HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
Peter N. Stearns, Ph.D.

# GLOBALIZATION – The Early Modern Period, 1450-1750

As historians have begun to pay serious attention to anchoring the phenomenon of globalization in the analysis of the past, many have recognized the importance of developments that began to take shape after 1450 or 1500. Some have introduced the term "proto-globalization" to cover this period. Approaches to globalization clearly accelerated, as the whole world was brought into regular interaction for the first time. The range and impact of exchanges increased, as new trade levels most clearly demonstrated and new technologies accelerated the speed of contact as well. The patterns fell short of more modern level – hence the hesitant "proto". Transportation speed was deficient by later standards, and some societies could still choose largely to opt out of the contact network altogether. Key categories of exchange, particularly in the cultural arena, also remained hesitant. The result is a real sense of transformation, compared to the transregional interplay of the previous period, but with further innovations still essential before modern globalization can be identified.

Even with the hesitations, however, two other features of globalization already began to emerge. New regional inequalities demonstrated that changes in contact patterns were creating winners and losers – an issue that still bedevils globalization today. And enough contact was possible that some societies became visibly concerned about protecting their historic identities, though the problem was not phrased in this modern way. Here too was an issue that contemporary societies – leaders and ordinary folk alike – still grapple with. The early modern period, in other words, clearly introduces a new chapter in the globalization story, in a number of ways.

**Basic Treatments (pick at least one):**

*Globalization: A Short History*. By Jurgen Osterhammel and Niels P. Petersson (Princeton, 2003). Pages 13 – 61.

*The Three Waves of Globalization*. By Robbie Robertson (Zed Book, 2003). Pages 87-127.

*Globalization in World History*. By Peter N. Stearns (Routledge, 2010). Pages 57-90.

## Technology and Trade

**The New Combination** Trade motivations spurred European leaders to new explorations, hoping for more advantageous commercial arrangements. The motivations combined with new technologies, particularly in navigation and weaponry, to give Europeans greater access to world trade. They also, initially by accident, facilitated the inclusion of the Americas in world trade for the first time. The whole package of developments, finally, steadily increased global trade levels, making imports and exports more important in a host of regional economies.

**Motivations** Europeans, led by the Portuguese and Spanish, began sending exploratory expeditions down the Atlantic coast of Africa during the 15th century, each trip pressing slightly farther than the last. Various causes were involved: Portuguese and Spanish leaders felt new energy after the expulsion of Islamic rulers from the Iberian Peninsula. Religious interests played some role, in seeking new missionary opportunities for Catholicism. But trade issues were front and center. Europeans wanted to expand their access to Asian products like spices and silks. They sought trade routes that could connect them more directly with Asia, so that they would not have to deal with Islamic middle-men in the Eastern Mediterranean. They also hoped to discover new sources of gold. Europeans were at a disadvantage in Asian trade because they had few products that attracted Asian buyers; new supplies of gold might repair that deficiency. Though they never found the treasures they sought, the allure long remained a factor in their new adventures.

**Technologies** European efforts built on a number of new technologies basically acquired from earlier contacts with Asia. Sailing ships and navigational devices improved, with initial gains and subsequent developments yielding new opportunities. Guns were equally important, giving new levels of force a key role in global contacts. Major innovations in global contacts have always depended in part on new technologies, and the early modern period was certainly no exception. Trade and communication benefited from new speed and capacity. The inclusion of new regions, particularly the Americas, depended on the improved technology as well.

**Sails** By 1500 European ships introduced a new pattern of sails. Borrowing the triangular, or lateen, sail from the Arabs, Europeans also added square sails. The result allowed sailors to take advantage both of crosswinds and tailwinds, which in turn permitted ships to cross stretches of water far from land. Traders could now cross the Indian Ocean directly, rather than hugging the shores, and they could navigate the Atlantic and Pacific as well. Other improvements included the use of different kinds of wood, to inhibit rot, and new hull design, again aimed at operations in mid-ocean. The results also improved cargo capacity, by as much as 25% by the 17th century.

**Directions** Along with sails came better navigational devices. Europeans had acquired the compass from Asia, and they steadily improved it; it was Columbus who praised the needle for "always seeking the truth." Europeans also worked on other methods to calculate direction without sighting land. Arab devices provided the basis for using stars for orientation. Mapmaking improved steadily as well, along with more detailed use of ships' logs to provide navigational information. By the 18th century, in a major development, Europeans also learned how to calculate longitude. All of this extended the use of the world's oceans. Already by 1500, sea routes extended 45% farther than had been possible in 1000, and the gains were just beginning.

**Guns** Guns, which Europeans adapted from the Chinese invention of explosive powder, played at least as great a role in new patterns of global trade. Ships' cannon, particularly, enabled Europeans to intimidate local rulers in the Americas, and also traders in many parts of Asia. An Aztec observer commented on Spanish cannon, used in the conquest of Mexico: "a thing like a ball of stone comes out from its entrails…shooting sparks and raining fire….It is a most unnatural sight." Guns, along with other factors, would expand rapid territorial gains in the Americas. But they also allowed the aggressive Europeans to take over about half of the trade in the Indian Ocean, simply through force and intimidation – though one Portuguese leader supplemented guns by cutting off the hands of Asian sailors who tried to defy his control.

**The New Geography: Americas** Based on new sailing technologies and new capacity for force, plus the odd mistake of Christopher Columbus in seeking a new route to Asia, European explorers and traders began to bring the Americas directly into global contact patterns, from 1492 onward. Successive expeditions reached farther and farther into the New World, making the Atlantic Ocean a central commercial artery for the first time.

**The Pacific** Utilization of the Pacific proceeded more slowly. But in 1519 Ferdinand Magellan, a Portuguese sailor under the Spanish flag, rounded South America and entered the Pacific, ultimately discovering Guam and going on to the Philippines, before heading through the Indian Ocean. Regular routes were set between Mexico to the Philippines. Full exploration of the Pacific, bringing inclusion of Australia and New Zealand as well as the American northwest, awaited the 18th century.

**Trade** The inclusion of American products, particularly the silver produced in Andean mines, progressively expanded the scope of world trade. Avid European merchants now had new means to pay for Asian goods. The Chinese responded eagerly, accelerating the manufacture of items like silk and porcelain – it was in the 17th century that the English word "china" reflected the importance of the latter product. China became the greatest earner of American silver – by the 17th century more silver Mexican pesos were circulating in China than in Mexico itself – but India was not far behind. Spice production for world trade also expanded.

**New Consumerism** With growing prosperity, European consumers also had a growing impact. They helped accelerate the output of goods like sugar, coffee (copied from the Middle East), tea, and cocoa.

Something of a mass market, and not just a luxury market, dependent on international trade emerged for the first time. Simultaneously, profits from world trade began to transform economic levels in both Asia and Europe. The global importance of merchants steadily expanded as well.

**Some Costs** There were clear downsides to this new global trade patterns. Growing use of silver fueled inflation, in China as in Europe, which hurt many in the lower classes. World trade also embraced a new dimension of the slave trade, now bringing millions of Africans to the Americas, in turn to provide labor for commercial exports like sugar. Global warfare expanded to contest national trading positions, pitting various European countries against each other for control of trade routes and colonial outposts. The violent aspect of this stage of globalization persisted.

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Excerpt from Christopher Columbus's Diary including parts on European weapons, trade, and navigation.

http://www.historyguide.org/earlymod/columbus.html

**Suggested Reading:**

*Merchants, Companies and Trade: Europe and Asia in the Early Modern Era* by Sushil Chaudhury and Michel Morineau (editors).

**Questions**

1. What are the main issues in determining the reasons for Europe's changing role in world trade? What explanation works best?

2. What was the role of guns in early modern world trade?

3. What was the impact of silver on regional commercial relationships during the early modern period?

4. How does Columbus' diary suggest the role of new technologies in European explorations and trade by the late 15th century?

5. Why did other societies not imitate European trade patterns during the early modern period?

6. What were the most important downsides to the early modern global trade system?

# The Columbian Exchange

**Geography** Active interchange among Europe, Africa and the Americas accelerated steadily after the Columbus voyage in 1492, and Asia would be drawn in as well. Expeditions came from Spain and Portugal; trade in African slaves soon added in, with over 12 million people shipped over a three-century span. Further, by the 16th century other European countries regularly reached the Caribbean and North America. While primary focus rested on Atlantic crossings, voyages across the Pacific changed the global landscape as well, for example directly connecting the Americas with the Philippines. The result was a new framework for global contacts in a number of respects.

**Columbian Exchange** One result began to take shape quickly in the 16th century, and continued to operate through the next two hundred years: a set of biological interactions that have been called the Columbian Exchange. The "Exchange" had a number of important, in some cases tragic consequences; it also illustrates the range of impact that global activities now entailed. Quite simply the exchange involved new movements of peoples, germs, animals and foods.

**Germs** Germs provided the most obvious drama. Europeans and Africans brought a variety of new diseases to the Americas (and in the 18th century, to Pacific Oceania), for which natives had no resistance. Smallpox, typhus and measles were the key villains, causing 80-85% mortality among local inhabitants and undermining local resistance to European colonization. There was some movement in the other direction, with new forms of malaria and yellow fever affecting southern Europe. But the big result of this aspect of the exchange was a huge change in regional population balance, opening up the Americas to new migrations or forced migrations from Europe and Africa.

**Animals** Animals moved also, mainly from Europe to the Americas, bringing horses, cows, sheep and so on. Some of these quickly affected native American life. Others had important, largely harmful impacts on the environment.

**Foods** Foods moved. European grains were brought to the Americas, while Africans brought strains of rice. These new foods particularly nourished European and African settlers – natives professed to find the taste of European bread "like that of dried corn stalks." More important was the movement of American foodstuffs – corn, various kinds of potato, chile peppers, several kinds of beans, ultimately the tomato – to Asia, Africa and Europe. The Spanish for example planted American crops in the Philippines, hoping to support labor force growth; Chinese traders encountered them there and brought some home. The results were twofold: first, some interesting changes in regional cuisines, in places like India or the Szechuan province of China. Second, the basis (along with local agricultural improvements) for rapid population growth. The pattern surfaced in China, for example, from the early 17th century onward. Ironically, Europeans were slow to use American foods, worrying that they were sinful because they were not mentioned in the Bible; but when they overcame their scruples, and began to grow potatoes from the late 17th century onward, a huge population boom resulted there as well. New global contacts had wide global consequences, and today about a third of the foods used around the world have American origins.

**People** Finally, people moved. European settlements in the Americas were not large enough to have massive effects on populations back home. But the slave trade involved so many young men from West Africa that local birth rates suffered, and African population levels as a whole stagnated during the period of the Exchange.

**Effects** Biological shifts do not often grab headlines, and the Columbian exchange was long underplayed. Its steady effects did however change the framework of world history. First, the drastic shift in regional population balance, to the detriment of Americans and Africans, had direct impact on peopling the Americas and an indirect impact on the places which now sent migrants. Second, the overall result, particularly thanks to the impact of new foods in Africa, Asia and Europe, was an acceleration of total global population growth, that would continue into the 20th century when new public health measures provided an even more important spur.

Third, while the most dramatic effects of the Columbian exchange settled down by 1700 (when

American populations now began to grow again, but mainly on the basis of whites, Africans, and mixed race), the pattern of more extensive and rapid global disease exchange continued. As noted "old world" diseases later reached the Pacific. Some Europeans, in New England and the Canadian northwest, began deliberately giving natives smallpox-infested blankets, knowing the results, so what had been a horrible historical accident became somewhat deliberate as well. But there was more. European-Middle Eastern interactions would help spread new forms of typhus; greater contact with India involved recurrent waves of cholera, reaching the Americas as well at many points in the 19th century. The kind of globalization that took shape after 1450 thus clearly brought unprecedented issues around the problem of epidemic disease – a potential with which the world is still grappling.

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**Also Suggested:**

*The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* by Alfred Crosby (New York: Praeger, 2003).

**Questions**

1. In what ways did the globalization of American foods have unusually important consequences after 1500, compared to other food exchanges in world history?

2. Discuss the roles Africa played in the Columbia Exchange.

3. How does the Columbian Exchange help explain the widespread use of slaves in the Americas? What other factors may have been involved?

4. Why were Native populations in the Americas more vulnerable to “European” diseases than African populations were?

5. How do horses in the Columbian Exchange suggest the importance of animals in world history?

6. How does the *las Casas* document reflect the impacts of the Columbian Exchange?

7. Using examples from the Columbian Exchange, discuss the role of chance or accident in world history.

## The Great Trading Companies

**New Types of Organizations** At least the names of some of the great trading companies of the early modern period are familiar, like the British East India Company. What is less commonly known is that these companies represented a significant innovation in business as well as political organization. They form the clear antecedent of the types of structures we now call “multinationals”, and in some cases they wielded almost as much power. They constituted a clear departure from the business organizations that had previously sustained transregional trade. Organizational change, then, along with new patterns of trade, technology and biological exchange, mark the early modern period as a clear departure in the world history of contact.

**Precedents** Arab and other merchants had long since devised effective procedures for dealing with long distance trade. They could issue letters of credit valid in different places, and they had mechanisms to exchange funds. Many of their interactions depended however on kinship networks, rather than a more structured bureaucracy. Branches of merchant families would simply be stationed in places like southern China, and the blood tie was taken as a guarantee of reliability. Indian merchants, dealing for example in central Asia, had similar arrangements. The approach worked well, but obviously it could have real limitations both in dealing with longer distances and in expanding the scale of transactions.

**Shareholders and Capital** The companies that Europeans began to form in the 16th century, to take advantage of the new trading opportunities, devised new methods of accumulating investment capital. They involved a number of shareholders, with agreed-upon obligations and benefits, which went well beyond kinship ties. The Dutch East India Company, set up in 1602, had two specified types of shareholders, one consisting of investors who sought a profit, the other embracing a smaller number of investors who would also combine to manage the company. Almost 400 businessmen, in various Dutch cities, responded to the initial invitation, despite the high minimum investment required, raising an initial capital of 6 million guilders. This kind of fund helped companies establish huge merchant fleets, while arrangements with the government provided a monopoly over the nation’s trade with Southeast Asia. Companies in other countries, notably France and Britain, had similar size and characteristics. The sheer organizational scale was unprecedented.

**Production and Trade** Most of these new companies, though initially formed for trade, also moved quickly into overseas production. The Dutch company, for example, not only established commerce in spices. It also used military force to seize trading facilities and land in what is now Indonesia, so that it could expand spice production directly, using slave labor. (Native populations might be forcibly expelled in order to make room for this kind of operation.) The goal was higher output of nutmeg and cloves, while cutting costs. In India, the British East India Company, authorized by the British state, in effect took over local government functions, in interests of expanding trade and production alike. These companies wielded tremendous political and economic influence, often outstripping the authority of local units – just as many multinationals do today.

**Organization and Information** The trading companies also innovated through their bureaucracy and information flow. They kept careful track of regional trade data, circulating news both to the home office and to other regional branches. They shifted funds from one place to another, depending among other things on the most favorable currency exchanges. Accounting procedures became more elaborate. Bureaucracies were recruited according to talent, though there was some preference for the offspring of shareholders (kinship is hard to deny entirely). Recruiters sought to winnow out people with vices such as heavy drinking or gambling. Most interesting of all was the increasing effort to standardize procedures, creating institutional rules and regulations that would preempt dangerous individual initiatives. The British companies thus had elaborate "laws and standing orders," specifying the procedures to be followed for all sorts of routine activities. Therese innovations were vital in allowing companies to expand steadily in a literally global arena.

**Growth Patterns** Finally, like the multinationals today, the big trading companies were built to grow. The Dutch company obviously had outposts in Holland and Indonesia. But it also established facilities in Persia, India, China and many other parts of Southeast Asia, trading among these centers as well as between them and Europe. The same company helped launched the new Dutch colony in southern Africa. Expansion also involved the range of goods. The company focused on spices, but it also bought textiles in China and India, and copper and silver in Japan. By 1669 the Dutch company was the richest the world had ever seen, with 150 trading ships, 40 warships, 50,000 employees and a private army of 10,000 soldiers. Companies of this sort were redefining what it meant to be a global player.

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**Suggested Reading:**

*The Trading World of Asia and the English East India Company 1600-1760* by K N Chaudhuri (Cambridge, 1978).

**Questions**

1. What was the relationship of the trading companies to the state? Are the companies best seen as extension of government or as expressions of advanced capitalism?

2. What were the main innovations introduced by the new trading companies?

3. What are the main similarities and differences between the trading companies and contemporary multinational corporations?

4. What were the economic and political powers the trading companies wielded in places like India?

5. How did the competition among European powers affect the trading companies? Why did governments like Britain give the companies so much latitude?

## Regional Inequality: a Problem of Globalization

**Complexity** The early modern period introduced two key complexities into regional relationships, and some elements of these complexities are still with us. First, the growing role of the West in trade and colonization created new gaps between its prosperity and success, and the numerous societies it exploited. A major theory has been constructed to capture this inequality. But second, regional participation also involved the success of many Asian societies, which does not neatly fit the "West and the rest" model. This second feature has gained growing scholarly attention as a huge modification of more traditional emphases on rising Western dominance.

**The West as Profit Center** Western Europe in 1450, at the outset of the early modern period, was not one of the world's most advanced societies. Its manufacturing and agricultural technologies and its political capacities were inferior to levels in many part of Asia. But in the ensuing centuries, the West caught up at least to some extent. It used its sea power (guns included) and its colonial holdings to expand its role in trade. It learned to profit not simply from trade itself, but also through controlling the ships and commercial companies through which trade flowed; profit attached to each of these elements. It also increasingly exported some processed goods, like manufactured guns and craft products, from which profit could be made. Though they were very unevenly distributed, wealth levels rose in many parts of Western Europe.

**Exploited Societies** A number of regions offered almost the mirror image of Western success, as they were drawn or forced into growing world trade at a clear disadvantage. These regions produced unprocessed goods, including foodstuffs, mineral products and in the case of West Africa, slaves. They imported more expensive items, including some of the European manufactured and craft wares. They depended heavily on forced labor (slavery or serfdom), seen as essential to keep costs down. Individual land- or mine owners (or slave traders) in these regions might grow wealthy, but the regions as a whole lost ground in the world economy. Merchant classes were small, with much trade handled by foreigners. Latin American and the southern colonies of British North America offered classic cases of this type of economy, but so in broad outline did West Africa. By the 18$^{th}$ century grain-producing areas of Eastern Europe, such as Poland and in some respects Russia, developed broadly similar patterns. In some cases, exploited societies also began to suffer new levels of environmental change.

**World Economy Theory** Relationships between the West and the exploited economies were characterized theoretically in the 1980s by American sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein, in his work on the world economy. Wallerstein not only called attention to the regional inequalities that developed in the early modern period. He also highlighted connections between economic position and conditions not only

in labor but also in politics. Thus the West increasingly featured wage labor, designed to maximize flexibility for manufacturing, but also strong states and militaries, which helped secure export gains and also benefited from growing resources. Dependent economies stressed coerced labor and also managed only weak states, open to penetration by Western traders and incapable of controlling the landlord class. Wallerstein's theory emphasized general typologies and the similarities among societies in each broad category. It also emphasized persistence, as the wealthy societies tended to augment their wealth but the poorer, dependent economies found it difficult if not impossible to escape their category. Thus Wallerstein saw elements of the early modern pattern enduring even in current global relationships.

**Critique** World economy theory encountered many criticisms, and it is less widely used today than when it was first developed. Critics note key differences among societies in a given category. Britain and France both drew profits from the world economy, but their political forms were quite different by the later 17th century. Strong West African monarchies contrasted with weak colonial states in Latin America, despite some broad economic similarities. Wallerstein's theory also offered little explanation of change, as when a region moved from one category to another. But the big problem critics emphasized, at least for the early modern period, involved Asia. Leading Asian economies not only did not fall into either of Wallerstein's main categories but had a driving global role that world economy theory, with its focus on Western profit-seeking, simply ignored.

**Asian Dynamism** China and India, and to some extent the Middle East, maintained great economic vitality during most of the early modern period. They did not mimic Western efforts to send merchants all over the world. China traded with Southeast Asia, India through the Indian Ocean, but neither ventured more widely at this point. Both depended heavily on Western merchants, who brought in New World silver and managed much of the export of regional products. But the Asian economies grew their manufacturing sectors, in part responding to growing global demand. Indian printed cotton, for example, gained customers in many regions. The success of major Asian regions in the world economy, despite trade policies that differed from those of the West, is the second great complication in the regional patterns of the early modern period – and a major challenge to theoretical generalizations as well. To be sure, variety and change must be acknowledged. Japan introduced trade isolation after 1600, severely limiting wider contacts. India, under Western colonial pressure by the 18th century, faced new limits on manufacturing exports as opposed to increased production of lower-margin items like spices. (Indian leaders began to lament their region's "poverty and distress".) China, however, retained its trade advantages into the 19th century.

**Regional Mixture** A growing world economy featured one region that particularly sponsored global trade activities. It featured a growing number of regions pressed to provide low-cost exports. Patterns of inequality emerged that would indeed persist into later periods, as world trade generated very uneven benefits. But the world economy also involved strong manufacturing centers in Asia. It also embraced some regions, like Japan or, before the 18th century, Russia, which had relatively little contact with wider trade networks. Finally, there were important changes in the mix during the early modern period itself. Spain and Portugal, initial trade leaders, fell back. India's economic position began to change under British pressure (including new British laws that restricted manufacturing imports from India). Merchants in the middle Atlantic colonies of British North America began to develop some global trade patterns of their own, though they were still modest players compared to Western Europe. Regional diversity remained a key theme, but the categories were not entirely rigid. Sorting out the complex relationships has been a major scholarly target in recent world history.

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**Questions**

1. What were the main features of Latin America's world economic position during the early modern period?

2. Is "exploited" a valid term to describe economic changes in places like Latin America or West Africa?

3. What are the main strengths and drawbacks of Wallerstein's world economic theory? Why has the theory lost favor among many historians?

4. What was the role of Asia in the early modern world economy?

5. To what extent did Western Europe gain global economic dominance during the early modern period?

6. How did Edmund Burke characterize British actions in India by the late 18th century? Why would a conservative like Burke raise concerns of this sort?

7. Compare the positions of Western Europe and the major Asian societies in world trade in the early modern period.

# Cultural Exchange and its Limits

**Protecting "Identity"?** Global exchanges in the early modern period obviously highlighted trade and biology, and most regions were directly affected in both categories. Cultural contact was another matter, however, with far less consistent activity than might have been expected. Several societies, implicitly or explicitly, sought to protect their cultural distinctiveness by limiting external influence in this area. The idea of "identity" did not yet exist, as a conscious construct, but many societies saw some definite threats. In some ways, cultural exchanges were more guarded than they had been amid transregional contacts in the previous, postclassical period.

**Missionary Religions** The most familiar kind of culture contact continued to a degree. Islam spread further in Southeast Asia and in the southern Philippines, completing a process launched at the end of the postclassical era. Islam also converted a minority in the Balkans, under the new Ottoman Empire. More striking were the missionary gains of Christianity that depended directly on the new contact patterns: Catholic missionaries worked diligently in Latin America and in the Philippines, with growing success. Along with Catholicism, Latin American societies imported dominant Spanish styles in religious art and architecture. Important elements of native culture persisted as well, in what was a new overall amalgam, but there was no question that contact brought significant cultural change. By the 18th century, upper-class Latin Americans frequently traveled to Europe, encountering other cultural currents as well.

**India and Russia** Different kinds of cultural exchanges affected India and Russia during the 16th century. Russian tsars were eager to establish closer relations with Western Europe, and imported Italian architects to help design structures such as the Kremlin in Moscow, where Renaissance and Russian styles were blended. Developments in India reflected new contact patterns more directly. Early Mughal emperors prided themselves on tolerance and on the ability to blend cultural elements from other societies, while retaining their commitment to Islam. They interacted with Portuguese merchants who gained territory on the western coast, in Goa. European portraiture styles and even clothing styles gained popularity in the Indian upper classes, and even the name "Mary" caught on for a while. These were fairly superficial and short-term connections, however.

**Japan** Japan reacted more systematically to outside cultural influences, after European traders and some missionaries began arriving in the 16th century. Initial European contact led to considerable Japanese enthusiasm for guns, and also several thousand conversions to Christianity. This led to leadership concerns about preserving the nation's feudal military structure and also its distinctive culture; the example of the Philippines coming under Spanish and Catholic control offered a clear warning. In response, from the late 16th century onward, the Japanese closed down almost all foreign interactions. Japanese were not permitted to travel. Only Dutch traders (seemingly safer than Spanish because they were not Catholic) had limited access to one Japanese port. Substantial isolation prevailed, in the policy of *Sakoku*, even as important but clearly separate cultural developments continued in the nation itself.

**The Ottoman Empire and China** The Ottoman Empire, close to Europe and aware of European patterns, stood aloof without however attempting formal isolation. Notably, key European developments such as the printing press or rising interest in science, were simply kept at bay, except for some use of European doctors by the sultan. Only toward the middle of the 18th century did printing begin to gain authorization. China was a somewhat different case. European missionaries gained some access during the 16th and 17th centuries, often adopting Chinese dress styles and habits as they worked for conversions. The Chinese also entertained some interest in European clocks, regarded as interesting oddities. Contacts remained quite limited, however, and then in the 18th century the Chinese began attacking the missionary movement in the interests of retaining cultural purity. Again, cultural exchanges did not begin to match the importance of commercial exchanges.

**Europe** Europe itself was not immune to cultural restraints. Europeans eagerly learned about exotic animals and other items from the growing range of contacts. New imports significantly affected popular taste. But their interest in foreign cultures more broadly was constrained, and Europeans were increasingly reluctant to acknowledge any borrowing that did occur – as from aspects of Islamic science, for example. In contrast, a sense of cultural superiority – for example, in a belief that Europeans were

uniquely interested in technological progress – began to define European attitudes toward the wider world.

**Science** Some signs of change did begin to emerge in the 18th century, though major developments were limited. China, as noted, did not budge, and shifts in the Ottoman Empire were modest. Japan, however, began to recognize that European scientific developments could not safely be ignored (as they learned about them from their Dutch connections), and allowed translations of scientific and medical works. Russia, beginning with Peter the Great at the end of the 17th century, went farther still. Peter was extremely interested in European science and technology, importing some experts (after his own incognito visit to Holland) and encouraging science education for the Russian elite. He also worked to westernize elements of Russian upper-class culture, for example in clothing styles and artistic and theatrical tastes. This was an effort at partial imitation; there was no attempt for instance to alter lower-class cultural patterns or to loosen the hold of Orthodox Christianity. But Russian high culture was moved increasingly into a Western orbit. Here was the clearest case of a shift from primarily trade contacts to a broader cultural spectrum.

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**Suggested Reading:**

*Science in World History* by James Trefil (New York: Routledge, 2012).

**Questions**

1. What were the similarities and differences between Japanese and Chinese management of cultural contacts during the early modern period?

2. How did cultural change in Latin America illustrate a process of syncretism?

3. Why and how did Russia “westernize” in the early modern period? What were the limits of the process in terms of cultural change?

4. How did new global contacts affect European culture?

5. What was the role of the scientific revolution in global cultural history during the early modern period?

6. Why and how was Catholic missionary activity more successful in the Philippines than in other parts of Asia during the early modern period? What were the limitations on the process?

7. Why did accelerating global contacts not have more consistent cultural impact around the world during the early modern period?