Unit 4: Development and Democracy in East Asia

SETTING: 1911

EAST ASIA IS POOR (EXCEPT JAPAN), AND NOT DEMOCRATIC

- At the dawn of the twentieth century, almost all of East Asia is poor, and no country is democratic. The region's biggest country, China, is on the edge of collapse and revolution.
- Japan is the one exception. It has an industrial economy, and it rules a small but growing empire in Korea and Taiwan.

CHINA: FROM REVOLUTION TO COMMUNIST INSTABILITY (1900 - 1976)

- In 1912 China's last dynasty collapses. Nationalists, Communists, and the Japanese fight to control China.
- The Japanese are defeated in 1945, and in 1949 Communists win the war. The Nationalists flee to Taiwan.
- Mao's efforts to remake society bring famine, violence, and economic stagnation.

THE COLD WAR TURNS HOT IN KOREA AND VIETNAM (1945 - 1976)

- In 1950, the U.S. and China fight each other in Korea. The Korean War divides the peninsula into a communist North and an anti-communist South.
- From 1955 to 1975, communists and anti-communists fight a devastating civil war in Vietnam. The communists win.

EAST ASIAN ECONOMIES TRANSFORM (1945- 1989)

- Japan, democratized by the U.S. after World War II, becomes an economic powerhouse.
- The Asian Tigers of Taiwan and South Korea follow the Japanese model to transform their economies and become democratic.
- China adopts capitalist economic reforms, but the Communist Party preserves authoritarian political control.

CHINA CREATES A PROSPEROUS AUTHORITARIAN STATE (1989 - 2025)

- In 1989, the Chinese government violently suppresses pro-democracy demonstrations in Tiananmen Square.
- China's capitalist economic reforms go national, and the country rapidly becomes much richer.
- Xi Jinping takes power in 2012, and makes China more authoritarian. After 2018 there are few limits on his power.

EAST ASIA IS RICH, WITH DEMOCRACY FOR SOME (BUT NOT CHINA)

- Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan maintain strong economies with democratic governments.
- China has one of the world's largest economies, and is a major supplier of many key products. China uses high technology to maintain one of the world's strictest authoritarian governments.

OUTCOME: 2026