

YOUTH CULTURE IN *Asia*

WEEK ONE

As you read through Youth Culture in Asia, try to imagine what it would be like to live in these other lands. This Newspapers In Education series is in partnership with the Jackson School of International Studies and runs through March 20. (Due to school vacations, this series will not run February 20.)

Photo courtesy of The University of Washington.



Photo: Children in Bukhara, Uzbekistan celebrating the spring harvest festival, Navruz.

Childhood and Youth Culture Overview

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Young people growing up today have different life choices and opportunities than their parents — and sometimes even their older siblings. Communication technologies such as the Internet, cell phones, instant messaging, global television, computers and video bring information to us so quickly that we learn of tsunamis in Asia, fighting in Iraq, nuclear missile testing in North Korea, or wildfires in California on a real-time basis. The availability and presence of information technology makes connections possible among individuals that only 25 years ago would have been hard to achieve without visiting the country or mailing hand written letters which might have taken weeks to arrive. Events happening overseas can seem very close to us, particularly if we have family or friends living or studying there — at other times these events can seem quite foreign and far removed from our day-to-day experiences of washing the car, going to school, listening to iPods, playing soccer or hanging out with friends.

Ever wonder what it would be like to be a child or teenager growing up in India? Uzbekistan? Java? Japan? What do your peers in other parts of the world do for fun? Play video games, rollerblade, take drivers ed, wander through malls or steppes? Are the lives of children and teenagers in other parts of the world the same as yours or different? In this multi-part series, you'll have a chance to explore their worlds through stories, articles and activities that highlight the lives of other young adults — whether it's young Raju sweeping cigarette butts from dirty trains, Timur envying his cousin in Tashkent, a young girl cramming for Japanese school exams or Javanese teens playing pranks on each others' birthdays.

In many countries youth remain invisible — excluded from school or denied essential services due to poverty, disease, weak governments and armed conflict. Even within a particular country, the experiences of young people may be very different

based on differences of caste, gender, race, disability or ethnicity. Sometimes children become invisible because they are orphaned or their parents are unable to take care of them; in other cases, the government may not provide protection or support to them. Then, they may fall victim to trafficking, early marriage (especially girls), combat or forced labor. When children and youth assume adult roles at the ages of six, 10, or 15, their options in life are greatly diminished. Sometimes governmental decisions as simple as eliminating school fees (so that more kids can attend school), establishing a birth registry so children have legal identities, providing safe drinking water and offering routine immunizations can have amazing effects on children's health and well-being.

As you read through these articles, consider the impact of global trends such as urbanization and globalization on young people. Some countries with the greatest numbers of youth surviving on less than \$1.00 (U.S. currency) a day are found in Asia: India (67.7 million); the People's Republic of China (33.3 million); Bangladesh (9.9 million); Indonesia (3.1 million) and Viet Nam (2.9 million). In eight years, young people in the workforce may reach 550 million of which 55 percent will be in Asia and the Pacific. Globalization and the development of cross-border economies have encouraged movement from rural areas to urban ones as individuals forego agriculture and flock to cities for employment in industry. The growth of cities puts pressure on mass transit, housing, the environment and sanitation.

In 1959, The United Nations General Assembly issued the *Declaration of the Rights of the Child* (Resolution 1386 (XIV)) which outlined the rights of children and the obligations of parents, governments and others to secure those rights on behalf of children. You might consider what values the students profiled here hold dear and what rights they have as individuals. For example, do they have the right to go to school? Marry whom they please? Travel alone? As you read through these stories, try to envision yourself in these other lands and try to imagine these students and peers coming here to your land, your city, your country. What would they find strange, funny, enlightening, amusing, weird or boring? Is there a shared youth culture that crosses geographical boundaries? Do you think your home, work and school seems like theirs — or different? What would you change if you could?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1) Which countries in Asia have the greatest number of youths living on less than \$1.00 (U.S.) per day?
- 2) What are some of the reasons children end up having to work, get married or fight in combat at a young age?
- 3) What are some changes in communications technology over the past 25 years which have affected the lives of children?

MORE TO EXPLORE

In The Seattle Times, try to find as many articles as you can that are written for, by or about people under 18. How many can you find? Do you think this number is high or low — should there be more articles for young people in the newspaper? Discuss the reasons for or against this with your classmates.

NEXT WEEK: CHILDREN'S WORK IN INDIA

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