

Japan Today

What You Will Learn...

Main Ideas

1. Since World War II, Japan has developed a democratic government and one of the world's strongest economies.
2. A shortage of open space shapes daily life in Japan.
3. Crowding, competition, and pollution are among Japan's main issues and challenges.

The Big Idea

Japan has overcome many challenges to become one of

Key Terms and Places

Diet, p. 602

Tokyo, p. 602

work ethic, p. 602

trade surplus, p. 602

tariff, p. 602

Osaka, p. 606

TAKING NOTES Draw a diagram like the one below. As you read, take notes about Japan's government, economy, and daily life in the appropriate ovals.



If YOU lived there...

You and your family live in a small apartment in the crowded city of Tokyo. Every day you and your friends crowd into jammed subway trains to travel to school. Since your work in school is very hard and demanding, you really look forward to weekends. You especially like to visit mountain parks where there are flowering trees, quiet gardens, and ancient shrines.

Do you like your life in Tokyo? Why or why not?

BUILDING BACKGROUND Although Japan has become an economic powerhouse, it is still a small country in area. Its cities have become more and more crowded with high-rise office and apartment buildings. Most people live in these cities today, though many feel a special fondness for natural areas like mountains and lakes.

Government and Economy

Do you own any products made by Sony? Have you seen ads for vehicles made by Honda, Toyota, or Mitsubishi? Chances are good that you have. These companies are some of the most successful in the world, and all of them are Japanese.

Since World War II, Japan's government and economy have changed dramatically. Japan was once an imperial state that was shut off from the rest of the world. Today Japan is a democracy with one of the world's strongest economies.

Government

Since the end of World War II, Japan's government has been a constitutional monarchy headed by an emperor. Although the emperor is officially the head of state, he has little power. His main role is to act as a symbol of Japan and of the Japanese people. In his place, power rests in an elected legislature called the **Diet** and in an elected prime minister. From the capital city of Tokyo, the Diet and the prime minister make the laws that govern life in Japan today.

Economy

Today Japan is an economic powerhouse. However, this was not always the case. Until the 1950s, Japan's economy was not that strong. Within a few decades, though, the economy grew tremendously.

The most successful area of Japan's economy is manufacturing. Japanese companies are known for making high-quality products, especially cars and electronics. Japanese companies are among the world's leading manufacturers of televisions, DVD players, CD players, and other electronic items. The methods that companies use to make these products are also celebrated. Many Japanese companies are leaders in new technology and ideas.

Reasons for Success Many factors have contributed to Japan's economic success. One factor is the government. It works closely with business leaders to control production and plan for the future.

Japan's workforce also contributed to its success. Japan has well-educated, highly trained workers. As a result, its companies tend to be both efficient and productive. Most workers in Japan also have a strong work ethic. **A work ethic is the belief that work in itself is worthwhile.** Because of their work ethic, most Japanese work hard and are loyal to their companies. As a result, the companies are successful.

Trade Japan's economy depends on trade. In fact, many products manufactured in the country are intended to be sold outside of Japan. Many of these goods are sent to China and the United States. The United States is Japan's major trading partner.

Japan's trade has been so successful that it has built up a huge trade surplus. **A trade surplus exists when a country exports more goods than it imports.** Because of this surplus, many Japanese companies have become very wealthy.

CONNECTING TO Technology

Building Small

The Japanese are known as masters of technology. Companies use this technology in many ways to create new products and improve existing ones. One way many Japanese companies have sought to improve their products—especially personal electronics products—is by making them smaller.

Since Sony released the first personal stereo system in the late 1970s, making small products has been a major business in Japan. Now shoppers can buy tiny radios, video games, cell phones, and cameras. Some of these products are smaller than the palm of your hand.

Generalizing Why might people want to buy small versions of products?



Japan is able to export more than it imports in part because of high tariffs. **A tariff is a fee that a country charges on imports or exports.** For many years, Japan's government has placed high tariffs on goods brought into the country. This makes imported goods more expensive, and so people buy Japanese goods rather than imported ones.

Resources Although its economy is based on manufacturing, Japan has few natural resources. As a result, the country must import raw materials. In addition, Japan has little arable land. Farms cannot grow enough food for the country's growing population. Instead, the Japanese have to buy food from other countries, including China and the United States.

READING CHECK Summarizing What have the Japanese done to build their economy?

Daily Life

Japan is a densely populated country. Slightly smaller than California, it has nearly four times as many people! Most of these people live in crowded cities such as the capital, Tokyo.

Life in Tokyo

Besides serving as the national capital, Tokyo is the center of Japan's banking and communication industries. As a result, the city is busy, noisy, and very crowded. Nearly 30 million people live in a relatively small area. Because Tokyo is so densely populated, land is scarce. As a result, Tokyo's real estate prices are among the highest in the world. Some people save up for years to buy homes in Tokyo. They earn money by putting money in savings accounts or by investing in stocks and bonds.

Because space is so limited in Tokyo, people have found creative ways to adapt. Buildings tend to be fairly tall and narrow so that they take less land area. People also use space under ground. For example, shops and restaurants can be found below the streets in subway stations. Another way the Japanese have found to save space is the capsule hotel. Guests in these hotels—mostly traveling businesspeople—crawl into tiny sleeping chambers rather than having rooms with beds.

Many people work in Tokyo but live outside the city. So many people commute to and from Tokyo that trains are very crowded. During peak travel times, commuters are crammed into train cars.

Tokyo is not all about work, though. During their leisure time, people can visit Tokyo's many parks, museums, and stores. They can also take short trips to local amusement parks, baseball stadiums, or other attractions. Among these attractions are a huge indoor beach and a ski resort filled with artificial snow.

FOCUS ON READING

How can you tell that the statements in this paragraph are facts?

Close-up

Life in Tokyo

Home to some 30 million people, Tokyo is one of the world's busiest cities. This illustration shows what a typical day in Tokyo is like.

Small Shinto shrines can be found even in the heart of busy Tokyo.

During peak travel times, Tokyo's trains are so crowded that people need to be pushed aboard.



Life in Other Cities

Most of Japan's other cities, like Tokyo, are crowded and busy. Many of them serve as centers of industry or transportation.

The second largest city in Japan, **Osaka**, is located in western Honshu. In Osaka—as in Tokyo and other cities—tall, modern skyscrapers stand next to tiny Shinto temples. Another major city is Kyoto. Once Japan's capital, Kyoto is full of historic buildings.

Transportation between Cities

To connect cities that lie far apart, the Japanese have built a network of rail lines. Some of these lines carry very fast trains called *Shinkansen*, or bullet trains. They can reach speeds of more than 160 miles per hour (250 kph). Japan's train system is very efficient. Trains nearly always leave on time and are almost never late.

Rural Life

Not everyone in Japan lives in cities. Some people live in the country in small villages. The people in these villages own or work on farms.

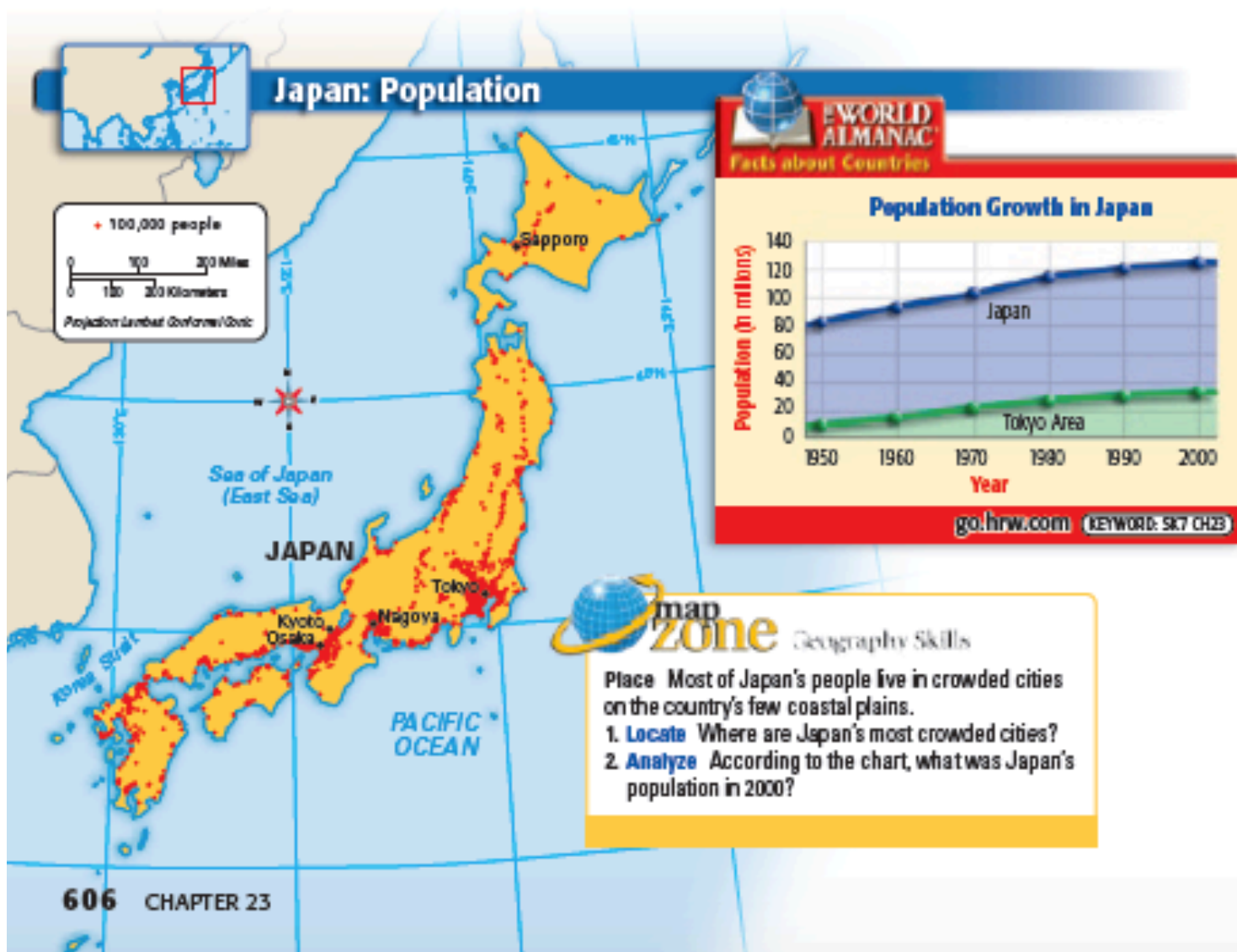
Relatively little of Japan's land is arable, or suitable for farming. Much of the land is too rocky or steep to grow crops on. As a result, most farms are small. The average Japanese farm is only about 2.5 acres (1 hectare). In contrast, the average farm in the United States is 175 times that size.

Because their farms are so small and Japan imports so much of its food, many farmers cannot make a living from their crops. As a result, many people have left rural areas to find jobs in cities.

READING CHECK Finding Main Ideas What are Japanese cities like?

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

efficient
productive and
not wasteful



Issues and Challenges

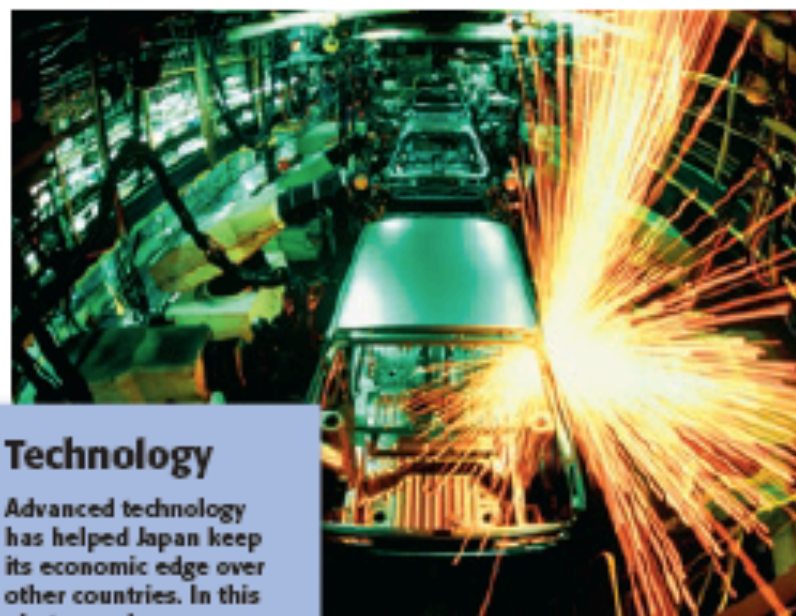
Many people consider Japan one of the world's most successful countries. In recent years, however, a few issues have arisen that present challenges for Japan's future.

One of these issues is Japan's lack of space. As cities grow, crowding has become a serious issue. To make space, some people have begun to construct taller buildings. Such buildings have to be carefully planned, though, to withstand earthquakes.

Japan also faces economic challenges. For many years, it had the only strong economy in East Asia. Recently, however, other countries have challenged Japan's economic dominance. Competition from China and South Korea has begun taking business from some Japanese companies.

Pollution has also become a problem in Japan. In 1997 officials from more than 150 countries met in Japan to discuss the pollution problem. They signed the Kyoto Protocol, an agreement to cut down on pollution and improve air quality.

READING CHECK Finding Main Ideas What are three issues facing Japan?



Technology

Advanced technology has helped Japan keep its economic edge over other countries. In this photo, workers use robots to assemble a car.

SUMMARY AND PREVIEW Since World War II, Japan has created a democratic government and a strong, highly technological economy. In the next section, you will learn about changes that have occurred in South Korea and North Korea in the same time period.

Section 3 Assessment

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Online Quiz

KEYWORD: S17 HP23

Reviewing Ideas, Terms, and Places

- Identify** What are some goods made in Japan?
 - Explain** How has Japan's government changed since World War II?
 - Elaborate** Why do you think work ethic is so important to the Japanese economy?
- Describe** How have people tried to save space in Japanese cities?
 - Evaluate** Do you think you would like living in Tokyo? Why or why not?
- Identify** What is one issue that crowding has caused for Japan?
 - Analyze** How are other countries presenting challenges to Japan's economy?

Critical Thinking

- Analyzing** Draw a graphic organizer like the one shown here. In one circle, write two sentences about city life in Japan. In another, write two sentences about rural life. In the third, write two sentences about issues facing the Japanese.

City Life

Rural Life

Issues

FOCUS ON WRITING

- Thinking about Japan** What image, or picture, of life in Japan could you write about in your poem? List two or three ideas. Then decide which is the most promising idea for your poem.