**Asia: Political Geography & History**

*Encyclopaedic entry excerpts taken from* ***National Geographic Education*** <http://education.nationalgeographic.com.au/education/encyclopedia/asia-human/?ar_a=1>

Asia is the largest of the world’s continents, covering approximately 30 per cent of the Earth’s land area. It is also the world’s most populous continent, with roughly 60 per cent of the total population.

The geographic term “Asia” was originally used by ancient Greeks to describe the civilizations east of their empire. Ancient Asian peoples, however, saw themselves as a varied and diverse mix of cultures—not a collective group. Today, the term “Asia” is used as a cultural concept, while subregion classifications describe the distinct geopolitical identities of the continent. These classifications are Western Asia, Central Asia, Southern Asia, Eastern Asia, South-eastern Asia, and Northern Asia.

Asia is home to the world’s earliest civilizations. Its indigenous cultures pioneered many practices that have been integral to societies for centuries, such as agriculture, city planning, and religion. The social and political geography of the continent continues to inform and influence the rest of the world.

**Political Geography**

Political geography is the internal and external relationships between a continent’s various governments, citizens, and territories. Asian governments and citizens have created and responded to political and social change in ways that have profoundly affected these relationships at both the local and international level.

The colonization of Southeast Asia is (an) example of how historic political geography can influence an entire region. Colonialism is foreign political rule imposed on a people. Chinese, Japanese, and European colonization of Southeast Asia lasted for more than 1,000 years. China, for instance, was the ruling power in Vietnam from about 110 BCE to 900 CE.

Colonial powers from Europe, the United States, and Japan imposed their rule on Southeast Asian peoples from the 1500s to the mid-1940s. While these powers had distinct motives, they were generally looking to expand their territory, increase trade, import cheap raw materials, and impose their cultural practices.

The Dutch and British established extremely powerful companies that oversaw trade and labour in their respective colonies. The Dutch East India Company, based in Indonesia, had the power to print its own money and engage in war. They enforced harsh labour practices on local peoples, who worked to collect lucrative spices and extract precious metals. These resources were then sold in Europe.

Spanish and Portuguese colonists spread the Roman Catholic faith by converting indigenous peoples, especially in the Philippines. The French used their military to maintain control of their colonies, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people.

The countries of Southeast Asia are now independent. However, their economies, politics, and culture still maintain aspects of the colonial period. For instance, the Vietnamese language is written with the Roman alphabet, not the glyphs, ideograms, or indigenous alphabets of neighbouring Asian nations. This is because the written Vietnamese language was established by the French, who use a Roman alphabet.