

A Quick Guide to the World History of Globalization

A Very Long-Term View

The many meanings of the word "globalization" have accumulated very rapidly, and recently, and the verb, "globalize" is first attested by the *Merriam Webster Dictionary* in 1944. In considering the history of globalization, some authors focus on events since 1492, but most scholars and theorists concentrate on the much more recent past. But long before 1492, people began to link together disparate locations on the globe into extensive systems of communication, migration, and interconnections. This formation of systems of interaction between the global and the local has been a central driving force in world history. [for very, very long-term *world system* history, see [Andre Gunder Frank](#) and especially "[the five thousand year world system: an interdisciplinary introduction.](#)" by Andre Gunder Frank and Barry K. Gills.]

Q: what is global?	A: the expansive interconnectivity of localities -- spanning local sites of everyday social, economic, cultural, and political life -- a phenomenon but also an spatial attribute -- so a <i>global</i> space or geography is a domain of connectivity spanning distances and linking localities to one another, which can be portrayed on maps by lines indicating routes of movement, migration, translation, communication, exchange, etc.
Q: what is globalization?	A: the physical expansion of the geographical domain of the global -- that is, the increase in the scale and volume of global flows -- and the increasing impact of global forces of all kinds on local life. Moments and forces of expansion mark the major turning points and landmarks in the history of globalization

- 1. c.325 BCE: Chandragupta Maurya** becomes a Buddhist and combines the expansive powers of a world religion, trade economy, and imperial armies for the first time. Alexander the Great sues for peace with Chandragupta in 325 at Gerosia, marking the eastward link among overland routes between the Mediterranean, Persia, India, and Central Asia.
- 2. c.1st centuries CE: the expansion of Buddhism in Asia** -- makes its first major appearance in China under the Han dynasty, and consolidates cultural links across the Eurasian Steppe into India -- the foundation of the silk road.
- 3. 650-850: the expansion of Islam from the western Mediterranean to India**
- 4. 960-1279: the Song Dynasty in China** (and contemporary regimes in India) which produced the economic output, instruments (financial), technologies, and impetus for the medieval world economy that linked Europe and China by land and sea across Eurasia and the Indian Ocean.
- 5. 1100: The Rise of Genghis Khan** and the integration of overland routes across Eurasia -- producing also a military revolution in technologies of war on horseback and of fighting from military fortifications.
- 6. 1300: the creation of the Ottoman Empire** spanning Europe, North Africa, and Middle East, and connected politically overland with Safavids and dynasties in Central Asia and India -- creating the great imperial arch of integration that spawned a huge expansion of trade with Europe but ALSO raised the cost for trade in Asia for Europeans ---
a side effect of this was the movement of Genoese merchant wealth to Spain to search for a Western Sea route to the Indies
- 7. 1492 and 1498:** Columbus and da Gama travel west and east to the Indies, inaugurating an age of European seaborne empires.
- 8. 1650: the expansion of the slave trade** expanded was dramatic during the seventeenth century -- and it sustained the expansion of Atlantic Economy, giving birth to integrated economic/industrial systems across the Ocean -- with profits accumulating in Europe during the hey day of mercantalism and rise of the Enlightenment. (estimates of slave trade population)
- 9. 1776/1789: US and French Revolutions** mark the creation of modern state form based on alliances between military and business interests and on popular representation in aggressively nationalist governments -- which leads quickly to new imperial expansion under Napoleon and in the Americas -- the economic interests of "the people" and the drive to acquire and consolidate assets for economic growth also lead to more militarized British, Dutch, and French imperial growth in Asia. These national empires expand during the industrial revolution, which also provokes class struggles and new ideas and movements of revolution within the national states and subsequently in

their empires as well. [The historical chronology of modernity](#) coincides with the chronology of globalization from the eighteenth century.

10. 1885: Treaties of Berlin mark a diplomatic watershed in the age modern imperial expansion by European and American overseas empires, beginning the age of "high imperialism" with the legalization of the Partition of Africa, which also marks a foundation-point for the creation of international law. In the last decades of the 19th century, the global "[white man's burden](#)" became a subject of discussion. (Here is an old syllabus for an undergraduate course on "[US Empire](#)" with some useful links.)

11. 1929: the great depression hits all parts of the world at the same time -- in contrast to depression of late 19th century, but following rapid, simultaneous price rise in most of the world during the 1920s. Preceded by first event called World War and followed by first really global war across Atlantic and Pacific.

12. 1950: decolonization of European empires in Asia and Africa produces world of national states for the first time and world of legal-representative-economic institutions in the UN system and Bretton Woods.

--- perhaps 1989 and the end of the cold war and globalization of post-industrial capitalism which appears to be eroding the power of the national states is on a par with the watershed of the 1950s -- we'll see **Part II**

Part II: globalization since the fourteenth century

1. The Segmented Trading World of Eurasia, circa 1350

By 1350, networks of trade which involved frequent movements of people, animals, goods, money, and micro-organisms ran from England to China, running down through France and Italy across the Mediterranean to the Levant and Egypt, and then over land across Central Asia (the Silk Road) and along sea lanes down the Red Sea, across the Indian Ocean, and through the Straits of Malacca to the China coast.

The Mongols had done the most to create a political framework for the overland network as attested by both Ibn Battuta and Marco Polo. The spread of Muslim trading communities from port to port along the littorals of the Indian Ocean created a world of sea trade there analogous to the world of land routes in Central Asia.

This was a world of commodities trades in which specialized groups of merchants concentrated their energies on bringing commodities from one port to another, and rarely did any single merchant network organize movements of goods across more than a few segments of the system. For instance, few Europeans ventured out of the European parts of the system; and the most intense connections were among traders in the Arabian Sea or the Bay of Bengal or the South China Sea regions of the oceanic system.

The novelty of the physical integration of the trading system is indicated by the spread of the Black Death in Europe -- which was repeated in waves from the fourteenth through the sixteenth centuries -- because the plague traveled from inland Mongolia and China to Europe by land and sea, lurking in rodents that stowed away on ships, feeding on their food supplies. The epidemics in Europe indicated a relative lack of exposure to the plague bacillus before then -- and though some outbreaks are indicated along the coast and in China at the same time, it appears that plague was endemic to the Asian parts of the system.

The parts of the system depended upon one another and with increasing frequency travelers record movements across the whole system are recorded from 1300 onward, as by Ibn Battuta, Marco Polo, and others. Janet Abu Lughod argues plausibly that the so-called "rise of Europe" after 1500 followed a mysterious period of decline in the Chinese part of the system, and that in the 1300s, it was actually the vast expansion in production in China that was most responsible for the integration of the trading system -- because all roads led to China in the medieval trading world. The expansion of the Chinese economy in this period is well documented and included agriculture and industry -- and the Mongol regime in China was significant force in tying China into the world economy more forcefully.

Coercion and state power was critical in producing stable sites of trade and accumulation along routes of exchange and in protecting travelers on the long overland routes between sites. There does not seem to have been any significant military power at sea.

Exchange within the various regional parts of the system was connected by networks of trade to commercial activity within trade and power relations in other parts -- in a segmented system of connections, like pearls on a string -- and

observers made it very clear that states took a keen interest in promoting and protecting trade, even as rulers also used force to extort revenues and coerce production here and there.

In South Asia, it should be noted, the Delhi Sultanate and Deccan states provided a system of power that connected the inland trading routes of Central Asia with the coastal towns of Bengal and the peninsula and thus to Indian Ocean trade for the first time.

Ibn Battuta as much as the Khaljis and Tughlaqs represent the nature of the agrarian environment in the fourteenth century, and though warriors did use force to collect taxes, there was also substantial commercial activity in farming communities over and above what would have been necessary to pay taxes. Agrarian commercialism inside regions of trading activity clearly supported increasing manufacturing and commercial activity -- and also a growth spurt in the rise of urbanization.

Ibn Battuta (1350) -- like Abu-l Fazl (1590) and Hamilton Buchanan (1800) -- viewed his world in commercial terms, and standing outside the state, he does not indicate that coercion was needed to generate agrarian commodities. At each stop in his journey, he observed everyday commercialism. "Bangala is a vast country, abounding in rice," he says, "and nowhere in the world have I seen any land where prices are lower than there." In Turkestan, "the horses ... are very numerous and the price of them is negligible." He was pleased to see commercial security, as he did during eight months trekking from Goa to Quilon. "I have never seen a safer road than this," he wrote, "for they put to death anyone who steals a single nut, and if any fruit falls no one picks it up but the owner." He also noted that "most of the merchants from Fars and Yemen disembark" at Mangalore, where "pepper and ginger are exceedingly abundant." In 1357, John of Marignola, an emissary to China from Pope Benedict XII, also stopped at Quilon, which he described it as "the most famous city in the whole of India, where all the pepper in the world grows."¹

2. The European Seaborne Empires, 1500-1750

a. Phase One: the militarization of the sea, 1500-1600

Vasco da Gama rounded Africa in 1498 and forced rulers in the ports in the Indian Ocean system to pay tribute and to allow settlements of Portuguese military seamen who engaged in trade, supported conversion, acquired local lands, and established a loose network of imperial authority over the sea lanes, taxing ships in transit in return for protection. The militarization of the sea lanes produced a competition for access to ports and for routes of safe transit that certainly did not reduce the overall volume of trade or the diversity of trading communities -- but it did channel more wealth into the hands of armed European competitors for control of the sea. The Indian Ocean became more like Central Asia in that all routes and sites became militarized as European competition accelerated over the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as the Portuguese were joined by the Dutch, French, and British.

b. Phase Two: early modern world economy, 1600-1800

The commodities trades continued as before well into the seventeenth century, concentrating on local products from each region of the Eurasian system -- Chinese silk and porcelain, Sumatra spices, Malabar cinnamon and pepper, etc. -- but by the 1600s, the long distance trade was more deeply entrenched in the production process. An expansion of commercial production and commodities trades was supported by the arrival into Asia of precious metals from the New World, which came both from the East and West (the Atlantic and Pacific routes -- via Palestine and Iran, and also the Philippines and China).

Like the plague in the 1300s, new arrivals in Europe after 1500 signal the rise of a new kind of global system. In medieval Europe, there was no cotton cloth, and no cotton cloth was produced for export anywhere except in the coastal regions of the Indian Ocean. Europeans began not only to buy this cloth for export to Europe, but to commission cloth of specific types for specific markets, and to take loans from local bankers and engage in commodities trades within the Indian Ocean system so as to raise the value of the merchant capital that they could re-export to Europe.

By 1700, European capital invested in trading companies traveled regularly to Asia on ships insured and protected

by European companies and governments, in order to secure goods produced on commission for sale and resale within Asian markets, with the goal of returning to Europe with cargo of sufficient value to generate substantial profits for investors. Circuits of capital thus moved along trade routes, across militarized sea lanes, and organized production of cloth for export in Asia. This Eurasian extension of the circuits of merchant capital did not only emanate from Europe; it also included large expansions within Asia itself, not only among the merchants and bankers who financed the regional trade and facilitated European exports, but also among financiers who provided state revenues in the form of taxation. The connections between state revenue collection and commodities trades became very complex and the Europeans were surrounded by Asian "portfolio capitalists" (as they have been dubbed by Sanjay Subrahmanyam and Chris Bayly) who operated both in the so-called private and state sectors.

By 1700, also, competing European powers also controlled the Atlantic Economy; and like cotton from Asia, sugar and tobacco from the Americas arrived in Europe as commodities within circuits of world capital accumulation (see Samir Amin, *Accumulation on a World Scale*). The role of *primitive accumulation* was much greater in the Atlantic System, including the capture of native lands in the Americas, forced labor in the silver mines of Peru, the purchase of slaves captured in wars along the African coast, the forced transportation of slaves to the Americas, and the construction of the slave plantation economy in coastal Americas. The volume of the slave trade peaked around 1750.

By 1800, the Atlantic and Indian Ocean systems were connected to one another via the flow of currencies and commodities and by the operations of the British, French, and Dutch overseas companies -- all being controlled, owned, or "chartered" by their respective states. The 17-18th centuries were the *age of mercantilism*, in which state power depended directly on the sponsoring and control of merchant capital, and merchant capital expanded under the direct protection and subsidy of the state treasury. It has been argued that the expansion of "portfolio capitalists" in the Indian ocean reflected a similar kind of mercantilist trend in Asia during the eighteenth century.

Ottoman, Safavid, Mughal, and Ch'ing empires provided an overland system of economic integration and interconnection that was more expansive than any before. Asian capital, coercive power, and productive energies were dominant in determining economic trends in the Asian parts of the world economy. European activity has long received the bulk of the attention by historians concerned with the integration of the early modern world economy, but from Istanbul to Samarkhand, Cochin, Dhaka, Malacca, Hong Kong, Beijing, and Tokyo, they were not the most prominent players in most of the major sites of economic and political activity until the later nineteenth century. Europeans were dominant only in the Atlantic System in the early eighteenth century -- the hemispheres of the world economy remained, in this respect, very different.

3. The World Empires of Industrial Capitalism, 1750-1950.

a. Phase One: the formation of national economies

Basic eighteenth century economic conditions continued well into the nineteenth century, until the railway and steam ship began lower transportation costs significantly, and to create *new circuits of capital accumulation* that focused on sites of industrial production in Europe and the US. But important structural changes in the world economy began in the later decades of the eighteenth century.

First, European imperial control of the Americas was broken, first in the north and then the south. This accelerated the rise of capital and capitalists as a force in the reorganization of nationally defined states, whose purpose was the political representation of the interests of their constituent property owners and entrepreneurs. The independence movements in the Americas and revolutions in Haiti and France produced new kinds of *national territoriality* within the world economy, and states that strove for greater control of resources within their boundaries than any before. Adam Smith and Frederick Hegel were two important theorists of this transitional period -- both of whom took a universal few of national issues, and theorized a great transformation away from an age of kings and emperors toward an age ruled by peoples and nations.

Second, European imperial expansion shifted into Asia, where the use of military power by European national states for the protection of their national interests became a new force in the process of capital accumulation. Chartered companies were criticized by Adam Smith as a state-supported monopoly -- for the English East India Company had a monopoly on the sale of all commodities imported into England from the "East Indies," which included all the land

east of Lebanon -- and this early version of the *multi-national corporation* expanded its power base in India with government support but without official permission. The British empire expanded without official policy sanction throughout most of the nineteenth century, as British troops went in simply to protect the operations of British nationals operating as merchants overseas.

The national state thus became both a mechanism for the control of territory within its own borders and for the expansion of national enterprise around the world. The US expanded over land and into Latin America by the expansion of the enterprise of its citizens and expansion of its military power, as the British empire expanded into Asia and then Africa -- along with the French and Dutch. In the discourse of nationalism, the "nation" and "empire" lived in their opposition to one another; but "economic imperialism" was standard practice for economically expansive nation states, and "gun boat diplomacy" became a typical feature of economic transactions among hostile states.

The 1840s form a watershed in the institutionalization of a world regime of national expansion and international economic organization -- when the British navy forced open the interior of China to British merchant settlements with military victories waged during the Opium Wars to protect the right of British merchants to trade in opium in China; and when the US Admiral Perry forced the Japanese to open their ports to American trade.

b. Phase Two: world circuits of industrial capital

The integration of separate, specialized world regions of agricultural and industrial production within a world economy of capital accumulation occurred during the nineteenth century. The industrial technologies of the factory, railway, telegraph, gattling gun, and steam ship facilitated this development; but as important were the organizational technologies of modernity, which include state bureaucracy, land surveys, census operations, government statistics, national legal systems, and the like. The result was not only the creation of regions of the world with their own distinctive economic specializations, integrated into one world system of production; but also the construction of a single world of rules and regulations for the operation of the system. This change did not happen over night, but it was clearly moving ahead at the start of the nineteenth century and well advanced by the end.

Institutional markers: (1) the abolition of the slave trade and (2) the rise of international protocols for the operation of national competition at a world scale, culminating in the treaties of Berlin that organized the partition of Africa in the 1880s.

Market indicators: (1) the South Sea Bubble and the crashes of the 1820s and 1830s, (2) the depression of 1880-1900 and its impact on Africa.

Regional Cases: (1) the US South, (2) the world cotton economy, (3) jute in Bengal.