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The Peoples of South-East Asia

The term 'South-East Asia' is generally understood to mean the countries lying roughly between India on the west and China on the east. It thus includes Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Brunei, Portuguese Timor, and the Philippines.

Geographical Features

The region consists of two major parts: the mainland and the archipelago. The mainland part is traversed by great river-valleys, most of them running from north to south. The major rivers are the Irrawaddy, the Salween, the Menam Chao Phya, the Mekong, and the Red River. The states of mainland South-East Asia have grown up in these valleys. The heart of Burma is the Irrawaddy; Thailand centres on the Menam Chao Phya; Cambodia and Laos lie in the Mekong basin; South Vietnam is based on the Mekong delta and North Vietnam on the Red River Delta.

The archipelago is different in character. It contains thousands of islands scattered over many square miles of sea. So in the archipelago large empires could be formed only by people who were willing to cross the seas between one island and another; thus seamanship has played a vital part in the history of these archipelagic states. The archipelago includes Indonesia, the Philippines, Brunei, Sarawak, Sabah, and Portuguese Timor; but Malaya and Singapore may also be included in the group, for the long peninsula running southwards to Singapore resembles the islands more than it does the mainland.

Southward Movement of Population

On the mainland the areas between the great valleys consist of high mountains and plateaux, usually forested. Movement from one valley to another is possible, but it is not so easy as movement along the valleys themselves. Also, the valleys are more fertile than the hills and therefore men prefer to