

Our Pen Pal in Asia

Blacks in Asia: The Agtas

Hello, from Japan!

I want to say I am having a great time sharing with you information about Japan. Japan is a really interesting country. I hope some day you can come here and visit me. I also want you to know Japanese young people really like hip hop music and fashion. Here in Japan young people listen to music by Beyonce, Rihanna and many others. Japanese children are now taking hip hop dance lessons at their schools. Hip hop dance is an official school subject in Japanese schools. Although I am now in Japan, I have also lived in China, Korea and Taiwan. Did you know black people have been living in Asia for thousands of years? Did you know the first people to live in Asia were black? In this newsletter we will learn about some of our black brothers and sisters who have been living in Asia for centuries.



Human Migrations Out of Africa

Out of Africa

Scientists have been studying the early people who lived in Africa for many years. After much hard and difficult research they have learned black people were the first people to walk on planet earth. This means there was actually a time in earth's history when black people were the only people living on the earth.

These early peoples in Africa later migrated across the world. The map you see above shows the migration routes these black peoples took when they journeyed out of Africa. Africans were the first people to live in China, India, and many other areas in Asia.



The Philippines on a map of Asia.

Blacks in the Philippines

The Philippines is a country located in Southeast Asia. The Philippines has a population size of about 100 million people. Manila is the capital city. People who live in this country are called Filipinos. The language they speak is called Tagalog. Many Filipinos can speak both English and Tagalog.

The first people to live in this country were black. For thousands of years black-skinned

people were the only human beings living in the Philippines. They came to the country from Africa.

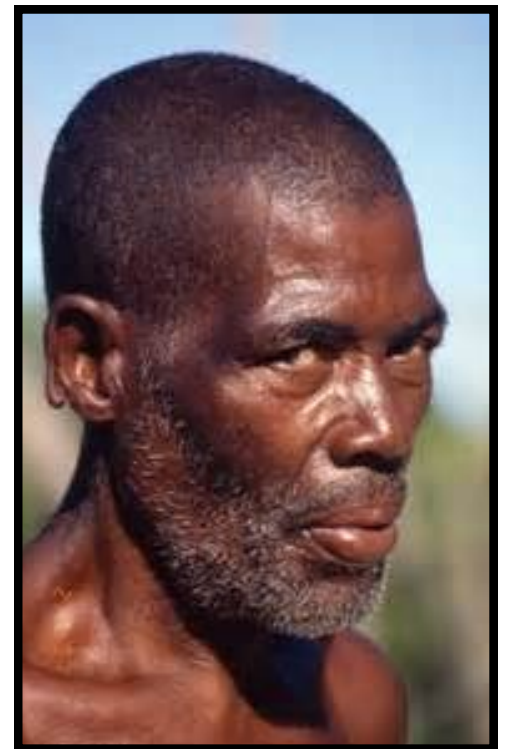
Manila, capital city in the Philippines



Today these black peoples can still be seen in the Philippines. There are many names for them. For example, *Negritos*, *Sakai* and *Semang*. These are negative terms for the Blacks in the country. The proper term for them is *Agta* which means "the People".



An Agta boy in the Philippines



An Agta man in the Philippines

Pictures of the Agta People



History of the Agta People in the Philippines

The Agtas were the first human beings to occupy the Philippines. Many scientists say they arrived in the country about 30,000 years ago. There are about 20,000 of them spread throughout the country. There are many different names for the Agtas. They are some times called *Aeta*, *Ati*, and *Igta*. When the Spaniards colonized the Philippines they referred to them as "Negritos". This name was due to the Agtas' black skin, broad noses and curly to wooly hair. There is an old Agta song which goes "Negritos, we indeed may be belonging to the black race, but, as natives of this place, like precious diamond are we".



Similar to the American Indians in the U.S., the Agta people have traditionally lived close to the land. For thousands of years they have studied the animals and vegetation in their environment and learned to live in harmony with nature. They have sustained themselves by hunting, fishing and gathering plant life. Recently they have started planting crops and trading with other people in the Philippines. Due to their practice of living close to nature, the Agtas are knowledgeable of about a hundred different medicinal herbs growing in the forest.

Its fun to learn about our relatives living in Asia. The Agtas are just one example of many black groups living in the Far East. The Black community is indeed an international global community!