

**Introduction**

This unit is designed to acquaint students with the history and culture of Southeast Asia. It emphasizes vocabulary as well as historical content.

The unit is made up of 15 pages of text, each with vocabulary words and/or comprehension questions.

Puzzles and other activities reinforce concepts and vocabulary.

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# Introduction

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The Indochinese peninsula is divided by mountains. On the western side of the mountains is Vietnam. On the eastern side are Cambodia and Laos. The Vietnamese people have been strongly influenced by China. The people in Laos and Cambodia have been influenced mainly by India.

In the mountains there are many different groups of people. These groups value

their independence from the people who live in the low lands and control the governments. These groups include the Hmong (also called Meo) and Yao (also called Mien).

Southeast Asia became important to the United States because of the Vietnamese War. Many refugees from Southeast Asia came to the U.S. after the war because of the harsh communist rule.



## The Cambodian People

Most people from Cambodia are Khmers. The Khmers moved into Cambodia from Laos during the 6th to 8th centuries A.D. Already living in Cambodia were the Cham people. The Cham people came from southern India. They brought with them the Pali script in which the Cambodian language is written, and the Hindu religion.

The Khmers replaced the Cham as the dominant people in the area, building a large empire and a very advanced civilization. With the Mongol invasions, the Thai people were driven from their home in China into present day Thailand. The great Khmer civilization was destroyed by attacks from the Thais on one side and the Annamese from present day Vietnam on the other side.

Most Cambodians (about 70%) are Khmer. There are some Cham left. Others are mountain people related to the Kha, Moi and Negritos who live in the mountains of Laos and Vietnam. There are also a large number of Vietnamese and Chinese. Many are a mixture of the various groups.

## Cambodian Customs and Beliefs

### Religion

Khmers are Buddhists.

### Traditional Beliefs

- Strangers must not enter the house.
- The meal is sacred and nothing must interrupt it.
- When sleeping, the head must point toward the south.
- Touching the head is a sign of disrespect.
- Houses must be built on stilts to keep out evil spirits which are found in the ground.
- Trees should not be allowed to touch or overgrow houses because they may allow in evil spirits.

### Terms

Pali script  
Khmer  
Cham

### Comprehension Questions

1. What people make up the Cambodian population?
2. How did India influence Cambodia?
3. Who were the Cham people?

