

Indian Cultural Contacts with Asian Countries [Ancient History Notes]

From the beginning of the Christian era, India established commercial contacts with China, Southeast Asia, West Asia and the Roman empire. It resulted in the spread of Indian culture, religion, languages, art and architecture. It is an important aspect of the history of India and the world. In this article, you can read all about the cultural contacts India had with other Asian countries for the [UPSC exam](#) history segment.

Indian Cultural Contacts with Asian Countries

It would be inappropriate to say that the Indians alone contributed to the culture of their neighbours - it was two-way traffic. For instance, Indians learnt the art of growing silk from China, acquired the craft of minting gold coins from the Greeks and the Romans, learnt the art of growing betel leaves from Indonesia. Similarly, the techniques of growing cotton spread from India to China and central Asia. However, Indians contributed more in terms of art, religion, script and language. With the decline of trade with the west, the trade with Asian countries and China grew steadily till the 12th century.

For more [notes on ancient Indian history for the IAS exam](#), click on the link.

- Central Asia was a great centre of Indian culture in the early centuries of the Christian era.
 - In Afghanistan, many statues of Buddha and monasteries have been discovered.
 - The ivory work found in Begram (Afghanistan) is similar to Indian workmanship in Kushan times. [Buddhism](#) continued to be followed in Afghanistan till the 7th century CE when it was supplanted by Islam.
 - Indian culture had also spread to Tibet and China through central Asia.
- China was influenced both by the land route passing through central Asia and the sea route through Burma (Myanmar).
 - Buddhism reached China at the beginning of the first century CE and from there it spread to Japan and Korea.
 - A number of Chinese pilgrims like Fa-Hein, Hsuan Tsang, I-Tsing came to India and hundreds of Buddhist monks visited China.
 - With the decline of the Roman empire, China had become the main focus of trade in the Indian ocean.
 - The main sea-port for foreign trade in China during this period was Canton or Kanfu (as the Arab travellers called it).
 - In Canton itself, there were three Brahmana temples in which Indian Brahmanas resided.
 - The Indian rulers - the Palas and the Sena rulers of Bengal, the Pallava and the Chola rulers of south India encouraged trade relations by sending a series of embassies to the Chinese emperors.
 - The contact with China continued till the Mongols established their empire in China (13th century).
- The Sailendra empire emerged as the important empire in southeast Asia in the 8th century and it comprised Java (which was called Suvarnadvipa or the island of gold by the ancient Indians), Sumatra, the Malay peninsula and other parts of the Southeast Asian region.
 - On account of their geographical position, they controlled the trade between China and India as well as other countries in the west.

- The Sailendra rulers were Mahayana Buddhists and maintained cordial relations with the Palas of Bengal and the Cholas of Tamil Nadu.
 - Rajaraja I - Chola king allowed the Sailendra king - Maravijayottungavarman to build a Buddhist monastery at Nagapattinam (Tamil Nadu).
 - Under the patronage of the Sailendras, the greatest monument was built at Barabodur in Java.
 - It is situated at the top of a hill and consists of nine successive terraces, crowned by a bell-shaped stupa at the centre of the topmost terrace.
 - The ruins of hundreds of temples and manuscripts in Sanskrit are found in Java.
 - In Indo-China (at present divided into Vietnam, Kampuchea and Laos), the Indians set up two powerful kingdoms in Kamboja (Cambodia) and Champa.
 - The powerful kingdom of Kamboja (modern Kampuchea) was founded in the 6th century CE.
 - Its rulers were followers of Shiva and developed Kamboja as a centre of Sanskrit learning and a number of inscriptions were composed in this language.
 - Champa is situated in the east of Kamboja.
 - Under its Hindu rulers, the Hindu culture, religion, customs were introduced in Champa.
 - Shaivism and Vaishnavism flourished and it was considered to be a great centre of education in Vedas and Dharmashastras.
 - Indian settlements in the Indian ocean continued till the 13th century. Many temples were built and the most famous was the Angkor Wat temple built by Suryavarman II in his capital city Angkor (Kambhoja). The sculptures in the temple depict the episodes from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata.
 - The cultural contacts between India and Burma (Myanmar) date back to the period of Ashoka, who sent his missionaries there to preach Buddhism.
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