

Conquest and Cultural Conversions, Trading Beyond Economics

HIST-1701H-W-F01

By: Mollie Schnurr

Student ID: 0692925

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2. Drawing on examples from at least two separate chapters of the assigned course readings, contrast motivation and approaches to empire and expansion between 200 B.C.E. and 1800 C.E. for THREE of the following areas: i. China, ii. Russians, iii. Europeans, iv. the Islamic world

During the period between 200 B.C.E. and 1800 C.E. Many empires were expanding and taking power. Three of these such empires were the Chinese, the Islamic, and the Russian empires. These three empires all approached ruling, unity and conquest differently, but they also have some similarities. These empires all required cultural conversions after conquest, and this ensured loyalty of the conquered people.

One of the great empires of the world in this period was the Chinese empire. This empire is unique because of its pattern of expansion. This included the Great Wall of China which stood on the northern frontier and acted as a military base and a symbolic barrier to mark Chinese territory from northern barbarian lands.¹ The borderlines shifted in this area frequently as northern pastoral people invaded, and the Chinese raided, but for the most part, this wall marked the end of Chinese northern expansion.² The Chinese, however, continued to expand southward, conquering Korea and Vietnam through military invasions. These created a hostile environment, so to maintain power over these regions the Chinese implanted their culture there. The Koreans modelled their capital city on the capital of China, used the same words for their kings, and adopted some of the strict rules around women that the Chinese had created, while the Vietnamese elites adopted many of the cultural traditions of China and respected Chinese

¹ Robert W. Strayer and Eric W. Nelson, "Chapter 3 State and Empire in Eurasia/North Africa," *Ways of the World* (Boston: Bedford St Martin's, 2019), 117.

² Robert W. Strayer and Eric W. Nelson, "Chapter 8 China and the World," *Ways of the World* (Boston: Bedford St Martin's, 2019), 330.

culture.³ The Chinese state was able to conquer both of these places through military might, but they retained power through the support of local elites and cultural loyalty.

Another great empire during this period was the Islamic empire. This empire is interesting because it combined religion with culture and empire building. One of their main purposes of expansion was to conquer trade routes in India, Turkey, West Africa, Spain and many parts of the Mediterranean.⁴ This allowed them to increase trade, safety and generate additional revenue from increased goods and taxes.⁵ This empire also continued to expand to maintain unity as there was fragmentation due to many believing in slightly different versions of the same religion.⁶ Once expanded, the Islamic empire took a very similar approach to the Chinese in that they culturally converted the people that they conquered through forced conversions.⁷ By forcing people to convert, the Islamic conquerors were able to ensure loyalty and prevent rebellions. The Islamic empire is interesting because it did not form around geographical or cultural connections, but rather religious ones. This changed both the degree of fragmentation and how they expanded and demanded loyalty, but they still relied on cultural conversions.

The third great empire during this time is the Russian Empire. This empire is different from the other two in that it began far later in 1480.⁸ This is mainly due to their climate, and the fact that they had been previously ruled by the Mongols. The Mongols invaded Russia but did

³ Ibid, 330.

⁴ Robert W. Strayer and Eric W. Nelson, "Chapter 9 The Worlds of Islam," *Ways of the World* (Boston: Bedford St Martin's, 2019), 365.

⁵ Robert W. Strayer and Eric W. Nelson, "Chapter 7 Commerce and Culture," *Ways of the World* (Boston: Bedford St Martin's, 2019), 289.

⁶ Strayer and Nelson, "Chapter 9 The Worlds of Islam," 369.

⁷ Fabio Lopez Lazaro, "The Rise and Global Significance of the First "West": The Medieval Islamic Maghrib," *Journal of World History*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (June 2013), pp. 290, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43286278>.

⁸ Robert W. Strayer and Eric W. Nelson, "Chapter 13 Political Transformations," *Ways of the World* (Boston: Bedford St Martin's, 2019), 565.

not occupy it, instead allowing the local rulers to rule and pay tribute.⁹ This allowed the Russians to develop a stronger state system as they adopted Mongol practices.¹⁰ After the Mongols left, the Russians began building their own empire and united under the Russian Orthodox Church. Shared religion gave them shared values and a sense of superiority as they linked themselves to Rome.¹¹ Once united, the Russians began to build their empire through military conquest and occupation. They were similar to both the Chinese and Islamic empires in that they also participated in cultural conversions. Once the Russians had conquered an area they would move into it. Despite the Russians being a minority in the areas that they conquered they were the political rulers and the ruling culture. They did not force any conversions, but they “Russified” regions.¹² This empire is interesting because, despite its late start, it became very large and influential rapidly, but it too relied on cultural conversions to ensure loyalty after conquest.

In conclusion, these three empires had many differences but they all shared the common trait of cultural conversions. The Chinese empire was unique in that they had a frontier which they did not expand beyond, the Islamic empire was unique in that they conquered maritime trade routes and used outward expansion to maintain unity, and the Russian Empire was unique in that they had been invaded and conquered by the Mongols for a significant amount of time and unified under a common religion. Despite these differences, these empires were all similar in that they required cultural conversions of the people that they conquered. Overall, these three empires have many differences which allowed them to expand under their unique circumstances, but they all required loyalty to maintain their empire after conquest.

⁹ Robert W. Strayer and Eric W. Nelson, “Chapter 11 Pastoral Peoples on the Global Stage,” *Ways of the World* (Boston: Bedford St Martin’s, 2019), 469.

¹⁰ Ibid, 469.

¹¹ Robert W. Strayer and Eric W. Nelson, “Chapter 10 The Worlds of Christendom,” *Ways of the World* (Boston: Bedford St Martin’s, 2019), 415.

¹² Strayer and Nelson, “Chapter 13 Political Transformations,” 568.

4. Drawing examples from at least two separate chapters of the assigned course readings, discuss the sources of supply, demand, and impact on trading nations of THREE of the following key products from the ancient and modern worlds: i. silk, ii. spices, iii. silver, iv. sugar.

Throughout history, the world has been interconnected through trade. Trade allowed people access to luxury products and colonial groceries from around the world. These goods were transported through overland routes such as the silk road, and through maritime routes. These goods affected the supplying nations, but they also greatly affected the nations where these products were in demand. These products created market changes, and impacts in both the economic systems, and everyday life. Three of the most important goods that were traded along these routes were silver, sugar and silk. These goods were particularly important because the demand was large, the production of these goods impacted the region producing them, and the impacts of both the demand and supply were beyond economic effects.

The first product that will be examined is silver. Silver was found in Japan and Spanish-controlled South America.¹³ Silver was also in high demand in China as there were laws requiring that taxes be paid in it.¹⁴ This increased the price of silver so that it was twice the price that it was in Europe.¹⁵ It also caused a commercialization of the nation as they were forced to sell their goods for profit, rather than substance, in order to get silver to pay their taxes.¹⁶ The suppliers, Japan and Spain, also gained a great deal of wealth from this trade. Japan used their wealth for infrastructure projects which spurred on the industrial revolution and caused

¹³ Robert W. Strayer and Eric W. Nelson, "Chapter 14 Economic Transformations," *Ways of the World* (Boston: Bedford St Martin's, 2019), 604.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 604.

¹⁵ Dennis O. Flynn and Arturo Giráldez, "Global Economic Unity through the Mid-Eighteenth Century," *Journal of World History*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (Fall, 2002), 393, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20078977>.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 607.

decreasing family sizes.¹⁷ Spain used their wealth to increase their power and wealth.¹⁸ The effects of silver were widespread as they affected both the Chinese economy and the economies and power systems of the Japanese and Spanish in South America.

The second product that caused a great deal of change was sugar. Sugar canes were first found in Arab nations but they were transplanted in the Caribbean and South American colonies as the growing conditions were very conducive to growth.¹⁹ These colonies were very impactful on South American and Caribbean society as they relied on imported African male slaves to operate.²⁰ The descendants of these imported slaves remain in these former colonies today.²¹ Sugar was transplanted in the colonies as it was in high demand in Europe. One country that benefited from increased importations of sugar was England. They imported enough sugar to supply everyone in the country.²² These importations improved the welfare of citizens as sugar is a high and easy source of energy.²³ Sugar was impactful on both the supply side, as it changed population demographics, and the demand side, as it improved welfare and changed purchasing patterns.

The third product that caused a great deal of change was silk. Silk was produced in China, originally by individual families and women in their homes.²⁴ Later, during the Song Dynasty, Silk production was brought into factories controlled by men.²⁵ Silk was both used as a status symbol and as a way of accumulating wealth in China and around the world.²⁶ Demand for

¹⁷ Strayer and Nelson, "Chapter 14 Economic Transformations," 606.

¹⁸ Flynn and Giráldez, "Global Economic Unity through the Mid-Eighteenth Century," 405.

¹⁹ Strayer and Nelson, "Chapter 13 Political Transformations," 559.

²⁰ Ibid, 560.

²¹ Ibid, 561.

²² Anne E. C. McCants, "Exotic Goods, Popular Consumption, and the Standard of Living: Thinking about Globalization in the Early Modern World," *Journal of World History*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (Dec., 2007), 453, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20079448>.

²³ Ibid, 453.

²⁴ Strayer and Nelson, "Chapter 8 China and the World," 325.

²⁵ Ibid, 325.

²⁶ Robert W. Strayer and Eric W. Nelson, "Chapter 7 Commerce and Culture," *Ways of the World* (Boston: Bedford St Martin's, 2019), 281.

silk was large, particularly in the Roman empire as no silk production happened in Europe until the 12th century, and Chinese production was thought of as higher value.²⁷ The Romans were appalled by the cost of this material and the trade deficit that it was creating and banned Romans from wearing it.²⁸ Despite this ban, there was an ever-present demand for Chinese silk in Europe. This material was very influential in China as well, because it was a material that was in demand globally but was mainly produced in one country. This demand led to the commercialization of production and increased wealth in trading. This material was both highly sought after as a wealth symbol, and it was a creator of wealth for the Chinese.

The effects on the demand and supply ends of these three products on the global trading system were large. These products provided both economic benefits and changed the balance of power and wealth globally. The silver trade changed the balance of power and commercialized China, sugar production motivated the slave trade and improved welfare in England, and silk became a universal symbol of wealth. These three products were very influential in the global trade system, and deserve to be looked at for both their economic and social effects.

²⁷ Ibid, 281.

²⁸ Ibid, 281.

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