



International Journal of Humanities & Social Science Studies (IJHSSS)
A Peer-Reviewed Bi-monthly Bi-lingual Research Journal
ISSN: 2349-6959 (Online), ISSN: 2349-6711 (Print)
Volume-II, Issue-III, November 2015, Page No. 181-186
Published by Scholar Publications, Karimganj, Assam, India, 788711
Website: <http://www.ijhsss.com>

Ethnic Groups in Asia

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Abstract

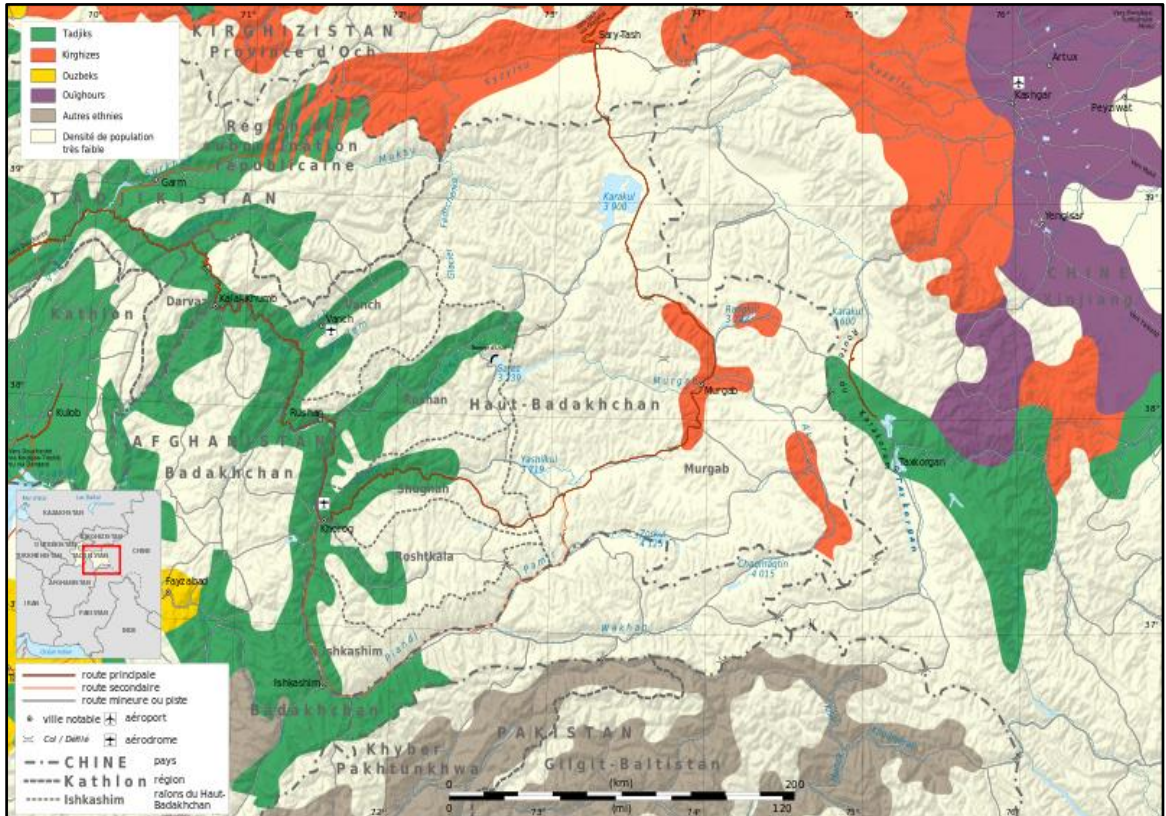
There is an abundance of ethnic groups in Asia, with adaptations to the climate zones of the continent, which include Arctic, subarctic, temperate, subtropical or tropical, as well as extensive desert regions in Central and Western Asia. The ethnic groups have adapted to mountains, deserts, grasslands and forests, while on the coasts of Asia, resident ethnic groups have adopted various methods of harvest and transport. Some groups are primarily hunter-gatherers, some practice transhumance (nomadic lifestyle) others have been agrarian for millennia and others becoming industrial or urban. Some groups or countries in Asia are completely urban (e.g., Hong Kong and Singapore) the largest countries in Asia with regard to population are the People's Republic of China, India, Pakistan, Japan and South Korea. Colonisation of Asian ethnic groups and states by European peoples beginning in the 16th century, reaching its peak in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (except in the former Soviet Union, which was dissolved in 1990).

Key Words: Asia, Ethnic groups, Asian People.

Introduction: The primitive anthropologists tried to determine the multi types of mankind's nature by classification under the title of race based on geographical areas and physical apparent characteristics like color and others. Race is applied to a group of people who have kept the common physical or biological characteristics in successive generations. Or a group of natural people inherited a common physical feature, they have the same race even with different languages and customs. According to this definition what makes difference between two races is physical inherent characteristics and nothing else. In 1350 B.C., scientists found the present physical differences among human populations and classified them into three groups regarding to the color, black, white and yellow. Experts of heredity and biologists do not have a common idea about the reasons of variety in races. It means that some of them know this difference resulted from heredity and others believe in environmental effects. The people of different places in the world are so mixed and it seems unlikely to determine the exact racial location. But it is not out of ambiguity, because the most anthropologists and scientists believe that human has always exposed to immigration and racial integration. Racial integration is, not only a historical reality, but also it is more intensive than the past in this active world [9]. The relations between nations and repetitive marriages of different races during centuries and their continuous changes have caused not to remain a fixed race. Asia continent as the largest and the most populous continent and the cradle of a developed civilization has different peoples with various races and with their special physical characteristics. On the other hand, it is the origin of different races, including yellow (Mogul), Siberia, northern and Mogul,

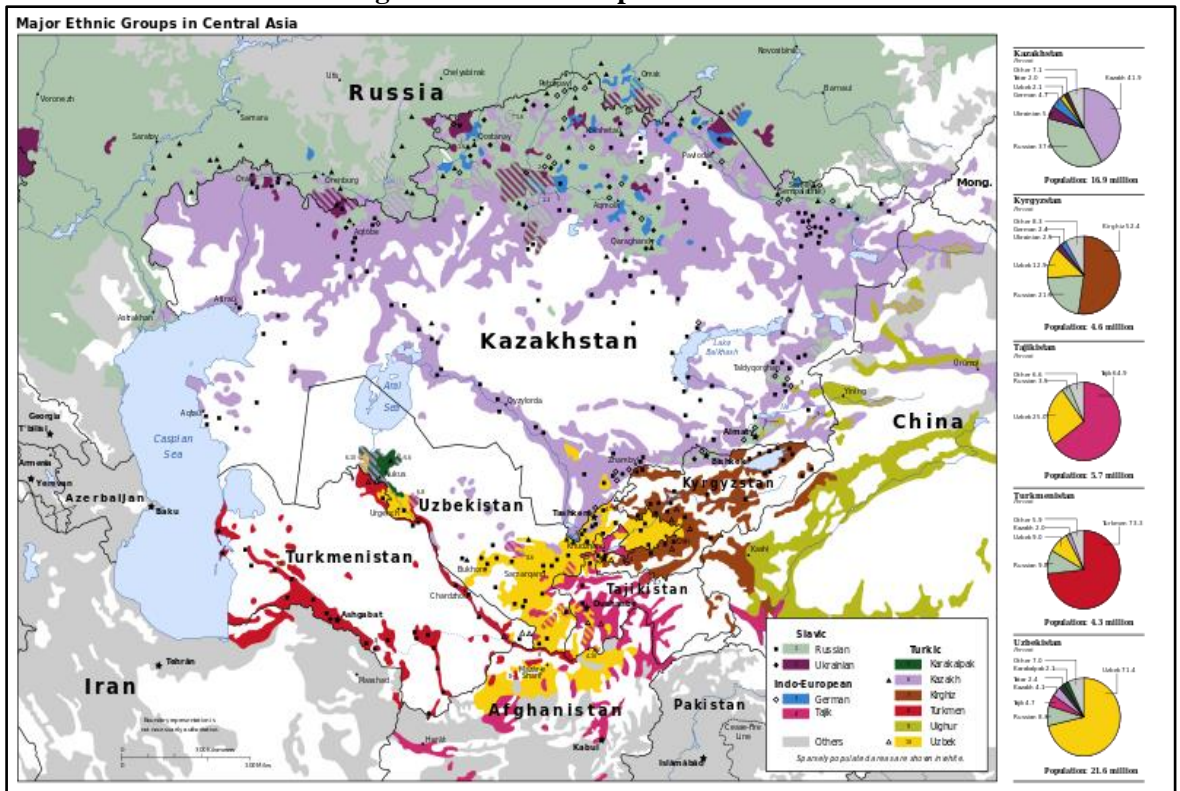
central Turkman, Indonesia, Mediterranean, Transoxania (Kyrgyz, Turkman, Tatar, Anatolian Turk). Although there have been intercourse among these ethnical groups, but all of them have their own special characteristics on the view of color, the form of skull and face [3].

Figures.1 Ethnological map of the Pamirs



Central Asia: Central Asia, in its most common definition, is deemed to consist of five former Soviet Socialist Republics. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Xinjiang of western China. In a wider view, Mongolia, Afghanistan, and northern Pakistan are included. Turkic, Indo-Iranian, and Mongolic peoples comprise its general ethnicities. The main religions of Central Asia are Islam (Turkic/Indo-Iranian peoples) and Buddhism (Mongolia). Central Asia has a long, rich history mainly based on its historic position on the famous Silk Road. It has been conquered by Mongols, Persians, Tatars, Russians, Afghans and Sarmatians and thus has a very distinct, vibrant culture. The culture is influenced by Chinese, Indian, Persian, Afghan, Arabian, Turkish, Russian, Sarmatian and Mongolian cultures [10]. The music of Central Asia is rich and varied and is appreciated worldwide. Meanwhile, Central Asian cuisine is one of the most prominent cuisines of Asia, with cuisines from Pakistan, India, China and Azerbaijan showing significant influence from the foods of Central Asia. One of the most famous Central Asian foods is the kebab. The literature of Central Asia is linked with Persian literature as historically it has been part of the Persian Empire for a lot of its history. Furthermore, being at the junction of the Silk Road it has numerous Chinese, Indian and Arabian literary works [5].

Figures 2. Ethnic map of Central Asia



East Asia: East Asia, in general terms, consists of China, Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, Japan, South Korea and North Korea, sometimes, Mongolia and Vietnam are included in the definition. The major ethnicities of East Asia are: Han, Yamato, and Korean. Other ethnic groups of East Asia include. Tibetan, Uyghur, Kazakh, Manchu and Mongol. Geographically East Asians farther north would also include groups such as the Buryats, Evenks, Yakuts, but due to the national and political dividing lines, the inclusion of East Asians north of China and Mongolia is not considered. Mainly, the language families or isolates of East Asia are. Sinitic, Tibeto-Burman, Japonic, Ainu languages, the Korean language, Mongolic, Tungusic, Turkic, Miaoyao, Taikadai and Mon-Khmer. The dominant influence historically has been China, whose area of cultural influence is generally known as the Sinosphere. Evidence of this can be seen in the cuisine, architecture and lexicons, for example, throughout the region, in modern times, however, cultural exchange has flowed more bi-directionally. Major characteristics of this region include shared Chinese derived language characteristics, as well as similar social and moral philosophies derived from Confucianism. The script of the Han Chinese has long been a unifying feature in East Asia as the vehicle for Chinese culture [2]. It was passed on first to Korea, Vietnam in the 1st century, then to Japan, where it forms a major component of the Japanese writing system. In Korea, however, Sejong the Great invented the hangul alphabet as a simpler alternative to Chinese characters (hanja), which it has largely supplanted as the main orthographic system for the Korean language. A similar phenomenon occurred in Vietnam, where the Chinese based Chữ nôm script once used to write the Vietnamese language has been gradually superseded by the Latin based Vietnamese alphabet since the area's absorption into the French colonial empire. In Japan, much of the Japanese language is written in

hiragana, katakana in addition to Chinese characters. East Asian countries, in particular China and Japan, an individual's educational level is traditionally measured by their quality of calligraphy and the number of characters within their vocabulary rather than diction, as is sometimes the case in the West. Japan, Korea and Vietnam, though not Chinese speaking regions, have had their languages influenced by Chinese to some extent. Even though their writing systems have changed over time, Chinese is still found in the historical roots of many borrowed words, especially technical terms. Apart from the unifying influence of Confucianism, Buddhism, Chinese characters, and other Chinese cultural influences, there is nevertheless much diversity between the countries of the region [4].

Ethnic groups in Northern Asia: For the most part, North Asia is considered to be made up of the Asian part of Russia solely. North Asia is geographically the northern extremity of East Asia and the physical characteristics of its native inhabitants generally resemble that of East Asians, however this is principally divided along political lines under separate national identities, particularly that of China, Mongolia and Russia. The main ethnic groups of the region speak languages of the Uralic, Turkic, Mongolic and Tungusic language families, along with East Slavs and various Paleo Siberian peoples, with most of these ethnic groups being composed of nomads or people with a nomadic history. The geographic region of Siberia was the historical land of the Turkic people, the Tatars, in the Siberia Khanate (dubious– discuss). Russia, under expansion of its territory however, took control of the region now known as Siberia, and thus today it is under Russian rule. There are roughly 40 million people in North Asia [8].

Ethnic groups of South Asia: South Asia, in general definition, consists of the countries of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The five Southern Indian states share a Dravidian culture, due to the prominence of Dravidian languages there. Sri Lanka has two main languages, Sinhalese which has Indo-Aryan roots and Tamil which has Dravidian roots. Bangladesh and the Indian province West Bengal share common Bengali heritage and culture, with Bangladesh having a prevalent Tibeto-Burman influence on its south eastern states. Pakistan is split with its two western regions of Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa sharing a greater Iranian heritage and its two eastern provinces of Sindh and Punjab sharing a more Indo-Aryan culture [10]. Nepal, the states of Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Ladakh in the state of Jammu and Kashmir and parts of the Indian states of Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand have a great cultural similarity to Tibet, Tibetan Buddhism being the dominant religion there. Finally the border states of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland and Tripura have cultural affinities with South East Asia. Bhutanese are often referred to in literature as Bhote (people of Bhutia Bhotia or Tibet). They follow Tibetan Buddhism to and it is dominant political and cultural element in modern Bhutan. Their language, Dzongkha, is the national language and is descended from Old Tibetan. Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism, religions founded in the region that is today's India, are spread throughout the subcontinent. Islam and Christianity also have significant region-specific histories. While India and Nepal have a majority of people following Hinduism, Sri Lanka and Bhutan have a majority of Buddhists. Islam is the second largest religion after Hinduism with Muslim countries like Pakistan and Bangladesh. Indo-Aryan languages are spoken in Pakistan and most of North, West and East India and Nepal. Dravidian languages are spoken in South India and Sri Lanka. Tibeto-Burman languages are spoken in the hills of Bangladesh, Nepal, North and North East India. Austroasiatic languages are spoken in certain northern and eastern areas of Bangladesh and in East and North East India [1].

Ethnic groups of Southeast Asia: Southeast Asia is often split into two parts: Mainland Southeast Asia, comprising Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Peninsular Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam and Maritime Southeast Asia, which includes Brunei, East Timor, Indonesia, East Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore. The region has been greatly influenced by the cultures and religions of India and China, as well as the religions of Islam and Christianity from Southwest Asia. Southeast Asia seems to be more influenced by India rather than China with the exception of Vietnam, which is considered part of the Sinosphere. Southeast Asia has also had a lot of Western influence due to the lasting legacy of colonialism. One example is the Philippines, which has been heavily influenced by Spain and the United States of America over the course of almost four centuries of colonisation. A common feature found around the region are stilt houses, while another is rice paddy agriculture, which originated in the region thousands of years ago [6]. Dance is also a very important feature of the culture, utilizing movements of the hands and feet perfected over thousands of years. Furthermore, the arts and literature of Southeast Asia is very distinctive as some have been influenced by Indian, Hindu, Chinese, Buddhist and Islamic literature.

Ethnic groups in West Asia: West Asia largely corresponds with the term the Middle East. West Asia consists of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Cyprus, Georgia, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. The region is the historical birthplace of Abrahamic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Today, the region is almost 93% Muslim and is dominated by Islamic politics. Israel is the sole exception, and is populated largely by Jewish immigrants from the diaspora. Culturally, the region is mainly Arab, Turkic and Persian, alongside smaller numbers of Greek, Kurdish people, Jewish people, Assyrian, Armenian and Cypriot peoples. Iraq is a unique example of both Persian and Arab culture. Many of the West Asian countries are desert, and thus many nomadic groups exist today, most notably the Bedouin. On the other hand, modern metropolises also exist on the shifting sands. Tel Aviv, Abu Dhabi, Amman, Riyadh, Doha and Muscat. The climate is mostly a desert one, although some of the coastal regions have a more temperate climate, including the mountainous Anatolian plateau (Turkey, Lebanon, Georgia and Armenia). Coastal areas of the Eastern Mediterranean, particularly Israel, Cyprus and Lebanon, have a distinct Mediterranean climate. The Persian Plateau (Iran, Iraq, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, and Turkmenistan) has a diverse terrain, it is mainly mountainous with portions of desert, steppe, and tropical forest on the coast of the Caspian Sea. West Asian cuisine is a fusion of Turkish, Jewish, Arabian, Greek, North African, and Persian cuisine. It is immensely rich and diverse. The literature is also immensely rich with Hebrew, Arabic, and Persian literature dominating. One of the most famous literary works of West Asia is 1001 Arabian Nights [7].

Conclusion: A continent as vast as Asia is bound to have great variations between its regions. There are differences in climate, landforms, and animal and plant life. But perhaps the greatest difference of all is between the many groups of people who live in Asia. Almost every racial type in the world can be found there. There is every variety of skin color, from white through yellow and brown to black, and every shade between. There is an equally great variety of physical types and facial appearances. These different types of body builds and features are found in every race or skin-color group. For thousands of years various groups have been mixing, creating ever new combinations of characteristics. Mankind has lived in Asia a very long time. Some of the oldest known fossils of prehistoric man have been found on the island of Java in Indonesia and near Peking in northern China. The world's oldest civilizations are Asian. Chinese civilization is nearly 5,000 years old, and the civilization of India is nearly that old. Much more significant than the physical differences

between Asia's peoples are the cultural differences the way they live, their habits and customs, the religions they believe in, their values, the languages they speak, the way they think. These differences, like physical differences, also cut across racial lines.

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