

# Asia: Human geography

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More than 18 million people live in Mumbai, India. It is one of the largest cities in Asia. Photo by: Anshuman Poyrekar/Hindustan Times via Getty Images

Asia is the largest continent in the world. About 6 out of every 10 people on Earth live there.

Asia was home to the oldest human civilizations. Today, it includes 47 countries with a wide range of rich cultures.

The human geography of Asia can be divided into two categories: cultural geography and political geography. Cultural geography includes things like art, language and social traditions. Political geography has to do with how power is shared between governments and the people.

## Historic Cultures



Asia was home to the first human civilizations. They sprang up in an area called the Fertile Crescent, in what is now the Middle East. This area includes Tigris and Euphrates rivers.

People used to live as hunter-gatherers. They moved freely in search of food. Thousands of years ago, people started to settle down in the Fertile Crescent, becoming the world's first farmers.

Soon, groups of people started working together, and new tools were invented, such as the wheel. Systems were developed to spread water, allowing people to have bigger and better farms. People learned to tame and keep animals, such as cows, sheep and pigs.

Farming made it possible for these people to build cities and civilizations. Thanks to farming, people had more food than they needed to survive. This gave them free time for things like writing, religion and trade.

The largest religion that came from Asia is Buddhism. Buddhism has its roots in Nepal and India and dates back more than 2,500 years. Trade routes helped spread Buddhism to other Asian territories. Today, Buddhism is a major religion in many countries in eastern Asia.

The modern human geography of Asia is changing quickly. New technologies are reshaping the world. Many Asian countries have been quick to adapt. The number of middle-class people in Asia is growing, and the Asian film, fashion, and music industries are on the rise.

### **Historic Issues**

The Middle East includes a number of countries that are located in between Europe and Asia, but almost all of these countries are technically considered to be part of the Asian continent. Egypt, on the African continent, is one exception.

One of the worst and oldest fights has been over the Levant. The Levant is an area in the modern-day Middle East. It is sometimes called "The Holy Land," as it is important to three major religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Because of its importance to so many groups, people have been fighting over the Levant for thousands of years. One ongoing conflict is between Israel and its neighbors. Israel was created in the Levant in 1948 as a state for the Jewish people. Before that, the area was a colony of Britain called Palestine. When Israel was created, many Palestinians felt that their land was taken unfairly. Since then, Israel has had to fight many wars to defend itself.

Today, there are still deep divisions between the Israeli and Palestinian people.

Another important part of Asia's political geography was colonization. Many places in Southeast Asia were ruled as colonies by other countries. Foreign powers held control in the region for more than 1,000 years.

European countries, the United States, and Japan controlled much of Southeast Asia from the 1500s to the mid-1940s. Private companies also held a lot of power. The Dutch East India Company, for example, became so large and powerful that it could print its own money and fight its own wars. These companies became very rich but gave little back to the local people.

Colonialism was held in place with force. The French, for example, used their military to control the local people in their colonies. This resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people.

The countries of Southeast Asia are now independent. The effects of the colonial period are still felt in their economies, politics, and cultures, though.

### **Current Issues**

The economies in Asian countries have grown in recent years, especially in India and China. This growth has had both good and bad effects.

China has one of the world's fastest-growing economies. China's economy is based on manufacturing, the making of goods like clothes, toys, and electronics in factories. China sells these goods all over the world.



As the economy has grown, wages have gone up in China. This has made life better for workers there. The growth in China has also caused a number of problems, though. While cities have expanded, people in the countryside have been left out. Also, China has struggled with severe pollution.

India's growth has been very different from China's. It is largely driven by information and technology, not manufacturing. For example, many Indian companies provide over-the-phone customer service or "tech support."

Wages in India have doubled in the past decade, bringing more than 430 million Indians out of poverty. The growth has also created a huge middle-class population.

However, there are extreme gaps between the rich and the poor in India. Millions of Indians live on less than \$1.25 a day. As in China, people outside the major cities have suffered the most.

### **Future Issues**

Asia's political and economic power looks like it will keep growing. This will probably have several serious effects on the environment.

Deforestation is one example. In Southeast Asia, forests are being cut down too quickly. Between 1990 and 2010, roughly 81.5 million acres of forest were lost. That is an area larger than the entire country of Vietnam.



Governments and others organizations are trying to step in before it is too late. Perhaps the most serious threat to the environment is global warming. As people build more cars and burn more fuel, the planet is getting hotter. Global warming is causing sea levels to rise.

Nowhere is the danger more real than in the Maldives, a country of hundreds of islands in the Indian Ocean. The effects of rising sea levels, a result of warmer temperatures, can already be felt

there. A 2004 tsunami flooded the entire country, killing 82 people. Approximately 12,000 more people had to find new homes.

## Quiz

1 Read the paragraph from the section "Historic Cultures."

*Farming made it possible for these people to build cities and civilizations. Thanks to farming, people had more food than they needed to survive. This gave them free time for things like writing, religion and trade.*

What is the MOST accurate explanation of this paragraph?

- (A) Farming in the Fertile Crescent allowed many other aspects of civilization to grow.
- (B) People were not interested in writing or religion before they developed farming.
- (C) Farming in the Fertile Crescent was quickly given up in order to study other things.
- (D) People did not have enough food to survive before they developed farming.

2 Read the section "Historic Issues."

Which sentence from the section shows the MAIN problem with colonialism in Asia?

- (A) Another important part of Asia's political geography was colonization.
- (B) Foreign powers held control in the region for more than 1,000 years.
- (C) These companies became very rich but gave little back to the local people.
- (D) This resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people.

3 This article is organized using cause and effect structure.

Why did the author choose to organize the information this way?

- (A) to explain the historical background information that led to the end of colonization in Asia
- (B) to show how cultural and political events in Asia's past have led to its current situation
- (C) to highlight the relationship between Asia's hunter-gatherer history and its current agriculture
- (D) to compare the daily life of Israelis and Palestinians living in the Middle East in Asia

4 Read the sections "Current Issues" and "Future Issues."

What is the connection between these two sections?

- (A) Both sections highlight the positive effects of Asia's growing economy.
- (B) Both sections explain how Asia is solving its pollution problems.
- (C) "Current Issues" highlights problems in Asia's economic growth, and "Future Issues" outlines possible solutions.
- (D) "Current Issues" explains what has caused Asia's economy to grow, and "Future Issues" describes negative effects of this.