

PART 5 – *World Trade*

12 ESTABLISHING WORLD TRADE ROUTES 1100 – 1500 C.E.

THE PATTERNS AND PHILOSOPHIES OF EARLY ECONOMIC SYSTEMS

COMMENTARY

Part Five – *World Trade* – examines the importance of trade and economics in world history (between c. 1100-1800) and its role in the transmission and exchange of ideas, culture and even diseases, as well as material goods. Chapter 12 reviews the origins and development of world trade networks from approximately 1100 to 1500, C.E. The thesis – or principal argument – of the chapter is that long-distance trade, mostly in **luxury goods** for the wealthy or non-perishable bulk items such as raw wool or cotton, has formed a significant component of the world’s economic systems from the earliest civilizations and that, by the beginning of the second millennium C.E., a number of flourishing, highly sophisticated -- and mutually connected -- **trading networks** had developed in China and southeast Asia, central and southwest Asia, the Indian Ocean littoral, sub-Saharan Africa and the Mediterranean basin. Similar trade patterns were established separately in the Americas as well, particularly in central America and the Andes region. The relatively impoverished regions of western and central Europe existed on the periphery of the Afro-Eurasian pattern of trade until a set of fortuitous climatic, social, religious and technological changes served to stimulate economic growth in Europe and eventually allowed Europeans to break out of their semi-isolation, thrust themselves into those long-established trade networks and even link the eastern and western hemispheres after 1492.

As Chapter 12 demonstrates, the study of long-distance exchange is important to historians for a number of reasons. First, the amount and nature of the goods traded provides a good index of the prosperity of a given economy and fluctuations in long-distance trade are indicative of important developments in other aspects of society. Medieval Europe, for example, could not be an important player in world trade while it remained relatively underdeveloped and the Christian Church was hostile to the idea of individual profit. Second, trade has played an important role in linking distant regions and in fostering the migrations of peoples and ideas. The Chinese, Arab and Jewish **diasporas**, for example, as well as the spread of Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam, have been fostered by traders. Thirdly, the study of world trade patterns helps us to understand that the economic goals, functions and priorities of different societies are by no means identical or even consistent. While **free market economies** based on private profit have existed in a number of places at different times, they have had to coexist with – and have often been superseded by – theories or systems which placed a higher value on the idea of a “**moral economy**” that guaranteed subsistence for all, or government-regulated economies which placed the welfare and security of the state above that of any group or individual.

The author outlines and compares the distinctive structures, major trade commodities and important developments in six major trading areas of the period: the Americas (including the Aztec and Inca trade networks); west and east Africa, south of the Sahara; the Indian Ocean trade system; the Mongol Empire; China and the South China Sea; and medieval Europe and the Mediterranean Sea. Several of these trade areas – most notably **Ming** China and the Aztec and Inca Empires -- were characterized by a high degree of state control over the economy, whereas others – particularly the Indian Ocean network and that of later medieval Europe – were tilted more toward private profit and a free market. China under the **Mongols** and the Ming Dynasty and medieval Europe are examined in the greatest detail, with implicit comparisons being made between the two. The major question addressed throughout the latter part of the chapter is why and how western Europe, an economic backwater at the beginning of the period, was able to become a dynamic trading power, while China, the world’s largest and most vigorous economy, began to show signs of stagnation, relative to the western upstarts.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

- A. Trade and Traders: Goals and Functions
 - 1. World trade: What Difference Does It Make?
 - a. Free market economies and the “human economy” in pre-modern times
 - b. The importance of “stranger merchants” and trade diasporas in world trade
 - 2. Trade networks, 1250-1500
 - a. Scholars of trade networks: Janet Abu-Lughod and Eric Wolf
 - b. The development of world trade networks before, at, and after 1500

- B. World Trade Patterns, 1100-1500: What Do We Know?
 - 1. The Americas
 - a. The Andes region
 - b. Mesoamerica
 - 2. Sub-Saharan Africa
 - a. West African: trading kingdoms of the Sahel
 - b. East Africa: the Indian Ocean network
 - 3. Indian Ocean Trade
 - a. Jewish traders: How Do We Know?
 - b. Muslim traders
 - 4. The Silk Routes and the Mongols
 - a. Genghis Khan
 - i. Extent of Mongol conquests
 - ii. The Pax Mongolica
 - b. World travelers: Ibn Battuta and Marco Polo
 - i. SPOTLIGHT: the Ships of Trade
 - ii. PROFILE: Marco Polo and His Famous Travels
 - c. Bubonic plague and the trade routes
 - 5. China and the South China Sea
 - a. The flourishing Chinese economy
 - b. From Mongol to Ming: dynastic transition
 - c. International trade and government intervention
 - i. The voyages of Zheng He
 - ii. The costs of limiting China’s trade
 - 6. Medieval Europe and the Mediterranean, 700-1500
 - a. The Early Middle Ages
 - i. Feudalism
 - ii. The manorial economy
 - iii. SOURCE: “Capitulare de Villis” – the Rules of Manorial Life
 - b. The High Middle Ages
 - i. The rise of an urban middle class
 - ii. Guilds and city-states confront rural aristocrats
 - iii. Economic and social conflict within the city
 - iv. The Church revises its economic policies
 - c. The Renaissance: intellectual and cultural transformation
 - i. Renaissance humanism
 - ii. SOURCE: the *Realpolitik* of Niccolo Machiavelli
 - iii. Dating the Renaissance: What Difference Does It Make?
 - iv. Renaissance Florence
 - v. Borrowing new technologies from the East
 - d. Ironies of the 14th century: plague and war
 - 7. Atlantic exploration
 - a. Portugal: Prince Henry the Navigator
 - b. Spain: the *Reconquista* and the voyages of Columbus

IDENTIFICATION TERMS

For each term, students should be able to provide an identification or definition, an approximate date, a geographical location (if relevant) and – most important – a concise explanation of its significance in the context of the chapter. Terms that appear in the *Study Guide* are listed in **bold** font in the first column.

Pochteca	free market economy	Marco Polo
Genghis Khan	supply and demand	Ming Dynasty
St. Thomas Aquinas	Tenochtitlan	feudalism
Mansa Musa	sahel	manors
Zheng He	Mali	bourgeoisie
“stranger merchants”	Kilwa	guilds
caravels	Cairo Genizah	city-states
bubonic plague	Sinbad	<i>Ciompi</i> Revolt
Great Zimbabwe	Mongol successor states	Niccolo Machiavelli
Renaissance humanism	“Pax Mongolica”	<i>Oration on the Dignity of Man</i>

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading and studying Chapter 12, students should be able to:

1. Understand the principles of a free market economy and realize that there have been alternatives in the past.
2. Explain the characteristic workings of long-distance trade; the importance of “stranger merchants” and “trade diasporas” in its conduct; and the reasons why Muslims and Jews often became traders.
3. Understand the importance of long-distance trade in the development of urban civilizations in Africa and the Americas and its role in the transmission and diffusion of technology, religion, culture and disease in Eurasia.
4. Understand the economic background of feudal society in medieval Europe and the relationship between increased trade and the evolution of centralized monarchies, the rise in the European standard of living, and the eventual emergence of the Renaissance.
5. Explain the importance of the Mongol conquests and the “Pax Mongolica” in accelerating the volume of world trade and the transmission of technology, culture and disease in Eurasia.
6. Connect the improvement of the European economy with the expansion of Europe, as exemplified by the Crusades, the *Reconquista*, increased participation in world trade, and Indian and Atlantic Ocean exploration.
7. Explain the reasons why Ming China did not follow up on the voyages of Zheng He, to become a leader in world exploration and trade.

SUGGESTIONS FOR LECTURE TOPICS

1. Compare free-market economies with the more typical regulated economies of China and other civilizations. Explain the importance of the question of the role of free-market economies in the historiography of world trade.
2. Discuss and compare the role of “stranger merchants” and “trade diasporas” with those of military conquests such as that of Alexander, the Romans, the Arabs or the Mongols, in the expansion and diffusion of world trade.
3. Discuss the connection between the diffusion of great world religions and the expansion of world trade.
4. Compare Ming China with late Medieval and Renaissance Europe, offering suggestions as to why it was the latter that was to embark on a path of exploration and expansion.
5. Discuss the West African kingdoms of Ghana, Mali and Songhai as “trade empires”.

TOPICS FOR ESSAYS OR CLASS DISCUSSIONS

1. Debate: World historian Linda Shaffer has argued, in an article entitled “Southernization,” that the main reason for western Europe’s emergence as a global economic and military power after 1450 was its borrowing of technologies,

crops, and industries from Asia and the Middle East. Considering what you have learned in Chapters 11 and 12, is this a valid argument?

2. From approximately 750 to 1500 C.E., central Asian, trans-Saharan and Indian Ocean trade routes were dominated by Muslim traders, mostly Arabs, Berbers and Persians. What are the most likely reasons for this Muslim dominance? What were some of its principal effects? Cite specific examples from the text.
3. Between 1407 and 1433, the Ming Emperor of China sent his great Admiral Zheng He on seven great seaborne expeditions, extending as far as India, the Persian Gulf and east Africa. But the voyages were discontinued and never followed up by the extension of Chinese political or commercial control to those areas, in spite of the fact that China was probably the richest and most powerful country in the world. Why was this the case? And what, according to many historians, were some of the consequences of this withdrawal?
4. The chapter discusses no fewer than five important social, political and cultural consequences of the flowering of the European economy from the 11th through the 15th centuries C.E. List as many of these consequences as you can and then review at least two of them in detail, explaining specifically how economic growth brought about the political, social or cultural change under discussion.
5. According to the text, Jews had become “so much a part of the merchant classes in early medieval northern Europe that a traditional administrative phrase referred to ‘Jews and other merchants’.” Why was this the case? In what respects were Jews the classical “stranger merchants” referred to earlier in the chapter? What were the effects of this on the status of Jews in Christian Europe?
6. In the extract from the *Summa Theologica* by St. Thomas Aquinas (p. 401), the text cites evidence of a major revision of the policies of the Christian Church regarding business and trade. What had been the earlier view of the Church? How does Aquinas reflect a rethinking of the Christian position? What may have been some of the reasons for this change? What were some of the consequences for the Church; for traders and businessmen; and for Jews in Europe?
7. Group work: What inferences and generalizations about long-distance trade can you make on the basis of the fragmentary excerpts from the *Rihla* of the Muslim traveler Ibn Battuta and the *Travels of Marco Polo*? How might they support some of the major points made in the chapter?
8. Group work: The two facets of feudalism – political and economic – are illustrated in the print from the *British Museum* (p. 379) and the extract from Louis the Pious’s *Capitulare de Villis*. What generalizations and inferences can be made about feudalism, vassalage and the manorial economy from these contemporary sources?
9. What does the extract from Niccolo Machiavelli’s famous handbook of political philosophy, *The Prince* (p. 402) have to do with the major themes of this chapter? Were Prince Henry the Navigator and Ferdinand & Isabella precursors of Machiavelli’s *realpolitik*? What about the Ming emperors of China?
10. Current events & issues: According to the author of the text, “All societies ... regulate trade to some degree in order also to serve the non-economic goals of the society. Business may be more or less regulated, but it is never completely unregulated.” Cite at least three examples of such regulation from the chapter. In each case, who was actually regulating trade and how? What “non-economic goals” were being served? Based on evidence, examples and arguments from this chapter, how much should a society’s economy be regulated, by whom and for what reasons or ends, if any?

TEXT RESOURCES (Spodek, 2nd ed.)

Timetables, charts and graphs:	Medieval World Trade	(p. 373-374)
Large photographs or illustrations:	<i>Quipu</i> from the Andes	(p. 379)
	Mosque at Jenne and Great Zimbabwe	(p. 381)
	Arab traders and <i>dhow</i>	(p. 386)

	Chinese silk manufacture	(p. 392)
	Modern Delft and medieval's-Hertogenbosch	(p. 398)
Maps:	World trade routes	(p. 377)
	Pre-Columbian America	(p. 378)
	African kingdoms	(p. 380)
	The Mongol successor states	(p. 384)
	The routes of the plague	(p. 391)
	Medieval European trade	(p. 397)
SPOTLIGHT:	The Ships of Trade	(p. 386-387)
PROFILE:	Marco Polo and His Fabulous Adventures	(p. 388)
SOURCES:	“Capitulare de Villis” – The Rules of Manor Life	(p. 395)
	The <i>Realpolitik</i> of Niccolo Machiavelli [<i>The Prince</i>]	(p. 402)

ADDITIONAL PRIMARY SOURCES (*Documents Set & www.prenhall.com/Spodek*)

12-1	Tenochtitlan: Diaz de Castillo's description of the metropolis of Mesoamerica
12-2	Mansa Musa: the “king who sits on a mountain of gold”
12-3	The cities of the Zanj and the Indian Ocean trade
12-4	The Mongol Khan's ultimatum to the nations of Europe
12-5	William of Rubruck: impression of the medieval Mongols
12-6	Castiglione's “Courtier”: prosperity makes a gentleman [from <i>The Book of the Courtier</i>]
www	A crusade gone wrong: a French knight's account [from Robert de Clar, <i>The Conquest of Constantinople</i>]

AUDIO-VISUAL RESOURCES (videos, DVD's, CD-ROM and web-sites)

The Age of Exploration: www.teleport.com/~dleahy/themes/explore.htm [web-site]

Includes a list of all major Portuguese and Spanish explorers and their voyages; background information on the Iberian kingdoms and their societies in the 15th and 16th centuries; and links to other sites.

The Age of Exploration and Expansion: Centron Films. [video; 17 minutes, color]

Provides background narrative on European expansion.

Gander Academy's European Explorers Resources on the World Wide Web: http://www.stemnet.nf.ca/CITE/Explorer.htm [web-site]

Includes information on all major European explorers and their discoveries, catalogued by their country of origin.

La Renaissance: http://sunsite.icm.edu.pl/wm/paint/glo/renaissance [web-site]

Contains information on Renaissance philosophy, history, social and political thought.

Medieval Spain: ftp://ftp.acns.nwu.edu/pub/Nuacademics/hispanic.studies/index/html [web-site]

Contains scholarly articles, texts and bibliographical information relating to medieval Spain and Portugal.

Medieval Studies: gopher://gopher.epas.utoronto.ca/11/cch/disciplines/medieval_studies [web-sites]

This site is maintained by one of the best Medieval Studies departments in the world: a large collection.

The Spice Route: the Discovery of the Sea Lane to Africa and Asia: Ebbo Demant, 1999. [video; 90 minutes, color]

This well-documented film re-creates the first 15th-century Portuguese voyages of exploration around Africa and into the Indian Ocean, using archival prints and maps, photographs of artifacts, readings from contemporary explorers' texts and recreations.

The Vikings: NOVA/WGBH Boston Video. [video; 120 minutes, color]

Archaeologists and historians describe the society, explorations and contributions of the Norsemen to the history of Europe, Russia and the Mediterranean.