

CHAPTER - 5

Regional Geography of Japan

5.01 Introduction and Location :

Japan is located off east coast of Asia. It occupies an important place amongst the developed industrial countries of the world. The country Japan is a string of a number of small and large islands in the northern part of the Pacific Ocean. Its ancient name was Nippon meaning the land of rising sun. Japan consists of four main islands Hokkaido, Honshu, Shikoku and Kyushu including a number of smaller islands of which Ryukyu is one. Honshu is the largest of all the islands. In 1868 Emperor Meiji united the whole of Japan under his rule. In those days Japan had no trade relation with foreign country. But later, when the feudal system was abolished and in the middle part of the twentieth century when Japan gained its sovereignty Japan entered into relationship with United States of America and other western countries. This was the beginning of rapid industrialisation and economic development of Japan. Explosion of atom bomb on Japan during the Second World War worked as a stimulant in this regard.

Situated in the Pacific Ocean the Japan archipelago is surrounded by the Sakhalin island, Kuril island and Okhotsk Sea in the north, the Taiwan Sea and East China Sea in the south, the Pacific Ocean in the east and the Japan Sea, Korea Sea and Russia Sea in the west. It has its extension from the 24° N latitude in the south to the 46° N latitude and from 123° E longitude in the west to 146° E longitude in the east. So this country is mainly included in the temperate climate. The north south extension of Japan is about 2400 kilometres. Its total area is about 377765 square kilometers. Significantly the geographical location, size and economic conditions of Japan are almost similar to those of

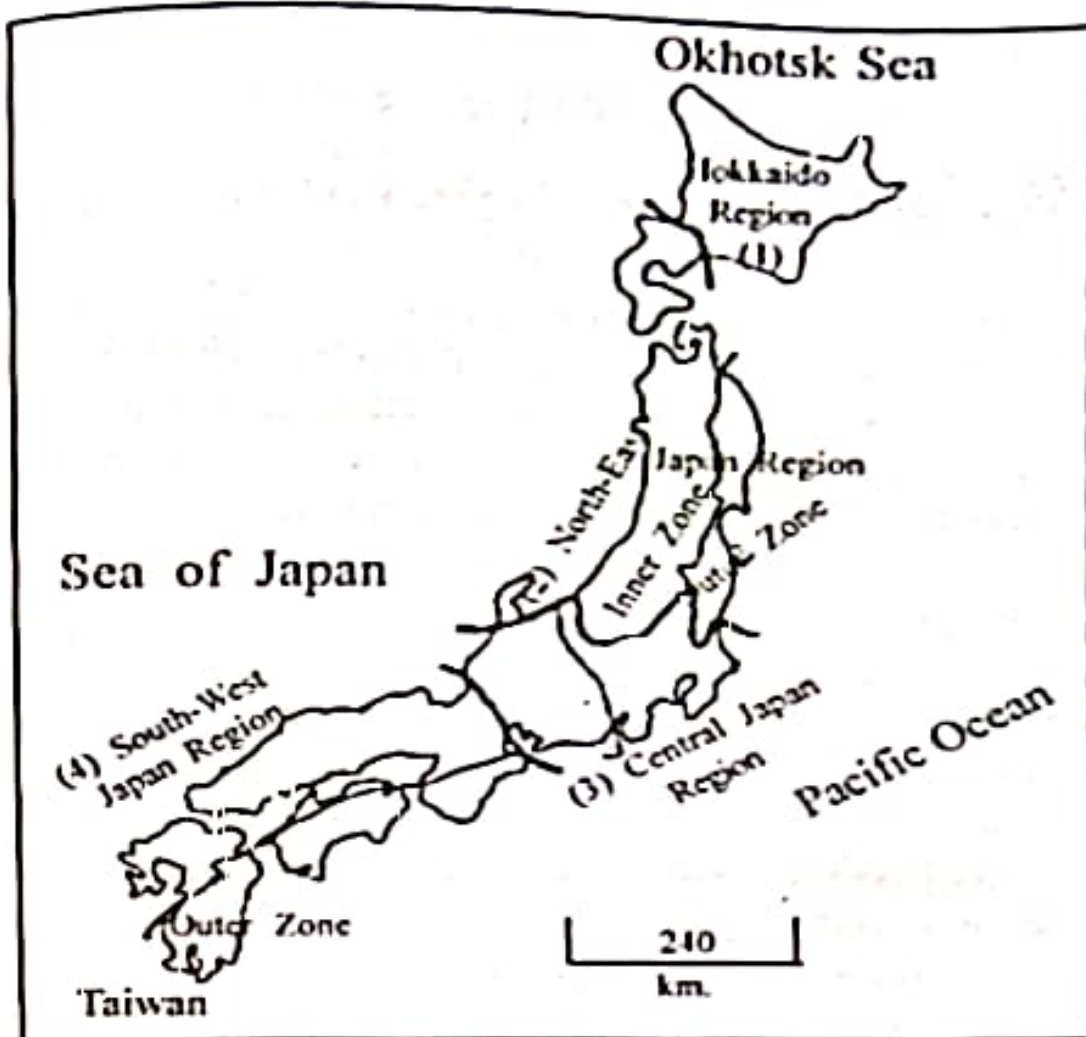


Fig. - 5.01 : Physical Divisions of Japan

the United Kingdom. According to estimated data of 2007 Japan has a population of 128 million. Even though the total area of Japan is small, it is the tenth largest country of the world in respect of population. Tokyo is the capital of Japan. It is important to note that inspite of scarcity of necessary mineral and other natural resources, Japan, being a small country with hills and mountains, is one of the developed countries in the world at present.

5.02 Physical Divisions :

Four major islands of Japan are surrounded by an arch-shaped mountain range. About 75% of the country's area is mountainous. The geological structure of Japan composed of newly formed folded mountain is very complex. It is still in unstable

west as inner zone and outer zone. The western portion along the Japan Sea is known as inner zone and the eastern portion along the Pacific Ocean is called outer zone. Moreover the central Japan region is divided into the Fossa Magna and Kwantō plain. Significantly the country's temperature and amount of rainfall gradually decreases from the south to the north.

(1) Hokkaido Region : The main island Hokkaido which exists in the northern most part of Japan, comprises this region. The landform of this region is mountainous. The height of the Achahidak Peak of the Hokkaido mountain range located in the central part of this region is 2290 metres. A number of extensive and alluvial lowlands are found in the midst of these parallel mountain ranges. Amongst these the Ishikari-Yufutoh plain formed by the Ishikari river is noteworthy. In addition Tsukushi and Konsen are two other significant plains of this region. Remarkably, Tsukushi plain is extensive along with terrace. On the other hand the Konsen plain along the coast of the Pacific Ocean is formed by accumulation of marine deposits. The coastal areas being somewhat up and low lands are suitable for construction of buildings, roads etc. Sapporo, Kushiro, Muroran, Asahigawa, Hakodate are small but important towns of this region.

(2) The North East Japan Region : The North East Japan region comprises the northern part of the Honshu island. The

western portion of this region is characteristically marked by numerous folds and faults. Two parallel mountain ranges namely Auo and Utsu lie in this region. The heights of the peaks of these mountain ranges vary between 1500-2000 metres. Coniferous trees of the mountains, volcanic peaks and lakes etc. have made the region attractive for the tourists. The region along the Pacific Ocean of north east Japan is separated from the region along the Japan Sea by a deep valley. Towards the east of this valley there lie the Kitakami plateau formed by old sedimentary rocks and Abukuma plateau made of volcanic rocks. The coastal areas of the South Kitakami region is narrow and the highlands are divided by numerous rivers. As this coast has descent due to earth movement, it became deep and broken. On the other hand, the coastal areas of northern Kitakami and Abukuma are plain with steep escarpment. Aomori, Akita, Morioka, Hachinohe, Sendai, Koriyama and Yamagata are some of the important cities of this region.

(3) Central Japan Region : The central part of Honshu island is known as the Central Japan. Here the Honshu mountains and Shicito Mariana mountain ranges fused together to create the highest mountain region of Japan. The highest portion of it towards the east is known as the Hida mountain. A river valley given the name of Fossa Magna has separated the mountain ranges. Towards the south of the Fossa Magna there lies the Mount Fuji, the holy mountain peak of the Japanese. This peak is composed of lava. Its height is 3776 metres above the sea level. Kwanto plain and Nabi plain are the two important plains of central Japan. Running through this region, the river Tone and others have created the flood plain which is extended upto the coast of the Pacific Ocean. This region is very suitable for agriculture. Yokohama, Tokyo, Nagoya and Toyama are the famous cities in the region.

(4) South West Japan Region : The South West Japan region comprises of the south west part of Honshu (i.e.,

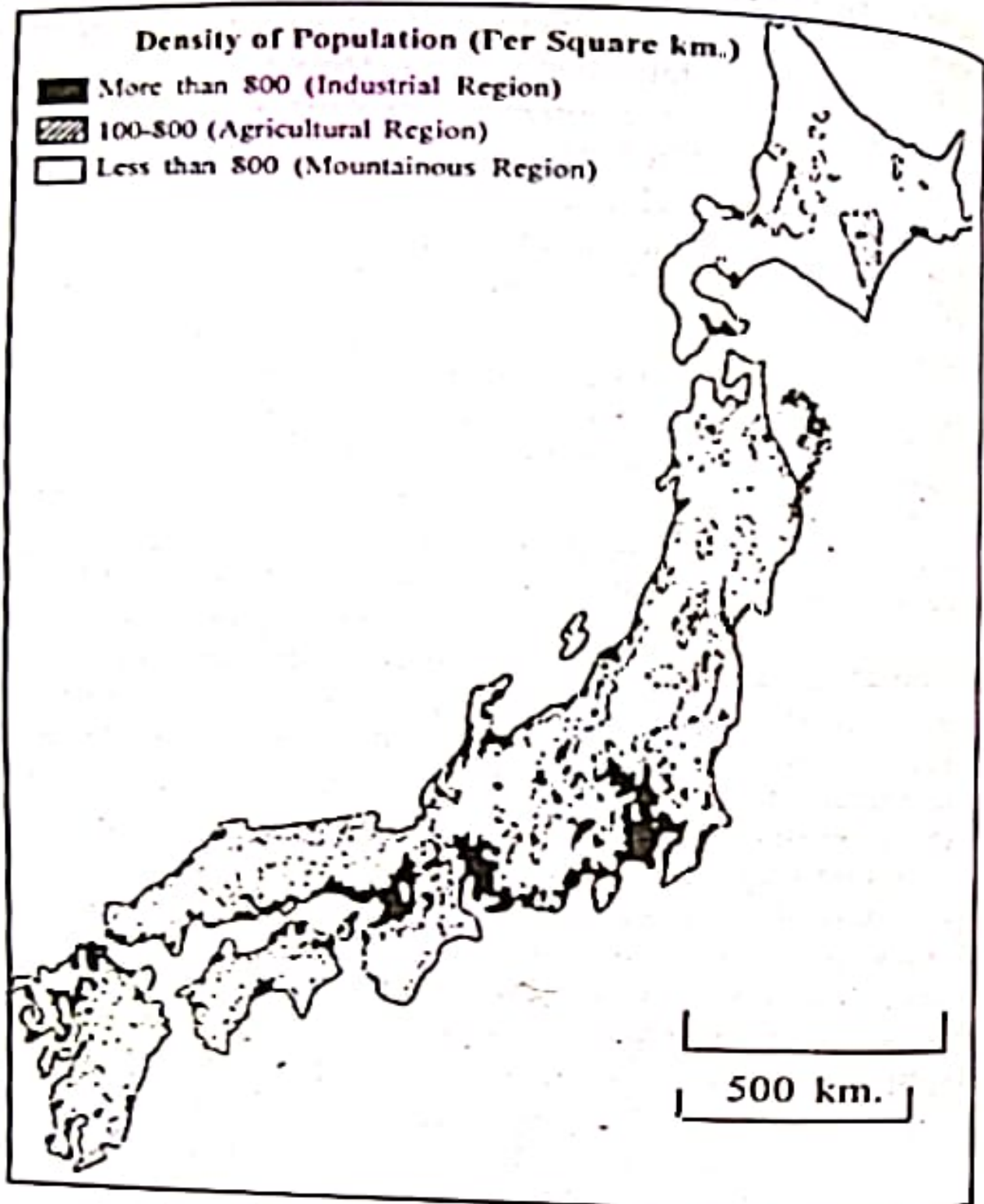


Fig.- 5.02 : Population Distribution of Japan

Chugoku-Hanshu), Shikoku and Kyushu island. The mountain ranges of this region is the longest in the country. Lying in east-west direction a fault has separated the coastal region of the Japan Sea from the region along the Pacific Ocean. Most of the areas of South West Japan region are formed by ancient rocks. The plains namely Kyoto, Nara and Biwa etc. have been formed from rift valleys. The natural beauty created by a large number of island shaped rocky hills and rugged coasts is very attractive in this region.

The narrow valleys which have separated the mountain ranges extending upto the coast of Shigoku region have been transformed into fertile croplands through deposit of alluvial rivers. In some places, large deltas are also formed by rivers. The delta of the Yodu river in the state of Osaka may be mentioned here. The region along the Pacific Ocean of South West Japan is mountainous. Towards its south, South Kyushu experiences frequent volcanic eruptions. There seems to be fewer plains in this region. The highland areas have formed Ria coastline in the eastern and western coastline of Kyushu island. Among the numerous townships of this region, Osaka, Kyoto, Kobe, Kita-Kyushu, Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Kagosima, Kumamoto, Okayama and Sakai are well known.

5.03 Population growth and distribution :

Japan is the tenth largest populous country in the world. It has also highest concentration of population. The country, being the home of mainly the Mongoloid group of people recorded about 5 million people in 610 A.D. It increased gradually to 38 million in 1880; 72 million in 1945; 127 million in 1999 and it reached 128 million in 2007 (Table 5.01). It is because of rapid socio-economic development that the rates of birth and death are specifically declining. Consequently the annual average growth rate of Japan's population has become 0.4%.

Table 5.01
Growth of Population in Japan

Census Year	Population (in million)
1880	38
1900	44
1920	55
1945	72
1960	93
1975	112
1999	127
2007	128

Due to difference in physiography and climate in one hand and imbalance in economic development on the other, the distribution of population is not uniform throughout Japan.

The mountainous regions being unsuitable for settlement and economic development, population in these regions is very thin. On the other hand the river valleys and coastal areas are densely populated. It is worth mentioning that the density of population in the mountainous region of Hokkaido and others is less than 100 against the average density of population of Japan being 338 persons per square kilometre. Density of population is between 100-800 persons in the agro-based plains and more than 800 persons in the industrialised plains. In brief, about 20% of population is settled in the mountainous regions that covers 80% of total area of Japan. For example, Hokkaido region, that covers 25% area of Japan, has only 5% of the country's population. Throughout the country, the Tokyo-Yokohama industrial region of Central Japan and Kobe-Osaka industrial region of South West Japan are the two densely populated regions. Because of industrialisation and urbanisation, the density of population in many places of these two regions is more than 10 thousand persons per square kilometre. Tokyo, the largest

city in Japan as well as in the world accommodates more than 3 crores of population, at present.

Agricultural production is diminishing in many places of the country as a result of rapid industrialisation. Therefore, migration of people from the rural areas to the urban areas is rapidly increasing. New towns are growing up and the mega-cities are expanding their boundaries. It is significant that during the last 47 (1960-2007) years the ratio of urban population has been increasing from 44% to 79%. Therefore it is evident that industrialisation and urbanisation rather than the physical factors have brought regional imbalance in the population distribution of Japan.

5.04 Economic Activities :

In Spite of having scarcity of necessary natural resources Japan has emerged today as one of the most developed countries in the world due to rapid agricultural and industrial development, improvement of transport system and expansion of international trade. In fact in terms of industrial production Japan occupies the second place throughout the world. The patriotism of the Japanese people, their working skill and the country's open industrial and market policies have enough contribution in this regard. The per capita annual national income of Japan is 33,000 dollars. With the economic development the standard of living of people is also going up. Significantly the life span of the Japanese people is the longest in the world. Against the average age of 78 years of life span of the Americans, the average life span of the Japanese is 82 years. According to the Report of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2003, Japan ranks the eleventh position in the world in respect of the standard of human development. On the other hand, Japan occupies the fourth place in the world in terms of development of Science and Technology.

So far as land use pattern is concerned it is observed that about 17% of the total area of the country is occupied by

agriculture. As agriculture is carried out here on commercial basis by adopting modern methods, so it is highly developed. The rate of yield of per hectare land of Japan is the highest among the eastern countries. About 290 kilograms of fertilizers are used in per hectares of land. As Japan is surrounded by seas and oceans so it has occupied the first position in fish production throughout the world. Among the people engaged in various economic activities, 6% are engaged in agriculture, 33% in industry and 61% in trade and commerce and other allied services. The development of industries and other allied services in Japan is very extensive. It occupies a significant position in the world in ship building, car manufacturing, production of steel, electronic goods and various daily used products. It may be mentioned that about 81% of Japan's export commodities are produced by using medium and high technology. About 40% of the country's total income comes from the industrial sector. The brief description given below in respect of agriculture and industry will highlight the economic development of Japan.

Agricultural Regions :

Due to the existence of hills and mountains and dense population, Japan's farmlands are very small in size. The farmlands are widely scattered as fragmented plots as a result of division of land. Therefore intensive cultivation is scientifically practised and sufficient amount of fertilizers are used to obtain maximum yields from these lands. Considering Japan's physiography various types of agricultural practices are carried out. Among these the Terrace cultivation, Mixed Farming, Inter culture Farming and Shifting cultivation are significant.

Rice is the major agricultural crop of Japan. Rice is cultivated in about two third of its cultivated land. On the basis of extension of the farmlands, for crop distribution and crop production, certain agricultural regions have been identified. The effect of the landforms, climate and soil etc. are very significant in this regard. Considering these the country may primarily be divided into two

agricultural regions— (1) The Old Japan Region and (2) Hokkaido Region. Again The Old Japan Region may be subdivided into inner zone, peripheral zone and frontier zone.

(1) Inner Zone : This zone lies in the central part of Japan. Its farmlands are very small in size. The climate being favourable to agriculture, two to three crops are annually cultivated in this zone. The density of population is very high in this region. Here, varieties of fruits, vegetables and flowers are commercially produced. Cattle rearing is practised for meat and milk. At the foothills of this zone terrace cultivation is practised. This zone is again subdivided into some small divisions –

(a) Sitsi-Kinki Division : It is a very small agricultural division included in the Sugoku hilly region. In summer, rice is cultivated in nearly 40% land of its plains. Horticulture and cattle-rearing also practised. Fruits are planted in the relatively highlands off the sea. In certain places of this division fruits, sweet potato etc. are produced through terrace cultivation.

(b) North Kyushyu Division : The farming of this division is of lower quality than that of the Sitsi-Kinki division. Rice is abundantly produced in the plains of this region.

(c) Sukio Division : The significance of this region is that the high lands where rice is cultivated are filled with water in artificial ways.

(d) Tokai Division : Under the influence of coastal Ocean current, the climate of this division is relatively warm. Here plain areas are quite limited. About 45% of farming is confined in highlands. Tea and various types of vegetables are produced. Animal rearing is also practised. This division is suitable for orange production.

(e) West Kanto Division : The division is characterised by large alluvial plains. Crops are grown twice in a year. One third of total wheat production and almost entire barley production of Japan are done here. This division is famous for mulberry tree.

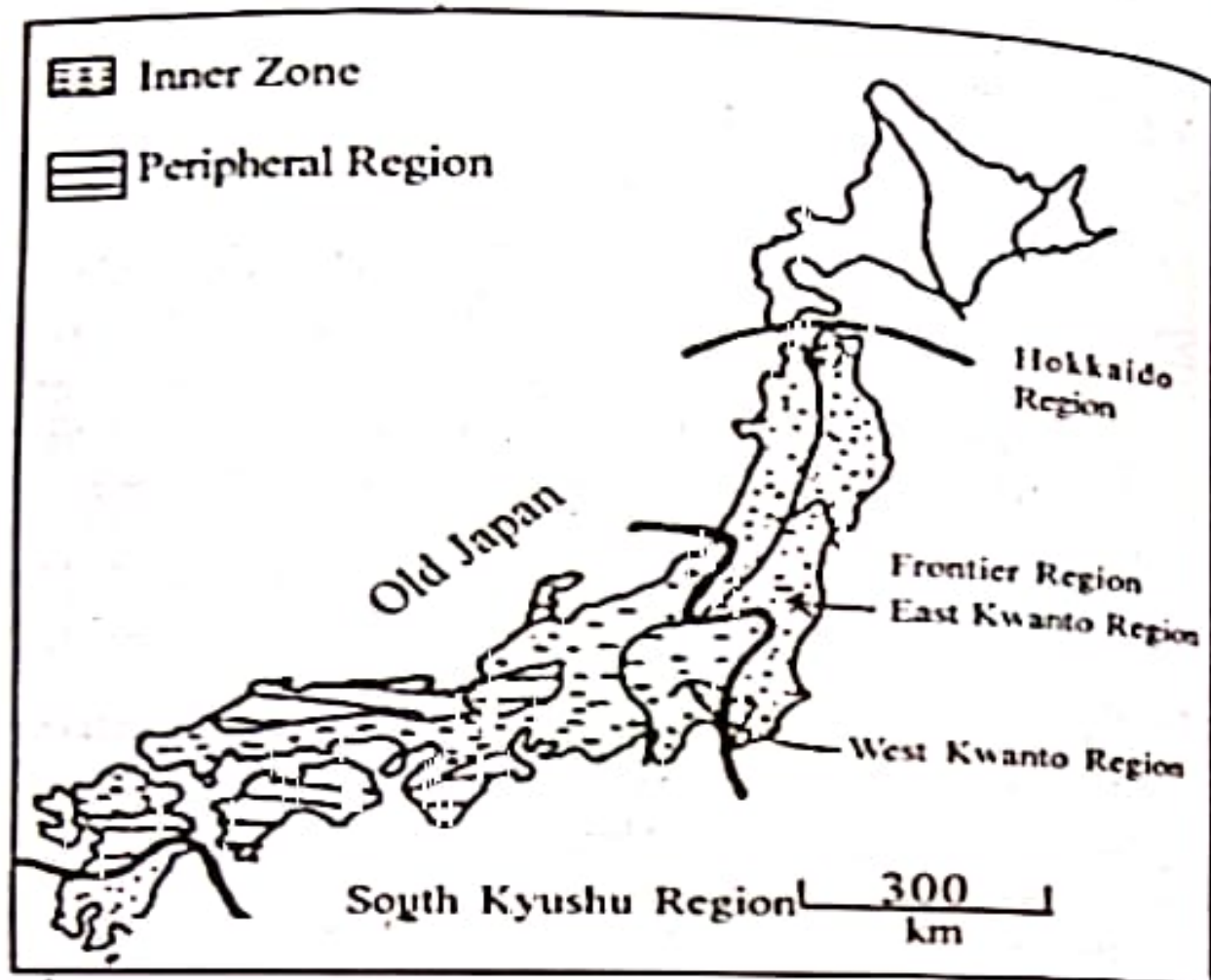


Fig- 5.03 Agricultural Regions of Japan

(f) **Tosan Division** : This region is hilly in character and therefore not suitable for cultivation. Most of the areas are covered by forests. Small amount of rice is cultivated in the narrow valleys of this zone.

(g) **Hakuriko Division** : This division may be recognised as the rice producing region. Here the rate of rice production is sufficiently high. Though the climate is cool nearly 45% of rice is produced here during the winter.

(2) **Frontier Zone** : The southern part of Kyushu island and Tohoku comprise this zone. In the southern part of Kyushu the farmlands are very small in size. The agricultural practice is also underdeveloped. Here about 45% people are cultivators. Large amount of fruits and vegetables etc. are produced in this

region due to relatively warm climate. On the other hand Tohoku situated in the northern part of Honshu island is a very cold region. Even in summer rice is not satisfactorily raised here.

(3) Peripheral Zone : The highlands of Southern Chikoku and the coastal areas comprise this zone. Here farmlands are large in size but not developed. Jhum cultivation predominates this zone. This zone may be subdivided again in four divisions—the central part of Kyushu, Sunin, southern part of Chikoku and Hida. The central part of Kyushu is very resourceful. In addition to rice, fruits, vegetables, mulberry etc. are cultivated here. The coastal areas of Sunin is not suitable for agriculture. Jhum cultivation is practised in the hilly areas of Chikoku. Most of the areas of Hida are mountainous. Of course the alluvial valleys are suitable for cultivation.

(4) Hokkaido Zone : The Ichikari plain is the main area for cultivation in this zone. The zone experiences excessive cold and therefore only one crop is raised during the year. Rice is the major crop of this zone.

A little amount of potato is also produced. Because of highlands, cold climate and unfertile soil the zone is not suitable for agriculture. This zone may also be divided into three divisions—Viz. Western Hokkaido, Central Hokkaido and Eastern Hokkaido.

Industrial Regions of Japan :

A large portion of the total area of Japan is occupied by various industries. Although the country is small in size the industrial region of Japan is quite vast. The industrial belt extending from Tokyo to Kyushu is about 1000 kilometres in length. Four large industrial concentrations can be recognised within this great industrial belt – (a) Tokyo-Yakohama region, (b) Osaka-Kobe-Kioto region (c) Nagoya region and (d) North Kyushu region.

(a) Tokyo-Yakohama Region : This region includes the coastal areas along the Tokyo Bay of the Honshu island. This region is highly suitable for the establishment of industries as it is



Fig - 5.04 : Industrial Regions of Japan

situated in the Kanto plain. A large variety of industries are found in the region. Amongst these industries the Iron and Steel industry, Ship building industry, Air craft manufacturing industry, chemical industry, textile industry and machinery industry are notable. Besides Tokyo the megalopolis and Yokohama there are more than 25 big and small towns and cities. These towns and cities are the centres of various types of industries. This zone provides to about 30% industrial production of Japan. Moreover this region has a number of hydro electricity production centres.

(b) Osaka-Kobe-Kyoto Industrial Region : It is situated in the coastal areas of the Osaka Bay. It covers the Kinki plain. Therefore this industrial region is also known as the kinki region. Good water transport facilities coupled with convenient rail transport of the plain and rapid industrialisation have contributed

in flourishing the industrial centre. In addition to Osaka, Kobe and Kyoto there are more than about ten towns in this region.

Osaka and Kyoto are traditionally famous for textile and handicraft industries throughout the country. The cotton and silk industries of Osaka have a good reputation. Machines and tools manufacturing industry has dominated both of these industrial centres recently. Raw materials for such industries are imported from foreign countries. Iron and steel industry, petroleum industry, Ship building industry, aircraft manufacturing and chemical industry are other industries of this region.

(c) Nagoya Industrial Region : It is situated on the east coast of Honshu between Tokyo-Yokohama and Osaka-Kobe-Kyoto region. It is a centre of cotton, silk and woolen textile industries. At present, car manufacturing industries have also developed here. This region is known as 'Detroit' of Japan.

(a) North Kyushu Industrial Region : This region is situated in the northern part of Kyushu. Sufficient coals are found here which satisfy the demand of the industries. The region is advanced in heavy industries like iron and steel etc. Ship building industries, cement and tools and machines manufacturing industries are also found in this region. Yawata, Nagasaki and Shimonosoki are important industrial centres of the region.

Exercise

1. State the geographical location of Japan.
2. Give a geographical description of Japan.
3. What are the major physical divisions of Japan? Briefly describe with map the landform of each division.
4. Give a brief description of the land forms of Japan.
5. Write briefly about population growth and distribution of Japan.
6. Mention the factors which affect the density of population of Japan.
7. Write about the role of agriculture in the economy of Japan.

8. Show the main agricultural regions of Japan on a map and describe the main characteristics of each region.
9. What are the chief industrial regions of Japan? Show these regions in a map and give a brief description of each region.
10. Write short notes on :
 - (a) Islands of Japan
 - (b) Physiography of Hokkaido region
 - (c) Industrialisation and economic development of Japan
 - (d) Terrace cultivation in Japan
 - (e) Tokyo Yokohama Industrial Region
 - (f) Coastal areas of Japan
 - (g) Honshu island region of Japan
 - (h) Mineral Resources of Japan

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