The Early History of Southeast Asia

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An overview of the lecture

- The land and its people in Southeast Asia
- Early kingdoms in mainland Southeast Asia
- Early kingdoms of Sumatra and Java
- The rise of new states from the 13th century
- The legacy of indigenous development
The land and its people in Southeast Asia

- **The weather**
  - (Tropical) rainfall well distributed throughout the year
  - The monsoon:
    - Southwest (June-Sep)
    - Northeast (Nov-Feb)

- **The geography**
  - Mainland: mountains, valleys, rivers and rapids divide the habitable areas
  - Maritime: numerous small and big islands form the Southeast Asian archipelago between the Indian and Pacific Oceans
The land and its people in Southeast Asia

- The region’s population migrated mainly from today’s southern China, northeast India and eastern Tibet
  - Early migration took place well before the 3rd century BC
  - The trend had been continuing for nearly two millennia

- An ethnically very diversified region
  - The Miao, Lolo and Yao peoples are found in North Vietnam and northern Thailand
  - The Malays migrated from today’s southern China (mainly Yunnan) first in 2500BC and then around 300BC
  - Myanmar has several ethnic groups of Mons, Chins, Burmans who came from today’s southwest China and northeast India
Early kingdoms in mainland Southeast Asia

- The impacts of weather and geography
  - Located at the center of the Sino-Indian trade route
  - The monsoon allowed maritime navigation around the year
  - Ample rainfall created the rice belt

- Agriculture and maritime trade were the key factors that consolidated the early kingdoms in Southeast Asia
  - Agriculture requires sophisticated infrastructure of irrigation
  - Maritime trade needs custom services and military capacity against piracy
  - Both contributed to the centralization of authorities
Early kingdoms in mainland Southeast Asia

- The Funan Kingdom (1\textsuperscript{st}-6\textsuperscript{th} century)
  - Mon-Khmer people
  - In the early 3\textsuperscript{rd} century, it extended to South Vietnam, Cambodia, central Thailand, northern Malaya and southern Myanmar
  - Controlled the maritime intermediaries of the Sino-Indian trade
  - *Mandalas*: a quasi-feudal political structure, with less effective control in distant parts of the kingdom
Early kingdoms in mainland Southeast Asia

- The Champa Kingdom (2nd to 17th century)
  - Mainly the Malay race
  - Covers southern and central Vietnam
  - Under the influences of China and India
  - Matriarchal society
Early kingdoms in mainland Southeast Asia

The Khmer Empire
- The state of Chenla was a vassal of the Funanese Kingdom
- Khmers overthrew the Funanese, but failed to manage the trading route
- In 706, it split into Upper Chenla and Lower Chenla
- Agriculture-based economy and sophisticated irrigation
- Some magnificent temples were built (e.g., Angkor Wat)
Early kingdoms in mainland Southeast Asia

- Early kingdoms in Myanmar
  - The Pyus
    - city-states between 4th and 8th century
    - Rich Buddhist traditions
  - The Pagan Kingdom
    - From 11 to 13th century
    - The Burmans in the north, excising political power
    - The Mons in the south, managing trade
Early kingdoms in mainland Southeast Asia

- Vietnam
  - A Chinese general found an independent kingdom, called Nan Yueh or Nam Viet in 207 BC, remaining part of China till 939
  - The Vietnamese revolt overthrew the Chinese rule and established Dai Viet as an independent kingdom
  - China’s influences on Dai Viet
Early kingdoms of Sumatra and Java

- Maritime commerce and agriculture were also the key to successful kingdoms in insular Southeast Asia
  - Maritime commerce: Srivijaya
  - Agriculture: Javanese states

- The rivalry between Java and Sumatra
  - Control of important trade routes
  - The Strait of Malacca and the Sunda Strait
Early kingdoms of Sumatra and Java

- **The Srivijaya**
  - From 7th to 13th century
  - A powerful fleet, compelling all shipping to pay dues and taxes
  - Excellent anchorage, storage and recreational facilities

- **The Sailendras**
  - Located in central Java
  - Borobudur, the largest Buddhist temple
  - Rivalry with Srivijaya
  - Raided mainland Southeast Asia
The rise of new states in Southeast Asia

- The Mongol invasion in the 13th century
  - Initially, most Southeast Asian kingdoms refused to recognize the Mongol rule
  - Mongol invasion: the destruction of Pagan in the mainland and the defeat of Singhasari in Java gave rise to new states

- Ayutthaya (Thailand)
  - The Thai state Nan Chao was defeated in 1253; southward expansion of the Thai after Pagan was defeated in 1287; the Khmer empire was weakened
  - Ayutthaya established itself as a powerful Southeast Asian state between the 13th to 15th century.
  - New alphabet, administrative and social structure and centralized government were established in this period
The rise of new states in Southeast Asia

- Ayutthaya embassy to France (Louis XIV) in 1686

- The ruins of Ayutthaya after Burma Invasion in mid-18th century
The rise of new states in Southeast Asia

- **Lan Na (13-16c)**
  - A Thai state centered at Chiang Mai
  - Burma ruling in the 16-17c
  - Revolt occurred in the 1720s

- **Lan Xang (13-17c)**
  - Founded by a Khmer prince
  - Capital at Luang Prabang
  - Split into N. and S. in 1690
  - S. (capital at Vientiane) controlled by Thailand in the 19c

- **The decline of Khmer**
  - Attacked by Thailand and Vietnam
The rise of new states in Southeast Asia

- Majapahit
  - The Majapahit managed to control most of the archipelago in Southeast Asia for about 70 years in the 14th century
  - Relying not on confederate alliance, but on direct conquest
  - The last maritime Hindu kingdom in Southeast Asia

- Melaka (Malacca)
  - The arrival of Islam from West India
  - Melaka offer a safe harbor for trading ships → a powerful trading state
  - Sending tributes to both China and the Thai court
  - Growing influences of Malay culture and language
  - Conquered by Portugal in 1511
Understanding the early history of Southeast Asia

- Inter-state competition in early Southeast Asia
  - Mainland Southeast Asia: Dai Viet vs. Champa; Thai Kingdoms competed with Khmer Empire; Burma vs. Thai Kingdoms
  - Maritime Southeast Asia: monopolizing trading route or controlling territorial spaces

- The political structure of early Southeast Asian kingdoms
  - The *Mandalas* in early Southeast Asia
  - The suzerainty-vassal relationship

- The regional context of Southeast Asia
  - The cultural influences of India
  - The tribute system centered on China