SOUTH-EAST ASIA

A Short History

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LONDON
MACMILLAN & CO LTD
NEW YORK · ST MARTIN'S PRESS
1957

First Edition 1954
Reprinted 1955, 1957

MACMILLAN AND COMPANY LIMITED
London Bombay Calcutta Madras Melbourne

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY OF CANADA LIMITED
Toronto

ST MARTIN'S PRESS INC
New York

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

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PREFACE

THIS is a book for the general reader and the student of history, not for the specialist scholar. But whatever interest and value it may have for the ordinary reader is due to those scholars of various nationalities who have worked in different parts of the whole historical field, and without whose labours a work of synthesis such as this could not have been attempted. To them the author is deeply indebted, and as deeply grateful. Special acknowledgement is due to Professor George Coedès, whose distinguished researches have thrown brilliant light into the dark places of early South-east Asian history. There is a real fascination in the study of the early history of South-east Asia, but it is at times the fascination of an especially difficult crossword puzzle in which many of the clues are horribly obscure, if indeed they are not entirely missing. The work of Professor Coedès is an outstanding contribution towards the solution of a number of vital clues.

The author also gladly acknowledges a debt of gratitude to all those friends, both students and colleagues, with whom he has worked in the University of Malaya.

It is particularly hoped that this book may contribute in some way towards stimulating a wider and deeper interest in the history of their own countries among students in South-east Asia itself.

HONG KONG B.H.

February, 1954

INTRODUCTION

THE term 'South-east Asia' is a convenient one. Although the area to which it refers forms neither a political nor a cultural entity, it contains a group of countries whose social structures have much in common, and whose past history and present politics show many similarities.

Geographically, the region is fairly well defined, though again it does not form a natural unit. It really comprises two broad geographical groupings: mainland South-east Asia, or the Indo-Chinese peninsula, containing the countries of Burma, Siam, Indo-China and Malaya; and island South-east Asia, or the Malaysian archipelago, stretching from Sumatra eastward and north-eastward to the Philippines. Mainland and island South-east Asia together form a great wall, with a few narrow gateways, between the Indian and Pacific Oceans; at the same time they provide a causeway—partly a series of stepping-stones—from Asia to Australia. A sea and land crossroads is thus formed by the north-to-south sweep of the peninsula and archipelago, and by the east-to-west sea-lane that runs between them.

On the north, the limits of the region are well defined by the mountain barriers that stand between the Indo-Chinese peninsula and the continental mainland of Asia. At the south-eastern end, however, where the archipelago stretches down towards Australia, no such clear definition is immediately apparent. But a closer view of the structure of the archipelago enables us to draw a boundary-line between the Moluccas and New Guinea, for structurally New Guinea belongs to the Australian continent and was once joined to it. On the other hand, the western islands of the archipelago—Sumatra, Java, Bali, Borneo, and other islands lying west of a line drawn through the Strait of Macassar and the Strait of Lombok—stand in a shallow sea on the Asiatic continental shelf and were once joined to Asia. The islands between them and New Guinea—the Lesser Sundas from Lombok eastward across to Timor Laut,

Celebes, the Philippines—form a transitional zone which may properly be included in island South-east Asia.

Almost the whole of this great region has a tropical climate, and consequently the mass of its 150 million inhabitants share broadly similar methods of food-production and ways of living. Rice is their basic food; the peasant family and the village community are the mainstays of their social structure.

The majority of these people are of Indonesian stock, but the external influences of two thousand years—Indian, Chinese, Islamic, European—have produced considerable linguistic, religious and cultural differentiation among them. South-east Asia has never been in any sense an isolated or self-contained unit. Because of its crossroads situation on the map of Asia it has always been peculiarly exposed to external influences; it has been a meeting-ground of commerce, cultures and civilizations. In a sense South-east Asia has always been part of something bigger than itself; it has generally played a passive role in history, one which has meaning and significance only against the background of the history of Asia as a whole. The really vital theme of its history is the theme of 'culture-contact'—the story of the successive waves of cultural and commercial influence which have swept over it in a dual process of destruction and creation, and of the repeated challenge to the peoples of South-east Asia to relearn, to readapt and to reinterpret.

Culture, commerce and religion have in past times been closely interrelated intrusive forces with which South-east Asia has had to reckon. The first introduction of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity was in each case associated with commercial enterprise. Each of these retains its adherents in South-east Asia, which is therefore far from forming a religious unit. About half the total population of the region is Moslem, the main concentrations being in Indonesia and Malaya. The people of Burma, Siam and Indo-China, and most Chinese in all parts of the region, are Buddhists. Most Indians throughout the region (mainly in Burma and Malaya) are Hindus. In the Philippines 95 per cent of the inhabitants are Christian.

Linguistically, South-east Asia again does not form a natural unit. Three of the great linguistic groups or families of Asia are

represented in the region: Malayo-Polynesian, Austro-Asiatic, and Tibeto-Chinese. Languages of the Malayo-Polynesian family —one of the most widespread linguistic families in the world—are spoken in the Malay Peninsula and throughout island South-east Asia including the Philippines. Languages with a common Austro-Asiatic basis are spoken in parts of Burma, Siam, Indo-China (Cambodia and Annam), and Malaya (among the Senoi). Burmese and Siamese are included in the Tibeto-Chinese family.

One result of South-east Asia's exposed position is that it now contains fairly large minority groups of non-indigenous Asians. Chinese and Indian immigration into such countries as Burma, Malaya, Sumatra and Java has created similar social and political problems in each, the problems of the 'plural society', a society in which 'distinct social orders live side by side, but separately, within the same political unit'.[1] But these are really old problems in a new and enlarged form. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that for the last two thousand years South-east Asia has been occupied with working out the consequences of problems presented to it either by the rest of Asia or by Europe.

In modern times almost all the countries of South-east Asia have shared the common status of colonial or dependent territories, and during this period the region has been exposed more than ever before to the influences of the outside world, a world that was itself changing rapidly. In their South-east Asian colonies the European powers, though without a common policy and without co-ordination, have had to attempt to solve common problems of political administration and economic development, and, in recent times, the common problem of emergent nationalism. South-east Asian nationalism, on its side, in its various forms and stages, has had to seek solutions of the common problem of winning and working self-government.

[1] J. S. Furnivall: *Netherlands India*, 1939, p. xv.

CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

PLATES

MAPS

Chapter One

THE HUMAN TEXTURE OF SOUTH-EAST ASIA

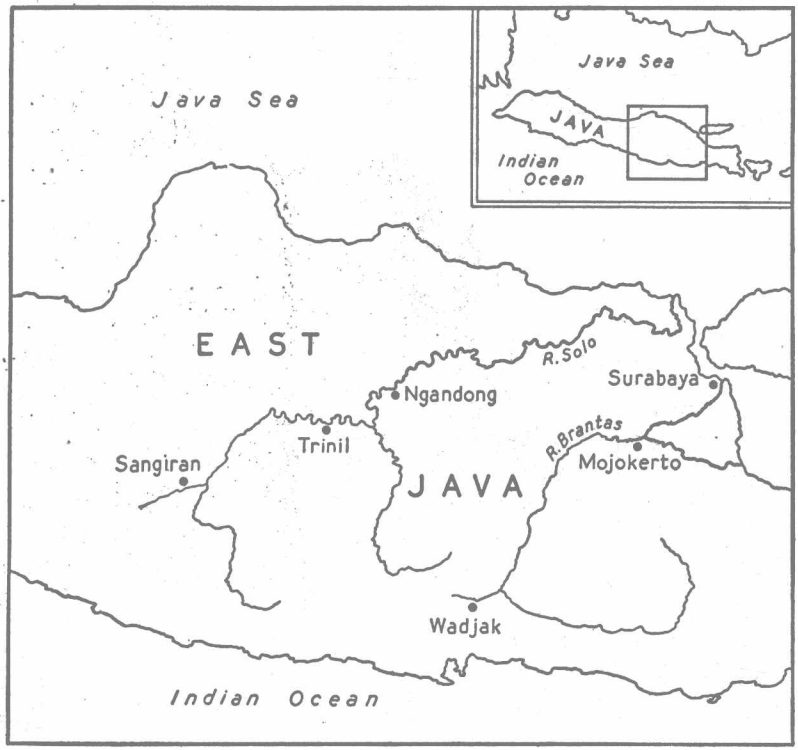
HISTORY proper begins with written records; it begins, in fact, with the alphabet. The material of history is the written word; writing on stone, clay, papyrus, parchment or paper. But for the prehistoric period we have no such records and so must look for other sources of information. This is largely a matter of spade-work, a question of digging at the right places for evidence of prehistoric man—his bones, his tools and his dwellings—and of piecing this evidence together in the light of our archaeological knowledge.

The decisive stage in the transition from earlier forms of life to human life may very likely have been reached in a tropical climate. At any rate, South-east Asia provides us with the earliest evidence of the way in which this transition took place. In central Java, near the village of Trinil on the Solo river, the upper part of the skull of a very early form of human being was found in 1891. It seemed to belong to a large hominid at an intermediate stage of evolution between anthropoid ape and man. This earliest known individual in human history, commonly referred to as Java Man, was named *pithecanthropus* (Greek *pithékos*, ape; *anthropos*, man).

No further evidence of early man in Java came to light until 1936, when a skull was found at Mojokerto (west of Surabaya) which was of pithecanthropoid type in miniature, belonging probably to an infant. Then in 1938 a series of further discoveries was begun in central Java. At Sangiran, on the Solo river, Van Koenigswald found in 1938 another *pithecanthropus* skull similar to the find of 1891; in 1939 a skull of the same type, but much larger and heavier-boned than the two earlier finds; and in 1941 a massive lower jaw-bone with three very large teeth in position—too large a bone to belong to *pithecanthropus* skulls of the size found earlier. It is possible that this last creature was an ancestor

of the hominid *pithecanthropus*; in other words, that the human form has evolved from much larger forms with a very massive skull.

From all this it appears that there was a momentous evolution of certain anthropoid-ape forms into primitive human forms in tropical South-east Asia somewhere about the beginning of the pleistocene, or most recent, geological period. *Pithecanthropus*, the product of this evolution, is a representative of the first human inhabitants of South-east Asia. Indeed it is probable that men of this type were at one time spread over the whole area from Java through the Indo-Chinese peninsula up to north China, where the remains of a very similar, though rather more 'advanced', type have been found—*sinanthropus* or Peking Man. A number of teeth belonging to a hominid similar to *sinanthropus* have been



EARLY MAN: SITES OF DISCOVERIES IN CENTRAL AND EAST JAVA

unearthed in northern Indo-China. We may perhaps assume that pithecanthropoid man spread gradually northwards into China from tropical South-east Asia, undergoing further evolution along the way.

The two types, Java Man and Peking Man, lived long before any representative of human evolution so far discovered elsewhere in the world. Both probably—*sinanthropus* certainly—stood more or less upright in a biped posture; they had reached the real starting-point in human history after which it was possible for man to use his arms and hands, to make tools, to draw pictures, and thereby to develop a human brain. Ever since that starting-point man has gained mastery over the world around him mainly by making tools and by improving them. And throughout 98 per cent of human history the best tools that man has had were made of stone. The pithecanthropoid man of South-east Asia probably used the coarse chopping and scraping tools of palaeolithic, or Old Stone, type which have been unearthed in Java, Malaya, Burma and north China, as well as the chopping tools of petrified wood which have been found in Malaya and Burma. With such tools he gradually learnt to shape other instruments of wood and bone.

For thousands of years these pithecanthropoid men and their more human descendants were wandering among the jungles of South-east Asia and along its rivers and coasts, hunting or gathering their food, resting in cave dwellings or in rough shelters, as some of the primitive peoples of the area still do.

Central Java again provides evidence of the further physical evolution of early human types in the direction of modern man or *homo sapiens*. A collection of skulls and skull-fragments excavated from the terraces of the Solo river at Ngandong gives us a partial picture of a more advanced type, named Solo Man. His skull and brain case are much larger than those of *pithecanthropus*, but otherwise he retains a fairly close affinity to the pithecanthropoid type, and he is not yet *homo sapiens*. The earliest examples of *homo sapiens* in South-east Asia, called Wadjak Man, were also found in Java, near the south coast. The Wadjak skulls are believed to belong to the late pleistocene or post-pleistocene period; that is, to about twelve thousand years ago.

A skull known as the Keilor skull, found near Melbourne in Australia in 1942, bears a close resemblance to one of the Wadjak skulls, and this suggests that the Wadjak-Keilor type of man was ancestral to the Australoid type, which survives in the Australian aborigines of today as well as in some of the hill-tribes of Malaya, and which must have been the earliest fully human type to form a widespread population of South-east Asia.

As far as our present knowledge goes, then, we may picture the evolution of early human forms in South-east Asia as having moved along the line: pithecanthropoid form through Solo Man form and Wadjak form to Australoid form.

From the time when *homo sapiens* finally emerged, and for a period of thousands of years, a succession of different human types followed one another down from continental Asia through mainland South-east Asia and the islands. This 'drive to the south' is a recurrent theme in South-east Asian history. The succession of broad human groups which moved down into the region in prehistoric times seems to have been: Australoid, Negrito, Melanesoid and Indonesian (or Austronesian).

The *Australoid* and the very similar *Veddoid* people were probably the first widespread human inhabitants of South-east Asia. The Australoid type survives in the aborigines of Australia and in the Senoi and Sakai hill-tribes of Malaya. The Veddoid type (though generally with a Proto-Malay admixture) is seen in certain groups in the southern parts of Celebes, and on the Engano and Mentawei Islands off the west coast of Sumatra. There are also Veddoid types in Ceylon, and the peoples of southern India show a strong Veddoid admixture. The Australoid-Veddoid type is dark-skinned, with a depressed nose, and curly but not woolly hair.

The next oldest group of people to move down into South-east Asia were the small woolly-haired *Negritos*, surviving nowadays in Malaya as the Semang people of Kedah and Perak and the Pangan in Kelantan, and in the Philippines as the Aetas. Both Australoid and Negrito peoples spread southward as far as Australia.

Following these two groups probably came the *Melanesoid* people, a type no longer surviving in South-east Asia, but numer-

ous in the Pacific islands to the east of New Guinea and Australia. Ancient skulls of Melanesoid type have been unearthed in north China and in Indo-China.

These three groups of peoples were at the mesolithic stage of culture, a transitional stage between the Old and New Stone cultures, at which some advance had been made in the quality and variety of stone tools and other implements and weapons, and also in invention of such equipment as fishing tackle and the dugout canoe with paddles. Examples of mesolithic industry have been found in Indo-China, Siam and Malaya, and in the larger islands from Sumatra to the Philippines. In the caves of northern Tonkin (Indo-China) a number of imperfectly polished or ground celts (chisel-edged stone tools) were discovered. This industry has been named Bacsonian, and there is another slightly different type known as Hoabhinian. Stone tools of a generally similar type to the Bacsonian have been found in Siam and, in the form of flaked hand-axes or scrapers, in Malaya and Sumatra.

The last great group of peoples to move down into South-east Asia in prehistoric times, probably between 2500 and 1500 B.C., was the group of the physical type called *Indonesian* or *Austronesian*. The descendants of these people form the basic population of Malaya and island South-east Asia today, and are essentially of the same human variety as the basic population of the rest of the Indo-Chinese peninsula and southern China. The mass of the southern Chinese are of the Indonesian physical type with a Mongoloid admixture, and it is very probable that the dispersal centre of the Indonesian people was in south-west China. The Indonesian physical type may be divided into two: Proto-Malay and Deutero-Malay. The Proto-Malay, which shows a clear Mongoloid admixture, probably formed the first basic Indonesian population of South-east Asia. It survives for the most part in mainland South-east Asia (e.g. the Jakun of Malaya), though in the islands the Bataks of Sumatra, the islanders of Nias, the Torajas of Celebes and most of the Dayaks of Borneo are Proto-Malay. The Deutero-Malay, a more mixed type—known also as the Coastal Malay—which must have followed the Proto-Malay very closely into South-east Asia, is represented by the Peninsular Malays, the Coastal Malays of Sumatra, the Javanese, Sundanese,

Madurese, Balinese, etc.; in fact it is the normal Malay type of South-east Asia.

With the coming of the Indonesian people begins the neolithic, or New Stone, age in South-east Asia, when the majority of the inhabitants of the region used a variety of stone tools of advanced workmanship, well finished or polished, but had not yet begun to use metal implements. In the Malay Peninsula, Sumatra and Java the most typical neolithic implements were the quadrangular adzes. These were made of a very hard stone, beautifully finished by grinding and polishing, and square or quadrangular in cross-section. At one end was a bevelled cutting edge like that of an adze or chisel. These implements were probably used for cutting and shaping wood, the small ones for carving and the largest ones for building boats and houses. A large number of finished and half-finished quadrangular adzes have been found in Java, where there seem to have been well-organized production centres supplying other parts of the archipelago. The large quantity and the fine quality of these adzes, which were often made from semi-precious stones, suggest that Java already had a fairly dense population, and one that had reached a relatively high level of civilization, at any rate during the later phase of the neolithic period.

The Indonesian also showed a certain sense of artistry in the clay pots that he made for cooking or food storage. The Malayan neolithic pottery, for example, although roughly finished and unimaginatively decorated, reveals a real spirit of artistic enterprise in the remarkable variety of its shapes and designs.

It was in the neolithic age, reached at different times in different parts of the world, that man carried through the first 'industrial revolution' in history. It was then that he began to turn from hunting and gathering his food to cultivating it, and thus learnt the new ways of living that made civilization possible. History really begins with agriculture and the techniques and ways of living associated with it. The cultivation of food-crops, the domestication of animals, and the making of pottery were the great social-economic achievements of the neolithic age.

The Indonesian people still obtained their food partly by hunting and fishing, but they were also agriculturists. They cultivated

rice and millet, either by the method of shifting cultivation (the *ladang* system), clearing a temporary field every year or so, or in permanent irrigated fields (the *sawah* system). They used these crops to brew a kind of beer as well as for food. They lived in wooden houses raised above the ground by bamboo or wooden piles. Their domesticated animals were buffalo and pig. They made cloth from the bark of trees. They were animists, believing that a life-force or soul-substance (*semangat*) was contained in all natural objects, and above all in their food plants. The life-force of the rice-field was personified as a goddess, the rice-mother, and a complex ritual made up of numerous prescriptions and prohibitions surrounded the cultivation and harvesting of the crop so that its life-force should be preserved and captured; for example, loud noise was to be avoided in the rice-field, and the grain had to be harvested with a small knife concealed in the hand. For the same reason the Indonesians were head-hunters, cherishing the head for its soul-substance.

Agriculture made possible a settled community life and the development of social custom and behaviour. The peasant village community became and remained the basic social unit under the guidance of its priest- or priestess-chief, who was the guardian of traditional religious and social custom (*adat*), regulations governing individual and group rights and duties, agricultural ritual, social privileges and penalties, all of which were handed down by word of mouth from generation to generation.

One aspect of early Indonesian community life is represented by megalithic or large stone monuments—tall upright stones (menhirs), raised horizontal stone slabs (dolmens), stone pyramids and terraces; all probably connected with ancestor worship or sacrificial ceremonies. On some of these monuments are carved simple magical symbols such as circles and rosettes. This megalithic culture is still alive in the Nias Islands off the west coast of Sumatra, and in the islands of Flores and Sumba; and even in parts of Java, Bali and Sumatra megalithic monuments are still used for ceremonial purposes.

The neolithic age in South-east Asia lasted from roughly 1500 to 300 B.C., when a new age began with the introduction of metals