

THEMATIC REVIEW SHEET #7: Transformations of Ideas, Boundaries, and Cultures

As the commercial revolutions that took place in Europe and China before 1500 brought about significant changes in the ways people lived, ideas about the way the world worked began to change too:

- **The revival or rebirth of earlier traditions**, such as that of Greco-Roman antiquity during the European Renaissance or the rise of Neo-Confucianism were both in part products of changing material conditions created by commercial expansion and urban growth in Europe and East Asia in the centuries before 1500 → changes undermine prevailing worldviews.
- **Syncretism** is another response to transformations in the material world that call for the reconstruction or renewal of inherited cultural, religious, ethnic, or intellectual traditions.
 - “Three Teachings” was an attempt to adapt Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism to change
 - in Southeast Asia after 1500 as both Islam and Christianity penetrated the societies
- A contrasting response to that of syncretism is the **division of inherited tradition**.
 - in Europe, a powerful challenge to the Catholic Church in the Protestant Reformation
 - doctrinal differences in Islam shaped the interaction of the Sunni Ottomans with the Shi'ite Safavids
 - the development of the Sikh religion in Mughal India

- Ideas in **Enlightenment** Europe that elevated **the role of the individual and reason**, as opposed to the Reformation's stress on the individual and faith had their counterparts in different traditions and changing notions of the relationship between individual and community elsewhere.
- In **China**, the evolution of the **Neo-Confucian tradition** brought forth the ideas that placed great **emphasis on self-cultivation and the inner capacity of each individual**.
- The **Scientific Revolution** produced a new understanding of the relationship between humans, the natural world, and the cosmos → these developments had a **profound impact not only in Europe, but also on Africa, the Americas, and Asia through European economic and political domination after 1500**.

- The establishment of the Atlantic world system and European dominance after 1500 shaped the nature of political and economic change over the course of the next 500 years → until nearly the end of the 20th century, Europe dominated and directed the flow of global power.
- Changing frontiers and boundaries indicate the extent, dynamics, and impact of global political and cultural interaction, often initiated through trade. **The outcomes of these interactions were varied: peoples were exterminated or assimilated, alliances were forged and reformed in the social mobility and intense competition of frontier zones.**
- It was trade with Asia that persistently attracted Europeans westward:
 - From the 7th to 17th centuries, Muslim states in West Asia controlled the lucrative trade between Europe and Asia, especially China.
 - The main impetus for Columbus's voyages was to discover a sea route to the “Indies” that would allow Europeans to circumvent the overland routes that passed through West Asia.
 - More successful was Vasco da Gama → the Portuguese then proceeded to establish a series of small commercial colonies that were to stretch from Arabia to China.
 - The Portuguese forged the way for the British, French, and Dutch → in the 17th century these European states established footholds in India and Southeast Asia
 - all around the India Ocean -- outflanking the Muslim states of West Asia.
- The expansion of Europe after 1500 had profound effects on landscapes, material culture, and social life around the globe. As technology transformed the physical landscapes and trade transformed the material world, people experienced these changes and responded to them in culturally distinctive ways.
- The **material advantages that resulted from exploration, conquest, and the establishment of overseas empires** were quickly apparent to Europeans:
 - Contacts in **Asia** made fortunes for those engaged in the **spice and tea trade**.
 - The **European-African-American Atlantic connection** and its subsequent extension into the Pacific opened a colonial treasure chest of natural resources such as **precious metals (especially silver), furs, fish and timber -- and the products of slavery and plantation production, such as sugar, tobacco, and cotton**.
- At the level of daily life, **global contacts provided ordinary Europeans such mundane things as new foods**: tea from China and coffee from Africa; potatoes, tobacco, maize, chocolate, tomatoes -- more than 100 crops -- from the Americas.
- In **East Asia, contact with Europe had relatively little real impact**, apart from the indirect - though long-lasting and profound - effects of new food crops.
- In other parts of the world -- such as **West Africa or North America -- contact with Europeans brought new goods** that were integrated into the cultural and social worlds of inhabitants or **new technologies** that altered traditional patterns of life, such as horses and guns for the peoples of the Great Plains.