Monsoon Asia
Introducing the Region: Physical and Human Geography

Chapter 27
Waiting for the Rains: The Effects of Monsoons in South Asia

Chapter 28
Tech Workers and Time Zones: India’s Comparative Advantage

Chapter 29
Mount Everest: Climbing the World’s Tallest Physical Feature

Chapter 30
China: The World’s Most Populous Country

Chapter 31
Population Density in Japan: Life in a Crowded Country

Chapter 32
The Global Sneaker: From Asia to Everywhere

What patterns do you see in this photograph?
See page 514 for details.
Monsoon Asia begins at the western border of India. From there, it reaches east to the Pacific Ocean. In the north, it spreads across China to the Korean Peninsula. A large peninsula south of China includes Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand. This peninsula is ringed by the South China Sea, the Gulf of Thailand, and the Bay of Bengal.

This region has several countries made up of many islands. They include Japan, the Philippines, and Indonesia. Sri Lanka, Brunei, and East Timor are other island nations.

The countries of Monsoon Asia are often grouped into three subregions. These smaller regions are South Asia, East Asia, and Southeast Asia.
Physical Features

Mountains are the most commanding feature of Monsoon Asia’s landscape. The rugged Himalayas form India’s northern border. They include Mount Everest, the world’s highest mountain. Like other mountain ranges, the Himalayas were formed when sections of Earth’s crust, called plates, collided. The two plates that came together to create the Himalayas are still colliding. As a result, the mountains are getting higher. But mountain building is a slow process. Mount Everest grows about half an inch a year.

South Asia

India makes up most of South Asia. Many people call India a subcontinent. Mountains and ocean separate India from the rest of Asia, so it is almost like a small continent.

Three important rivers begin in the Himalayas. They are the Indus, the Ganges, and the Brahmaputra. The Ganges and Brahmaputra meet to form one of the world’s largest river deltas. Then, they empty into the Bay of Bengal.

The Ghats are another mountain range in India. The Eastern and Western Ghats run parallel to India’s coasts. Between them lies the Deccan Plateau. The Deccan Plateau covers most of southern India’s interior.

East Asia

East Asia’s landscape is diverse. Mountains surround the Plateau of Tibet. The Huang He begins on this plateau. So does the Chang Jiang (Yangtze), the third longest river in the world. Both rivers run east across China before emptying into the Pacific.

North of the Tibetan Plateau lie the Taklamakan and Gobi deserts. The Gobi is one of the world’s largest deserts. According to legend, an angry Mongolian chief created it. He turned the land to desert when Chinese warriors forced him to leave this area.

The hilly Korean Peninsula and the chain of islands that make up Japan are also part of East Asia. Japan’s islands were formed by volcanoes.

Southeast Asia

Southeast Asia is not one big landmass. Instead, it is made up of peninsulas and islands. For example, the Malay Peninsula juts out into the South China Sea.

Thousands of islands dot the seas of Southeast Asia. Some, like Borneo, are fairly large. Others are so small that they just look like specks on a map.
Climate

As the name of this region suggests, the climate of much of Asia is shaped by monsoons. Monsoons are strong winds that create the rainfall patterns in this region. In summer, monsoons blow from the ocean toward the land, bringing clouds that are heavy with rain.

In areas affected by monsoons, summers are very wet and winters fairly dry. Mumbai, India, for example, has a monsoon climate. It gets more than 70 inches of rain between June and September. But the same city gets little or no rain from December to April.

South Asia

South Asia’s climate ranges from arid to tropical. The northwest part of the subcontinent is dry. So is part of the Deccan Plateau in central India.

The Himalayas have a highlands climate. In a highlands zone, the climate gets colder as elevation increases. The Himalayas are very high and very cold. Snow covers the higher peaks throughout the year. In fact, the word Himalaya means “House of Snow.”

Tropical climates dominate the rest of South Asia. A tropical wet climate makes the west coast hot and rainy all year long. Much of interior South Asia is tropical wet and dry. The area has one rainy season and one dry season. Temperatures remain fairly high year-round. Finally, north central India has a humid subtropical climate, with hot, humid summers and mild winters.

East Asia

Like South Asia, East Asia has a variety of climates. A highlands climate is found in the Plateau of Tibet. Arid and semiarid areas border this landform. They include the Gobi and Taklamakan deserts.

The Korean Peninsula has a humid continental climate. People there endure hot, steamy summers. Then they face very cold winters. Parts of Japan and eastern China experience a humid subtropical climate. They have hot, steamy summers and mild winters. Rain falls fairly evenly throughout the year.

Southeast Asia

Southeast Asia is tropical. Most areas nearest the equator have a tropical wet climate. It is hot and rainy all year in the Philippines, Singapore, and most of Malaysia and Indonesia. Other parts of Southeast Asia have a tropical wet and dry climate. The weather is hot all year with both rainy and dry seasons in most of Thailand, Cambodia, and southern Vietnam.

The mountain regions of Japan have severe winters with heavy snow.
Vegetation

The vegetation in Monsoon Asia varies as much as the region’s climate does. In the drier parts of the region, only desert scrub survives. But in the tropical zones, lush plants thrive and form thick rainforests.

Elevation also has a big effect on Monsoon Asia’s plant life. Remember that in a highlands climate, temperature varies with elevation. Vegetation varies with elevation as well. The region’s highest mountains are so cold that they are covered by ice and snow. Very little can grow in this ice cap vegetation zone.

South Asia

The plant life of South Asia varies with the climates and the altitude. The driest land supports only desert scrub. Tropical grassland covers much of central India. Mixed forest appears on the lower slopes of the Himalayas. In the tropical climate zones, broadleaf evergreen forest is common.

East Asia

Because East Asia has so many climate zones, this subregion supports many different types of plant life.

The Plateau of Tibet and mountainous parts of China support highlands vegetation. The large deserts are home to desert and desert scrub vegetation. Much of the northern part of this subregion is too dry for trees. But grasses grow well there.

The warmer and wetter areas of East Asia support forests. Northeast China, the Korean Peninsula, and Japan are covered with mixed and deciduous forest. Many pines grow on Japan’s mountains and along its seashores.

Much of southeastern China has a humid subtropical climate. Broadleaf evergreen forests thrive where it is warm and rainy.

Southeast Asia

Just about all of Southeast Asia is warm and wet. Rainforests and tropical grassland cover most of this region. Over time, much of the rainforest has been cleared to raise crops that do well in the tropics. People grow rice, sugarcane, tea, and rubber.

Many types of bamboo grow well here. Bamboo is a grass. But unlike most grasses, it can grow to huge sizes. Some types of bamboo may reach over 100 feet high and have stems a foot in diameter. Bamboo stems are made into everything from houses to tools. Bamboo probably has more uses than any other plant in tropical areas.

Tibet is often called the “Roof of the World.” Yaks graze in the highland meadows on the Plateau of Tibet, which lies more than 10,000 feet above sea level.
There are 23 countries in Monsoon Asia. Some, like China, are very old. Others, like East Timor, are quite new.

Much of Monsoon Asia is densely settled. China is the world’s most populous country. It has more than 1.3 billion people. India is a close second with more than a billion people.

With so many people, it is no surprise that some of the world’s largest and most crowded cities are found in Monsoon Asia. They include Kolkata and Mumbai, India; Dhaka, Bangladesh; Shanghai, China; Seoul, South Korea; Tokyo, Japan; Manila, Philippines; and Jakarta, Indonesia.
History

Some of the world’s earliest civilizations arose in Monsoon Asia. At different times, rulers united parts of the region into empires. Later, European countries colonized much of the region. In modern times, most Asian peoples have gained their independence.

Early Times

East Asia’s first civilization took root in the Huang He valley. China was split into many kingdoms early in its history.

In 221 B.C.E., one of these kingdoms, the Qin, united China. The name China comes from the word Qin. The first ruler of this empire, the Emperor Qin, built China’s first Great Wall. From the first emperor until modern times, China was ruled by a series of dynasties, or ruling families. When one family lost power, another rose to take its place.

South Asia’s first civilization arose in the Indus River valley around 2500 B.C.E. One of its main cities was Mohenjo-daro. As many as 40,000 people lived there. The people of Mohenjo-daro enjoyed comforts that were very advanced for that time. Their homes had indoor bathrooms that drained into a city sewer system.

No one knows how the Indus Valley civilization ended. But by 1700 B.C.E., it had vanished. For centuries after that, South Asia was a land of small kingdoms.

In the 320s B.C.E., a powerful family called the Mauryas saw how weak these kingdoms were. The Mauryas conquered most of them and united India into one empire. The Mauryan Empire lasted for about 130 years.

Conquests and Colonies

After the Mauryan Empire fell, India once more broke apart. Then in 1526, invaders from Central Asia conquered India. The invaders, called Mughals, united India as a new empire. The Mughals ruled India into the early 1700s.

Starting in the late 1400s, Europeans colonized many parts of Monsoon Asia. The Spanish set up trading posts in the Philippines. The Dutch started colonies in Indonesia. The British began businesses in India. By the late 1700s, the British ruled most of India.

In the 1800s, France joined the race for colonies. The French took over much of Southeast Asia. They controlled the area that is now Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.

The Modern Era

In the last half-century, most colonies in Monsoon Asia freed themselves from European control. India gained its independence from Great Britain in 1947. The French left Southeast Asia in the 1950s.

Parts of Monsoon Asia have prospered in recent years. Japan is now one of the world’s leading industrial countries. Other areas, such as South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore, have also developed modern industrial economies.

However, Monsoon Asia has developed unevenly. Some people live very well. But in many parts of the region, most people still live in poverty.

Monsoon Asia Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5000 B.C.E.</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>500 C.E.</th>
<th>1000 C.E.</th>
<th>1500 C.E.</th>
<th>2000 C.E.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2500–1700 B.C.E.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Rise and fall of civilization along Indus River</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3000–1700 B.C.E.</td>
<td>Civilization arises along Huang He</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>320s B.C.E.</td>
<td>Mauryas unite India</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>221–210 B.C.E.</td>
<td>Emperor Qin unites China</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1565–1571</td>
<td>Spain conquers the Philippines</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late 1400s–mid 1900s</td>
<td>European colonization</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1757</td>
<td>British colonize India</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945–present</td>
<td>Industrialization of Asia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>India wins its independence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Population

About 3.5 billion people live in Monsoon Asia. That is more than half the world’s people. China, India, and Indonesia are three of the world’s five most populous countries.

Monsoon Asia is mostly rural. However, cities are growing quickly. Every year, large numbers of people leave the countryside to look for work in cities. As a result, many cities suffer from overcrowding. The people who live there are often unemployed and poor.

Monsoon Asia is a region with many religious traditions. In India and Nepal, most people are Hindu. Islam also has many followers in Monsoon Asia. In fact, Indonesia has the world’s largest Muslim population. Nine out of ten people there are Muslim.

Buddhism is the main religion in Southeast Asia. Most people in Japan practice Shinto or Buddhism. Confucianism began in China about 2,500 years ago. Its influence is still felt today. Christianity also has followers in Monsoon Asia, especially in the Philippines.

Monsoon Asia: Major Religions

- No religion, 21.3%
- Christianity, 7.2%
- Buddhism, 12.1%
- Hinduism, 27.8%
- Islam, 14.2%
- Judaism, 0.1%
- Indigenous, 14.2%
- Other, 2.4%
- No religion, 21.3%

Monsoon Asia: Urban and Rural Population, 2007

Urban, 39.1% = 10% of the total population
Rural, 60.9%

Monsoon Asia: Population Growth, 1950–2050

Year 1950: 1,266 million
Year 2008: 3,482 million
Year 2050: 4,342 million

Sources: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. Encyclopaedia Britannica.
Economic Activity

The economy of Monsoon Asia is a mix of old and new. Most people still work to feed themselves by farming and fishing. At the same time, parts of the region have become important centers for industry and finance.

The many people of Monsoon Asia who live near the seacoast have always fished for food. But fishing has also become a big business in Asia. **Commercial fishing** is different from traditional small-scale fishing. Commercial fishing boats can gather huge amounts of fish in their nets. Most of what they catch is processed, packaged, and sent all over the world.

Resources

Monsoon Asia is rich in resources. Northern China has large coal deposits. It produces more coal than any other country on Earth. Southeast Asia has much of the world’s tin. Petroleum reserves lie beneath Indonesia. In addition, the region’s many rivers are well suited for **hydroelectric power**.

Land Use

Most people in Monsoon Asia still live off the land. Some are subsistence farmers. They grow enough to feed their families. Rice is the staple for many of them. Others are commercial farmers. They grow crops for export, including tea, cotton, spices, and tobacco.

More than 90 percent of the world’s rubber is produced in Southeast Asia. Rubber comes from the sap of the rubber tree. To get the sap, a rubber tapper cuts a diagonal shaving of bark from the tree. A metal spout and cup are attached to the bottom of this cut. Sap oozes from the cut and drips into the cup. Tappers collect about a teacup of sap each time they tap a tree.

China’s commercial fishing industry is among the world’s largest. Indonesia exports large amounts of shrimp and tuna. India, Japan, and South Korea also have large fishing industries.

Nomadic herders live in some remote parts of Monsoon Asia. Their lives are similar to their ancestors’ lives. They herd cattle, goats, sheep, and yaks. Other parts of Monsoon Asia, however, have booming modern economies. International trade is strong in Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong, and South Korea. China is a major producer of consumer goods, as well as machinery. Japan is a world leader in the production of cars and electronics.

The Three Gorges Dam, on China’s Yangtze river, was completed in 2009. It produces more hydroelectric power than any other dam in the world. This power will support the growth of industry across China.