***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