

THEMATIC REVIEW SHEET #6: Commerce & Change - Creation of a Global Economy

- Economic changes in both China and Europe were on such a large scale that they have been called “revolutionary”. As commerce grew in importance, Europeans and Chinese experienced significant changes in the social order, particularly the growth of merchants as a social and economic class.
- The daily material lives of people of people were transformed by the expansion of commerce - which brought new goods and products to eat, wear, and use - and by developments in technology – such as printing and metalworking.
- These changes took shape in different social and cultural settings and produced very different results in Europe and China.
 - After the commercial revolution, which was followed by the Mongol conquest, China turned inward, rejecting the exploration of the rest of the world.
 - In contrast, the combination of commercial growth and technological developments produced in Europe an outward expansion that sought to support and expand
- Earlier commercial developments in Europe, the desire for profit and power, and competition among emerging nation-states inspired the voyages of exploration that led to the shift of world trade and wealth – eventually to the Atlantic Ocean.
- Coupled with domestic political, economic, and social conditions that prompted expansion outward, improvements in navigation and shipping enabled western and northern Europeans to establish their preeminence over the world’s seas.
- Commerce in South and Southeast Asia, as well as coastal East Africa, was soon dominated by maritime Europe → and the great inland trans-Saharan and Central Asian caravan routes declined.
- In East Asia, the effects of European expansion in the 15th and 16th centuries were felt primarily through the indirect impact of a world economy that would eventually transform China from an East Asian core to a European periphery. → By 1500, Europe was poised to reap, accumulate, and invest the profits of a developing capitalist economy.
- Between about 1500 and 1800, following Columbus’s voyages, the economic relationships and societies of the Americas, Europe, parts of Africa, Asia, and the Pacific were transformed through the creation of an Atlantic world economy that provided the means for subsequent European expansion into Asia and the Pacific.
 - Establishment of Atlantic connections had a profound impact on the lives and cultures of African peoples, particularly those of West and Central Africa.
 - The new global connections upset the balance of the long-established relations among Asia, Africa, and Europe – replacing and redirecting their world systems of land-based and maritime, inter- and intraregional commerce.
- **TRIANGULAR CONNECTIONS among societies in Africa, Europe, and the Americas revolved primarily around an expanding Atlantic trade, with its foundations mired in slavery and merchant capitalism → constituted a westward shift of power away from earlier Afro-Eurasian centers such as the Indian Ocean trading world and the East Asian core economy of China.**
 - Unlike the Americas, parts of Africa, and Southeast Asia, before 1800 East Asia
 - During the 3 centuries following the opening of the Atlantic frontier, Europeans tended to see the world’s shores as the entry to areas they could dominate and commodities they could exploit.
 - They tended to view sub-Saharan Africa as a uniform, undifferentiated continent of peoples without a past. In part this was the result of ethnocentrism, a prevailing racism and ignorance that led Europeans to view African societies as homogeneous
 - For several centuries after 1500, Europeans saw Africans and other non-Europeans as they wished to see them and as their economic and political connections with them forced them to be → in parts of Africa and across the Americas and into Southeast Asia, the European worldview dominated.