

# Cities of Asia

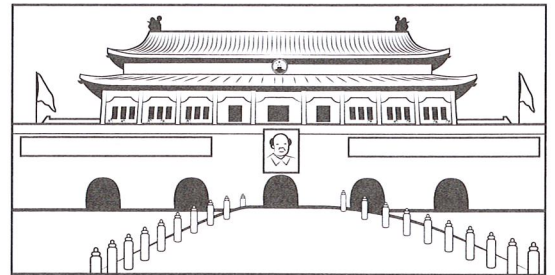
Cities are generally founded in strategic locations such as places with access to fresh water sources, or near to harbours and waterways for trade purposes, or along overland trade routes. They can also be established in areas which service large agricultural regions or as political or business centres for a region. Some cities in Asia have been continuously settled for many centuries and have evolved according to the needs of the population, while others are more newly established. Read about two of the largest, oldest and most populous cities in Asia.

**Beijing**, the capital city of the People's Republic of China since 1949, was known as Ji, a walled city from the 11th until the 7th centuries BCE. The location, on the north-east edge of the North China Plain, was relatively uninterrupted by rivers and mountains (unlike the areas further south) and meant that messages could be more rapidly be delivered by horse, which led to the region becoming a political centre. Additionally, the vast fertile plains surrounding the location have been used as farming lands for many centuries. Currently, Beijing is one of the most populated cities in the world, with over 15 million inhabitants (source: CIA World Factbook).

The city has many sites of great cultural and historical significance, such as the Forbidden City (constructed between 1406 and 1420) and the adjacent Tiananmen Gate (1415) and Tiananmen Square. Mao Zedong announced the establishment of the People's Republic of China under the leadership of the Communist Party in the square on 1 October 1949, signalling the beginning of sweeping cultural, economic and political changes.

Beijing hosts examples of architecture ranging from the traditional imperial Chinese style to modern innovative skyscrapers, apartment buildings and facilities (such as the Olympic Park). Beijing is a major transport hub connecting to the rest of the country and the world, and also has major transport infrastructure for its millions of residents. Bicycles and taxis are a popular mode of transport in the city, as are its public transportation options. Due to the millions of residents, air pollution from vehicles and factories is a huge problem for the city, particularly at certain times of the year.

The city has been a major economic, political, cultural, educational and business centre in China for centuries and it continues to grow and develop as rapidly as China's economy. The people of Beijing experience relatively high standards of living—with access to electricity, running water, education and health-care—compared to people in other, poorer parts of China. This is reflected in the life expectancy of the city's residents which is considerably higher than those living in poorer rural areas, and in the rates of infant and mother mortality in childbirth which also differ considerably between cities and rural areas.



**Mumbai** is the most populated city in India, with over 13 million inhabitants. Interestingly, the city of Mumbai was built on reclaimed lands. It began as a fishing village around the 2nd century BCE and was surrendered to the Portuguese, who were interested in setting up a trading post there, after a treaty in 1534. The seven islands came under British rule in 1661 after the marriage of an English king to a Portuguese princess. Soon after, the islands were leased to the British East India Company who were interested in the city's strategic position between Asia and Europe as a world trading port, and its deep natural harbour.

Between 1782 and 1838, an ambitious civil engineering project to reclaim the land between the seven islands was completed, which led to further growth and expansion of the city. The textile trade and the operations of the port brought money, workers and trade to Mumbai for many years.

Today, Mumbai (renamed from Bombay in 1995) is the most prosperous city in India. It is the home of the lucrative Indian film industry known as Bollywood and is the country's primary financial centre. There are, however, very wide divides between the people of Mumbai in terms of their financial position. Over half of the city's residents reside in slums where they live in cramped conditions in temporary homes constructed from whatever materials they can find. These slums lack access to clean running water and sanitation systems (such as toilets and rubbish collection services), which often leads to disease and ill-health.