, but the four major religions are Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, and Hinduism. In many areas, traditional beliefs are liberally intertwined with the religious belief systems. For centuries, Islam, Buddhism, and traditional belief systems have held in check the spread of Christianity, with exceptions in Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, and the Solomon Islands. Today, 90 percent of Solomon Islanders are professed Christians, and approximately 81 percent of Filipinos are Roman Catholic.<sup>18</sup> While Indonesia is predominantly Muslim, the government officially recognizes Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, and Buddhism.

### *Islam*

Islam was founded in 610 AD in what is now known as Saudi Arabia. By the thirteenth century, Muslim merchants and missionaries spread Islam throughout Maritime Southeast Asia, largely by

peaceful means. Today, only 15 percent of the world's billion-plus Muslims are of Arab descent. Over 60 percent of the world's Muslims live in Asia. Indonesia's population is more than 87 percent Muslim, making it the largest Muslim majority country.<sup>19</sup> The two major sects of Islam, Sunni and Shi'a, have historically been in conflict, as they have developed into two distinct religious movements. Globally, between about 85 to 95 percent of Muslims belong to the Sunni sect, and Southeast Asia is primarily Sunni. In Brunei, the national religion is the *Shafi'i* school of Islam,<sup>20</sup> which is also prevalent in Egypt and parts of Eastern Africa.

Islam is practiced by more than 60 percent of Malaysians. Religion correlates strongly with ethnicity in Malaysia, with most Muslims being Malay, most Hindus being Indian, and most Buddhists being Chinese. The diversity "heightens the importance of religious identity, and most Malaysians have a strong sense of how their religious practices differ from that of others."<sup>21</sup>

"While Muslims constitute the overwhelming majority of Indonesians at nearly 90 percent, they are themselves divided into several groups, including Javanese Syncretists, traditionalists, and modernists or reformists."<sup>22</sup> In terms of political significance, the largest concentration of Muslim traditionalists is in eastern Java. Islamic modernism or reformism is

a movement that rejects all four of the traditional Sunni legal schools, preferring direct interpretation of the meaning of the Koran. While modernists live in every region, their political center of gravity has been in the islands outside of Java, especially Sumatra and Sulawesi. Modernists also tend to be urban and to have often been educated in Western style schools, as opposed to the Koranic schools associated with traditional Islam.<sup>23</sup>

In the Philippines, tensions have been ongoing for decades between the Roman Catholic majority and the Muslim minorities in the south. From the early 1970s until 1996 when a peace accord was signed, the two groups engaged in a violent dispute over control of Mindanao.<sup>24</sup>

## Buddhism

The origins of Buddhism date back more than 2,000 years to a Hindu region in what is today southern Nepal. Buddhism split into the Theravada and Mahayana sects around 100 AD. Mahayana spread eastward and northward in the centuries that followed, entering Tibet in the mid-650s A.D. There, it developed into a third sect called Vajrayana.

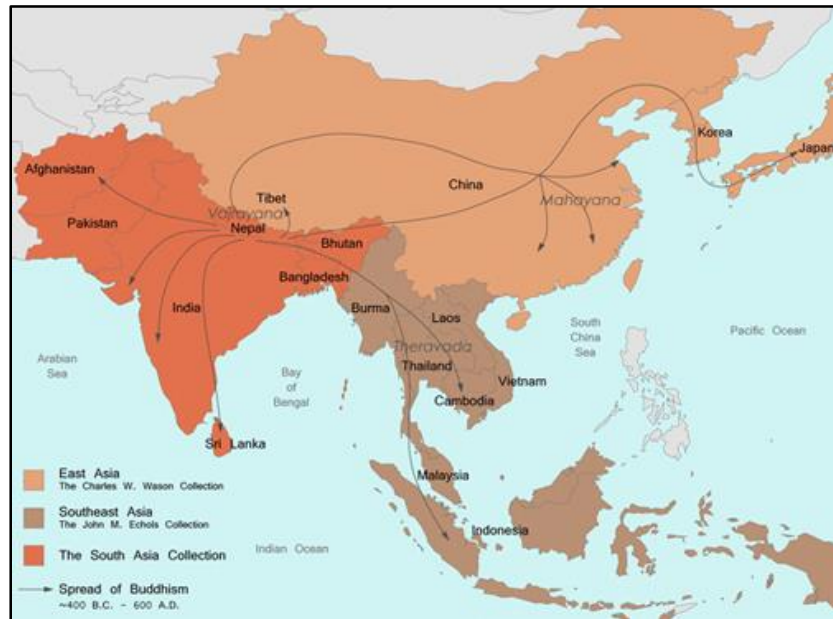
Muslim Population by Region				
	2010		2030	
	ESTIMATED MUSLIM POPULATION	ESTIMATED PERCENTAGE OF GLOBAL MUSLIM POPULATION	PROJECTED MUSLIM POPULATION	PROJECTED PERCENTAGE OF GLOBAL MUSLIM POPULATION
<b>World</b>	<b>1,619,314,000</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>2,190,154,000</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
Asia-Pacific	1,005,507,000	62.1	1,295,625,000	59.2
Middle East-North Africa	321,869,000	19.9	439,453,000	20.1
Sub-Saharan Africa	242,544,000	15.0	385,939,000	17.6
Europe	44,138,000	2.7	58,209,000	2.7
Americas	5,256,000	0.3	10,927,000	0.5

Population estimates are rounded to thousands. Percentages are calculated from unrounded numbers. Figures may not add exactly due to rounding.

Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life • *The Future of the Global Muslim Population*, January 2011



Although in sheer numbers there are more followers of Islam, the majority of Southeast Asian countries are predominantly Buddhist. Most Buddhists are Sino-Indonesian, the descendants of migrants from China during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Before Theravada Buddhism was introduced to Southeast Asia, there existed indigenous belief systems and religions. Because of its flexible quality and liberalism, Buddhism easily absorbed certain elements of existing belief systems into its mainstream practice.<sup>25</sup> The



Spread of Buddhism (Source: Cornell University)

majority of people in Cambodia, Laos, Burma, Singapore, and Thailand practice Buddhism. There are also sizeable communities in Vietnam, Malaysia, and Singapore that specifically practice Mahayana Buddhism, but the majority of Southeast Asians remain followers of the Theravada tradition.

### ***Christianity***

Christians account for less than 25 percent of Southeast Asia's total population, and are most prevalent in the maritime region. The Philippines, Timor-Leste (both mostly Roman Catholic), Solomon Islands, and Papua New Guinea are the only predominately Christian countries in Southeast Asia.

While Catholicism accounts for the majority of Christians, the Dutch and other colonial powers introduced Protestantism to the region. In recent years, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Charismatic Episcopal Church, and other Western evangelical churches have successfully converted a significant percentage of the population. Christianity has a long historical influence in Southeast Asian affairs, as well as support and close ties to the West. When restrictions were lifted in 1989, Christian converts returned from refugee camps and foreign countries, and Christianity has since established a strong foothold among ethnic Khmers.

### ***Hinduism***

Hinduism is the world's third largest religion, after Christianity and Islam. Hinduism has its roots in India and evidence dates Hinduism back to at least 3000 BC. It is the predecessor of Buddhism. By repeated cycles of reincarnation, good works and positive *karma*,

Asceticism is characterized by an abstinence from worldly pleasures, often for the purpose of pursuing spiritual goals. Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism all advocate restraint with respect to actions of body, speech, and mind.

one eventually escapes the human condition fundamentally characterized by pain and suffering. Meditation, chanting, prayer, monastic living, and asceticism are often considered paths to enlightenment.

Hinduism, with its multiple gods and maze of diverse sects, practices, and ways of worship practices; is far less well-defined and unified than Buddhism. Hinduism is practiced widely in Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and the Philippines, largely because of the presence of Indians that migrated from the Indian sub-continent. Hinduism is also generally tied to a complex social caste system. The Balinese people of Indonesia still practice a type of Hinduism that incorporates native spiritual elements.



Angkor Wat in Cambodia is the largest Hindu temple in the world (Source: Wikipedia)

### ***Significant Minor Religions***

Other minor religions that can be found throughout the region include:

- Animists: Believe that the universe contains three worlds: the past, present, and future. These are parallel worlds that cross each other. Animists or “traditional believers” tend to seek harmony between these worlds. There are no animist holy texts, nor official places of worship. Instead, the rituals are considered part of their ethnic identity. Each ethnic group has its own creation story, creator-god, spirits, and rituals.
- Shamanism: A shaman has great skill, knowledge, and power; and the ability to communicate with and control spirits, even allow a spirit to enter into or eject from the body.
- Ancestor Worship: The belief that deceased ancestors continue on as spirits watching over descendants. Respect, ritual, and worship will win an ancestor’s assistance or intervention.
- Sikhism: Borrowing elements from Islam and Hinduism, Sikhism started in a northern Indian, 15<sup>th</sup> century Hindu province. However, it shares beliefs common to Hinduism incorporating the concepts of dharma (reincarnation), karma (enlightenment), and escape from cyclic suffering.

### **Family Structure**

Southeast Asian family dynamics differ from those in the United States. Most Southeast Asians live in collectivist societies where loyalty toward family is imperative. Much of the family dynamic has roots in the Chinese philosophy of Confucianism. Confucian thought asserts that the family unit is the primary social unit. Relationships within the family create the structure for all other relationships, and comprise three of the "five relationships" in society: sovereign-subject; husband-wife; parent-child; elder brother-younger brother; friend-friend. In this hierarchy, each role is clearly defined. The concept of **filial piety**, which is devotion of a child to his parents, is the foundation for all other relationships in society.<sup>26</sup>



Groups form social networks along lines of religion, gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic standing. In rural areas, Southeast Asians live in traditional, semi-independent villages governed by a council of elders, consensus, and customary village law. Family kinship provides a safety net of mutual support and can provide marriage partners, business opportunities, as well as

local and region wide political influence. Kinship ties promote the greater good of entire families and clans. Often, loyalty is given to one's family and ethnic group rather than to the state. Members of an extended family are expected to help each other on a reciprocal basis. In the Philippines, *utang na loob* is the maintaining of a relationship by balancing obligations and debts.<sup>27</sup> A consciousness of obligations, and the giving and receiving of tangible and intangible favors, are highly characteristic of Filipino society.

*Utang na loob* refers to reciprocity, and is fundamental to the Filipino value system. The internal dimension (*loob*) differentiates *utang na loob* from an ordinary *utang* or debt; thus goes much deeper than ordinary debt or the western concept of owing a favor. Being aware of this concept is important, because it could directly affect expectations between partner nation forces.

Major events as births, weddings, funerals, and major holidays play a key role in the development and preservation of important kinship ties. These occasions, whether festive or mournful, provide opportunities for people to share their food and drink with family and valued members of their communities. Many families would rather go into debt than be unable to throw a lavish party for all attendees. Networking with influential members of one's community (and remaining thereafter in their good graces) strengthens the status of a person within that communal group.

## Social Structure

As mentioned, many Southeast Asian societies are hierarchical in nature, beginning with the family and moving outward into the greater society. In Java, power has traditionally flowed down from a patriarchal leader to close personal friends and kinsmen. Loyalty to this hierarchical structure ensures communal harmony, often at the expense of individual rights and initiative.

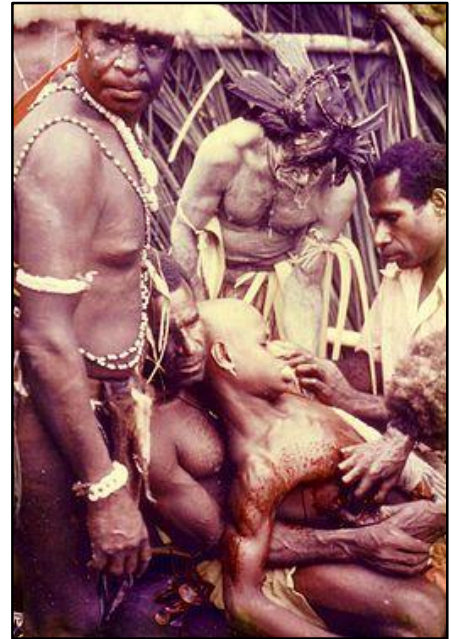
Outright contradiction with a leader is frowned upon because it causes the authority figure to lose face. The concept of face is also Chinese in origin. The Chinese word for face, *lian*, can mean a physical face, or a reputation. The concept of face represents the confidence of society in a person's character.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, authority figures are often protected from bad news, since giving bad news implicates the bearer of the news or his or her subordinates. When a subordinate causes his boss to lose face and then experiences bad luck, such as a car accident, the mishap may be seen by others as the boss inflicting divine retribution on the subordinate for causing him to lose face. Problems are often ignored or passively dealt with and conflict avoidance is an important cultural value in Southeast Asia.

## Traditions and Superstitions

Superstition plays a large part in the psychological make-up of many Southeast Asians. The region's religions are rich with folk-tales and even some heads of state in the region rely heavily on the supernatural and astrology when making major decisions about policy and rule of law.<sup>29</sup> Many people will pray to objects or perform rituals in the belief that they exert a supernatural power.

In Thailand, Buddhist amulets are a fundamental part of the culture and daily life. Many Thais believe that the veneration of amulets creates power and protection and that the amulet has the ability to increase one's prosperity, self-confidence and personal as well as societal competence.<sup>30</sup>

In countries like Papua New Guinea, rite of passage rituals play a significant role in the social structure of communities. The Kaningara tribe, for example, practices a ritual known as Crocodile Cutting. This ceremony, is a male-only ritual with participants starting as early as 12 years old, and involves intense cutting and scarification. It is believed that the blood from a maternal birth must be drained in order to release any femininity and is necessary for a boy to become a man.<sup>31</sup>



Crocodile Cutting ceremony in Sepik River, PNG (Source: Wikipedia)

## **Government and Politics**

### **Why Government and Politics Matter to You as a Marine**

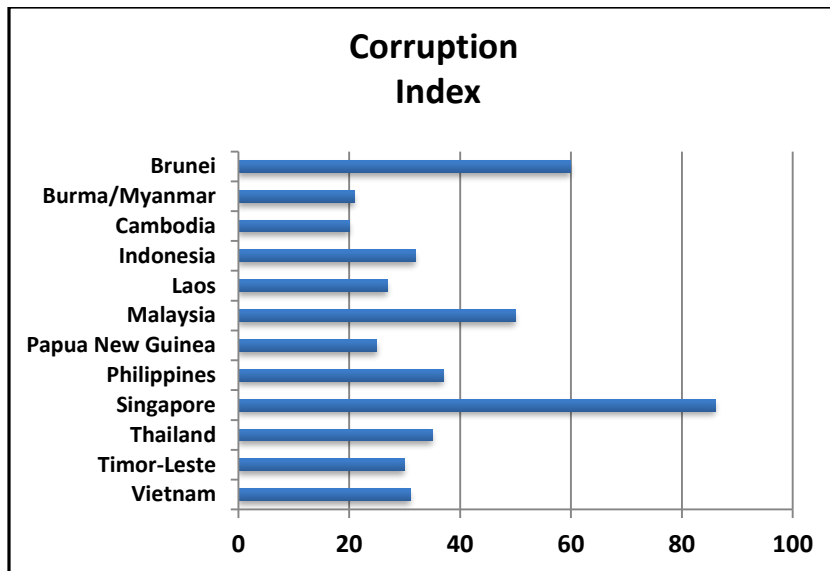
Most people live in states governed by formal and informal institutions. Marines need to know how power and authority are distributed in the state by studying the formal and informal structures of governments in the region. In addition, Marines need to understand how people, groups, and institutions exercise power and authority, in other words, what comprises politics in the states.

### **Introduction**

Southeast Asia has seen significant political transformation since the end of WWII. Independence from colonial rule brought undemocratic regimes, but political norms have changed over time, and most of the countries of the region have evolved in a democratic direction since the 1980s. In 2010, Burma held its first democratic elections in 50 years. But while the growing economies of the region have reduced poverty and fostered the growth of middle classes, the region still grapples with political unrest, which creates regional instability and leads to a lack of cooperation between governments.

The types of government range in this region from democracies, to socialist republics, to parliamentary governments to monarchies. None of these types of governments, however, are without flaws. Corruption and political manipulation often limit effective political representation for the average citizen. Nepotism is prevalent in the region and has been a hindrance to political development.<sup>32</sup> Personal connections based on tradition, religion, and centuries of practice are important and affect the region's social and political functions. These kinds of relationships are so intertwined that they are certain to have implications for the political systems of Southeast Asia's various countries. Loyalty and trust ensure good political allies and are thus used to ensure that a civilian government has the support of the military. By extension, the government assumes it will not be overthrown. This, however, is not always the case.

While Thailand is also officially a monarchy, it is not without a fair amount of political instability. In 2006, Thaksin Shinawatra was ousted as prime minister of Thailand by a military coup. A national referendum for the constitution was called by the military and the junta also promised a democratic general election in 2007. Thaksin's party, the People Power Party (PPP) garnered the majority of the votes in that election. However, by 2008 the country was back in political turmoil, with the PPP government facing pressure to step down amid mounting unrest. In 2011, the Pheu Thai Party, which maintained close ties to Thaksin, nominated his younger sister, Yingluck as their candidate for Prime Minister in the 2011 general election. On 23 May 2014 Yingluck was arrested on charges of corruption, along with former cabinet ministers and political leaders, in the wake of a military coup.



The perceived levels of public sector corruption, 2013 (ranges from 0 (very corrupt) to 100 (very clean)).

Source: Transparency International

In the years following the Vietnam War, countries like Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam have experienced decades of relative stability. Vietnam is one of the world's few remaining one-party communist states. The increasing role of the National Assembly in reviewing legislation and policies and a gradually more incisive media have contributed to greater transparency in Vietnam, but there are still limits to opposition. Citizens can be given long prison terms based on broad charges, such as espionage or undermining national security.

Timor-Leste has been an independent state for just over a decade, following its independence after an Indonesian-backed pro-integrationist militia went on a rampage, killing an estimated 1,300 people and destroying Timor-Leste's infrastructure.<sup>33</sup> Since 2006 the main threat to East Timor has been internal weak state institutions and rivalries among the ruling class and security forces. Extreme poverty, lack of infrastructure, unemployment, and population displacement continue to threaten the existence of the world's newest countries.

Religion still affects regional politics as well.



Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien Mosque in Brunei  
(Source: Wikipedia)

Brunei is a very small oil-rich country governed by an Islamic Sultanate, which is essentially a monarchy. The current monarch, Hassanal Bolkiah, has reigned for a half century. The country is almost 80 percent Muslim and in 2014, despite international protests, the monarchy imposed Sharia law on the country.

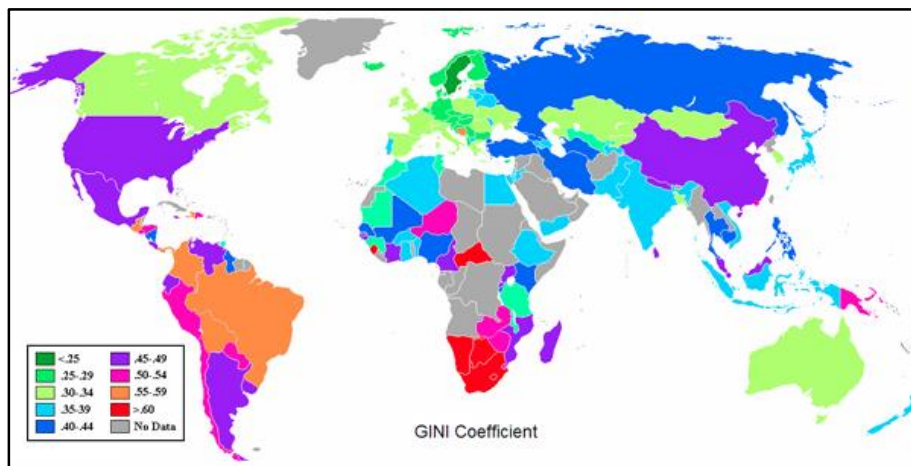
## Economic Overview

### Why Economy and Infrastructure Matter to You as a Marine

The goods and services that people exchange, the infrastructure that people use to move them, and the formal and informal structures that make exchange possible all play critical roles in survival. A thorough understanding of a region is impossible without knowledge of its economy because the region's political, social, and cultural trends both reflect and shape economic developments and trends.

#### Introduction

The economic climate in Southeast Asia has seen dramatic changes since the Vietnam War era. Most countries in the region have moved rapidly from being societies serving as suppliers to their colonial powers to being active and significant participants in the modern free market system. Southeast Asia's participation in the world economy has led to growth in the region. While there are still pockets of extreme poverty, particularly in rural areas, Southeast Asia has made significant strides in the last decade to close the wealth gap, with most countries now having a better Gini Coefficient than the United States.



Source: CIA

The Gini coefficient is a measure of statistical dispersion intended to represent the income distribution of a nation's residents. This is the most commonly used measure of income inequality. A Gini index of 0 represents perfect equality, while an index of 100 implies perfect inequality.

The Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia have become markets for global investors, and have expanded their economic focus from the production of purely raw materials and agriculture to the export of more advanced goods, such as electronics, semiconductors, and automobiles. Despite a general trend of economic growth in the region, however, most of Southeast Asia struggles with a



significant income gap and many countries have significant poverty issues, especially in rural areas where incomes grow at a much slower pace than in cities.

## Agriculture

The cornerstone of agricultural production in Southeast Asia is rice, with nearly every country engaged in wet rice cultivation. The rice grown in the hilly areas is dry rice. Unlike wet rice cultivated in the low land areas where soil is covered in varying depths of water, dry rice cultivation or dryland rice farming does not use irrigation, and crops rely solely on rainfall for growth and development. Dryland rice farming takes place on well-drained soils above the flood line, where seasonal rainfall and the ability of the soil to retain water are the sole determinants of crop growth and development.”<sup>34</sup>



Rice harvesting in the paddies in Thailand (Source: Wikipedia)

Rice requires a steady supply of water, so effective irrigation is important. Countries rely on rain fed systems of irrigation, with the latter being important to the production of high-yielding varieties (HYV) of rice. The Green Revolution brought these HYVs to the region in an effort to increase rice production, avoid famine, and provide for better food security.

Cash crops are agricultural products grown for profit, with many Southeast Asian cash crops sold via export markets. Regional cash crops include palm oil, rubber, coffee, cocoa, sugar, and sweet potatoes, among others. In most of Southeast Asia, people living in the rural countryside are impoverished and rely on subsistence agriculture to survive.

## Fishing

The countries and their thousands of islands have long coastlines. Fishing is very important to economies overall in the Southeast Asia region. For littoral Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand fish is an especially important export commodity. Like advanced technologies applied in agriculture's Green Revolution, improvements in fishing techniques have led to increased production. Aquaculture, or fish farming, is an important revenue earner for many economies in the region. Thailand's shrimp farms supply a great deal of the shrimp sold in the United States.

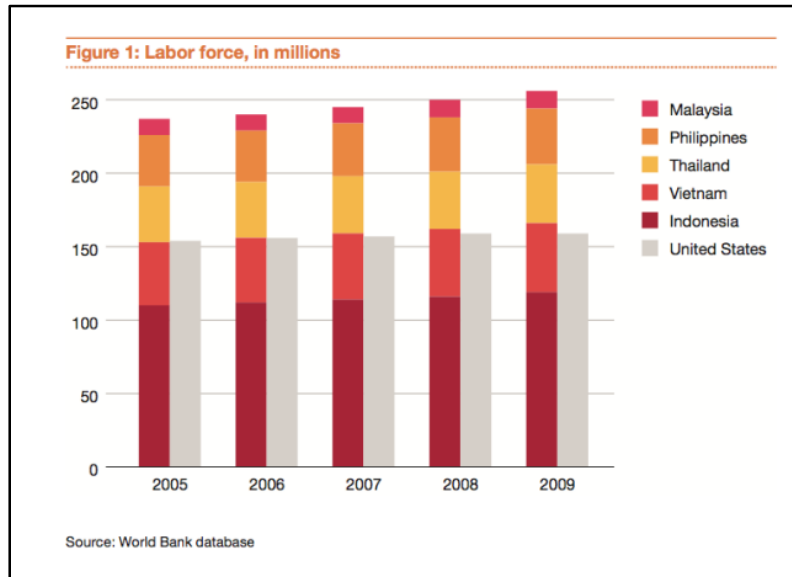
Technological advances have allowed for faster fishing boats that can go further to catch more fish, but they have also started to produce negative results. Those in the fish industry today go beyond their traditional locations to catch fish. Overfishing of waters, fishing in off-limit waters, and competing for fish in congested waters have left overcrowded fishing areas of the sea with less fish. Maritime fishing areas are polluted from fossil fueled engines and garbage dumping. Conditions less favorable to

catching fish have made some areas along coastal fishing villages fertile areas for the recruitment of desperate locals by pirates.

## Manufacturing Industries

Southeast Asia's manufacturing capacity has grown at a staggering rate over the first two decades of the 2000s. The growth of Southeast Asia's labor force in the 'fastest five' (Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam) has been more than twice China's growth rate each year from 2005 to 2009.<sup>35</sup> Increasing middle class populations throughout Asia, including in the Southeast region, likewise increasingly demand all kinds of manufactured goods. In addition to a growing population, Southeast Asian countries, on average, invest

more than the United States into individual education so that the populations as a whole are becoming a larger and better educated workforce. Important industries in the region range from textiles to semiconductors. The textile industry is a key industry in Thailand and Burma, while Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines have robust electronic products industries.

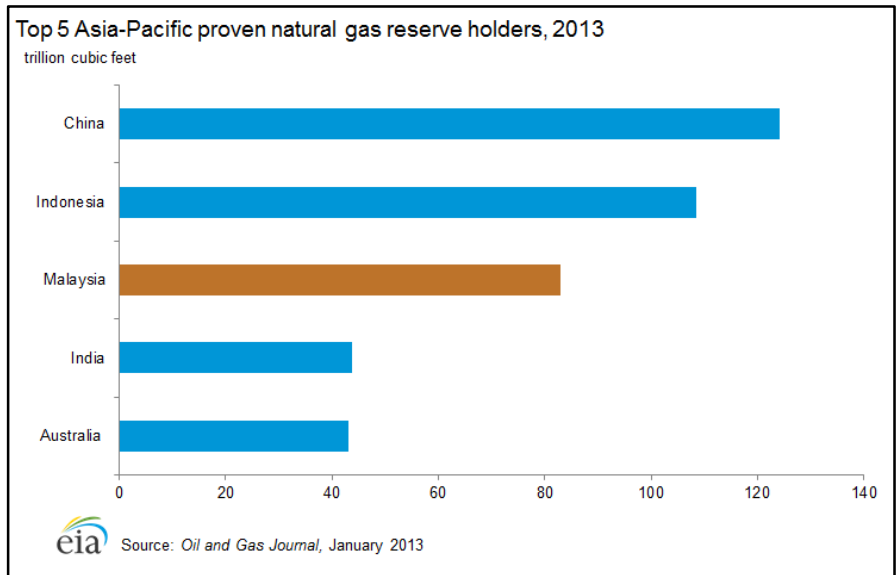


In 2010, Vietnam surpassed China to become the largest production venue for Nike, while Coach announced plans in 2011 to shift half of its production activities from China to neighboring Asian countries. In 2010, Intel opened a \$1 billion assembly and testing plant in Ho Chi Minh City, and in fall 2013, Nokia broke ground on a \$300 million manufacturing plant in Hanoi.<sup>36</sup> While international foreign direct investment (FDI) in Southeast Asia has increased significantly, the region's governments have only recently liberalized trade and investment policies, and have just begun to implement more transparent regulations to combat corruption in economic sectors.

## Natural Resources

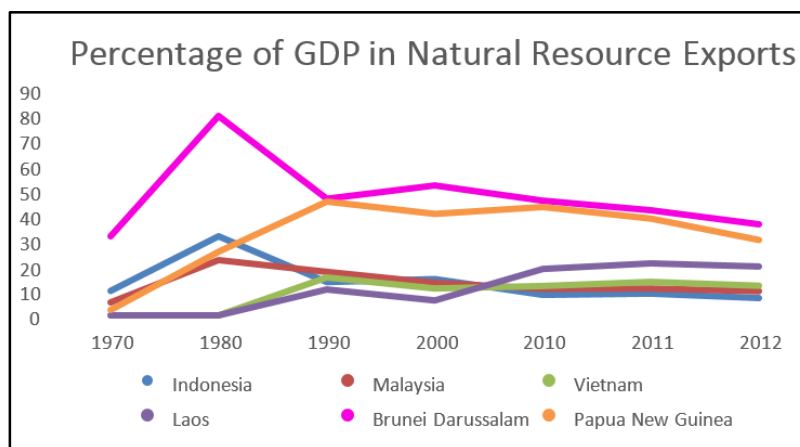
With the exceptions of Laos and Cambodia, the oil industry is a significant contributor to the region's economy. Brunei's main industries are petroleum, petroleum refining, and liquefied gas. Indonesia and Malaysia also have petroleum and natural gas resources and natural gas production industries. Singapore has significant oil drilling equipment and petroleum refining industries. As a whole Southeast Asia nations contribute a great deal to the world's fuel industry in addition to the region providing a main sea line of communication (SLOC) for the transport of oil.

Malaysia and Indonesia are major gas producers. However, Indonesia's domestic pipeline network is not as well integrated as Malaysia's network. Brunei's economy is based heavily upon proceeds from exports of crude oil and natural gas and it relies heavily on hydrocarbon revenues for nearly two-thirds of its GDP. It is one of the world's top natural gas exporters and has proven natural gas reserves of 14 trillion cubic feet.<sup>37</sup>



Oil in the region has become an important source of revenue for Indonesia, Vietnam, and Malaysia. Demand for oil and the known deposits below land and sea have sharpened the assertions of which territories and oceans belong to which country. In this decade, territorial disputes over islands in the South China Sea have increased significantly. Until May 2008, Indonesia was the only member of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). It has since dropped out of the association because of its low level of oil exports. Malaysia's oil and natural gas resources have sparked the country's revitalization after the world tin market collapsed in the 1980s. Before the collapse, Malaysia had been the world's leading tin producer.

Natural gas is the fastest growing primary energy source in the region, and the volume of natural gas reserves is growing. Indonesia and Malaysia are large, regional natural gas exporters, and rank within the top ten of the world's leading natural gas exporting nations. Indonesia is also the world's leading exporter of liquefied natural gas and controls more than 25 percent of the global market.



Source: World Bank

In addition to fuels, Cambodia, Malaysia, Philippines, Vietnam and Indonesia also export a significant amount of timber, particularly to China to fuel its construction boom. This heavy export industry has caused a severe deforestation problem in these countries, and recent efforts have been made to cut back on logging and decrease the countries' dependencies on this export revenue.



## Remittances

Southeast Asia is a region that has high levels of labor migration. Many of these migrants send money, referred to as remittances, back home to their families. In the Philippines, remittances sent to family members account for up to 14 percent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP). Filipino migrant workers working in the United States, which hosts the largest number of Filipino migrant workers in the world, send more than 40 percent of their total remittances back to the Philippines, compared to Filipino migrant workers in Saudi Arabia, who send home only about 4 percent of their total remittances. Accelerated economic growth in Singapore, coupled with a lower than average birthrate, have created a labor shortage that is eased by the importation of migrant workers from neighboring countries, who account for about 30 percent of the total workforce. In Vietnam, up to 10 percent of the GDP can be attributed to receipts of remittances. Remittances sent to Vietnam are the fourth highest in Asia.

A remittance is a transfer of money by a foreign worker to an individual in his or her home country. Money sent home by migrants competes with international aid as some of the largest financial inflows to developing countries.

## The Informal Economy

A vibrant informal economy exists in much of Southeast Asia as well. In terms of its contribution to GDP, the informal sector accounts for up to 60 percent of annual output in the countries of Asia.<sup>38</sup> There are many people in deep poverty who use the unregulated informal economy as a way to make ends meet. Many of these workers operate as unregistered street vendors. In Bangkok, Thailand, there are about 380,000 food vendors who are not part of the formal economy. In local markets throughout the region, goods are often traded directly rather than purchased with national currencies.

Southeast Asia also accounts for one-third of the world's sex industry. In this region alone, it is a nearly \$10 billion a year industry,<sup>39</sup> is completely unregulated, and is part of the informal economy. It is estimated that 30 to 35 percent of all sex workers in the in Southeast Asia are between 12 and 17 years of age. The Cambodian Government further substantiates this statistic with reports that indicate 37 percent of victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation are children.<sup>40</sup>

The area is also home to the Golden Triangle, a major narcotics production and transit region. The Triangle is an area where the mountains of Thailand, Burma and Laos overlap, and the region is the world's second largest producer of opium, following Afghanistan. In 2013, the countries of Burma and Laos saw a 22 percent increase over the previous year,<sup>41</sup> rendering opium production a significant and growing contributor to the informal economy in those countries.

## Infrastructure

Southeast Asia's infrastructure is in various stages of development. The infrastructures of some countries reflect expanding 21<sup>st</sup> century technology, while others struggle to match the pace and demand of growing populations. Much of Maritime Southeast Asia has a highly developed communications infrastructure with high-speed internet, multi-language newspapers, and television broadcasts with high volumes of subscribers. Cellular telephones are the norm in Southeast Asia as landlines are either non-existent, or often in poor repair, especially in the mainland region. The quality of service provided may often be directly proportional to the economic conditions of the country. For

example, communications in poverty stricken Laos are markedly inferior to those of wealthy Singapore. Government control of communications is widespread.

## Energy Sources

While conventional thermal fuel sources such as coal and oil are still important in Southeast Asia, emerging markets in natural gas and alternative energies are becoming increasingly significant, especially due to the rising cost of oil. Several offshore and upriver natural gas reserves are currently being explored or are already being drilled. These include the Timor Gap, shared by Australia and East Timor; the Tangguh gas field in Western New Guinea, belonging solely to Indonesia; the Malaysia-Thailand joint Development Area (JDA); and disputed reserves in the South China Sea (SCS).

Electric utilities can be found in most urban and suburban areas. Rural areas are rarely linked to the power grid. Most of the time they operate sparingly due to frequent energy demand spikes that overwhelm the existing power grid. Blackouts are frequent, especially on Java, due to heavy demand. In comparison, while the United States consumes about 12,600 kilowatt hours of electricity per person; Brunei and Singapore consume about half that amount. Alternative energy in the region is generally confined to hydropower and geothermal energy. The Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, and Indonesia all use hydropower for a significant portion of their energy needs. Of note, hydroelectric dams have devastated some rural agricultural communities by disrupting streams once used by farmers for irrigation. In many instances, communities in places like Laos and Vietnam have been resettled. While there has been some resentment, the reaction has been fairly mixed, with some people feeling reasonably compensated and others much less so.

## Water and Waste Management

Water purification plants are present only in major towns and cities. Water pipes in many cities are aging, plagued with leaks, and affected by soil erosion and theft. To be safe, many people boil their water or purchase boiled water from vendors. Singapore imports half of its water from Malaysia due to the lack of adequate freshwater sources for the island's five million people. After Singapore gained its independence in 1965, the pricing of water at 120,000 gallons per dollar—as agreed upon in the 1920s—became a source of conflict and continues to cause tensions between the two countries.

Many rural villagers empty their sewage into the nearest stream. Stilt villages often deposit their waste into the streams below their houses and let currents carry it off. This method of waste removal is also an urban issue. In Bangkok, the *Khlong* canal network used for transportation doubles as a sewage outlet way. Garbage collection in major cities is intermittent. Even when waste is picked up, overflowing landfills worsen groundwater pollution and pose a threat of garbage landslides to adjacent shanty towns. Much of Jakarta's 20 tons of trash per day ends up in Jakarta Bay.



Stilt village in rural Laos (Source: Wikipedia)

## Communications/Telecommunications and the Internet

Reflecting the economic disparities of many countries in the region, telecommunications systems vary from modern high-technology digital to Soviet-era technology. Cell phone use, even in the poorer countries, is increasing rapidly – particularly in urban areas. In many regions, landline telephone system infrastructure was never developed, and users skipped directly to cell phones as their first access to communications. In contradiction to the wider use of technology, electricity is often unavailable or limited in many rural areas.

Southeast Asia has nearly 200 million internet users.<sup>42</sup> The most connected countries are Singapore, Brunei, and Malaysia. Laos, Burma, and Cambodia; though each have barely 1 percent of their population connected to the Internet. As the Internet has become an extremely popular informational and entertainment tool, many countries censor the content of Internet traffic. The Burma government for example, in 2007, shut down the Internet altogether in the face of pro-democracy demonstrations. As well, radio and television are either directly or indirectly state-controlled to various degrees.

## Mass Media

Burma, Brunei, Vietnam, Laos, Malaysia, and Singapore have strict censorship of their internal media. Only two countries in the region have a completely free press: Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. Many countries in the region have major English-language newspapers. The exception is Laos, which produces its newspapers in French. Thai-language satellite television is also common in Laos, where Laotians regularly view Thai programming.

## Transportation

Riverine transportation is crucial to major port cities in mainland Southeast Asia, and to inland and rural areas. People living inland send trade goods downstream to larger settlements where the river is wider, deeper, and more suitable for barges. Urban ferries can be very crowded and lack basic safety equipment.

Southeast Asian governments have had varying degrees of success while constructing reliable road networks into challenging rural and secluded areas. Even transportation routes in cities suffer from a lack of urban planning and are often severely congested. Local travel is facilitated by traditional modes of transportation, including rickshaws (commonly called tuk tuks) to vessels that ply inland waterways.

Despite the soaring costs of automobiles and fuel, vehicle ownership in Southeast Asia outpaces infrastructure development. Automobile use is concentrated mainly in cities, which contain most of the region's modern roads. Motorcycles and bicycles are the most common form of transport. They allow for easy maneuvering between lanes of gridlocked traffic in the city and on narrow rural roads and trails.



Tuk tuk driver in Cambodia (Source: Wikipedia)

The quality of roads in Southeast Asia deteriorate the farther one travels from cities. Road quality corresponds to the level of economic development in various countries. For example, roads are of relatively high quality in peninsular Malaysia and Brunei, while roads are poor in Laos, Burma, and Papua New Guinea. During the wet season, these roads are vulnerable to floods and mudslides. Except for the heavily populated islands of Sumatra, Java, Madura, and Luzon, roads in Maritime Southeast Asia are generally no more than dirt tracks. During the wet season, potholes abound and flooding occurs in low-lying roads and streets.

Drivers in Southeast Asia are less observant of the rules of the road because laws are not strictly enforced. Generally speaking traffic fatalities occur at a much higher rate in Southeast Asia than in the United States. Motorcyclists weave dangerously in and out of traffic. The prevalence of bicycles in the urban areas of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia make driving extremely dangerous there.



Traffic in Hanoi (Source: Wikipedia)

Most major cities are served by commuter trains that connect to the suburbs. Some cities like Manila, Singapore, and Bangkok have above-ground metro systems. Wherever buses, taxis, and rickshaws are heavily used, city streets, with few exceptions, are overcrowded and congested. Getting to work in Manila and Jakarta often involves a commute of two hours or more. Bicycle and motorcycle use is very common in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.



## Regional Security Issues

### Why Regional Security Issues Matter to You as a Marine

A thorough understanding of a region is difficult without an account of its most significant security challenges. These challenges tend to affect not only relations between states in the region but also the behavior of its people and the choices they make. Regional security issues encompass a host of topics ranging from wars between states, to insurgencies, to organized crime, to weak institutions, to systemic corruption. Some of them involve violence, while others weaken states and societies and have the potential to turn low level conflicts into violent confrontations.

#### Introduction

The Southeast Asia region has a long history of being colonized by Western powers. All of the countries in the region, except for Thailand, were colonized at one point by the Americans, British, Dutch, French, or Spanish. The United States has had a significant presence in the region, beginning with the Spanish-American War and, most notably, during the Vietnam War. In recent decades, the U.S. has made great strides in re-establishing positive relationships with countries in the region. As such, the United States has significant national interests there that can be impacted by regional events or trends. Therefore the United States military is actively involved in measures to prevent threats and instability in the region.

In recent years, many of the terrorist threats in the region have been eliminated, largely due to the efforts of Operation Enduring Freedom – Philippines (OEF-P). However, while extremism has been minimized, there are issues that -- due to their direct or indirect threat to U.S. national security -- continue to be of concern for the United States.

#### Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)

Most of the countries of Southeast Asia participate in a geo-political and economic organization, the **Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)**. The members of ASEAN include Brunei, Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. Despite efforts to resolve

ASEAN does not have a military force, nor is it a defense pact. Members have held military defense meetings as part of the ASEAN Regional Forum, and have entered into military agreements with other countries, provided they do not threaten the security of neighboring countries. USPACOM has participated in the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting and the ASEAN Humanitarian Assistance, Disaster Relief and Military Medicine Exercise.

disputes peacefully and to cooperate on issues of mutual concern, there are numerous contentious security issues on which ASEAN focuses, mostly stemming from territorial disputes, ethnic diversity, and disputes over natural resources.

For current information about some of these ongoing issues, refer to the Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies at <http://www.apcss.org>

## Natural Disasters

The impact of natural disasters in Southeast Asia affect the United States directly and significantly. In addition to massive human casualties, natural disasters affect the U.S. economy. The U.S. has a large economic investment in the region, particularly in Indonesia, Singapore, and Malaysia. Furthermore, due to extensive bilateral cooperation with the region's militaries, when disaster strikes, the U.S. military is often a first responder to these catastrophes; and often remains at the disaster scene to support the recovery, clean-up, and reconstruction.



USMC LCpl Christopher E. Pring, coordinates the loading of palletized water with the Philippine Air Force for transport following Typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda (Source: U.S. Marine Corps photo by Cpl. Codey Underwood)

The Ring of Fire region is disproportionately prone to natural disasters. The numerous active fault line areas are likely to experience volcanic eruptions above and below the sea and earthquakes that can generate tsunamis. These natural events come from seas shifting as a result of the ocean floor rising or falling. Because more than half of Southeast Asia's population resides on the coast and waterways, heavy rains and flooding brought by monsoons have the potential to cause massive property damage and many casualties. Volcanic eruptions and earthquakes are also common and trigger tsunamis that can devastate an entire region.



Ring of Fire map (Source: USGS)

On December 26, 2004, one of the deadliest tsunamis on record struck the Indonesian island of Sumatra and other smaller territories bordering the Indian Ocean. Nearly 300 thousand people were

killed or vanished with the retreating tide, and nearly 2 million people were left homeless or displaced throughout the region. The United States' response, called Operation Unified Assistance, provided more than 15,000 U.S. military members, more than 70 reconnaissance-assessment flights, 1300 fixed-wing aircraft flights, more than 2,200 helicopter flights, 17 navy ships, and more than 24 million pounds of relief supplies and equipment.

The United States government again led the effort when Typhoon Haiyan struck the western coast of the Philippines on November 8, 2013. The typhoon resulted in more than 6,000 deaths, over 4 million people displaced, and more than \$13 billion in economic losses. Because of its proximity to the region and the general flexibility and robust capability of the MAGTF construct, the Marine Corps provided some of the first responders to the disaster.

## **Territorial Disputes**

In recent years, the region has seen an uptick in territorial disputes. These include both land and sea disputes over borders and regions where control over, or access to, natural resources is a constant source of contention. Two of the most significant disputes include a boundary dispute along the Thailand/Cambodia border, and contested sovereignty over several potentially resource-rich areas in the South China Sea.

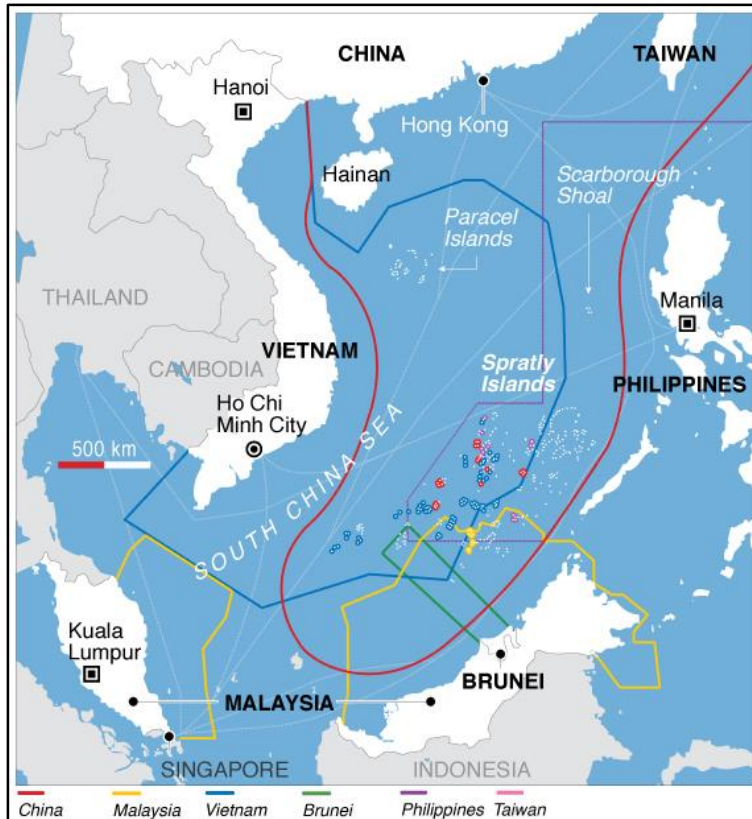


**Preah Vihear Temple (Source: Wikimedia Commons)**

The border dispute between Cambodia and Thailand dates back at least a century, when French Indochina and Thailand first sought to demarcate their common border. The most important issue in this dispute is Preah Vihear, an ancient Hindu temple, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, as well as an important tourist attraction. A 1962 decision by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) awarded the temple to Cambodia, but Thailand has continued to press the issue. The two countries engaged in armed conflict over the site in 2011, damaging the temple's buildings. Thailand took the case to the ICJ again, and in November of 2013 the ICJ ruled that the area around and below the temple belongs to Cambodia and that any Thai security forces still in that area should leave. To this day, the dispute remains unresolved.

Five countries in the region, as well as China and Taiwan, have claims in the disputed waters near Philippines and Vietnam. Several nations claim maritime rights in portions of the South China Sea, which is rich with resources, including oil, natural gas, and fisheries. These disputes are primarily between China and Taiwan, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Brunei. Disputes over these waters were infrequent until 1991 when China invoked international law to claim it as sovereign territory. In 2011, the United States officially condemned China's use of force in the South China Sea, and from that point forward, the number of skirmishes in this maritime region has increased.





China is pressing huge territorial claims, outlined in red, in the South China Sea region. The Philippines, Vietnam and others are also making claims (Source: VOA)

South China Sea. China responded to the U.S. action by engaging in bilateral negotiations with some of its neighbors and increasing naval drills in the South China Sea in a show of force.

Perhaps most important to the United States, however, is that maritime trade has doubled every decade since 1945, and three out of the 20 busiest ports in the world are in the South China Sea.. Oil tankers originating in the Middle East, headed for the United States, pass through the Strait of Malacca and out to the Pacific. This Strait sees more than 16 million barrels of crude oil pass through it daily, and piracy, attempted theft, and hijackings are a constant threat to ships operating in the area.



Strait of Malacca (Source: Wikipedia)

Oil reserves in the sea are estimated to be in the billions of barrels. Fishing accounts for a large percentage of the region's GDP, with nearly a tenth of the world's fishing stock found in this small area. Furthermore, fish accounts for approximately 20-50 percent of the protein intake in Southeast Asia. China's attempt to exert control within its nine-dash line has the potential to affect American interests because conflict in that region can impact freedom of navigation for trade and military vessels. It also threatens the right of countries, including the U.S., to capitalize on the mineral and fish resources outside of legitimate Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ). Furthermore, the U.S. is bound to defend the Philippines under a mutual defense treaty. In 2012, the U.S. announced that it would expand its military presence in the Philippines, and in 2013 the U.S. began to increase its presence at port facilities near the



## Internal Conflicts

The government of Burma has struggled with internal conflicts involving ethnic minorities off and on for decades, and ethnic tensions in Burma threaten to destabilize the region. Insurgencies have taken place in the hills along the country's borders. Minority groups resent domination by the majority Burmese. The conflict between the Buddhist Burmese majority and Muslim minority groups continue to be a problem for the Burma government and surrounding countries, as the conflict forces minorities to flee the country into neighboring Bangladesh and Thailand. In 2012, ethnic Burmese began a series of riots in which they attacked the Rohingya Muslim minority and drove many from their homes.

The surge of refugees creates a need for camps, which in turn places economic stress on the countries involved, as well as increased human trafficking and regional instability. Punitive government responses to these insurgencies against civilians as well as armed fighters, have further alienated the groups in question, but there is hope that Burma's recent move toward democracy might lead to a resolution to the conflict. The Thai government has grappled with intermittent insurgencies from the Muslim ethnic Malay minority in the south of the country. Most of these groups seek to separate from Thailand, given the region's closer ethnic and religious connection with Malaysia. The country also has a history of insurgencies among the hill peoples along the country's borders, though these areas have seen little fighting in recent decades. These ethnic groups have long felt alienated from Thailand's national institutions.



Rohingya refugees in Indonesia (Source: VOA)

While OEF-P has helped to largely eliminate the major insurgent forces that operate in the Philippines, insurgent groups still exist in the country. The New People's Army (NPA) is a Maoist insurgent group operating in Luzon, the country's northernmost major island, and home to the capital, Manila. The NPA is a designated terrorist organization by the U.S. State Department, and its aim is to overthrow the government of the Philippines in order to establish a Communist regime. The organization entered into peace talks with the Philippine government in late 2013; however, shortly thereafter, the government suspended peace talks and in 2014 arrested the group's leader, his wife, and five of the top ranking officials.

Ethnically based insurgent groups have fought the government of Indonesia for decades, especially on smaller islands further from the capital Jakarta. The two most important insurgencies, in Aceh and Timor-Leste, ended in the late 1990s, but Indonesia has also been plagued in recent years by the regional terrorist organizations Jemaah Islamiya (JI) and Jemaah Anshorut Tauhid (JAT), both of which are State Department designated terrorist organizations and seek the establishment of an Islamic caliphate in Southeast Asia. JI's bombings have targeted locations frequented by international tourists, especially hotels, while JAT's largest attack, also a bombing, came against a Christian church in Java.

In addition to physical terrorist attacks, these organizations commit cyber-crimes, armed robberies, and other illegal activities in order to fund operations. Although Indonesia, Malaysia, and the

Philippines have improved efforts to control their shared maritime boundaries, terrorists still enjoy some freedom of movement. This enables them to blend in with the general population or form networks with other like groups to facilitate the flow of personnel, weapons, communication, and money across the region.

Southeast Asia includes some of the busiest sea-lanes in the world, including the Strait of Malacca between Singapore and Malaysia, which links the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. Approximately one-quarter of the world's raw materials, finished goods, and oil pass through the Strait of Malacca, making it one of the most important shipping lanes in the world.

The combination of thousands of small islands and atolls, weak control by central governments, and the proximity of some of the world's busiest shipping lanes make Southeast Asia a targeted area for piracy. The Strait of Malacca and the Singapore Strait, at its southeastern end, raise special concern as one of the world's most critical choke points. Because of the sheer volume of goods and critical resources that pass through this strait, the potential shut down or takeover of the straits would undoubtedly result in an international political and economic crisis.

## **Trafficking**

Southeast Asia is a nexus for trafficking of various types – from human to narcotics to wildlife. Trafficking is not only a large part of the informal economy in the region, it also poses a real threat to regional and global stability.

### ***Drug Trafficking***

Southeast Asia is home to the region known as the Golden Triangle, a 150,000-square-mile, mountainous region located on the Burma/Laos/Thailand border. Opium poppies originated in Southeast Asia, and the region has long produced opium and heroin, especially in the triangular area between Laos, Burma, and Thailand. Burma is



Major drug trafficking routes (Source: CIA)

the world's second largest producer of opium, behind Afghanistan. Insurgents and terrorists often fund their operations through drug trafficking, especially in poppy-growing areas.

Since the 1970s, the region has also exported synthetic drugs, such as methamphetamine. Both Malaysia and Burma are major producers of synthetic drugs. Malaysia has become an international import/export hub, shipping cocaine from South America, and ecstasy, methamphetamine, and ketamine from India to countries throughout Asia.

## *Human Trafficking*

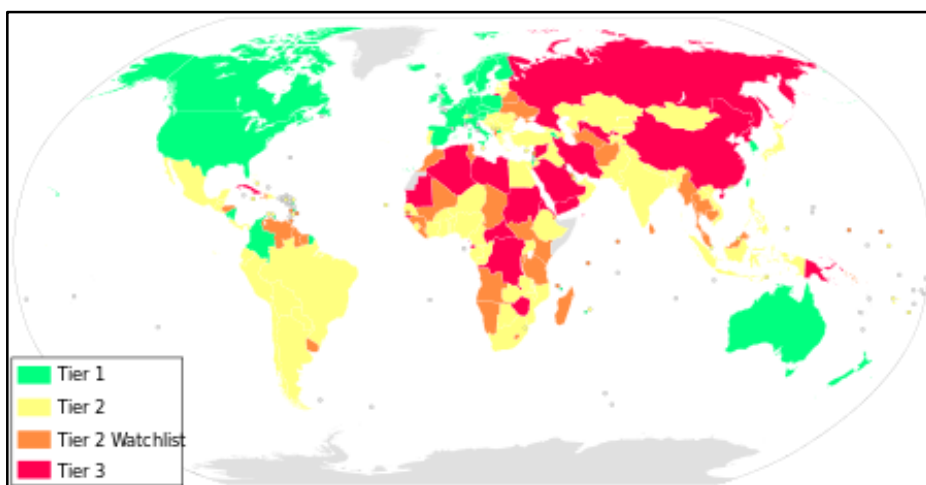
Human trafficking is also a serious problem in the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, Burma, Malaysia, Vietnam, and Cambodia. More people are trafficked from the Southeast Asia region than from anywhere else in the world. Asia is a source and destination of human trafficking, especially the trafficking of women and children. Human trafficking organizations often take women and children by coercion or under false pretenses—such as offering legitimate job opportunities—from locations in the Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam, Cambodia, Myanmar, Malaysia, and the Solomon Islands.

**Debt bondage** (also known as **debt slavery** or **bonded labor**) is a person's pledge of their labor or services as security for the repayment for a debt or other obligation. The services required to repay the debt may be undefined, and the services' duration may be undefined. Debt bondage can be passed on from generation to generation.

Employers, employment agents, or informal labor recruiters commonly use **debt bondage** to indenture trafficking victims to their employers. Additionally, victims are often intimidated by confiscation of identity and travel documents and threats of deportation.

Although most countries have laws against human trafficking, enforcement of those laws may be selective at best. Law enforcement officials may be more likely to punish or abuse the victims of trafficking than the perpetrators. This can make victims reluctant to seek help, especially when they do not have the legal right to live and work in a country, or if their documentation has been confiscated.

The State Department issues a Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report annually to review and monitor country's policies in regard to human trafficking. The TIP Report is a tool used to engage foreign governments in dialogues to advance reforms, combat trafficking, and target resources on prevention, protection



Tier map from Trafficking in Persons report (Source: U.S. Department of State)

and prosecution programs. The report places countries in tiers based on their efforts and abilities to combat trafficking, with Tier One being the best ranking (meaning that the country has no human trafficking problems) and Tier 3 being the worst. The countries of Southeast Asia consistently rank among the worst in the world. The report is also used by international organizations, foreign governments, and nongovernmental organizations.

## ***Wildlife Trafficking***

Wildlife trafficking, while seemingly less of a threat to U.S. interests, has increased dramatically in Southeast Asia in recent years, and is becoming a larger threat to regional and global stability. Throughout Asia, there are many types of endangered animals or animal parts that are considered symbols of wealth and status or are valued as key components of traditional medicines. These include native species of both Asia and Africa so many of the trafficking rings are transcontinental. The black market price in Asia for many animals and animal parts, such as rhino horns and elephant tusks can reach into the millions of U.S. dollars. Efforts to combat poaching in recent years have increased, but poachers are becoming increasingly sophisticated as well. A common thread with all of these types of trafficking is the links to both organized crime and terrorist organizations. Trafficking rings are often run by gangs and/or terrorist organizations, and the revenues generated from these illegal activities help to support these organizations.



African elephant tusks bound for Asia (Source: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service)

While the region is not without its problems, the bilateral relations between the United States and nearly all of the countries in the region have strengthened significantly over the last two decades. The United States' continued engagement in political, economic and military issues have served to solidify alliances in the region and create new partnerships. As the United States continues to pursue its Asia rebalance strategy, the critical role that Southeast Asian alliances play in this strategy cannot be understated. The United States' future in the Asia Pacific region hinges largely on a secure and stable Southeast Asia.



## Case Study: The Culture of the Javanese in Indonesia

The case study in this chapter introduces a culture from the Southeast Asia region, using the concepts introduced in the Operational Culture General (OCG) document (see attached document).

### Introduction

The case study in this chapter introduces a culture from the Southeast Asia region, using the concepts introduced in the Operational Culture General (OCG) document (see attached document).

The island of Java is one of over 17 thousand islands in an archipelago that is the Republic of Indonesia. It is the largest archipelago in the world, with three major island groupings. Java is the main island of one of these groups. Java is home to about 135 million people, making it the most populous island in the world. About two-thirds of these inhabitants are Javanese, who make up about 40 percent of the population of Indonesia as a whole. Javanese, like other neighbors on the island, the Sundanese and Madurese, are the descendants of the Austronesian-speaking people, who came to the island some five thousand years ago.



Java, Indonesia (Source: CIA)

Javanese share many cultural characteristics with the other cultures across Southeast Asia, but they are unique. The Javanese culture is the product of a centuries-long process of people's adapting to the environment in order to eke out a living. It has grown out of interacting with the environment, building economic, social, and political relationships, and holding the beliefs that guide Javanese through everyday life.

This case study will examine a typical Javanese family living on the island. Among the millions of people of Java, a family could be a wealthy family, a middle income family, or a poor peasant family. This family, the Eko Family, is a poor peasant family with five members. This nuclear family is made up of the father, Eko (many Javanese have no surname), his wife is called Ayu, and their three children: son Harto; daughter Iswara, and youngest son Dipa.

In their early years of marriage, Eko and Ayu planned to have two children, in line with the country's "two is enough" family planning policy put into practice late last century. They ultimately ended up with three. The Eko family lives in a house in a cluster of similar houses not far from an important river, and near a large and growing hamlet where a few factories operate. The family farms wet rice, as their ancestors did for many centuries. Knowing something about the layout of the island and its overall environment sets the scene for learning about the family.

## **Physical Geography**

Human beings have always relied on their physical environments for survival. It should therefore come as no surprise that each culture has developed its own unique way of interacting with the environment. The first dimension discussed in this case study examines how the physical environment influences the Javanese, and how the Javanese respond to the environment. Any given environment allows for a range of possible responses, and each culture adapts in a different and unique way.

Java's 135 million people make up over half of Indonesia's population. Despite being an archipelago, the region is mountainous. Between these mountains lie limestone ridges and lowlands. To the south are broken plateaus. Most rivers on the island flow northward. They are only navigable during the rainy season, and then only by small boats. The Eko family lives near the Citarum River, which supplies water to some 10 million people in Indonesia's capital city, Jakarta. Despite Java's having some of the most beautiful and scenic landscapes on earth, the Mother Nature Network lists the Citarum River's basin among the 15 most toxic places to live. Nonetheless, the Citarum and similar rivers are the main sources of water for drinking and irrigation.

Indonesia undertook rigorous campaigns to reduce its population growth during the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, through family planning and birth control. Before that time, it was preferable to have larger families, as more people yielded more human resources to manage the workload necessary for farming and rural life. Today, as a result of the government's campaigns, most people consider two children per family ideal, although many people still have big families. While the Eko family has three children, Eko's and Ayu's parents had considerably larger families.

The Eko family lives near the edge of the Citarum River, which frequently overflows its banks and deposits dirty water and trash into Eko's rice paddies. The centuries-old system of channeling water flowing down hills to the Citarum River is beneficial for the Eko family and their neighbors, as the irrigation system is used to control water flow to, in, from, and around their rice paddies. However, they often worry about the river overflowing its banks and the extra work that flooding brings.



Harvesting trees for timber and clearing land for cultivation have resulted in extensive deforestation in Java. Deforestation increases the damage from severe weather, reducing the number of trees that minimize runoff and high winds that result in the destruction of crops and homes.

Near the location where the Eko family lives, the Citarum River now overflows more frequently, and with greater volumes of water. Shrinking rainforests also threaten many species of wildlife with extinction. Volcanic eruptions and flooding pose a continuing threat to the Eko family and other Javanese families in the area. Having no ability to prevent these disasters, and only a limited ability to cope with them, the Ekos place their faith in God and find comfort in their practice of Islam.



Rice farmers in rural Java (Source: Wikipedia)

Over 5,000 species of plants are found on Java. Thick bamboo forests and jungles grow on damp mountain slopes. Banana, mango, and other fruit trees as well as teak, rasamala, and casuarina, sago palms, and banyan trees grow alongside bamboo in Java's forests. Java's wild animals include monkeys, wild pigs, crocodiles, some 400 species of birds, 100 kinds of snakes, and 500 species of butterflies, and an abundance of insects.

### **The Economy of the Culture**

In the United States, the word economy usually brings to mind things like money, banks, and the stock market. These things do indeed make up the economy, but not all of it, and they are much more important in some countries than in others. The economy of a culture includes everything that the people do to produce and distribute the goods and services that they want and/or need to sustain themselves. The second dimension of this case study examines the economy of the Javanese and the ways they find to thrive or merely to survive.

Javanese engage in a wide variety of economic activities. The people of Java contribute to Indonesia's chief exports: oil, gas, plywood, textiles, and rubber. Teakwood and palm oil are important to Java's economy. Textiles, clothing, footwear, cement, and chemical fertilizers are manufactured by the island's small- and medium-sized plants. Children of Javanese parents, especially poor peasants, often work outside the home to earn additional income to support the family. These children work in factories, in addition to helping the family grow rice. Dipa, Eko's youngest son, works in a plant manufacturing electronics components in a larger hamlet down the road.

The primary crop grown on Java is rice, both the wet and dry varieties. Wet rice is grown in paddies in lowland areas. This is where the Eko family lives and works. Dry rice, watered by rainfall, is grown in upland areas. Wet rice is heavily fertilized. In hilly wet rice areas, paddies occupy terraces cut into hillsides. Wet rice accounts for some 90 percent of Indonesia's total rice area, and 94 percent of total

production. Lowland rice farming is heavily concentrated on Java. This type of rice yields an average of 60 percent more per acre than the rain-fed upland crop. Rain-fed rice crops receive small applications of man-made fertilizers. The government of Indonesia is working continuously to increase the country's rice production. This push for greater productivity is motivated by increasing domestic demand due to population growth.

However, attempts to increase rice production create other problems. Clearing land worsens rain runoff, which leads to flooding, and additional fields require additional fertilizer. Fertilizer use was 144,000 tons in 1961. By 2009, it had soared to 4.47 million tons. The inhabitants of Java grow a number of other fruits and vegetables, and non-food crops as well, both for their own consumption and export to other countries. The Green Revolution was a particularly significant period of rapid increase in rice production. This increased production resulted both from new, high-yielding strains of rice, and from the expansion of the area used for rice cultivation, made possible by improved techniques that enabled rice farmers to plant crops on land that had previously been unused. Because of this, the Eko family can grow much more rice on their small plot of land than previous generations.

### ***Industries***

Agriculture is the primary industry in Java, engaging the vast majority of the rural population. Shortly after independence in 1991, farmland was privatized. Since then, most of the arable land has been owned by single households in small tracts, 1-1.5 hectares, not suitable for high-crop farming. However, in many villages a few families managed to accumulate between 200 and 300 hectares of land through access to capital or bribes of local officials.

Java's farming lands are irrigated by a complex network of aqueducts, dams, canals, and reservoirs. This efficient irrigation system was built and refined over the centuries. Many farming plots are so small that even hand-held mechanical farming equipment is not usable, especially where the land is terraced. The Eko family does not use machinery, although some dry rice farmers up the valley, where there are no paddies, share the use of a small tractor.

Fishing villages are situated along Java's coast, and Javanese consume a good deal of fish. The Ekos raise fish in their rice paddies. In addition to providing a good source of protein, fish help to fertilize the fields. Water buffalo are common in Java, but they are raised primarily as working animals. The Eko family owns a water buffalo and share the use of the buffalo with a neighbor when preparing the paddies for planting and transplanting seedlings. Because they cannot make use of machinery, the buffalo is a valuable asset to Eko and his neighbors.

### **Social Structure**

Javanese society is paternal, aristocratic, and stratified. Most people live in villages. Historically, these same villages supported courts and nobility. Village elders shared political power with the aristocracy. Whereas the elders governed by common consent, the aristocracy served as representatives of the royal family. Values from this culture of the past survived the colonial period of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and still exist in some forms today. The conduit for the transfer of these values has been oral tradition, literature, and the refined arts. The family is still at the center of the village system, with an emphasis on unity, loyalty, and respect for the elderly.

Javanese enter into marriage with the intent of establishing a nuclear, autonomous household. The nuclear family is the foundation of Javanese social structure. Young couples on Java often live in the home of the wife's parents for three to five years until they are financially able to live independently, as Eko and Ayu did. It is not unusual for the wife's parents to provide a house to the son-in-law and daughter near their own home. In cases where a couple resides away from both parents, they will maintain close contact with their own parents. Although polygamy is permitted in Javanese culture, it is not widely practiced.

Divorce is accepted among the Javanese, but the shame that comes with it varies. Javanese women tend not to view divorce as a viable option: they view divorce as reflecting their lack of self-control and refinement. Married couples try to avoid serious conflict, and so explosive argument and fighting are minimal. Eko and Ayu keep their quarrels from neighbors and children.

Parents teach their children about the concepts of *isin* (shyness), *wedi* (fear), and *sungkan* (respectful politeness), to encourage social harmony and respect in their outside relationships. Children learn to control their natural impulses in order to maintain social harmony. Unconditional love is the basis of intra-family relations, which is why Eko and Ayu tolerate Dipa's tendency to rebel against tradition, so long as he fulfills his obligations to the family.

A relationship between father and child does not begin until the child starts to walk. Around age five, the child is taught to approach the father more formally and stay respectfully away from him. The father is accorded respect by the child. Elder siblings take care of the younger ones. Javanese take their obligations to family members seriously, and failing to fulfill a family obligation is a serious breach. Loss of parental blessing is the expected outcome of a conflict with parents. Javanese parents teach their children a pessimistic view of life and describe it as a series of hardships and misfortunes. Children are taught to be in a continuous state of concern. They are also taught to exert themselves to overcome hardships.

Schooling to the sixth grade is mandatory in Indonesia, but this requirement is too difficult to enforce fully in rural areas. Like most Indonesian children, the Eko children have all received some schooling, and are literate. However, the need for their contribution at home, and the expense of school fees, clothes, and supplies, kept them from attending for the full six years. Children in Java also provide security to parents in old age. This is expected from both male and female children since there is no gender preference for male children, as there is in other parts of Asia. Harto, Eko's eldest son, is traditional. He knows the farm will be his someday and stays close to the family.

Unlike some other countries in Asia, people's bonds with one another usually remain strong even when individuals migrate from one area to another. Historically, labor intensive farming was done by large families. Sons have been important to farming, but today women also work in the fields to bring in the best crops possible. As early as age 10, many children seek employment outside the home and the family farm to supplement the family's income. Javanese base their identities on their family, ethnicity, religion, and locale.

As in many other parts of the world, population pressures and falling crop prices are among the reasons that people leave rural areas to find work in urban areas. Increasing population, introduction of new technologies, and the introduction of new ideas into the social fabric of the Javanese people have had an impact on the family, village, and the Indonesian nation.

Change is a normal part of culture and can arise for many different reasons. Government policies, combined with an increased cost of living in Indonesia, has resulted in smaller nuclear families. As countries become more industrialized, smaller families are one of the societal changes that have a significant impact on cultures.

Dipa works at a local factory alongside engineers, technicians, and managers educated in modern cities, and is exposed to a life much different than rural farm life. The factory gave him an iPod and he is always listening to it. His father Eko tells him to take the earphones out of his ears and put the iPod down at home. Dipa is a fan of the styles and trends in the hamlet where he works. Dipa wants to learn what his co-workers have learned; he even aspires to be like them. However, his parents' main concern is his proper relationship with his family, and thus, there is some conflict within the Eko home. Javanese maintain good relationships by following socially acceptable behavior. Following the norms that govern relationships is important because they rely so much on other people, relatives and close neighbors in particular. Mutual help (*gotong*) and the bond between households (*rukun tango*) are community ideals.

Eko receives gratification from knowing that his water buffalo helps his neighbors in the rice paddies. For their part, the Eko family can always count on neighbors to share fruit and other food whenever it is available. Ayu also gives her neighbors vegetables she grows near her house, and this social relationship helps families cope with the difficulties presented by the natural environment, and maintains a society built on *adat*—Indonesia's customary law. The principles taught by *adat* include having respect for elders and being in harmony with society and nature. These principles are the building blocks of Indonesia's society that enable a family to cope and eke out a living.

As introduced in the Operational Culture General lesson, reciprocity is a series of exchanges that create and reinforce a relationship over time. Reciprocity in rural areas where resources are scarce is not just appreciated; it can be critical to community survival.

## Political Structure

The political system of Java was historically based on that of the Dutch. Netherlands established itself as the dominating economic and political power on Java following the collapse of the Mataram Empire in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The Dutch trading company had already been a major power in the region since the early 1600s, and became more involved in the management of politics in Java in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which gave them an advantage in the local economy. The Dutch remained the colonial rulers until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. By that time, Indonesian students studying abroad began to return home, bringing with them nationalist notions and political theories founded on Islamic principles. At the end of World War II, Indonesia finally gained its independence from the Netherlands and founded its own independent government, based partly on those nationalist and Islamic principles.

The terms of deference and obedience to the ruler are conceived in the Javanese *gustikanwula* (lord-subject) structure, which also describes man's relationship to God, as well as the subject's relationship to his ruler. The reciprocal reward for obedience is benevolence. Benefits flow from the center to the obedient people. Javanese bureaucratic culture is filled with an attitude of obedience: respect for seniors, conformity to hierarchical authority, and avoidance of confrontation. These are all characteristics of the pre-independence *priyayi* class, whose roots go back to the traditional Javanese royal courts.



Leaders at a local town hall meeting (Source: Wikipedia)

Following its move to becoming an independent state, the country's first leader, Sukarno, set forth in the constitution five principles on which the new political system was to be based. These principles, known as *Pancasila*, include belief in one supreme God; humanitarianism; nationalism expressed in the unity of Indonesia; consultative democracy; and social justice. Unlike the Muslim nationalists who pushed strongly for a completely Islamic state, the supporters of *Pancasila* advocated for cultural neutrality and even subscribed to some democratic and Marxist ideologies. While not completely opposed to Islamic principles (*Pancasila* also is monotheistic in its principles), Islamists view it as being too secular. This difference in ideology has been just enough to foment an often adversarial relationship between the Indonesian state and Islam. The two ideologies have been locked in conflict from the founding of the republic to present day.

According to the Operational Culture General lesson, holism is the idea that all socio-cultural aspects of human life are interconnected. Islam was introduced in Indonesia in the 11<sup>th</sup> century by traders from the Middle East. Since that time, Islam has been fundamental to the political institutions of the country, the family structure, the establishment of traditions and holidays, and the social networks that are created.

Eko and his family encounter the political structure mostly at the local level, in the form of village leaders and local bureaucrats. Eko never finished the sixth grade, and although he can read, the affairs of government do not concern him. What does concern him is paying taxes and farming. When the government offers to help him farm better, Eko is interested. Like most of his community, Eko is also a devout Muslim. He and other Javanese respect government, and they expect respect in turn from government officials. Eko and his family are also committed to helping their neighbors in times of trouble and looking out for the community as a whole. As reflected in most of Indonesian society as a whole, Eko and his family have incorporated Islamic and *pancasilan* principles into their moral code without conflict.

## Belief System

Javanese have a fundamental value that is summed up in the term *adat*. Underlying *adat* is a deep sense of man's relationships with the supernatural, with nature, and with his fellow man. Achieving and maintaining balance is the principal pillar of a Javanese's religious beliefs. Javanese beliefs also have a mystical, magical dimension.



The word *adat* is derived from Arabic *Adalah* (court of) and translated as customary law. This embraces the whole of Javanese traditions, and forms the structure for social relations among Javanese. *Adat* governs relationships between individuals, the individual and the family (including marriage), the individual and the community, and even the individual and government. It also covers subjects that help to define those relationships, including ownership and disposition of property, and inheritance rights. Emphasis is on the individual's being a part of the family or other group, and life in society should be harmonious unity. That is why typical Indonesians choose to answer yes to many questions even when they would prefer to say no, in order to maintain harmony and avoid confrontation.

Although Javanese are predominantly Muslim, cultural practices surrounding weddings, funerals, and the birth of children are influenced by the island's Hindu heritage as well. Javanese who practice this traditional, syncretic form, a group that includes the Eko family, are called *abangan*. A smaller group of Javanese Muslims, called the *santri*, rely more on their own reading of the Koran and other holy texts than on unthinkingly following tradition. Many of them, the modernists, espouse a purist form of Islam, with the syncretic elements removed, but others choose to practice traditional syncretism.



Traditional Javanese wedding (Source: Wikicommons)

Major Muslim annual rituals include *Ramadan* (the month of fasting), *Idul Fitri* (the end of fasting), and the *Hajj* (an annual pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia). Because Indonesia's population is so large, there are more Indonesians at the *Hajj* each year than any other nationality. Smaller pilgrimages are made to graves of saints who are believed to have brought Islam to Indonesia. Javanese perform rituals based on indigenous beliefs to mark life-cycle events or to appease spirits. They are led by shamans, spirit mediums or prayer masters, either male or female.

Rituals are conducted at birth or death according to traditions specific to the particular religion and place. Such rituals, it is believed, honor and feed spirits at graves of ancestors. These rituals may include people who practice sorcery or protection against evil magic. Eko sets the example for his family, and he and his wife have taught their children to join in prayer. The couple periodically engages in fasting on occasions where the family confronts difficulty, such as a flood that damages the family's rice paddies. If a bad spirit is believed to suddenly possess a house, even Muslims like the Eko family may consult with a shaman to rid the area of this spirit.

Throughout Indonesia people believe that the dead influence the living. Funerals serve to facilitate passage of the spirit to the other world. Cemeteries are believed to be the dwelling places of ghosts. In Java, the dead are honored every Thursday evening in ceremonies conducted by the family. When a Muslim dies, the dead must be buried within 24 hours, with funeral services officiated by Muslim authorities. Local church leaders oversee burials of Christians. Muslims and Christians each have their own cemeteries. Secondary rites are also held to assure the well-being of the soul and to protect the living.



## **Conclusion**

You might have noticed that the case study does not include all, or even many, of the concepts discussed in the Operational Culture General document. This is only natural; a comprehensive body of literature devoted to the study of a single culture is rare. In fact, Marines are frequently called upon to operate in areas where current information on local culture is scarce. What the OCG and the chapters in this document do is help Marines learn about their assigned region and acquire skills and concepts that will assist them in operating effectively in complex cross-cultural situations in any part of the globe when information is scarce or rapidly changing.

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