

8. To what extent did Japan challenge the power of the Western nations in East Asia by the early 20th century?

Candidates are required to consider the merits or otherwise of the suggestion that Japan may have been in a position to alter the balance of power in East Asia by the early 20th century. The end point is flexible so candidates may stop either before or after the First World War, but material beyond 1922 is really out of the timeframe.

Indicative content

- In 1894, at the start of the Sino-Japanese War, the major Western powers in East Asia were Britain, France, the US and Russia. They expected China to win the war and the balance of power to remain the same. However, Japanese industrial and military modernization after 1868 had been extensive and more thorough than China's and so Japan was victorious.
- The Treaty of Shimonoseki (1895) made China concede territory to Japan, pay an indemnity, open new ports to Japanese trade and recognize the independence of Korea. The 1895 Triple Intervention of Russia, France and Germany forced Japan to return the Liaodong (Liaotung) Peninsula to China, indicating these countries' view that their interests in the region were under threat.
- Britain saw Japan as a useful potential ally against Russia and the Anglo-Japanese Alliance (1902) suited both Japan and Britain. However, Japan was not regarded as an equal.
- The defeat of Russia in the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905) shocked the Western powers. The Treaty of Portsmouth (1905) recognized Japanese interests in Korea and China.
- Although Britain, France and the US were greater powers on the world stage, none had military or naval bases of any importance in northeast Asia and Japan continued to develop its military and imperial ambitions in the region (for example, its annexation of Korea in 1910). Thus, there was some shift of power towards Japan in East Asia.
- Japan entered the First World War as an ally of Britain in August 1914. It was a chance for revenge against Germany for her role in the 1895 Triple Intervention and to take the German naval base at Jiaozhou (Kiaochow). Japan also saw opportunities in China and issued the 21 Demands in 1915.
- The Treaty of Versailles (1919) was a disappointment for Japan because of the failure of the racial equality clause, but Japan did gain Shandong (Shantung) and Germany's north Pacific possessions.
- The Western powers felt that Japan threatened their interests in the region and the Washington Conference in 1922 attempted to address this issue.

*The above material is an indication of what candidates may elect to write about in their responses. However, it is not exhaustive and **no set answer is required**.*

*Examiners and moderators are reminded of the need to apply the markbands that provide the “best fit” to the responses given by candidates and to **award credit wherever it is possible to do so**.*