Following are the answers to the questions from the Unit 6 Assignment: “Comparing Industrial Legacies: China, Japan, and Africa.” Please compare your answers to the ones here, but remember, you do not need a word-for-word match to the answers; rather, you should make sure you have the right idea and can express the answers in your own words. If you do not think you can do this, you should go back and revisit the relevant course resources. You should also refer back to this answer key as a study guide to help you remember the most important points from Unit 6.

1. The “Great Reversal of Fortune” was the decline of China and the rise of Europe, Britain in particular. In the early 1800s, the Qing Empire of China was the wealthiest and most powerful on earth, but by the later stages of the century, China as a nation was severely weakened and impoverished, whereas Britain had assumed the status as the wealthiest and most powerful nation in the world. According to Drs. Bol and Kirby, the forcible implementation of the opium trade by the British through the Opium Wars was one of the most crucial moments in modern Chinese history because it led to the “Great Reversal of Fortune.” For more, see their “Lecture 23: Opium and the Opium Wars.”

2. In his review of The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy, Perdue explains Kenneth Pomeranz’s thesis as follows: Around 1800, England and China were basically similar across all economic indicators, including such measurements as standard of living, market development, and agricultural productivity. This thesis is an important refutation to the argument that the reason Europe industrialized before China is because of European economic superiority. In fact, the two regions were about equal, with China even a bit more advanced; for example, the world’s wealthiest person during this time was a Chinese merchant. Instead of intrinsic European economic advantages, Pomeranz argues two accidents were responsible for the Industrial Revolution occurring in Europe: the easily accessible deposits of coal in Britain, Germany, and elsewhere, and the discovery of the New World. Both these “geographical contingencies” enabled Europeans to undergo rapid economic development during the nineteenth century and industrialize, whereas China’s economy, without access to new material resources like coal, grew much more slowly. For more information, please reread Perdue’s review article.

3. Cuban sugar planters received foreign investment and developed new technologies in the mid-nineteenth century, but one of the key factors that made the “Sugar Revolution” possible was cheap Chinese labor. No longer able to use African slaves, planters instead turned to importing Chinese workers, mostly single males, who harvested the sugar and built new railroads, generating massive profits for the sugar
industry. For more, see Learner.org’s “Bridging World History: Unit 19: Global Industrialization.”

4. Unlike China, which lost the Opium War to Britain in 1842 and was forcibly incorporated into the British-dominated industrial world economy, Japan was never defeated in war. The Japanese did, however, receive heavy pressure from the United States via Commodore Matthew C. Perry’s naval fleet to open their country to Western trade, which the Japanese did in 1854. Thus the Chinese were defeated in a war with Britain and the Japanese were prodded by the United States a dozen years later to open their economies to Western traders. For more information, revisit the resources in subunit 6.3.1.

5. The Meiji government saw the need to modernize in three broad ways: politically, militarily, and economically. The Meiji sought to modernize economically by following the Western path of industrialization; likewise the government sought to modernize politically by creating a parliament and national constitution. Militarily, the Meiji government’s goal was to modernize the military by conquering new territories and expanding their imperial reach. For more on this topic, see Professor K. Ohno’s “Lecture 3: Meiji: Key Goals of the New Government.”

6. The Japanese silk industry was a major beneficiary from the opening of Japan to the West. Silk underwent a tenfold increase shortly after the Meiji government began the process of modernization, and its social impacts were dramatic. The need for factory workers caused many young women to move to the cities to work in silk factories, reminiscent of British and American cotton mills, whereas Japanese men took wage work in the farming aspects of the silk trade—growing rice and tending mulberry trees. While most factory work went to women, the higher paid skill positions in the silk industry remained the sole province of men. For more, see Learner.org’s “Bridging World History: Unit 19: Global Industrialization.”

7. Unlike Japan and China, Africa was divided up amongst the European powers by the end of the nineteenth century. Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, and Portugal staked the largest claims in Africa. There were multiple factors motivating this new imperial push: rivalries between European nations, the desire for markets for finished goods, and the desire to control tropical commodities and cash crops. For more on this topic, see the New World Encyclopedia’s “Scramble for Africa.”

8. Dr. John Merriman identifies “God, Gold, and Glory” as the three major forces shaping European imperialism in Africa. The “God” aspect was one motivation for imperialism, as Europeans claimed to be bringing civilization, and Christianity in particular, to the “savages” of Africa. The “Gold” aspect was that there was a tremendous amount of money to be made in the raw materials of the African continent. Both cash crops and mineral resources like tin, diamonds, and of course, gold itself, tantalized Europeans with the possibility of earning a fortune. Finally, “Glory” was the imperial rivalries themselves. Merriman points out that even Germany, which was
initially reluctant to obtain colonies, eventually joined the competition because of its desire to surpass France and Britain as world powers. For more, see Dr. Merriman’s “Lecture 15—Imperialists and Boy Scouts.”

9. The biggest similarity among all three cases is that Western powers used varying degrees of force to bring all three regions into the industrial world economy. The ways this happened were slightly different, with China fighting and losing a war, but retaining independence; with Africa becoming thoroughly colonized; and Japan able to industrialize and modernize on its own terms. Another similarity is that all three regions remained autonomous from the industrialized nations of Europe until late in the nineteenth century. Western industrialization enabled conquest in Africa, victory in China, and the opening of Japan within a very short period of time. An important difference among these three cases is how they fit into the modernizing world economy. Japan developed its own industries, and used silk and tea in particular, to industrialize, creating factories and large cities on a Western model. China, however, was not so fortunate and was forced to become a recipient of British opium and later other manufactured goods. China also became a labor supplier, as Chinese migrant workers went all over the world working in developing industries. Finally, Africa suffered the most as it was directly colonized and its resources were exported for European benefit. Africa also played the most direct role in European imperial rivalry, as the jousting for control of Africa was an important factor leading to the hostilities among European nations that would explore into World War I.