***Asia***

Cultural Characteristics

Areas of extremely dense and sparse population

      Almost all coastal areas in Asia are very densely populated

      Areas around major rivers (Ganges, Indus, Yangtze, Yellow, Mekong, etc.) are heavily populated

      Japan has a very high population density

      Parts of the Philippines and the Indonesian island of Java are very heavily populated

      Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan experience poverty due to overpopulation

      Western China (Tibetan Plateau, Gobi Desert) is sparsely populated

      Western Pakistan (arid) and Mongolia (desert and steppe) are also sparsely populated areas

Contrast between rural and urban areas

      Many Asian cities are very developed and wealthy; Tokyo, Chinese coastal cities, etc. are major areas of industry

      Rural areas of Asia are often very poor, depending on subsistence farming and nomadic herding

Religious diversity

      Hinduism:  semi-polytheistic religion practiced almost entirely in India; worship in temples or at shrines; believe in reincarnation; Ganges River is holy

      Islam:  monotheistic religion practiced in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Brunei, Malaysia; worship in mosques; Abrahamic religion

      Buddhism:  non-theistic religion worshipped in areas of China (especially Tibet), Japan, Southeast Asia

      Christianity:  small Christian populations live in former areas of Western colonization; Philippines is 80% Christian

      Taoism:  polytheistic Chinese folk religion; related to Confucianism

      Shinto:  animist Japanese religion; formerly the state religion but not since WWII; related to Buddhism

      Confucianism:  Chinese philosophy that is sometimes called a religion based on the teachings of Confucius

Caste system in India

      Strict social class system in India tied to Hindu beliefs; Class based on birth and tied to wealth, occupation

      Many Hindus believe in karma, believing that if you are good in this life you will be rewarded in your next life

Respect for ancestors

      Many Asian cultures, especially those in China and Japan are characterized by very high respect for one’s elders and ancestors; many Eastern religions contribute to this cultural characteristic

Religious conflicts (Hindu/Muslim)

      Many different religions in Asia

      India is dominantly Hindu, but Muslims and other minority religions live there

      Kashmir is a major area of conflict between Hindus and Muslims

Cultural Heritage

      Silks:  famous Chinese silk has been traded for thousands of years

      Batik:  “painting” technique using melted wax on fabric; common in Indonesia and Malaysia

      Wood and ivory carving:  India is famous for ivory carvings from the tusks of elephants; ivory trade has been illegal in most countries since 1989

      Ideograms, unique alphabets:  ideograms are characters used to represent entire words or thoughts; the Chinese alphabets uses many ideograms rather than simple letters

      Jewels:  jewels were frequently used in art in Asian countries such as India and China

Cities as Centers of Culture and Trade

**Tokyo, Japan**

      Capital of Japan and part of the most urbanized area on Earth; on the island of Honshu

      One of the world’s major global cities; home of a major stock market

      Historically hit by several major earthquakes, most recently in 1923

      The Tokyo area has a larger economy than all but 7 countries

      Very efficient public transportation; center of culture, trade, and education

**Beijing, China**

      Capital of China and the center of culture, politics and education (although Hong Kong and Shanghai are more important for trade and economics); host of 2008 Summer Olympics

      Forbidden City in Beijing was the home of many Chinese emperors

      Tiananmen Square was the center of political protests in recent years

**New Delhi, India**

      Capital of India; not far from the Taj Mahal

Cultural Landscape

**Taj Mahal**

      Located in Agra, India, not far from New Delhi

      Built by a Muslim emperor in the 17th century as a mausoleum for his wife

      Fell into disrepair when Muslim empire collapsed and Hindus took over

      Recently restored to former glory; now a symbol of national pride; major tourist site

**Angkor Wat**

      Located in the jungles of Cambodia; built in the 12th century as a Hindu temple

      Later became a center of Buddhist worship; largest religious structure in the world

**Great Wall of China**

      Built by a series of Chinese dynasties to keep out Mongol and Turkic invaders from the north around 200 B.C.

      Possibly as many as one million people died during its construction

      The Wall was minimally successful in keeping out the invaders

      About 80% of the Wall is now in disrepair

**Floating Markets**

      Vendors on small boats sell goods in areas of Southeast Asia; Many in Thailand and Vietnam

**Religious Structures**

      Islamic mosques, minarets in Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh

      Buddhist pagodas in Nepal, Southeast Asia, China, Japan, Sri Lanka, Bhutan

      Hindu temples and shrines in India

**Terraced rice fields**

      Terracing creates usable farmland in mountainous areas of China, Southeast Asia

      High population of Asia demands that land isn’t wasted