Expansion of Civilization in Southeast Asia
The Kushan Empire (ca 150 BCE – ca 200 CE)

- It developed after the Scythians had destroyed what was left of Macedonian Greek power in NW India in the 2nd century BCE
- It was an important hub of trade routes linking India, China, and the West (esp. Rome, whose sea trade passed through the Kushan kingdom)
- The Kushan capital was located in Bactria (near Kabul)
- Kanishka (r. 78-114 CE), nominally a Buddhist, was its greatest ruler
- Kushan peoples were of Indo-European descent and had been driven out of Central Asia by the Xiongnu (Huns)
The Gupta Dynasty (320-550 CE)

- The Gupta Dynasty followed after a long period of decentralization in India.
- Its first leaders sought to revive the glory of the Mauryan Empire, which had ended centuries earlier (in 185 BCE).
- **Chandragupta I**, the son of a prosperous family of landowners, began the Gupta dynasty in 320 CE.
- He was enthroned at the former Mauryan capital of **Pataliputra**, on the Ganges River; this city now became the Guptas’ capital.
- The Guptas were very successful rulers even if they were never able to amass as much power over their subjects as the Mauryas had. Most political decisions were made by local officials.
Main rulers of the Gupta dynasty

-Chandragupta I (r. 320-335 CE) – he was the founder of the imperial Gupta dynasty

-Samadragupta (r. 335-376 CE), aka Kaviraja (the poet-king) – a great military leader, he also backed the arts. Like other Guptas, he was Hindu in religion.

-Chandragupta II (r. 376-415 CE), aka Vikramadvita (“He whose splendor equalled the Sun”) – the greatest of the Guptas, he ruled during its Golden Age. He favored many artists, including the famed poet-dramatist Kalidasa. He was also notable for an expansionist foreign policy. In 409 CE he defeated the Shaka (or Scythian) kingdom in the west.
Chandragupta II’s peaceful reign at home made a deep impression on travellers. The Chinese Buddhist monk Fa Xian, e.g., commented on how rare serious crime was throughout the breadth of the realm.

Fa Xian was also impressed by India’s prosperity under Chandragupta II. Metalworking was important, and the silk, wool, and linen industries thrived.

On a negative note, however, the caste system seems to have been revived.
Main achievements of India during the Gupta Dynasty

- Under the Guptas, Indian mathematics was the probably the most advanced in the world. Indians already had invented the decimal system, the concept of zero, and Indian-Arabic numerals.
- Indian astronomers were also very skilled. **Aryabhata the Elder (476-550 CE)**, for instance, whose work reflected a knowledge of Greek astronomy (of Hipparchus, e.g.), was able to calculate the length of a solar year as 365.3586805 days. He also was able to predict solar and lunar eclipses. The fact that the earth’s shadow was curved in an eclipse, made him conclude that the earth was round. Aryabhata also seems to have believed that the earth revolved around the Sun.
- Because of an increase in trade, banking also developed under the Guptas.
- They enjoyed good commercial relationships with China, Southeast Asia, and the Mediterranean.
- Lastly, they were responsible for spreading Buddhism into China.
Kalidasa (fl. 5th century CE)

-Great Sanskrit poet and dramatist; one of the so-called “Nine Gems”; sometimes referred to as the “Shakespeare” of India; he combined various languages in his plays

-Wrote a popular 100-verse poem *The Cloud Messenger*, which tells the tale of a devil who, separated from his lover by his master’s curse, tries to reach her with a cloud’s help.

-Kalidasa also wrote *Shakuntala*, perhaps the best-known play in Indian literature. It tells the tale of Dushyanta, a king who first meets and falls in love with the forest nymph Shakuntula, then loses her and forgets about her, only to find her again at the end, thanks to a ring he had given her earlier.

-Other Sanskrit plays were also popular during the Gupta period. Esp. in the South, acting troupes regularly performed for enthusiastic crowds.
Further developments in Buddhism, etc.

- Division in Buddhism between Theravada (or Lesser Vehicle) and Mahayana (or Greater Vehicle) Buddhism
- Mahayana Buddhism attempted to maximize the number of people who could obtain release from the wheel of life; it revered the bodhisattva Avalokitesvara (“Lord of Compassion”), aka Guan Yin (his Chinese name). As a bodhisattva (or saint), he was postponing his own Buddhahood in order to help all humans achieve nirvana.
- Despite Mahayana Buddhism’s success at first, eventually its popularity declined in India. Theravada Buddhism also became less influential. Hinduism was revived, and Islam made inroads too.
- The Bhakti (or devotional) movement, a new kind of Hinduism that focused on such things as Lord Rama’s story, appealed to many Indians looking for a relationship with a personal god.
- Islam, with its emphasis on the equality of all believers before God, attracted many others in India dissatisfied with the caste system.
Sikhism

• This new religion was founded in the Punjab by Guru Nanak (1469-1538), a Hindu who rejected the caste system
• It tried to blend Islam and Hinduism
• Ultimately it provided a third religious alternative in India
• Peaceful at first, it eventually turned militant in an effort to protect its followers against both Hindu and Muslim attacks
Other important teachings of Sikhism

- **The 5 Ks** (the Panj Kakkar or Articles of Faith)
  1. Kesh = uncut hair
  2. Kanga = a wooden comb
  3. Kara = a steel bracelet
  4. Kacher = special undergarment
  5. Kirpan = a small steel sword

-Prohibition against eating meat, using tobacco or other intoxicants, or committing adultery
The Golden Temple at Amritsar – one of the holiest Sikh sites
Mahmud of Ghazni and the Delhi Sultanate (1206-1526)

- In NW India, Mahmud of Ghazni (971-1030 CE), a Muslim leader based in Afghanistan, defeated the Rajputs (“Sons of Kings,” these aristocratic clans were thought to be descended from the Huns) and established a state based in Delhi.
- Eventually this state evolved into a sultanate which controlled most of northern India.
- By the 14th century this Sultanate in turn encountered opposition from other Turkish armies which had marched into N. India.
- The strongest leader of these Turks was Tamerlane. This Mongol khan made Samarkand his capital.
- Over a century later, ca 1530, other Turks, led by Babur, would establish the great Mughal dynasty over almost all of India.
Religious and Cultural Achievements of Medieval India

-Caves of Ajanta (late 5th century CE) – found in the Deccan Plateau – have magnificent stone sculptures and frescoes in the Mahayana and Hinayana Buddhist caves

-Cf. Hindu rock temples nearby (e.g., the Kailasantha Rock temple at Ellora, dedicated to Siva), from the 7th-9th centuries

-Cave Temples of Mamallapuram, ca 8th century CE, and dedicated to Siva, are found in Southern India

-Sun Temple at Konarak – now in ruins – is located near Orissa (in E. India)

-Medieval temple art at Khajuraho (10th century CE) – after the Gupta period

-gopuram or gopuras – an impressive gate tower, usually very ornate, found at the entrance to a Hindu temple, esp. in southern India
Classical Indian music

- Classical Indian music was derived from Vedic chants
- *Nada* = actual physical vibrations of music which were thought to have spiritual connections also.
- *Raga* = a scale or series of notes that comprise a melody
- *Sitar* = stringed instrument used in much of Indian music
- Even today, India is famous for its sitar players (see e.g. the legendary Indian virtuoso Ravi Shankar and his influence (on George Harrison and the Beatles, many others))
Southeast Asia: Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, Malaysia and Indonesia

-In Thailand, a kingdom called Ayyutthaya (or Siam) developed by the 14th century; its people were influenced greatly by Buddhism.

-In Cambodia, in contrast, another civilization, called the Khmer civilization, flourished from the 9th through 15th centuries CE; its capital was Angkor Thom.

-To the east of the Khmer was the Champa kingdom, in present-day Vietnam.

-Malaysia and Indonesia, to the south, were more decentralized.

-Two major trading states in the Southeast Asian archipelago, however, were Srivijaya and Majapahit.
The Khmer Civilization

-The Khmer dominated agriculture and trade on the SE Asian mainland
-Its capital was **Angkor Thom** while its most important temple complex was at **Angkor Wat**
-Like other SE Asian civilizations, it assimilated both Indian and Chinese practices into its way of governing
-Jayavarman VII (r. ca. 1181-1215 CE) was probably its most effective king; unlike most other Khmer rulers, he was a Buddhist; before he died, he was able to annex the Champa Kingdom
Jayavarman VII as a living Buddha
Angkor Wat
The Khmer state at its peak
Maritime empires of Srivijaya and Majapahit

-Merchants from India brought Hinduism with them to what is now Malaysia and Indonesia; a number of small Hindu kingdoms developed in this area.

-The **Srivijaya** kingdom, in southern Sumatra, was perhaps the strongest of these kingdoms.

-By the 5th century CE this kingdom had become more of a Buddhist stronghold.

-For the next several centuries, until approx. 1000 CE, Srivijaya controlled the Malacca Strait and thus the long-distance trade in spices, lumber and precious stones that passed by that route.

-Its power eroded over time as a result of conflicts with both the Cholas (from southern India) and the Majapahit Empire (from Java), and it ceased to exist as an empire by the 13th century CE.
Majapahit Empire
The Majapahit Empire

- After the decline of Srivijaya, control of maritime trade in SE Asia shifted to the Majapahit Empire, based in East Java.
- The Majapahit Empire enjoyed great commercial success from the end of the 13th to the end of the 15th century. Control of trade through the area as well as good rice harvests contributed to the economy’s vitality.
- Visitors such as the Chinese admiral Zheng He were impressed by its wealth. Life at court was also apparently very refined.
- This empire was essentially Hindu in orientation although Islam had begun to spread through the Indonesian archipelago well before Majapahit became an independent kingdom.