

Southeast asia



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Although the different parts of Southeast Asia have some similarities in cultures and values, I only agree to a limited extent that Southeast Asia is a single geographical, historical and cultural unit. Unit, by the very definition of the word, refers to a single, complete and undivided whole. Southeast Asia therefore cannot be a single unit since it is made up of different countries and each of these countries has its own unique history and culture that makes it different from the others.

Hence this essay will look at some of the possible evidences of Southeast Asia being a single geographical, historical and cultural unit, as well as the reasons of why I only agree to a certain extent that Southeast Asia is a single geographical, historical and cultural unit. First of all, I partially agree that geographically, Southeast Asia is a single unit. When we mention geography we are concerned about the region's location, as well as physical characteristics such as land, river and mountains.

Southeast Asian countries are all located around the same area and this naturally makes these countries geographically similar since they are near one another and not divided into regions which have different locations, climates and habitats. To be precise, Southeast Asia is geographically located between south of China, east of India and north of Australia, and this region lies on the intersection of geological plates with heavy seismic and volcanic activity which occurs periodically and affects the people living in Southeast Asia in one way or another.

This shows that Southeast Asian countries are all located in the same region and hence they are a single geographical unit. However, I also disagree to a

certain extent that geographically, Southeast Asia is a single unit. Like previously mentioned, geography is also about the region's landscape features. With a huge area of approximately 4000000km² that is divided by the sea and rivers, Southeast Asia sure does have differences in its physical structures of the land, which does not make it a single geographical unit.

For example, Lao is a landlocked country while Cambodia, Vietnam, Thailand and Myanmar are all countries which have sea borders. Singapore is a city island while the rest of the countries are partially made up of different clusters of small islands. Basically, Southeast Asia is divided into two geographic regions. While mainland Southeast Asia is contiguous, insular Southeast Asia is fragmented. Also, Southeast Asia is composed of mountainous areas, jungles and fertile deltas.

Hence, the composition of many different types of terrains and landscape features in Southeast Asia makes it not a single complete geographical unit despite its location. Secondly, I partially agree that historically, Southeast Asia is a single unit. Southeast Asian countries, even though they are located in a large region, do experience similar past events which makes them a historical whole. For example, from around 600 BC the widespread of Hinduism extended from India into Cambodia, Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines and the rest of the Southeast Asian countries.

Even until today, the cultural influence of Hinduism can be found in nearly every region of Southeast Asia and this rich heritage can be traced back to ancient times. This clearly shows that Southeast Asia is a single historical unit in the aspect of the widespread of Hinduism. However, by looking at

other past events of Southeast Asia I also disagree that historically, Southeast Asia is a single, undivided unit as historical events are not shared by all parts Southeast Asia.

For example, all Southeast Asian countries were colonized by the Europeans except Thailand as Britain and France used Thailand as a boundary between their powers to avoid conflicts between the colonial powers. Thailand was also the only country in Southeast Asia which was not colonized by the Japanese as they made a political and military alliance with the Empire of Japan. Hence historically, Southeast Asia is not a complete and undivided region since many historical events were not shared by the whole region.

Lastly, I disagree that culturally, Southeast Asia is a single unit as different countries have different cultures and Southeast Asia especially, has a great diversity in its culture, religion, and ethnic composition. Although the staple food throughout the region is rice (food culture) and like what was mentioned, the cultural influence of Hinduism affected the whole Southeast Asia, there are many different ethnic groups in Southeast Asia with their own unique cultures which result in their different approaches to life.

For example, during meeting and greeting, traditional Malay men and women do not shake hands since Muslim men are not supposed to touch women in public. However, for the Chinese living in Southeast Asia, people may shake hands with opposite gender, given that the women extend her hand first. At a simplistic level, all these differences the people's way of life has got to do with their ethnic groups and the cultures they are being influenced by.

This can be further proved by the striking difference of Singapore being fast-paced and Malaysia being easy-going. This is due to the majority of Chinese living in Singapore and majority of Malays living in Malaysia. Singaporeans being straightforward and competitive, are often described as kiasu, a Hokkian word meaning 'afraid to lose' while Malaysians have a easy-going attitude and overall positive outlook of life.

Hence we can conclude that since there are many ethnic groups in Southeast Asia, naturally there will be many different unique cultures present in the region which makes it separated cultural units. All in all, despite the similarities in the geography, history and culture of Southeast Asia, I personally agree only to a limited extend that Southeast Asia is a single geographical, historical and cultural unit due to their greater differences in geographical features, unique histories and rich cultures.