

Essay and Discussion Questions

Asia Higher Education Questions

Help students understand Asia through these essay and discussion questions.

Question 1

Why—and how—have foreign powers sought to expand their influence throughout Asia? How have Asian powers worked to maintain and assert their independence in the face of external pressure?

Question 2

To what extent does China’s “century of humiliation” drive the country’s contemporary aims and geopolitics? Discuss China’s current foreign policy goals and explain the tools it is using to accomplish them.

- In your opinion, how effectively is contemporary China pursuing its foreign policies? Why?
- Why might some of China’s neighbors approach China with open arms and others approach China with caution, or even hostility? What does this range of approaches reveal about broader histories, tensions, and politics in the region?

Question 3

How should the United States respond to a rising China? To what extent have United States foreign policy goals in the region changed in response to China’s rise? How might China respond to a more aggressive foreign policy? How might other countries in the region respond to China’s rise?

- Write a policy brief to the U.S. President that explains China’s political, military, and economic rise. Ensure that your policy brief makes a recommendation on how the government should approach China, and why.

Question 4

Asian countries have emerged as some of the world’s fastest developing powers. Describe the factors underpinning that growth. Which factor would you deem most important, and why?

- Explain in your own words the benefits and challenges resulting from Asia’s economic growth. Why might the implications of this growth be described as complex?
- What particular challenges do Asia’s youth populations face today in response to the region’s economic and demographic growth? What are some of the social and political consequences of these challenges?

Question 5

Evaluate the different political systems that exist on the Asian continent. How have some countries in the region been able to develop strong democracies? Why might other democratic governments in Asia be seen as backsliding?

- Imagine you are a foreign policy advisor. Choose a country within Asia and write a 1-2-page memorandum to your national leader on your chosen country’s contemporary political system, being sure to note areas of both confidence and concern.

Question 6

Despite being a small, impoverished country, North Korea poses a major threat to regional and global security. What factors underpin this threat? In your opinion, is there hope for a deescalation in tensions between North Korea and the rest of the world? Why or why not?

Question 7

Using examples from East Asia or South Asia, explain how internal social and cultural divisions have contributed to discord, mistrust, and even conflict over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. What efforts are populations within that region making to overcome these challenges?

- How have certain countries in Asia used the concept of national security as a tool for internal repression and violence?

Question 8

Asia as a region deals with profound military and economic competition, but world events have increasingly demanded cooperation amongst the region's countries. Give an example of attempted regional or international cooperation in Asia, explaining both its context and the reasons why this cooperation was—or was not—effective.

Question 9

How have Asia's different subregions and countries worked to assert their own unique identities within the broader "Asian" category? Answers might include the World Nomad Games in Central Asia, Bollywood in South Asia, or K-Pop in South Korea. What other examples of national and regional cultural expression can you find, either in these resources or through additional external research?

Question 10

To what extent are territorial disputes in the region driven by natural resources? By strategic geopolitical positioning? By preexisting political tensions? To what extent should the United States involve itself in these disputes?

- How do territorial disputes in the region affect countries' economies, strategic positionings, and geopolitical relationships?
- How do high levels of militarization raise the stakes of the region's territorial disputes?
- Why might the United States involve itself in territorial disputes in the region?