The Cultural Geography of East Asia
Chapter Objectives

- Discuss the ethnic groups that comprise East Asia’s peoples and the population distribution of the region.
- Explain how East Asians have been influenced by China since ancient times and, in more recent times, by contact with the West.
- Describe how, despite Chinese influences, each country in East Asia has its own unique cultural traditions.
Population Patterns

Section 1
Objectives

- Name the ethnic groups that make up East Asia’s population.
- Identify the country in which the majority of East Asians live.
- Describe how the population in East Asia is distributed.
Terms to Know

- Aborigine
- Homogeneous
A Geographic View

Tokyo street at night
Geographic Literacy

- Tokyo, Japan; Beijing, China; Shanghai, China; and Seoul, South Korea are four of the largest cities in the world. The United Nations projects that Tokyo will have a population of nearly 29 million in 2015. The four cities combined then will be home to about 76 million people.
Human Characteristics

- East Asia has about 1.5 billion people—about 25 percent of the world’s population. Among the region’s major ethnic groups are the Han Chinese, Tibetan, Japanese, Korean, and Mongolian.
- **China** About 92 percent of China’s population belongs to the Han ethnic group.
- The remaining 8 percent belongs to about 55 different ethnic groups.
Human Characteristics

- **Japan, Korea and Mongolia**
  - About 99 percent of Japan’s population is ethnic Japanese, descendants of Asian migrants who crossed the Korean peninsula to Japan centuries ago.
  - Koreans trace their descent to peoples from northern China and Central Asia.
  - They have maintained a common identity despite periods of foreign rule and today’s political division.
  - People living in Mongolia are mostly ethnic Mongolians who speak the Khalkha Mongolian language.
Where East Asians Live

- Because much of East Asia is barren or mountainous, the region’s population is unevenly distributed.

- **Population Distribution and Density**
  - More than 90 percent of China’s population lives on less than 20 percent of the land.
  - People tend to live on coastal plains and in river valleys.
  - The interior steppes of Mongolia are home to only four people per square mile.
  - The tiny island nation of Taiwan, on the other hand, is crowded because space is limited.
Where East Asians Live

- Population Distribution and Density (cont.)
  - Most Taiwanese and Koreans live in cities.
  - In Japan, forested mountains cover the central part of the country.
  - Most Japanese are crowded into valleys and coastal plains.
  - The Tokyo metropolitan area is home to more than 26 million people.
  - The northern island of Hokkaido, however, is still mainly rural and sparsely populated.
Where East Asians Live

- **Japan’s Urban Lifestyle**  Because space is so limited, Japanese in urban areas usually live in small houses or apartments.
- Japan has eased traffic congestion by investing in an efficient rapid transit system.
Where East Asians Live
Migration

- In recent decades, many Chinese and South Koreans have moved from rural areas to cities.
- Southeastern China’s free-enterprise zones are a favorite destination.
- In South Korea, people migrate to coastal cities.
- In the mid-1900s, many North Koreans migrated south to escape communism.
- South Korea’s population is about twice as large as North Korea’s.
Challenges of Growth

- In China and South Korea, steady migration from rural villages to cities has led to urban overcrowding and farm labor shortages in the countryside.
- The Chinese government hopes that newly built rural towns with more social services will encourage people to stay on their farms.
- Since 1979, the Chinese government has permitted only one child per couple.
- This policy is not followed by all Chinese, but it has helped slow population growth.
Government and History

Section 2
Objectives

• State the reasons for East Asia’s wide variety of climates.
• Discuss East Asia’s first reaction to contact with the West.
• Cite the major wars and revolutions that have occurred in East Asia.
Terms to Know

• Culture hearth
• Dynasty
• Clan
• Shogun
• Samurai
A Geographic View

Army of clay soldiers, China
Geographic Literacy

- In 1940, the Japanese government signed the Tripartite Alliance with Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. After the Japanese bombed Hawaii’s Pearl Harbor in December 1941, the United States immediately declared war on Germany and Japan. Japan gained control of most of Southeast Asia and the western Pacific, but the Battle of Midway in 1942 stopped Japanese advances. Japan finally surrendered to the Allies on September 2, 1945, after the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were destroyed by U.S. atomic bombs.
Ancient East Asia

- **China’s Dynasties**
  - China’s culture began in the Wei River Valley more than 5,000 years ago.
  - Over the centuries, ruling dynasties faced invasions from Central Asia, natural disasters, and rebellious local lords.
  - Failure to attend to these problems often led to a dynasty’s collapse.
  - The dynasty was said to have lost “the mandate of heaven,” or divine approval, and it would give way to a new ruling family.
  - During the era of the Zhou dynasty, Chinese culture spread and trade grew.
Ancient East Asia

- **China’s Dynasties continued**
  - The teachings of Confucius and Laozi on discipline, moral conduct, and harmony with nature also had a profound influence on East Asian life.
  - The Zhou dynasty was followed by a series of dynasties that expanded China’s territory.
  - In the 200s B.C., Qin Shi Huang Di united all of China and built part of the Great Wall to keep out invaders.
  - During the Han and Tang Dynasties, traders and missionaries took Chinese culture to all of East Asia.
  - In the early 1400s, under the Ming dynasty, Chinese naval expeditions reached the coast of East Africa.
  - The Qing dynasty ruled China from the mid 1600s to the early 1900s.
Ancient East Asia

- **Korea and Japan**
  - Buddhism spread from China to become Korea’s chief religion.
  - A series of Korean dynasties united the Korean Peninsula.
  - About A.D. 1300, the Chinese took control of Korea.
  - In the years that followed, the Korean government and educational system were based on the teachings of Confucius.
  - China and Korea had a major impact on Japan’s civilization.
  - In the A.D. 400s, Japan’s clans, or family groups, united under the Yamato dynasty.
  - Yamato emperors adopted China’s writing system, philosophy, and governmental structure.
  - From the 1100s to the late 1800s, a series of military leaders called shoguns ruled Japan in the emperor’s name.
Ancient East Asia
Contact with the West

- By the 1600s, western Europe had developed shipping routes to Asia, hoping to share in the region’s rich trade in tea and silk.
- China, Japan, and Korea, however, rejected Western efforts to enter their markets.
- Under Western pressure, China in 1834 opened the port of Guangzhou to limited trade.
- Both Europe and Japan later claimed large areas of China as spheres of influence where they had exclusive trading rights.
- In 1899, the United States brokered an agreement to open China to trade with all nations.
Contact with the West

- The United States also worked to open Japan for trade.
- In 1854 U.S. naval officer Matthew Perry finally forced the country to end centuries of isolation to trade with the United States.
- Rule by shoguns soon ended, and the emperor regained full authority.
- In the years that followed, Japan modernized its economy, government, and military forces.
Modern East Asia

• During the 1900s, East Asia as a whole was involved in two world wars. Meanwhile, each East Asian country faced its own internal upheavals.

• Revolutionary China In 1911, a revolution ended the rule of dynasties in China.

• By 1927, military leader Chiang Kai-shek had formed the Nationalist government.

• After years of civil war, the Communists, led by Mao Zedong, won power in 1949 and set up the People’s Republic of China on the Chinese mainland.

• The Nationalists fled to Taiwan and established the Republic of China.
Modern East Asia

- In recent years, China’s communist economy has opened to free-market influences.
- Taiwan has prospered economically and carried out democratic reforms.
- Japan’s Transformation From the 1890s to the 1940s, Japan used diplomacy and military force to create an empire.
- After its defeat in World War II, Japan lost all these acquisitions but rebuilt its economy and is today a global economic power.
Modern East Asia

- **A Divided Korea**
  - In 1950, communist-ruled North Korea invaded American-backed South Korea.
  - During the Korean War, United Nations forces, led by the United States, rushed to South Korea’s defense.
  - A 1953 truce ended the fighting. Millions of Koreans died, and both Koreas were devastated.
  - Today, the thirty-eighth parallel still separates North Korea and South Korea.
  - North Korea often cannot meet the basic needs of its people, while South Korea has become an economically prosperous democracy.
  - Today the two countries are trying to improve their relations.
Modern East Asia
Modern East Asia

- **A Free Mongolia**  From 1924 until 1991, Mongolia was a communist state under the influence of the Soviet Union.
- After the fall of Soviet communism, the Mongolians adopted a democratic constitution.
Cultures and Lifestyles

Section 3
Objectives

• List the languages that the people of East Asia speak.
• Describe the religions and philosophies that many people of East Asia follow.
• Discuss how the living standards of East Asians compare with one another.
• Compare education in East Asia with education in North America.
• Identify the traditional arts that make East Asia unique.
Terms to Know

- Ideogram
- shamanism
- lama
- acupuncture
- haiku
- calligraphy
- pagoda
A Geographic View

Worshipers at Buddhist shrine, China
Murasaki Shikibu, author of *The Tale of Genji*, was born in Kyoto, Japan, around A.D. 978. She insisted on learning to read and write Chinese, which was unusual for girls of that time and place. Murasaki was an attendant at the Kyoto court of the Empress Akiko, whom she taught to read and speak Chinese. Many events in *The Tale of Genji* are based on Murasaki’s experiences at court, as can be seen by comparing the novel to her diary.
East Asia’s Languages

• East Asians speak languages from several language families. More than 1.2 billion people in China speak Sino-Tibetan languages, which include Chinese and Tibetan.

• **China’s Languages**
  • Han Chinese is the most widely spoken language in China.
  • Mandarin, the northern dialect of Han Chinese, is China’s official language.
  • It is taught in schools and used in business and government.
  • Cantonese, another major dialect, is widely spoken in southeastern China.
  • Other languages of China include Tibetan, Manchu, Uygur, and various Mongolian dialects.
East Asia’s Languages

• Chinese languages use **ideograms**—pictures or symbols that stand for ideas.

• Each ideogram has one meaning.

• When two or more are combined, they take on a new meaning.

• Spoken Chinese languages also depend on tone or pitch.

• Syllables can change meaning depending on their spoken intonation.
East Asia’s Languages

- **Japanese and Korean Languages** Although the Japanese language developed in isolation, experts believe it may be distantly related to Korean and Mongolian.

- Japan’s first writing system was based on Chinese characters.

- In more recent times, Western languages, such as English, have influenced the Korean and Japanese languages.
Religion and Philosophy

- Traditional religions and philosophies in East Asia include Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism.
- Shintoism is an ancient Japanese religion that emphasizes reverence for nature.
- Christianity is widespread in Korea, and western China has many Muslims.
- Communist governments in China and North Korea discourage all religious practices.
- In Tibet, the Chinese government has placed harsh restrictions on the Buddhist population.
- The Dalai Lama, Tibet’s spiritual leader, leads a worldwide movement in support of Tibetan rights from his place of exile in neighboring India.
Standard of Living

- During the 1900s, East Asia experienced tremendous economic development.
- Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea grew wealthy, and many of their citizens achieved high standards of living.
- Although China enjoyed significant economic advances, individual conditions varied widely.
- China’s economy still trails that of Japan.
Standard of Living

- **Japan’s Downturn and Recovery**
  - The Japanese traditionally have valued individual loyalty to society in return for society’s protection and support.
  - People have been expected to work long hours, and in return employment has been secure, with high wages and benefits.
  - In 1997 Japan suffered an economic downturn, and economic pressures forced companies to lay off many workers.
  - Since then, companies have offered workers fewer rewards, and workers have less loyalty to their companies.
Standard of Living

- **China’s New Direction** The course of China’s economy changed in the 1970s when a new leader, Deng Xiaoping, came to power.
- Deng allowed limited free enterprise and private ownership in business.
- He also welcomed foreign investment in China.
- Since the 1970s economic reforms have helped raise the living standards of some Chinese.
- Most of the Chinese people, however, are still engaged in agriculture.
Standard of Living
Education and Health

- East Asians value learning. Today elementary education is free throughout the region, and opportunities for higher education have greatly expanded.

- **Literacy and Learning**
  - Japan, Taiwan, and the Koreas have literacy rates of 95 percent or higher.
  - China and Mongolia have literacy rates of 82 percent.
  - Young South Koreans, who spend an average of 14 years in school, are among the region’s best-educated students.
Education and Health Care

- **Health Care**
  - Communist countries generally provide free health care.
  - As China moves toward a market economy, however, its government no longer guarantees equal access to health care.
  - There is now a growing gap in the quality of health care between urban areas and rural areas.
  - Many East Asians rely on both Western medicine and traditional herbal medicines.
  - Centuries-old techniques like acupuncture are widely accepted around the world.
Leisure Activities

• **Food**  East Asians prefer staple foods, such as wheat, millet, and rice.

• Many maintain vegetarian diets or get protein from fish.

• In recent years, Western foods, such as beef and dairy products, have become popular.

• As a result, heart disease and high blood pressure are on the rise in the region.
Leisure Activities

- **Sports and Festivals**
  - Traditional East Asian sports include several varieties of martial arts.
  - Baseball is also very popular, particularly in Japan, and the region is home to many Olympic champions.
  - East Asian holidays celebrate religious beliefs, seasonal changes, and historical events.
  - Parades and ceremonies, such as those marking the Lunar New Year, are common.
The Arts

- East Asian artistic traditions are deeply rooted in the past.
- Religion has inspired much of the region’s art.
- China’s Cultural Revolution in the 1960s tried to wipe out traditional arts in favor of communist-inspired art forms.
- Today Chinese artists have returned to their traditions.
- **Literature**  In ancient China and Japan, poetry and prose literature described human relationships and the beauty of nature.
- **Music and Theater**  East Asian music is based on a five-tone scale with a melody line but no harmony.
- Forms of drama include Japanese Kabuki and Noh theater and Chinese opera.
The Arts

- **Visual Arts**  East Asian artists are known for landscape paintings that often include verses done in elegant brush-strokes.
- The Japanese also create vivid prints using carved wooden blocks. Other Japanese art forms include origami, or artistically folded paper objects, the tea ceremony, formal landscaping, and ikebana, or flower arranging.
- Chinese porcelain has been admired throughout the world for centuries.
- Buddhist temples throughout East Asia contain sculptures in stone, bronze, or jade.
- **Architecture**  Brick, wood, and stone are commonly used building materials in East Asia.
- Bamboo is important in the architecture of Japan and southern China.
Section 1 – Summary

- East Asia’s 1.5 billion people are made up of many different ethnic groups with a variety of religions, languages, and cultures.
- Population in East Asia is unevenly distributed. It is concentrated in urban areas, in river valleys, and on coastal plains.
- Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea are highly urbanized countries. Mongolia is predominantly rural. In China most people live in rural areas.
- Massive migration from rural to urban areas has caused farm labor shortages in parts of East Asia.
Section 2 – Summary

- Confucianism and Daoism developed in China about 500 B.C. Buddhism spread from India throughout East Asia.
- China was ruled by a succession of dynasties until the early 1900s.
- Contact with the West forced East Asians to modernize.
- Revolutions and wars transformed East Asia in the 1900s.
- By the end of the 1900s, East Asian countries had important roles in the global economy.
Section 3 – Summary

• Sino-Tibetan languages and Korean and Japanese are the region’s main languages.
• East Asians often adopt practices from more than one religious tradition.
• Rising standards of living since 1945 have brought dramatic improvements in education and health care for some countries.
• East Asians have a long history of traditional arts and activities.