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| Basic Points of Interest on the Geography of East Asia |
| * The climate of East Asia is both similar to and different from that of Europe and the United States. It is similar in that it is a temperate climate, with colder winters and warm summers. It is different in that most of the rainfall occurs during the warm summer months, rather than during the winter months. This abundant water supply during the warm growing season allows for intensive agriculture, with two and sometimes three crop cycles per year. (The summer rains are borne by monsoon winds, determined by the land mass of Central Asia: in the winter, the cold, dry heavy air over Central Asia flows outward toward the sea; in the summer months, when the warm air over the Central Asian land mass rises and cools, moist air from the ocean flows back bringing rainfall over the land.) \*\* * Rice, the primary cereal crop grown in East Asia, is particularly suited to the warm, wet growing season. (Rice is best grown in flooded fields, or paddies.) Since rice produces a much higher yield per acre than does a crop such as wheat, it can support a much greater population per acre than does wheat. Climate, agriculture, and population size are closely related in East Asia where large population densities have existed throughout history. \*\* The northern part of China has a wheat-based agriculture, while the southern part of China has a rice-based agriculture. * The distinctive geographical characteristics of China (continental), Japan (insular), and Korea and Vietnam (both peninsular) affected the historical development of each country. * Chinese or "Sinic" civilization (written script, Confucian thought, and Buddhism that had come to China from India) spread northward to the Korean peninsula and then to the islands of Japan, and southward to what is today northern Vietnam — facilitating and engendering dialogue and exchange among the four countries of the East Asian cultural sphere. The climate of all four countries supports wet rice agriculture. * Chinese civilization first developed along the major river systems of the Huang He (Yellow River) and then the Chang Jiang (Yangzi or Yangtze River) in eastern China. China's population and agricultural settlement spread southward through history and remain concentrated today in the central and southern regions of east China, south of the Great Wall, in an area known as "China Proper." * The west and north of what is China today are dominated by mountains, steppe lands, plateaus, and deserts. These areas were predominantly settled in the past by nomadic peoples. Over the course of Chinese history, neighboring and Turkic peoples from China's border regions have often ruled kingdoms, intermarried with Chinese ruling families, and/or attacked and conquered other settled, agricultural kingdoms of "core" China. In recent centuries, Chinese from the eastern provinces have settled in the western, interior provinces, often at government instigation. * Japan is an island country composed of four main islands and thousands of smaller ones. The main islands are, at their closest point, 120 miles off the coast of Asia. Japan's geographic distance from the Asian mainland is cited as one reason why Japan has been able so consciously and deliberately to borrow and adapt innovations from other civilizations and to forge a strong cultural identity. * China and Japan are two of the world's most populous countries. China with more than 1,322,000,000 people supports approximately one-fifth of the world's population but has only 7% of the world's arable land. Japan is the 10th most populous country in the world; its land area is comparable to that of Italy or California. Japan's population in 2007 was estimated at 127,000,000 — less than half that of the United States, which had 301,000,000 people. China's population is approaching five times the population of the United States. Korea has 23,000,000 in the north and 49,000,000 in the south, while Vietnam has 85,000,000. In charts that rank the world's more than 200 countries by size of population: China ranks #1, Japan #10, Vietnam #13, and the Korean peninsula, with the populations of North and South Korea added together, would rank #17 — more populous than Turkey, the Congo, France, the United Kingdom, or Italy. The United States ranks #3 in population, after China and India. * The Korean peninsula shares borders with China and Russia; it is the portion of the Asian mainland closest to the Japanese islands. The Korean peninsula is well endowed with natural resources. Korea is presently divided politically into two countries, the Republic of Korea ("South Korea") in the south and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea ("North Korea") in the north. * Vietnam is divided by topography into northern and southern regions, each dominated by an alluvial plain. The Red River delta is in the north, the Mekong River and its delta are in the south. Despite the large delta regions, three-fourths of Vietnam's territory is mountainous. * The Japanese islands lack most of the natural resources necessary to support an industrialized economy. These resources must be imported.   Questions in Response to Reading  1. According to the passage, why is rice the staple crop of East Asia?  2. Describe the Sinic civilization.  3. Citing information from the passage, describe the geography of China.  4. The fact that Japan is located 120 miles off the closest mainland has enabled what?  5. Compare and contrast China and Japan based on the information provided in paragraph number 9.  6. According to the final paragraph, Japan must important their resources. Explain why. |