Chapter 7: Paths to Modernisation

Exercises — Exercises

Q1 What were the major developments before the Meiji restoration that made it possible for Japan to modernise rapidly?

Several changes under the Tokugawa shogunate (1603-1867) prepared Japan. In the late sixteenth century the peasantry was disarmed, so only samurai carried swords, which ensured peace and order. Daimyo were ordered to live in their domain capitals, and land surveys identified owners and taxpayers and graded productivity, giving a stable revenue base. Castle-towns grew; by the mid-seventeenth century Edo was the world's most populated city, with Osaka and Kyoto also large. A commercial economy with financial and credit systems developed, merit began to count over status, and a lively urban culture, wide reading and a big printing trade emerged. Silk production was developed at Nishijin, money use spread, and a rice stock market arose. Study of ancient Japanese literature also strengthened a sense of national identity.

Q2 Discuss how daily life was transformed as Japan developed.

As Japan developed, the multi-generational patriarchal household gave way to the nuclear family, the 'new home' (homu), with husband as breadwinner and wife as homemaker. This created demand for new domestic goods such as electric rice-cookers and toasters, family entertainments and housing; in the 1920s cheap houses were available for a down payment of 200 yen and 12 yen a month for ten years, against a bank employee's salary of 40 yen a month. Middle-class families enjoyed electric trams, public parks (from 1878), department stores and the fashionable Ginza. The first radio stations opened in 1925, films began in 1899, and the actress Matsui Sumako became a star. The 'moga' (modern girl) reflected ideas of gender equality. It was a period of vitality and questioning of traditional norms.

Q3 How did the Qing dynasty try and meet the challenge posed by the Western powers?

The Qing dynasty was undermined by the Opium War (1839-42) and growing foreign pressure. Reformers such as Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao initiated policies to strengthen the system: building a modern administrative system, a new army and an educational system, and setting up local assemblies to establish constitutional government, so as to protect China from colonisation. Students were sent to study in Japan, Britain and France to bring back new ideas, and many in Japan became leading republicans. Thinkers, citing the fate of Poland and India, argued that traditional ways of thinking, especially Confucianism, had to change. In 1905 the centuries-old examination system, which tested only classical literary skills, was abolished. Despite these steps the dynasty was hesitant and was overthrown in 1911.

Q4 What were Sun Yat-sen's Three Principles?

Sun Yat-sen, founder of modern China and first president of the republic, put forward a programme called the Three Principles (San min chui). The first was nationalism, meaning the overthrow of the Manchu, seen as a foreign dynasty, and of other foreign imperialists. The second was democracy, meaning the establishment of democratic government. The third was socialism, meaning the regulation of capital and the equalisation of landholdings. These ideas became the basis of the political philosophy of the Guomindang. However, the plank of regulating capital and equalising land was never carried out, because the party ignored the peasantry and rising social inequalities.

Q5 How did Korea deal with the foreign currency crisis in 1997?

Korea faced a foreign currency crisis in 1997, caused by increasing trade deficits, poor management by financial institutions and reckless business operations by conglomerates, after it had opened its markets and joined the OECD in 1996. The crisis was handled with emergency financial support from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). At the same time, efforts were made to improve the country's economic constitution. Citizens actively contributed to repaying the foreign loans through the Gold Collection Movement. In December 1997 the opposition leader Kim Dae-jung was elected president, marking a peaceful transfer of power.

Q6 Did Japan's policy of rapid industrialisation lead to wars with its neighbours and destruction of the environment?

Yes, to a large extent. Japan's modernisation was driven by the slogan 'rich country, strong army' and a fear of being colonised by the West. The army and navy were under the emperor's direct command and outside government control, and the military, strengthened further after 1899, pressed for a vigorous foreign policy to acquire territory. This fear was used to silence opposition to military expansion and higher taxes. The result was wars with China (1894-95) and Russia (1904-05), the annexation of Taiwan and Korea, and later the Pacific War. The colonial empire suppressed democracy at home and left a legacy of hatred in the region. Rapid, unregulated industry and the demand for timber also caused environmental destruction. The Ashio mine polluted the Watarase river, ruining 100 square miles of farmland, and Tanaka Shozo led a protest in 1897 with 800 villagers that forced pollution-control measures. In the 1960s cadmium poisoning, mercury poisoning at Minamata and air pollution led to civil society movements and stricter laws.

Q7 Do you think that Mao Zedong and the Communist Party of China were successful in liberating China and laying the basis for its current success?

The answer is mixed. Mao based revolution on the peasantry rather than urban workers, organised a peasants' soviet in Jiangxi with land redistribution, supported women's rights through a new marriage law, and survived the Long March (1934-35) to build a base at Yanan. This won a strong social base, and the CCP defeated the Guomindang, establishing the People's Republic in 1949. The Communists removed centuries-old inequalities, spread education and raised the consciousness of the people. But the Great Leap Forward (1958), with backyard steel furnaces that produced unusable steel, and the Cultural Revolution (from 1965) caused turmoil, weakened the Party and disrupted the economy and education. The state became highly centralised and repressive. Current economic success came after Deng Xiaoping's reforms from 1978 (the Four Modernisations, a socialist market economy), which brought back market methods under continued Party control. So Mao freed China from foreign control and old inequalities, but the present prosperity rests more on the later reforms, and inequality and political control remain.

Q8 Did economic growth in South Korea contribute to its democratisation?

To a considerable extent, yes, though the link was not direct. Under Park Chung-hee, export-led growth built heavy industry, but democracy was suspended in pursuit of development; the Yusin Constitution (1972) gave the president absolute authority. Growth under Chun Doo-hwan, from 1.7 per cent in 1980 to 13.2 per cent by 1983, brought urbanisation, better education and media advancement. Citizens' awareness of political rights grew, producing demands for direct presidential elections. After the 1987 death of a student under torture, the June Democracy Movement, joined by the middle class, forced a constitutional revision allowing direct elections. Later peaceful transfers of power followed, and the 2016 candlelight protests showed democratic maturity. The text adds that Korean democracy owes a debt to economic development, but it was citizens' elevated political awareness and struggle that played the lead role.