

Concluding Remarks

Lesson | 05



Growing Interconnectedness

Before concluding this module, let's review a few points. The mobility of commodities, people, and techniques marked the beginning of a new global network that connected people far away in ways that still shapes our lives today. The Manila galleons followed regular shipping routes from Asia to the Americas and back. This global trade also facilitated transportation along China's rivers and canals, among states in Asia, across the Americas, and between the Americas and Europe. Chinese raw silk was widely available in markets in the American colonies and was processed by silk workers in New Spain. Silk making manuals were translated from Chinese into Spanish and circulated in the Americas. Silkworms and mulberry trees native of Asia were introduced to new continents. Merchants brought the vibrant red dyes made from the cochineal insect from Mexico around the world. In short, driven by a combination of supply and demand factors, and facilitated by new trade networks, the world was becoming more interconnected than at any previous era in history. In the process, new hubs for the exchange of European and Asian goods were emerging, connecting the Atlantic, Indian, and Pacific Ocean trade networks for the first time.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

GROWING INTERCONNECTEDNESS

FACTORS AT WORK

REGIONAL HISTORIES

LEGACIES AND LESSONS FOR
TODAY

Factors at Work

Looking at early history of the global trade gives us a sense of the various factors at work in this period of early modern globalization. We have seen how a changing environment combined with state policies, and belief systems to shape the limits and opportunities in the production of manufactured goods. We have seen how changing social hierarchies, growth in wealth, and a desire to access faraway markets combined to shape the changing fashion tastes of consumers in the Americas and Europe. And we have seen how governments tried - and failed - to control the contours of this global trade to protect their sense of political and social order as well as their fiscal stability, as businessmen found ways to ensure a profit, sometimes even going outside the law to do so. Out of all these complex factors emerged a global network of human relationships as well as material exchanges spanning Asia, the Americas, and Europe.



***Chinese porcelain imported during the Malina Galleon
on display at the San Diego Fort in Acapulco, Mexico***

Regional Histories

To understand the emergence of these global networks, we also need to understand the history of each of the regions that formed a part of it on their own terms as well, including their own specific environments, how their political systems functioned, what belief systems predominated, and what technologies people in each had access to. Understanding how each of these societies functioned on their own is critical to help understand the new interactions developing between them.



*Silk spinning mill,
Suzho, China*

Legacies and Lessons for Today

Legacies of early modern silk trade between China and New Spain continue to influence these regions today. In present-day Mexico, the Oaxaca region is still a center of silk production. The producers there face fierce competition from producers in China for sale on the clothes market in the United States. In addition, competition between imported and locally-produced silk continues to be a challenge for the Mexican silk industry. While the government in Mexico today is seeking to revive domestic silk production by promoting the introduction of the Chinese *Bombyx* silkworm and adopting Chinese production techniques, these projects have been criticized for failing to appreciate unique, local aesthetic traditions. From the sixteenth century to the present, the Pacific trading networks that linked Latin America and China have been a cause of both economic concerns and political struggles.

This history not only continues to shape people's lives in Mexico and China, but the entire world order today. Still today, Chinese textile workers are producing clothes for export to the Americas and Europe, where changing fashions drive adjustments to the global market. Still today, Chinese businessmen are importing foreign currencies in ways that contribute to a global trade imbalance. You might just stop reading for a moment and look around you. What can you see that was made possible by the global trade patterns first initiated in the 16th century that we have been studying?

Did you know?

Alongside other fabrics like wool, silk is still produced in the Oaxaca region today. Learn more about people in Teotitlan del Valle reviving silk production!

[Silk weaving in Teotitlan del Valle,
Oaxaca](#)

**Man weaving in
Oaxaca, Mexico**





**Women inspecting
woven silk, 12th c**

But this set of lessons not only teaches us about the legacies of the past that continue to shape our lives today. They also provide a model of analysis that allows us to understand our place in a globally interconnected world. Consider your own fashion choices, for instance. Now ask yourself what trade networks had to be created to get those products to you. What kind of governmental support might have contributed to those networks developing? What interest do the relevant governments have in promoting or restricting those markets? What environmental factors shape the ability to produce those products? How do the labor conditions or modes of production shape the supply chains for those products? What kinds of religious or ethical considerations shaped the production, distribution, and consumption of those products. And finally, what kinds of global interdependencies have been created by the development of these globalized markets, and what are some of the possible implications of those interdependencies be in the future, for all the various stakeholders?

At *History for the 21st Century*, we believe that learning studying history in this way can help us all think about the historical legacies we have inherited, to make wise decisions today and tomorrow. We hope you agree.



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