How are Japan and the Koreas governed today?

The citizens of Japan and South Korea enjoy political and economic freedom. Their governments are democracies that protect the rights of the people. Their economies are free markets that have very little government control. In a free market, business is influenced by supply and demand rather than government policies. In contrast, North Koreans have very little freedom. Their government is a communist dictatorship. North Korea's Communist Party controls the country's politics and economy. Citizens of North Korea have little influence over their government.

Two Democratic Systems, One Dictatorship

The citizens of Japan and South Korea choose their leaders. This is not true in North Korea. There, Kim Jong-il and North Korea's communist party, the Korean Workers' Party (KWP), control the government.

South Korea has a presidential political system. Citizens elect the president, who heads the executive branch of government and serves as the head of state. The president is the country's symbolic leader. Citizens also elect the members of the legislative branch of government. The legislative branch makes the country's laws. In South Korea, the legislature is called the National Assembly.

Japan's government is a parliamentary system. In this system, people elect representatives to the legislative branch. The legislature then selects the prime minister, who heads the executive branch. Since Japan is a constitutional monarchy, the emperor is the head of state. However, the emperor's powers are only symbolic.
Political Systems of Japan and the Koreas

Japan and South Korea are both democracies, but each country organizes its government differently. People in South Korea elect their president and members of the National Assembly. Japanese voters elect only the members of the legislature.

In Japan, real power lies with the prime minister, cabinet, and legislature. The Japanese legislature is called the Diet. It has two parts, the House of Councillors and the House of Representatives. Because Japan’s prime minister leads the Diet’s largest party, he also controls the Diet.

North Korea’s citizens can also vote in elections, but they do not have a real choice. The Korean Workers’ Party creates a list of candidates for each position in the government. No one runs against these candidates. For example, no one ran against Kim Jong-il in the last election. He controls North Korea’s Communist Party and makes sure that his supporters are chosen for the legislature.
In North Korea, the courts do not review the laws made by the government. However, in both South Korea and Japan, the highest levels of the court can review the laws. The courts can challenge laws that disobey the constitutions of these countries. They make sure new laws do not violate the constitutional rights of the people. This role is much like that of the Supreme Court of Canada.

**Rights and Responsibilities of Citizens**

The citizens of Japan and South Korea are involved in government and enjoy many rights. By contrast, citizens of North Korea have very few rights. The government of North Korea has much greater control over its citizens' lives. North Korea's government controls almost every aspect of life in the country. Individuals have very little power.

**The Communist System**

Communism is both an economic system and a political system. The government plans the economy, owns most businesses and land, and assigns jobs to citizens.

People have fewer choices in a communist system. For example, individuals cannot decide to start a business of their own. Very few privately owned businesses are allowed. Even food distribution is tightly controlled by the government. Many people have very little to eat.

**North Korea**  
Many North Koreans belong to the Korean Workers' Party (KWP). Kim Jong-il is the head of the KWP. This organization strengthens his dictatorship.

There are other political parties in North Korea, but they must closely follow the ideas and policies of the KWP. In elections, North Koreans have only one choice—a KWP candidate.

In a dictatorship such as in North Korea, citizens are not allowed to challenge the government. Protestors risk their freedom and their lives by speaking out. Many people who protest conditions leave the country or are jailed. It is almost impossible for citizens to organize together to promote change.
Democratic Systems

In Japan and South Korea, there are several political parties. When the citizens of Japan and South Korea vote, they choose among candidates from different parties. Representatives must work hard on issues important to their voters if they want to win.

As in Canada, political parties express the needs and points of view of different groups of people. Citizens can form groups and speak out when they disagree with their leaders. In South Korea and Japan, citizens are free to create organizations to express their opinions and protect their interests. Unlike in North Korea, the citizens in these democracies have freedom of speech.

In South Korea, citizen organizations are growing in size and power. Human rights organizations, churches, and labor unions have all worked for individual and economic rights.

Japan also has many activist groups. Labor unions and activists have struggled there for years to improve working conditions and pay rates for workers. The government listens to their ideas and works with these groups to improve life in Japan.
Cultural Sharing
There is greater cultural and artistic diversity in Japan and South Korea than in North Korea. This is because the democratic governments of Japan and South Korea allow more freedom. People are allowed to choose how they will express themselves.

The societies of Japan and South Korea both influence and are influenced by the cultures of other nations. Cultural imports include the spread of Christianity, especially throughout South Korea. Western clothing and sports such as baseball and soccer have also become popular in Japan and South Korea.

There are many cultural exports from Japan and South Korea as well, especially because of their technological influence. Japanese martial arts, such as karate, and Korean tae kwon do are popular around the world. Japan has also had a huge influence on entertainment through video games, anime, and manga. Manga, a kind of illustrated book, is read by people of all ages and covers many different genres, such as science fiction, fantasy, and drama.

Thinking It Through

Key Ideas
1. Complete a chart to summarize what you have learned about the governments of Japan, North Korea, and South Korea.

Thinking Critically
2. Describe three important ways that your family’s life would be different if Canada were governed by a dictatorship.

3. In what ways does cultural sharing have an impact on the lives of people in South Korea? Provide examples to evaluate whether cultural sharing is a positive or negative consequence of a democratic government.

Chapter Focus Question
How do various forms of government affect people’s lives?


What Do You Think?
5. Could citizen groups organize in North Korea? Explain why or why not.
Looking Back...
Systems of Government

Chapter Focus Question

How do various forms of government affect people’s lives?

You have made connections between the governments of Japan and the Koreas and their impact on the people. Use the section heading questions in the chapter to summarize what you have learned.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section Heading Questions</th>
<th>Important ideas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How do the governments of Japan, North Korea, and South Korea meet geographical challenges?</td>
<td>The government must help people prepare for natural disasters.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Communicate Your Understanding

Prepare a conversation among people of Japan, South Korea, and North Korea that provides a response to the Chapter Focus Question. Form small groups. Decide who will represent each country. Select two or three central ideas for your conversation that will connect to the Chapter Focus Question. For example, you might focus on

- how geographic challenges are met
- how leaders are selected

Discuss how you will present your role. Practise your conversation before you present it to another group.

Think About Your Learning

1. How does learning about governments in other parts of the world help you as a citizen of Canada?
2. What question would you want to ask a student from Japan or the Koreas about the government in their country?

Online Country Community Activity

Video Conferencing

You will meet your e-mail friend face-to-face in real time. In this conference, you will chat with your friend and discuss how working with a student from another country has improved your learning of social studies.