

What You Will Learn...

Main Ideas

1. Throughout history, many different groups have conquered Central Asia.
2. Many different ethnic groups and their traditions influence culture in Central Asia.

The Big Idea

The countries of Central Asia share similar histories and traditions, but particular ethnic groups give each country a unique culture.

Key Terms and Places

Samarqand, p. 248

nomads, p. 250

yurt, p. 250

TAKING NOTES

As you read, use a chart like the one here to organize your notes on the history and culture of Central Asia. Be sure to pay attention to the different peoples that influenced the region.

History	Culture

History and Culture

If YOU lived there...

Your family has always farmed a small plot of land. Most days you go to school and work in the fields. One day you get news that invaders have taken over your country. They don't look like you and they speak a different language, but now they are in charge.

How do you think your life will change under the new rulers?

BUILDING BACKGROUND You may have noticed that the names of the countries in this region all end with *stan*. In the language of the region, *stan* means "land of." So, for example, Kazakhstan means "land of the Kazakhs." However, throughout history many different groups have ruled these lands.

History

Central Asia has been somewhat of a crossroads for traders and invaders for hundreds of years. As these different peoples have passed through Central Asia, they have each left their own unique and lasting influences on the region.

Trade

At one time, the best trade route between Europe and India ran through Afghanistan. The best route between Europe and China ran through the rest of Central Asia. Beginning in about 100 BC, merchants traveled along the China route to trade European gold and wool for Chinese spices and silk. As a result, this route came to be called the Silk Road. Cities along the road, such as **Samarqand** and Bukhara, grew rich from the trade.

By 1500 the situation in Central Asia had changed, however. When Europeans discovered they could sail to East Asia through the Indian Ocean, trade through Central Asia declined. The region became more isolated and poor.

Invasions

Because of its location on the Silk Road, many groups of people were interested in Central Asia. Group after group swarmed into the region. Among the first people to establish a lasting influence in the region were Turkic-speaking nomads who came from northern Asia in AD 500.

In the 700s Arab armies took over much of the region. They brought a new religion—Islam—to Central Asia. Many of the beautiful mosques in Central Asian cities date from the time of the Arabs.

Arabs, followed by other invaders, ruled Central Asia until the 1200s. Then, Mongol armies conquered Central Asia, destroying many cities with their violent attacks. Eventually, their empire crumbled. With the fall of the Mongols, various tribes of peoples, such as the Uzbeks, Kazakhs, and Turkmens moved into parts of the region.

Russian and Soviet Rule

In the mid-1800s the Russians became the next major group to conquer Central Asia. Although the Russians built railroads and expanded cotton and oil production, people began to resent their rule.

After the Russian Revolution in 1917, the new Soviet government wanted to weaken resistance to its rule. The new Soviet leaders did this by dividing the land into republics. The Soviets encouraged ethnic Russians to move to these areas and made other people settle on government-owned farms. The Soviets also built huge irrigation projects to improve cotton production.

The Soviet Union collapsed in 1991. As the Soviet government and economy fell apart, it could no longer control its huge territory. The Central Asian republics finally became independent countries.

READING CHECK **Generalizing** What groups of people influenced Central Asia?

Influences on Central Asia

The Arabs, Mongols, and Soviets all had a major influence on Central Asia.

Arab Influence

- The Arabs ruled Central Asia in the 700s and 800s.
- They introduced Islam and built beautiful mosques.
- They influenced styles of art and architecture in the region.



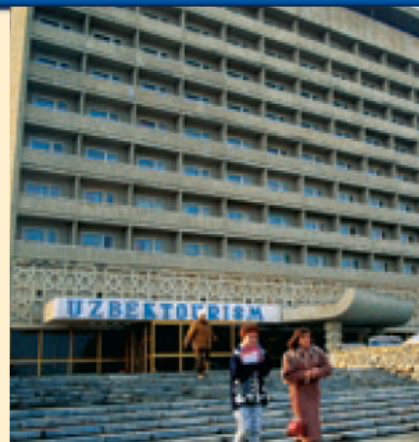
Mongol Influence

- The Mongols ruled from 1220 to the mid-1300s.
- They destroyed cities and irrigation systems.
- Eventually, they supported literature and the arts at Samarkand.



Soviet Influence

- The Soviet Union controlled Central Asia from 1917 to 1991.
- The Soviets separated ethnic groups and banned religious practices.
- They began growing cotton and constructed many useful but stark buildings.



Culture

The people who came through Central Asia influenced culture in the region. They brought new languages, religions, and ways of life that mixed with traditional ways of life in Central Asia.

Traditional Lives

For centuries, Central Asians have made a living by raising horses, cattle, sheep, and goats. Many herders live as **nomads**, people who move often from place to place. The nomads move their herds from

mountain pastures in the summer to lowland pastures in the winter. Today most people in Central Asia live in more permanent settlements, but many others still live as nomads. The nomadic lifestyle is especially common in Kyrgyzstan.

Unique homes, called yurts, make moving with the herds possible. A **yurt** is a movable round house made of wool felt mats hung over a wood frame. Today the yurt is a symbol of the region's nomadic heritage. Even people who live in cities may put up yurts for special events such as weddings and funerals.

Close-up

Inside a Yurt

Historically, the nomadic life required that all possessions be portable—even houses. Nomads moved their yurts with them from place to place.



A hole at the top allows smoke from a fire to escape.

Nomads roll up part of the felt mat to create a door.

Traditional carpets provide decoration and warmth and are a yurt's main furniture.

ANALYSIS
SKILL

ANALYZING VISUALS

Why would a yurt be easier to move than another type of house?



Interactive Map

Languages of Central Asia



Geography Skills

Regions People in Central Asia speak many different languages.

1. **Use the Map** What language is spoken in the largest area?
2. **Compare** How do language regions compare to political boundaries?

go.hrw.com

KEYWORD: SK7 CH10



People, Languages, and Religion

Most people in Central Asia today belong to one of several ethnic groups that are part of a larger ethnic group called Turkic. Some of these ethnic groups are Kazakh (kuh-ZAHK), Kyrgyz (KIR-giz), Turkmen, and Uzbek (OOZ-bek). Another group, ethnic Russians, came to Central Asia when Russia conquered the region. They still live in every Central Asian country.

Each ethnic group speaks its own language. Look at the map above to see where a particular language is the primary language. In most countries in the region, more than one language is spoken.

When the Russians conquered Central Asia, they **established** their own language as the official language for business and government. It is still an official language

in some Central Asian countries. The Russians also introduced the Cyrillic alphabet, the alphabet used to write the Russian language. Most countries in Central Asia now use the Latin alphabet, however, which is the one used to write English. Afghanistan also has its own alphabet. It is used for writing Pashto, one of that country's official languages.

Just as people in the region are of many ethnic groups and speak different languages, they also practice different religions. Traders and conquerors brought their religious beliefs and practices to the region. Islam, brought by the Arabs, is the main religion in Central Asia. Some people there also practice Christianity. Most of the region's Christians belong to the Russian Orthodox Church.

FOCUS ON READING

What context clues give a restatement of *Cyrillic alphabet*?

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

establish to set up or create

Ethnic Groups of Central Asia

Traditional clothing, such as the hats men wear, distinguishes members of different ethnic groups in Central Asia.

ANALYZING VISUALS
Why do you think men wear different hats?

Turkmen



Kyrgyz



Uzbek



During the Soviet era, the government closed or destroyed more than 35,000 religious buildings, such as mosques, churches, and Islamic schools. However, since the end of the Soviet Union in 1991, many religious buildings have reopened. They are in use once again and are also beautiful symbols of the region's past.

READING CHECK Summarizing How did Russian and Soviet rule influence culture in Central Asia?

SUMMARY AND PREVIEW Many different groups of people have influenced the countries of Central Asia over the years. As a result, the region has a mixture of languages and religions. In the next section you will learn about the governments and economies of the countries of Central Asia today. You will also study some of the challenges these countries face.

Section 2 Assessment

go.hrw.com

Online Quiz

KEYWORD: SK7 HP10

Reviewing Ideas, Terms, and Places

- Identify** What people brought Islam to Central Asia?
 - Analyze** What impact did the Silk Road have on Central Asia?
 - Elaborate** How might Central Asia's history have been different without the influence of the Silk Road?
- Define** What is a **yurt**?
 - Analyze** What are some of the benefits of nomadic life, and what are some of the challenges of this lifestyle?
 - Elaborate** How might the mix of ethnic groups, languages, and religions in Central Asian countries affect life there today?

Critical Thinking

- Sequencing** Review your notes on the history of Central Asia. Then organize your information using a time line like the one below. You may add more dates if you need to.



FOCUS ON VIEWING

- Taking Notes on History and Culture** What information about the history and culture of the region might encourage your listeners to visit Central Asia? What sites might they be interested in visiting? Jot down a few notes.