

## East Asia Study Units - Unit One

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### Module One: Why Study East Asia?

#### LESSON ONE: EAST ASIA & THE WORLD

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**GRADE LEVELS:** 9-12

**TIME REQUIRED:** Two class periods with discussion.

#### GOALS:

1. Highlight the importance of relations between the United States and East Asia.
2. Learn how to read and create graphs.

#### MATERIALS/PREPERATION:

1. Graph paper or computers for students to use in designing graphs.

#### INTRODUCTION:

East Asia is an extremely important region of the world for Americans to become familiar with. Economically, countries including Japan and China are among our most significant trading partners. Militarily and politically, tens of thousands of American military service people are stationed in Japan and South Korea, and tensions between Taiwan and China as well as North Korea's nuclear ambitions are of great concern to American policymakers. Culturally, film and animation coming out of East Asia is seen as "cutting edge." Historically, although all of this attention on East Asia might seem to be a recent development, in fact the U.S. has paid close attention to the region since well before World War II (consider, for example, the Open Door policy). In spite of these strong ties, students often have little opportunity to learn about East Asia in school.

In summary, why study East Asia? Certainly because East Asia is the home to a large percentage of the world's population, its countries are economically powerful and have important historical legacies, and because we have military commitments to Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea. But also because by studying East Asia we are able to learn about different cultures and new ways of thinking. And, of course, many American families have come to the U.S. from the countries of East Asia.

This lesson is designed to help students begin to discover and appreciate the importance of East Asia to their lives as 21 st century Americans. At the same time, the lesson gives students opportunities to interpret and design graphs and maps.

## ACTIVITIES:

### Day One:

1. Opening Quiz
2. Finding East Asia on the map
3. Population
4. Area
5. Interpreting an alternative map
6. Reading trade tables
7. Homework

### Day Two:

1. The Next Class
2. Interpreting tables
3. Understanding "trade imbalances"
4. Graphing long-term trade trends
5. Small group work
6. Discussion

## DAY ONE:

1. **Opening Quiz:** I'd like you to take a little quiz – not for a grade, just to get a sense of your international cultural awareness (see quizzes A, B, and C which follow):



A1.



A2.



A3.

Who are these characters, and what do they have in common?

**Answers:** A1. Kiki of Kiki's Delivery Service; A2. Godzilla; A3. Pikachu, the lead character of Pokémon. All three originated in Japan.



B1.



B2.



B3.

What do these three foods all share?

**Answer:** All have Chinese origins. Students will quickly recognize pot stickers or dumplings (Jiaozi in Chinese) as coming from China, but some might not know that pasta noodles came to Europe from China, or that the techniques of plant grafting, still used today to produce fruit-bearing apple trees, originated in China.



C1.



C2.



C3.

Where these things (kites, compasses, and fireworks) all were invented?

**Answer:** In China. For a long list and chronology of Chinese inventions and “firsts,” including the kite and the compass, see <http://www.computersmiths.com/chineseinvention/index.html>

For more on the history and development of gunpowder and fireworks, see

<http://www.ch.ic.ac.uk/local/projects/gondhia/index.html>

In fact, take out one of the books you have in your school bag – any book, it doesn’t matter which one. Were it not for the invention of paper by the Chinese and moveable printing type by the Koreans, we might not have books as we know them today, from the textbooks you use here at school to the Harry Potter books or other titles that you or your friends might read for

pleasure. The artistic and cultural contributions of East Asian peoples to world civilization are enormous. We see them acknowledged even in the modern names of the countries – it is no coincidence that “china” is both the word for fine porcelain and the name of the country that first produced such porcelain, and the English name for Japan comes from an old word meaning “lacquer,” a highly-prized export from that country centuries ago. As you probably already know, it was the desire of Europeans to reach East and Southeast Asia that led explorers such as Columbus to venture into unknown waters. For in Columbus’ day (the fifteenth century), China was the richest country in the world. The point is that the countries of East Asia have played an important role in world civilization and continue to impact our lives today.

**2. Finding East Asia on the map:** Let’s start by learning where East Asia is. Can anyone point to it on the map? Yes, we use the term “East Asia” to refer to the easternmost countries of the Asian continent: China, Japan, the two Koreas, and Taiwan. Other terms that you might have heard applied to this region include “Far East” and “the Orient,” though these are not used much today (although the term “orient” may still be used to describe rugs or spices, some consider it offensive when used to identify people).

**3. Population:** These countries are the homes to a large percentage of the world’s population. Let’s look at this list of countries and the size of their populations:

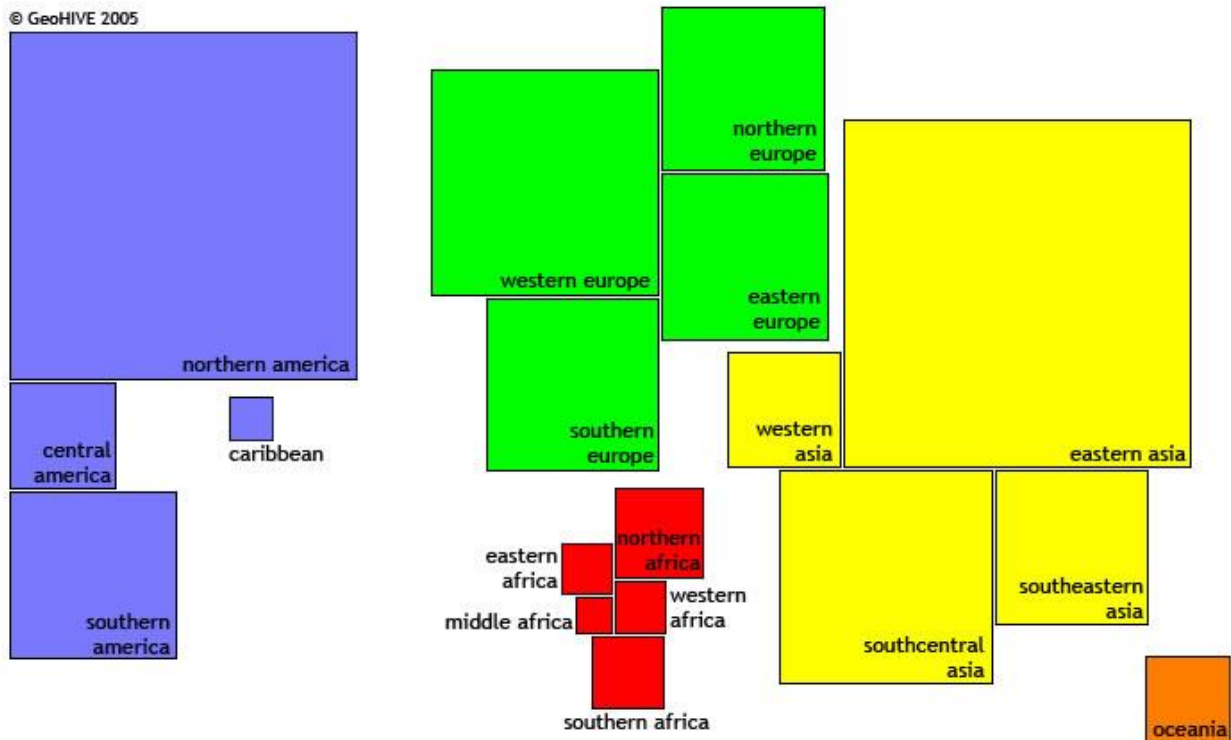
[http://www.mongabay.com/igapo/world\\_statistics\\_by\\_pop.htm](http://www.mongabay.com/igapo/world_statistics_by_pop.htm)

Where does China rank? (Answer: #1) How about Japan? (#10)

**4. Area:** China also occupies a significant amount of the earth’s surface. As we can see in the following table, it is the fourth largest country in terms of area, only a bit smaller than the U.S.

[http://www.mongabay.com/igapo/world\\_statistics\\_by\\_area.htm](http://www.mongabay.com/igapo/world_statistics_by_area.htm)

**5. Interpreting an alternative map:** Now let’s talk for a minute about the place of East Asia in the world. We’ll begin by looking at this rather funny map:



This is a map of the world, but obviously it is not a typical map. Can anyone guess why this map is drawn the way that it is? The makers of this map wanted to represent economic power, as measured by GDP (gross domestic product). The size of each region is based on its relative economic power in the world economy, so in this map, southcentral Asia appears much larger than South America, even though South America is larger in terms of land area on the globe. Looking at the map, two regions stand out as far bigger than the rest – North America and East Asia. What does that suggest about the economic strength of those region’s countries in the world?

**6. Reading trade tables:** As you might guess, if North America and East Asia have the largest economies in the world, then they probably buy and sell a lot of goods from each other. Let’s take a look at our final table for today, a list of America’s top trading partners:

<http://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/statistics/highlights/toppartners.html>

As you can see, the top four consist of Canada and Mexico, our immediate neighbors to the north and south, and China and Japan. We see China and Japan among the top countries both for U.S. imports and exports - that means that we are all buying each other’s goods, and the economies of our countries are closely linked.

**7. Homework:** We’ll look at that in a bit more detail next class, but before we meet again, I’d like you to do a bit of homework to get ready. Please go home and make a list of things around



your house that were made in Asia. These might include clothes, electronic goods, cars or motorcycles, books, movies, or art, etc. Note the item and where it was made or what its connection to Asia is, and bring your list with you to our next class.

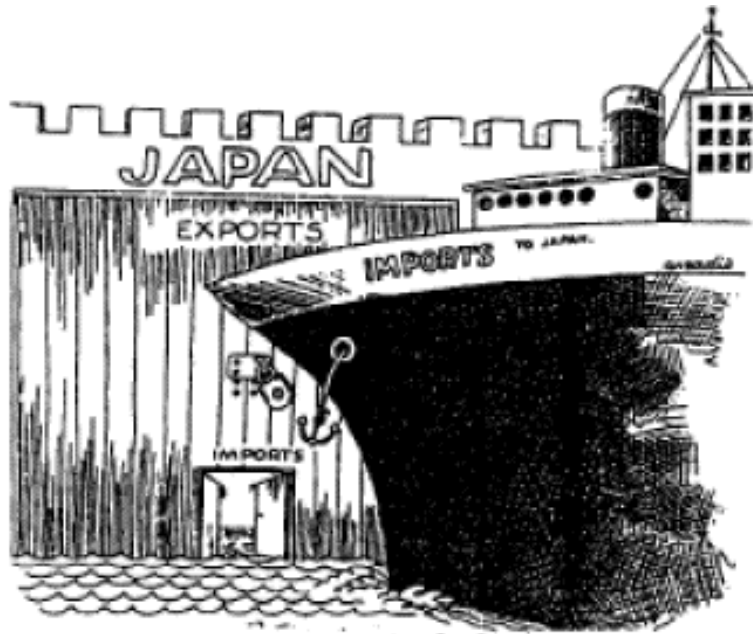
## **DAY TWO:**

**1. THE NEXT CLASS:** Have some of the students share items from their homework lists. You might wish to create categories such as “electronics,” “automotive,” “movies/music,” “books/manga,” “food,” “clothes/shoes,” etc. The point, of course, is to help the students realize how interconnected our economy is with that of East Asia. And, at the same time, to learn how to read and create graphs.

**2. Interpreting tables:** Please form small groups and take a look at these handouts, which include information from the U.S. Census Bureau statistics on American trade with China (<http://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/balance/c5700.html#2005>) and Japan (<http://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/balance/c5880.html#2005>).

How many millions of U.S. dollars worth of goods did Americans import from those countries in 2004? How many millions did American export to China and Japan? What does that suggest about the nature of America’s trade relationship with those countries? (Answer: we are importing much more than we are exporting) We refer to this as a trade imbalance.

**3. Understanding “trade imbalances”:** Other terms you might hear used to describe such imbalances are “trade deficit” and “trade surplus” – in the case of the U.S. and China, which country has the deficit, and which has the surplus? (China has the surplus, and the U.S. has the deficit) The very large trade imbalances that the U.S. has with China and Japan have been a source of tension in international relations. Take a look at this political cartoon. What does it suggest about the cause of the problem?



Source: Arcadio, 1992 Cartoonists & Writers Syndicate

In this cartoon, Japan is shown to have a tiny door for accepting imports, but a gigantic one for exports. The implication is that the Japanese are unwilling to buy American goods and that they are responsible for the trade imbalance. But there are problems on the American side as well. Let's consider automobiles for a second. The Japanese, like the British, drive on the left-hand side of the road, so cars produced in Japan for the domestic market have the steering wheels on the right. When the Japanese made cars to sell in the U.S., they moved the steering wheel over the left. But for many years, when American car companies tried to sell their cars in Japan, they did not bother to put the steering wheel on the right like Japanese drivers are used to. So it should come as no surprise that American cars did not sell as well in Japan as Japanese cars did in the U.S.

**4. Graphing long-term trade trends:** Even so, Japanese companies have made efforts to limit the trade imbalance because they value good relations with the U.S. Let's look at some long-term trends in trade. Here is historical data, which shows the state of U.S.-China and U.S.-Japan trade over a number of years (see the web links in point #2). Looking at this data, please create a graph that shows the trend of U.S. trade with these countries over time. Along one axis, list the years "1985, 1990, 1995, 2000, and 2004." Along the other axis, list the volume of trade. What are the trends? Do you notice a difference between U.S.-China and U.S.-Japan trade?

**5. Small group work:** Let's try making some more graphs to help better understand the conditions and problems that East Asian countries face today. For the instructor: choose any of the following as potential graph topics. You can find data at [The World Research Institute](http://www.worldresearchinstitute.com)

- a. population of China, Taiwan, Japan, and the two Koreas as a percentage of world population
- b. population of those countries compared with the U.S.
- c. percentage of the population that is children or elderly
- d. life expectancy
- e. population density

**6. Discussion:** After the small group, have a class discussion in which students can share their finding and you can discuss the significance of the information they have been working with. For example, if one country has a high population density, then the people must be able to live in close quarters and use resources efficiently. Or, if a country has a high percentage of elderly, what does that suggest about long term population trends? (answer: that the country's population may be shrinking)