

A Global, 15th century, snapshot

* Much of this information is gleaned from *Traditions & Encounters: A Global Perspective on the Past* (McGraw Hill: 2006).

- It is very important to remember that civilizations do not operate in isolation - in ancient times Greeks interacted with Romans and Egyptians. Delegations from China were entertained in Rome, and traders connected vast African Empires with India and beyond. **Avoid the temptation to compartmentalize, and therefore isolate, communities.**

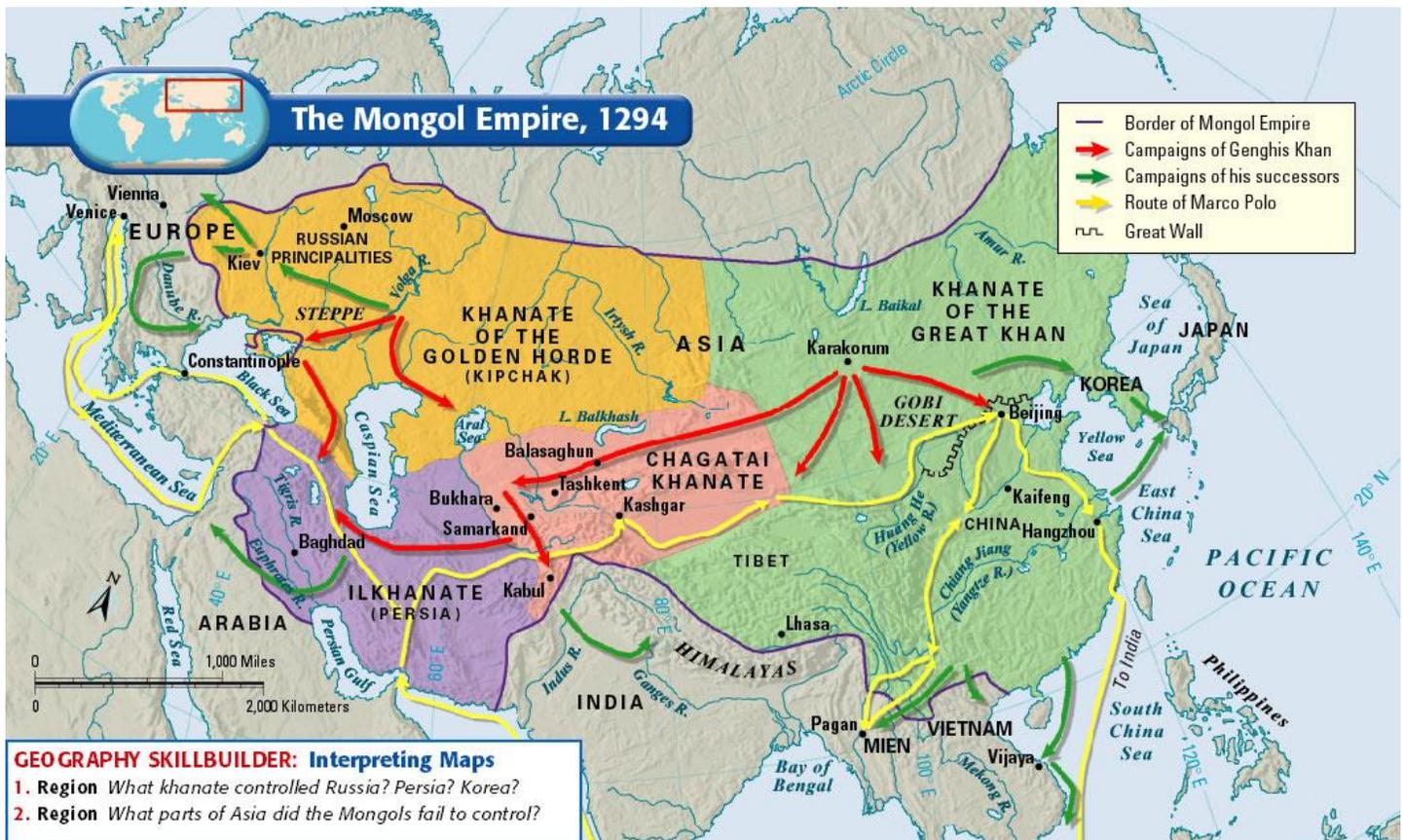


- Between 1000 and 1500 CE (Common Era), the peoples of the eastern hemisphere (Africa, Asia and Europe) traveled, traded, communicated, and interacted more regularly and intensively than ever before.
- For centuries the Silk Road (a series of transportation routes) connected the three continents allowing for the flow of knowledge, faith and technology. This was also the way in which the Bubonic Plaque traveled from Asia into Europe.
 - This transportation route disintegrated in 1453 with the fall of Constantinople (modern-day Istanbul) to the Ottoman Empire.

- Once Constantinople fell, the Ottoman Empire absorbed modern-day Greece, Bulgaria & Romania.
- A nomadic people were again asserting control over a long-settled society and consolidating a vast empire.

Impact of Long-Distance Trade

- Three of the more-important motives for long-distance trade during this time were trade, diplomacy & missionary activity (faith).
- Cross-cultural interactions were too numerous to list them all, but highlight that there were all kinds of exchanges going on.
 - Many large cities had quarters filled with foreign traders: Khanbaliq (modern-day Beijing), Baghdad, Venice, Timbuktu, and Cairo (to name a few).
- The city of Melaka (modern-day Malaysia) was founded in 1390, and by the end of the 15th century was reported to have over 80 languages being spoken on its streets.



- The massive Mongol Empire (visited by the famous Venetian Marco Polo via the Silk Road in 1271 - he also visited, with his family, Sumatra, India and Arabia) covered vast tracks of Asia and the Middle East - it even included modern-day Moscow and Ukraine. There was much communication between the Mongol Court and the Western European Kingdoms who considered a military alliance against their common Muslim enemies.
 - Roman Catholic Pope Innocent IV dispatched a series of envoys who invited the Mongol khans to convert to Christianity and join Europeans in a crusade against the Muslims. The khans declined the invitation, proposing instead that the pope and European Christians submit to Mongol rule or be destroyed.
 - Mongol traders spread gunpowder technologies west from China. Gunpowder reached Europe by way of Mongol-controlled Russia by the mid-thirteenth century. Canons emerged the next century from China to Europe.



- DYK: The magnetic compass was invented in China and spread through the Indian Ocean basin until Europeans began using it during the 12th century. China is also credited with giving the world the "sternpost rudder."
- Mongol rule in China was replaced by the Ming Dynasty in 1368 - the first emperor moved to centralize authority more tightly than ever before in Chinese history. Ming emperors ruled directly at the head of a strong central government.
 - The Ming dynasty sought to expand its rule out into the world and sponsored a series of oceanic explorations from 1405-1433.
 - At the head of these explorations was the Muslim eunuch admiral Zheng He. His first voyage comprised of 317 vessels accompanied by nearly 28,000 troops. Zheng He visited southeast Asia, India, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), the Persian Gulf, Arabia, and East Africa (Kenya). He even brought a zebra and giraffe back to show the emperor. In Ceylon, Zheng He built a monument honouring Buddha, Allah (PBUH), and Vishnu.
 - These expeditions ended abruptly after imperial officials destroyed much of the nautical charts Zheng He had prepared. The expeditions were seen as too expensive, and resources were needed to repel a renewed invasion by the Mongols and further develop China's agricultural endeavours.

- Islam was spreading across India, southeast Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa, thanks to Sufi mystics (Sufi's did not insist on a strict, concrete understanding of Islam - they even tolerated reverence of traditional deities, whom the Sufis treated as manifestations of Allah (PBUH) and his powers.
 - The troubadours of Western Europe drew on the poetry, music and love songs of Muslim performers when developing the literature of courtly love.
 - Muslim traders introduced new foods (citrus fruits and Asian strains of rice) to sub-Saharan Africa. They also introduced cotton to the region, and by 1500 was the principal textile produced in sub-Saharan Africa.
 - Muslim traders also introduced sugarcane to southwest Asia and northern Africa. It was these traders that introduce refined sugar to Europeans during the crusades (Europeans had previously used honey and fruit as sweeteners).
 - European scientists consulted with their Muslim and Jewish counterparts in Sicily and Spain to learn about the natural world.
- By 1500, India's population had reached 105,000,000. The sub-continent was filled with small states ruled by powerful maharaja's, sultans and local families. The caste system served as the most powerful organizing feature of Indian society.
 - The southern coastline were dotted with trading posts, and served as meeting points for traders from all over the Indian, Persian, Arab, East African, Chinese and European worlds.
 - By 1500 India's Muslims numbered 25,000,000 people.
- Europe was a fragmented continent, comprised of a series of regional states rather than a centralized Empire. The bubonic plague devastated the region in a series of waves.
 - Powerful monarchies began emerging in the 15th century through the emergence of new taxes on their subjects to supplement rulers' incomes & the maintenance of standing armies.
- The process of state building was most dramatic in Spain where the marriage in 1469 of Fernando of Aragon and Isabel of Castile united the two wealthiest and important Iberian realms. With a massive standing army, the united kingdom completed (what they called) the *Reconquista* by conquering the Muslim kingdom of Granada and absorbing it into their realm in 1492. For many historians, this marks the beginning of the nation-state.



SILK ROAD & OCEAN TRADERS

Connecting China and the Middle East

ca. AD 600–1700

The Silk Road was the means by which trade moved overland between the Middle East and China. The trade began during the 100s BC (and probably earlier). Ships also sailed directly from the Arabian Peninsula across the Indian Ocean thanks to the pattern of the annual "trade winds." Overland and sea commerce grew after the Islamic conquest of the Middle East and Central Asia from the 600s AD. Individuals of diverse backgrounds and religions took part in the trade between the Middle East and China. These included Jews, Christians, and Muslims from the Middle East who traded in China and India.

Ceramics are the most tangible products of the trade to the Middle East, since textiles, spices, and other luxury items rarely survive archaeologically. Other goods and technologies that came from China include papermaking, gunpowder, compasses, and silk. Religious ideas also traveled. Islam, Christianity, and Judaism came to China from the Middle East via these routes.

The Silk Road is a series of overland trade routes that connected China, Central Asia, and the Middle East. Silk was one of many commodities traded.

Indian Ocean trade routes connected the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf in the Middle East with India and China.

