

East Asia Unit (China, Japan, Korea)

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

East Asia is today an area of dramatic transformations, yet ancient philosophy and forms of government still influence economics, politics, the environment, and human well-being. For most of East Asian history, the rich cultural areas of eastern China were the source of wealth, technology, and culture. Although the surrounding areas were heavily influenced by China, many countries in the region developed distinct cultures and have taken very different economic, political, and social paths. Cultural diversity is a major issue in East Asia, despite the fact that most countries each have one dominant ethnic group.

The physical geography of East Asia is diverse, but harsh and often mountainous; few areas are naturally suitable for agriculture and uses of the land have been inventive. Both population and population densities are high; China alone has more than one-fifth of the world's population, and although couples are now limited by law to one child, the population will continue to grow because so many people are now entering their reproductive years. The size and growth of the population in this region is a concern, as it is difficult to provide an acceptable standard of living for the population. Gigantic strides in improving quality of life for the vast majority of East Asians are evident, but many of these improvements are coming at a cost to the environment.

There are huge economic opportunities in this region. Some countries have had state-aided market economies since World War II; others are moving away from centrally planned economies. However, the countries in transition face a number of struggles as they attempt to reduce regional variations in prosperity, pursue more market-oriented economies, maintain food stability, and create opportunities for rural economies.

East Asian countries are now beginning to address some of the problems that have been left unresolved for decades. Population control, gender inequality, and the lack of political participation are important issues in the future of this region.

I. THE GEOGRAPHIC SETTING

A. Physical Patterns

Landforms

- Of the few flat surfaces in this region, many are either too dry or cold to be naturally useful agriculturally; thus, people have been particularly inventive in creating space for agriculture.
- The landforms of East Asia form four steps, descending from west to east:
 1. The Plateau of Tibet
 2. A broad expanse of basins, plateaus, and low mountain ranges that include upper portions of the Huang He and Chang Jiang
 3. Broad coastal plains and the deltas of China's great rivers, with intervening low mountains and hills
 4. The continental shelf and numerous islands

Climate

- East Asia has two contrasting climate zones.

The Dry Interior

- The western zone in the interior of the continental landmass is an extreme example of a continental climate.
- The dry interior is characterized by grasslands, deserts, scattered forests, and large, uninhabited areas.

The Monsoon East

- The winter monsoon winds bring dry, frigid, arctic air that produces a long, bitter winter. The summer monsoon winds bring warm tropical air from the Pacific Ocean that picks up moisture, which is deposited as rain.
- Forests in this area vary from coniferous to tropical rain forests; once plentiful, much forestland has been lost to agriculture; development threatens remaining natural areas.

B. Human Patterns over Time

- East Asia is a region of ancient civilizations and until the twentieth century, China was the main source of wealth, culture, and technology for the region. Nonetheless, relatively isolated eastern areas each developed a distinctive culture.

The Beginnings of Chinese Civilization

- A feudal system of small kingdoms developed nearly 4000 years ago; after prolonged wars between 400 and 221 B.C.E., the Qin dynasty emerged as the dominant power and laid the foundations for great Chinese empires to come.
- The Qin dynasty broke the feudal system; agricultural output increased because people worked harder to farm land they now owned. The salaried bureaucrats who replaced their former masters were more responsible in building and maintaining public works.

Confucianism

- Beginning 2500 years ago, Confucianism, which altered social, economic, and political geography, taught that the best organizational model was a hierarchy modeled after the patriarchal family. The emperor was seen as the source of all order and civilization.
- Women were restricted to domestic spaces and roles, and placed under the authority of her parents and, when married, her husband.
- With its emphasis on obedience, Confucianism served the interests of the political elite, which curtailed the power of the merchant class through high taxes. The result was little incentive for agricultural improvements, industrialization, or entrepreneurialism.

China's Preeminence

- By the tenth century, farming had improved, metallurgy flourished, and innovation advanced.
- However, rulers favored elite interests at the expense of ingenuity and change, thus leaving China ill-prepared to the challenge posed by Europe at the dawn of the seventeenth century.

European Imperialism in East Asia

- In the mid-1500s, the Spanish and Portuguese began trading with the region. European – particularly British – influence increased as foreign merchants gained access to the huge Chinese market.
- In the mid-1800s, Qing dynasty leaders tried to stem the European incursion by fighting the Opium Wars with Britain. China was defeated and the Qing empire collapsed.

China's Turbulent Twentieth Century

- The Nationalist party (Kuomintang or KMT), originally socialist in its program, increasingly served the interests of the urban upper and middle class after Chiang Kai-shek assumed the leadership in 1925. The rival Chinese Communist Party (CCP), led by Mao Zedong, appealed to rural laborers.
- Japan took advantage of the internal struggle in China and invaded in 1937. The KMT and CCP tried to unite against the common enemy, but when Japan surrendered to the Allied forces at the end of World War II, the war between the two parties resumed.
- The KMT was pushed out of mainland China by the CCP and many KMT supporters fled to Taiwan, where they formed a government-in-exile. The CCP assumed control over the economy and brutally occupied Tibet (Xizang). Mao became a sort of emperor with unquestioned authority.
- The Communist revolution led to the reallocation of land and wealth, public

works projects, and new opportunities for women. However, there were enormous human and environmental costs as a result of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution.

- After Mao's death, Deng Xiaoping initiated a series of reforms in the early 1980s to liberalize China's economy while maintaining Communist Party control.

Japan Becomes a World Leader

- By 300 C.E., Japan was divided into military clans that established rule over most of what is now Japan.
- Ideas and material culture were imported from China and the Korean Peninsula until about 800 C.E., when Japan turned inward, developing a feudal system with a rigid class structure ruled by shoguns; foreigners were expelled.
- Perry's expedition (1853) opened Japan to international trade and political relations. Japan realized that two centuries of isolation would have to end. The Meiji reformers set Japan on a course of modernization and industrial development.
- Japan colonized Korea, Taiwan, and Manchuria, but lost these foreign territories after its defeat in World War II.
- Japan rebuilt rapidly after World War II and eventually became a giant in the global economy.

Conflict and Transfers of Power in East Asia

The Korean Peninsula

- Korea was unified until 1945; to prevent the country from complete Soviet control, the United States proposed dividing the country at the 38th parallel.
- In 1950, North Korea (Soviet-backed) attacked South Korea (U.S.-backed). The ensuing conflict resulted in much loss of life and devastated infrastructure.
- After a truce in 1953, North Korea closed itself off from the rest of the world, while South Korea evolved into a prosperous market economy.

Taiwan

- Taiwan was long a poor agricultural island. In 1895, Japan annexed it and exploited its resources.
- Taiwan has since become a modern, densely populated, and highly industrialized society.
- Today, however, its status is ambiguous; the United Nations does not recognize it, yet it operates as an independent country.

Mongolia

- Mongolia was controlled by China from 1691 until the early twentieth century.
- Mongolia followed a Communist system until the breakup of the Soviet Union; it has since attempted to develop a free-market economy.

C. Population Patterns

- Because of rugged, dry, or cold regions, 90 percent of the region's population is clustered on only one-sixth of the land. People extract a very high level of agricultural production – with considerable environmental costs – from this land.

Declining Population Growth

- Most couples in China are limited by government policy to one child. As a result, the birth rate is lower than the world average; however, the population will continue to grow because so many people are just entering their reproductive years.
- With relatively fewer births, the average age of the population will rise fairly quickly. This will cause a problem in China that Japan is already facing – a very large elderly population.

HIV-AIDS in East Asia

- East Asia is experiencing a potentially explosive HIV-AIDS epidemic.

II. CURRENT GEOGRAPHIC ISSUES

A. Political and Economic Issues

- After World War II, the Communist regimes of China, Mongolia, and North Korea relied on central planning; Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea established state-aided market economies.
- More recently, China and Mongolia have adopted reforms that allow market forces; however, despite rapid economic growth, this transition has caused hardships for many.

The Japanese Model

- The economies of Japan, Korea, and Taiwan grew tremendously in the twentieth century. Credit for this economic success belongs mostly to Japan, which began to develop the model of a state-aided market economy.

Japan's Economic Rise

- Japan is renowned for its successful export industries. It steadily built its economy until World War II, when most major cities were bombed and destroyed.
- However, through a strong state bureaucracy, the opening of markets, and innovation in manufacturing, Japan rebuilt itself into a wealthy and influential nation.
- The *kaizen* system has influenced economic geography globally.

Recession and Subsequent Low Economic Performance

- Japan's economic problems since the 1990s are linked to the financial crisis in Southeast Asia, corruption, overexpansion of production, and the fact that

workers have been overly protected and not encouraged to perform at their full potential.

- A consequence of Japan's relatively low wages is that consumers cannot buy many of the goods they produce. Paying workers more could fuel overall economic growth.

Economic Challenges

- Experts debate whether Japan can continue to be successful.
- Workers are agitating for changes, more women are entering the workforce, the population is aging, and China could pose a competitive threat.

The Communist Command Economy

- After World War II, China, Mongolia, and North Korea abolished private property and the government took control of the economy.
- These sweeping changes proved less successful than was hoped.

The Commune System

- In China, the priority was to improve both agricultural and industrial production.
- Land was taken from landlords and given to millions of landless farmers.
- The resulting tiny plots proved inefficient, and farmers were assigned to cooperatives that would share labor and pool resources. Full-scale communes took over all aspects of life.

Focus on Heavy Industry

- The focus of the Communist leaderships was on heavy industry, not consumer goods. Funds for industrial development were diverted from the already inefficient agricultural sector.

Regional Disparity in China

- The policy of regional self-sufficiency encouraged each region to develop independently, building agricultural and industrial sectors of equal strength to even out the distribution of income.
- This policy wasted time and resources because funds were used to establish industries in nearly every province, regardless of practicality.

Globalization and Market Reforms in China

- In the 1980s, China pursued a more efficient and market-oriented economy. This decentralized decision making, allowed farmers and small businesses to make profits, encouraged regional specialization, and allowed foreign investment and the sale of foreign products in China.
- China has become a participant in the global economy as a significant producer of manufactured goods, and it represents a market of more than 1 billion customers.

Regional Specialization

- Managers of state-owned enterprises were given the right and responsibility to improve the efficiency of their operations.

- Managers and entrepreneurs were able to take advantage of the different resources and opportunities in different areas of the country.

Trends in Agriculture

- Market reforms brought new opportunities, but these reforms are leading to shortages of land and water that could compromise food security.
- Pressures on food production systems are increasing because agriculture is possible only on a portion of China's land.

A Market Focus for Rural Enterprises

- Entrepreneurial rural enterprises have become the mainstay of many rural economies. They now constitute one-quarter of the economy.
- Their growth has been accompanied by environmental pollution and corruption.

The Persistence of Spatial Disparities

- The Chinese economy has become more productive overall; however, reform has proceeded slowly.
- Long-standing disparities in wealth between China's regions are increasing, resulting in widespread social unrest.

International Trade and Special Economic Zones

- Special economic zones (SEZs) and economic and technology development zones (ETDZs) are central to the new market reforms in China.
- SEZs and ETDZs function as free-trade zones and have brought international investment and industry.
- SEZs and ETDZs are major growth poles, as many coastal cities have grown into some of the largest urban areas in the country.

Shifts in China's Employment Scene

- Millions of young migrants have been recruited to leave rural villages to work in SEZs. Many come intending to send money back home and eventually return home to improve their communities. However, these workers are often paid less and work longer hours than the recruiters promised.
- These circumstances are beginning to change, however, as workers are in short supply. Factory owners are now paying more and improving working conditions, making China less competitive in the world market.

China in the Global Economy

- Dramatic economic changes allowed China to be admitted to the World Trade Organization (WTO), which seeks to remove barriers to global trade.
- The inclusion of China in the WTO is highly controversial. China has brutally suppressed separatist movements, committed human rights abuses, and much of its growth is based on environmentally destructive activities and abuses of workers.
- China is now investing in, trading with, and giving development aid to other developing countries in Southeast Asia, Africa, South Asia, and Latin America.

B. Sociocultural Issues

Population Policies and the East Asian Family

- By 2000, women in Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea were bearing fewer than 2 children on average.
- In the 1970s, in China especially, leaders realized that the rapidly rising population was sapping its ability to progress.

The One-Child-per-Family Policy in China

- The one-child-per-family policy – never popular because it is unevenly enforced – created a major challenge in a society that placed great value on the extended family.
- The prospect of having only one child caused great despair. Chinese policy makers have sought to eliminate the traditional preference for males by empowering women economically and socially.
- Population control has been effective; the one-child family is now in the majority. However, the population is now aging and especially dependent on younger generations

Missing Females in Cultural Context

- The number of male children significantly exceeds the number of female children. Births of girls may have gone unreported, girl babies may have died in infancy because of neglect or infanticide, or female fetuses have been aborted.
- There is now a shortage of women of marriageable age in the region.
- In some countries, women are receiving more secondary education than men; educated young women are being increasingly recruited for management positions.

Family and Work in Industrialized East Asia

- In urbanized areas, the wife still performs most domestic duties and looks after her husband and children.
- Most women do not desire a job with full responsibilities because jobs are particularly demanding and the “culture of work” often comes at the expense of the family.
- The East Asian urban family structure is now being publicly challenged, even by urban men. They are the ones who are most regimented and deprived of personal time and have the power to change the system.

Indigenous Minorities

- Most countries have one dominant ethnic group, but there is cultural diversity in the region as a whole.
- The term Han, referring to 93 percent of the Chinese population, connotes a pride in Chinese culture and a sense of superiority over ethnic minorities and outsiders.
- Theoretically, the largest minority groups in China have been granted regional autonomy and can manage their own affairs; however, the Han-dominated

Communist party has not allowed self-government.

Turkic-Speaking Peoples

- Many of these minorities, such as the Uygurs and Kazakhs, remain nomadic.
- The Beijing government has sent hundreds of thousands of Han settlers to dilute the power of minorities and rid them of “unacceptable” cultural practices and distinctive identities.
- Although assimilation may be the long-term outcome, for now there has been a rebirth of Islamic culture among these people.

The Hui

- The Hui have a long tradition of commercial activity and are particularly successful in China’s new free-market economy.
- Descendants of ancient Muslim traders, they are using their money to revive religious instruction and to fund their mosques.

The Tibetans

- Tibetans are an impoverished ethnic minority in a territory that was invaded by the Chinese government.
- The Dalai Lama and thousands of his followers were forced into exile in India.
- Hundreds of thousands of Han were resettled in Tibet, where they control the economy and major cities, exploit resources, and force native Tibetans to adopt Chinese ways.

Indigenous Groups in Southern China

- More than 20 groups of ancient native peoples live in remote areas of the mountains.
- Women are treated more equally among the ancient native peoples in China’s far southwest than in Han culture areas.

Aboriginal Peoples in Taiwan

- Although it is 95 percent Han, Taiwan is home to 60 minority groups.
- Mountain dwellers have resisted assimilation better than plains dwellers; both groups are now protected and may live in mountain reserves if they choose.

The Ainu in Japan

- A strong sense of cultural solidarity and tendency to suppress differences results in considerable discrimination against minorities.
- The Ainu are being displaced by forestry and other development activities.
- Numbers of full-blooded Ainu are small because, despite prejudice, many have been steadily assimilated into the mainstream population.

C. Environmental Issues

- East Asia has a number of environmental concerns resulting from high population density, rapid economic development, poor resource management, and ineffective planning.

Air Pollution in China

- Consumption of fossil fuels is increasing with industrialization. Coal burning is the primary cause of China's poor air quality.
- Although it has only one-tenth the number of vehicles of Los Angeles, pollution in Beijing equals that of Los Angeles. The government, however, is increasingly "green" in its energy policies.

Water in China: Too Much, Too Little, and Polluted

Flooding

- Summer monsoons can cause catastrophic floods, requiring elaborate flood control systems; however, flood control failed repeatedly in the late 1990s.
- The Three Gorges Dam is designed to improve navigation, control flooding, and generate electricity; however, it has serious flaws.
- Flooding is a natural phenomenon, but it is exacerbated by human activities.

Drought

- Droughts occur every year in China. They often cause more suffering and damage than other natural hazards; they are made worse by human activities.
- As China's population, urbanization, and water consumption grow, demand for water will increase. China needs to find new sources of water or find ways to conserve.

Water Pollution

- A third of China's population does not have safe drinking water; only a quarter has access to sanitation.
- In the east, salt water is intruding into aquifers because coastal cities have withdrawn so much water from them.

Efforts to Improve Environmental Health

- A Green movement, fueled by higher literacy rates and a freer press, is creating an informed public that is pressing for environmental cleanup. A system of permits, incentives, and penalties is being imposed on industry and farming.

Environmental Problems Elsewhere in East Asia

- All countries in the region are experiencing water and air pollution associated with modern agriculture, industrialization, and urbanization.
- North Korea has suffered from flooding as a result of deforestation. Crop failures related to environmental mismanagement have caused thousands of deaths.
- Air pollution is a problem in cities in Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea. High population densities and rising lifestyle expectations make it difficult to improve environmental quality.
- Taiwan's extreme population density and high rate of industrialization have exacerbated pollution and related environmental problems.
- The eastern coastal zone is subjected to typhoons.
- Japan is located along the Pacific Ring of Fire, so it is vulnerable to volcanoes,

earthquakes, and tsunamis.

D. Measures of Human Well-Being

- More than most other regions, human well-being here varies widely from country to country.
- This disparity is somewhat misleading; Communist governments in North Korea, Mongolia, and China have attempted to provide basic necessities for their citizens.
- Assessing progress toward gender equality is difficult because figures are incomplete.
- China has made gigantic strides since the 1970s in reducing infant mortality and increasing life expectancy.