Introduction

The Global Integration of Space

Traditionally, historians have presented the 1400s and 1500s as the "age of discovery," when Europeans began to explore, encounter, and exploit territories in Asia, Africa, and America. Yet research over the past twenty-five years has made it increasingly clear that this age of discovery was rooted in extensive contact among peoples across Eurasia (the land mass comprising Europe and Asia) long before Vasco Da Gama landed off the Malabar coast of India in 1498. No episode better illustrates the extent of these intercontinental connections than a fairly well-known anecdote from the initial encounter between Portuguese and Indian officials in Calicut. According to the story, Da Gama prepared to make contact with native peoples shortly after dropping anchor offshore. Apparently he harbored some apprehension about how a foreign Portuguese mariner might be received, so Da Gama selected a convict on board, João Nunez, to go ashore first to see what would happen. Much to the relief of Nunez, and the surprise of Da Gama, local officials recognized him as someone from Iberia (on the western coast of Europe), perhaps even as Portuguese, and took him to two north Africans who were conversant in Castilian and Genoese, languages in Spain and Italy.

The recognition of Nunez as an Iberian, as well as the presence of Africans familiar with two European languages in India, highlight the cosmopolitan character of Asian commercial centers and the prevalence of long-distance travel long before the period of European expansion. The hundred-year period from roughly 1250 to 1350 was

a relatively peaceful one across Asia, so adventurers and missionaries from various parts of Europe, most famously Marco Polo from Venice and William Rubruck, a Franciscan priest from Flanders, traveled as far as Beijing (also known as Peking) and Karakorum (in present-day Mongolia), respectively. Europeans were not the only ones venturing into strange lands, since Arab, Indian, Chinese, Persian, and Turkish peoples joined travelers like Ibn Battuta (a well-known Moroccan explorer) on the Silk Roads; on the Muslim Hajj, the obligatory pilgrimage to Mecca; and on ships in the Indian Ocean. As a result, Indians and Africans in Calicut had already discovered European peoples before Vasco Da Gama arrived at the end of the fifteenth century.

Just as the 1400s and 1500s were not exactly the paramount age of European discovery (at least of Asia), they were also not simply the era of European expansion throughout the world. To be sure, Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, English, French, German, Swedish, and Danish officers carved out overseas outposts and colonies from the 1400s to the 1700s. But these European countries were by no means the only empire builders, for a number of Asian states established political control over much more vast tracts of land during this time. Three expansive and prosperous Muslim empires rose, sprawling across north Africa, eastern Europe, and western and central Asia all the way from Anatolia (present-day Turkey) to the Ganges River basin (today Bangladesh). The Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal Empires all emerged in the 1400s and 1500s, promoting the revival of Islam; the intermingling of Arab, Turkish, and Persian cultures; and the expansion of regional and long-distance trade networks across these immense territories.

On the eastern end of the continent, a vigorous dynasty arose in China; in the mid-1300s, it was the most powerful empire in the world. The Ming (1368–1644) and later the Qing (1644–1911) dynasties rebuilt the economic infrastructure in east Asia and expanded broadly across central Asia into Mongolia, Turkestan, and Tibet. In the extreme north, Russian emperors created an immense north Asian empire, spanning the frozen tundra of Siberia all the way to the Pacific Ocean. The subjugation of Siberia and the exploitation of its vast resources enabled emperors to construct a highly centralized state that made it a forceful presence in Asian and European geopolitical

affairs. This empire brought Russian merchants into contact with English, Dutch, Turkish, Iranian, Armenian, Indian, and Chinese traders. Indeed, this was a time of global expansion.

This unprecedented empire building across Eurasia inaugurated a new era in world history characterized by cross-cultural interaction among peoples from around the globe. Historians refer to this age, extending from roughly around 1400 to 1800, as the early modern period. Though peoples from Africa, Asia, and Europe had engaged one another intermittently since ancient times, early modern cross-cultural exchange was distinctive in its worldwide scale and its ongoing regularity. Global interactions in the early modern period also had far-reaching ramifications, leading to foundational shifts in economic structures and political power relations on every continent.

Early modern interaction was distinctive, also standing out from later, modern patterns that emerged in the 1800s with the advent of industrialization. The Industrial Revolution equipped western nations with the technical capacities that enabled a handful of European countries, and later Japan and the United States, to dominate world affairs in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In this age of imperialism, these powers heavy-handedly imposed direct colonial rule or introduced a more veiled political control over almost all the surface area of the globe. Despite all of the violent subjugation that occurred in early modern times, no region stood at the apex of world dominion.

This book illustrates the unique character of cross-cultural encounters in the early modern age and their influences on the development of world societies. The emergence of powerful empires around the world set in motion processes of exchange that reached across all continents except Antarctica. Empire building in this period established four central forms of interaction: new commercial exchange networks, large-scale migration streams, worldwide biological exchanges, and transfers of knowledge across oceans and continents. This was a period in world history characterized by intense cultural, political, military, and economic contact, yet all this interaction was not the story of one region dominating all the rest. Rather a host of individuals, companies, tribes, states, and empires clashed and competed – but also cooperated with one another – bringing regions of the world into sustained contact and leading ultimately to the integration of global space.

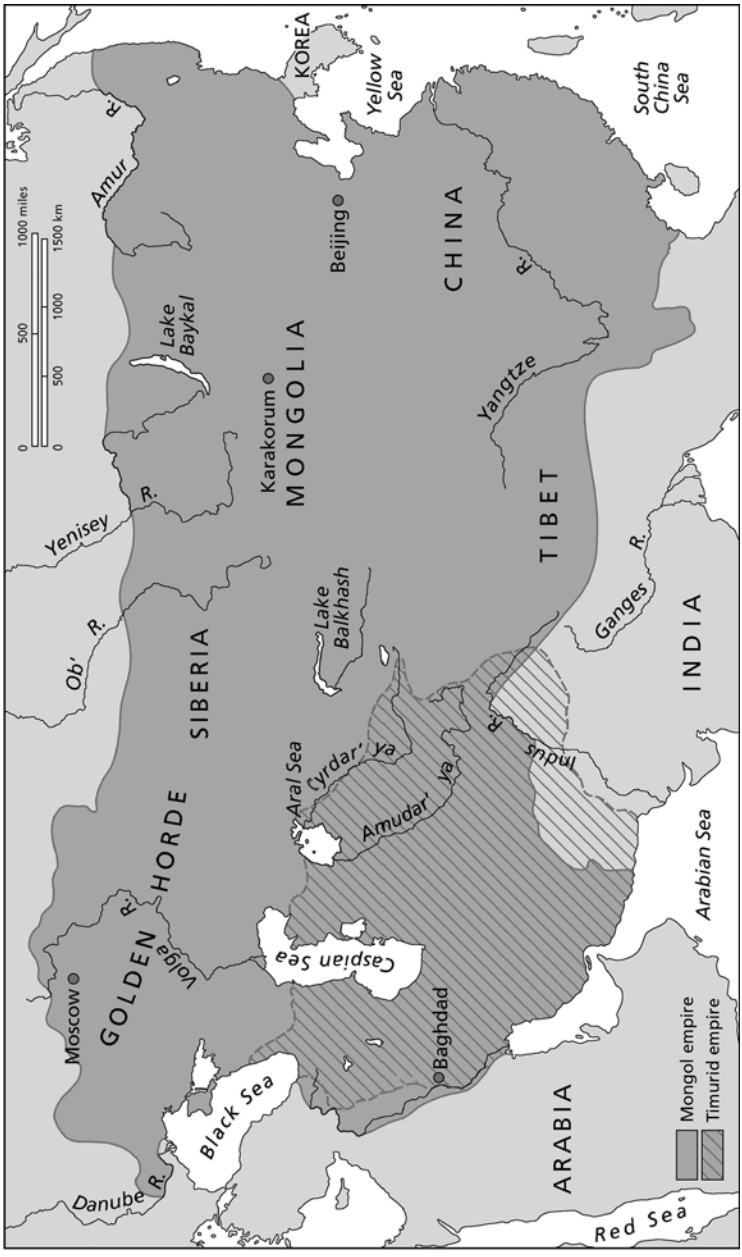
Global Empire Building

Why did so many empires develop throughout Eurasia in the 1400s and 1500s?

Even though a host of immediate factors specific to particular regions contributed to the development of these empires, from a long-term perspective the episode that linked them all was the rise and fall of the Mongols in the 1200s and 1300s. During this time, this nomadic people from western Mongolia under the charismatic leadership of Chinggis Khan (Genghis Khan), conquered and subjugated vast regions of Asia. The Mongol empire in its heyday in the late 1200s stretched all the way from the Mediterranean Sea to the Sea of Japan. To the north, one branch of the Mongols, the Golden Horde, controlled Russia by reducing it to a vassal state. This was the largest empire in world history, comprising one third of the land area of the globe.

Mongols were fierce fighters, showing no mercy to those who resisted their demands, and brilliant tacticians, coordinating complex battlefield maneuvers. The secret to their success, however, lay in their unsurpassed horsemanship. Bred for speed, stamina, and sturdiness, Mongolian horses could cover a hundred miles in a day. On a long campaign, a Mongol warrior could subsist for over a week on the milk from a mare and the blood of his mount, obtained by cutting open a vein in the steed's neck and stitching it together after use. Opposing armies across Eurasia proved no match for the dexterity and the aggressiveness of Mongol forces. After conquering a defiant city, warriors laid waste to it, taking away women and children, and slaughtering all the men. Despite this brutality, once Mongol hordes had conquered a region, they promoted trade, diplomacy, and travel. Mongol rulers from China to Persia encouraged travel and welcomed foreign merchants, emissaries, and even missionaries, thus opening cities across Asia to international exchange.

When the empires established by Chinggis Khan and his successors began to break apart in the mid- to late 1300s, a powerful Turkish leader, Timurlane, invaded and wreaked havoc on Mongol territories from the Black Sea to the Indus River. Thus, the broad region including eastern Anatolia, Persia, Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Uzbeck, fell under the control of Timurid dynasties, so named for



MAP I.1. Mongol and Timurid Empires

Timurlane and his descendants. Just as the spread of Mongol empires bred all sorts of interaction, the decline of Timurid empires exerted a powerful pull on expansion-minded Asian dynasties.

How did these Mongol and Timurid empires play such a pivotal role in the emergence of Eurasian states, which eventually produced a new pattern of global exchange in the early modern period? The Muslim empires (Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal) that came to power in central and south Asia grew directly in response to weak Mongol-Timurid regimes. Mongol incursions in central Asia pushed the Ottomans into Anatolia where they found a home on the borders of the Byzantine empire, a Greek and Christian realm centered at Constantinople. After the demise of the Mongols in the 1300s, Ottoman sultans expanded at the expense of Byzantine and Mongol-Timurid territories. Likewise, the decentralized character of the Timurid dynasty in Iran enabled the Safavid dynasty, a Shi'ite Muslim clan in Ajerbaijan, to rally warriors to take control of the region. The Ottoman and Safavid regimes, therefore, formed successor states to Mongol-Timurid rule.

The Mughals, however, represented the continuation of a Mongol-Timurid kingdom, since Timurlane conquered Delhi in 1398. The Mughal dynasty that conquered large portions of India in the early sixteenth century came from Mongol and Timurid ethnic stock. Babur, the founder of the Mughal Empire, claimed descent from both Chinggis Khan and Timurlane, and thus regarded northern India as part of his heritage. Babur distributed the top military and administrative posts to Mongols and Timurids who accompanied him in India. "Mughal," which means Mongol, denotes this nomadic warrior lineage.

The expansion of both Russia and China across northern and central Asia, respectively, also resulted from the presence of Mongol power and its subsequent weakening in the 1400s and 1500s. Russian tsars (emperors) saw opportunities for conquest when the Mongol territories broke apart in the late 1400s. In the 1230s, the Golden Horde pushed into Russia and decisively defeated the princes of Kiev, the most powerful figures in the region north of the Black Sea. The Golden Horde made Russia a vassal state for well over two hundred years, exacting tribute from princes and cities. Russian lords regularly trekked to the Horde's headquarters in Saray, bearing all sorts of goods to their overlords. Should Russian leaders fail to meet these obligations, the Horde would exact revenge by raping, pillaging, and terrorizing local peoples.

After the Golden Horde went into decline in the 1400s, the Grand Prince of Moscow declared independence in 1480. As the Mongol states crumbled, Tatars (Mongol and Turkic peoples some of whom had belonged to the Golden Horde) came to rule over a patchwork of territories to the east in Kazan, western Siberia, and Kazakhstan. Russian tsars in the 1500s seized the opportunity to enlarge their holdings in the east at the expense of these Tatar territories.

After throwing off Mongol rule in 1368, the Ming dynasty in China turned its attention to the west, where Mongols and other groups posed a threat to Chinese society. The Chinese state extended the Great Wall of China in the north, negotiated with tribal leaders, and eventually embarked on a long campaign to subdue its enemies. This struggle against Mongol tribes led to the Chinese conquest of central Asia in the 1600s and 1700s. By the close of the early modern period, the Qing dynasty controlled an imperial expanse that extended across Mongolia, Manchuria, Turkestan, and Tibet. The move toward the central Asian plain was an important factor in the growth of Chinese hegemony from the South China Sea to the Himalayas. As a result of imperial expansion into the central Asian land mass, China did not pursue an empire in southeast Asia or the Indian Ocean. The government in fact turned away from maritime Asia, seeking to limit contacts between Chinese merchants on the southern coasts and foreign traders.

On the far western end of Eurasia, Europe too felt the impact of Mongol empires. Mongol rulers encouraged travel and trade, giving a variety of Europeans the opportunity to encounter the wonders of Asian lands. Many travelers composed accounts of their experiences, and these narratives found a ready market among urban elites, aristocrats, and churchmen. Merchants, missionaries and diplomats such as Marco Polo, Giovanni di Piano Carpini, Odoric of Pordenone, William Rubruck, and John of Marignolli wrote about the places they visited, which circulated widely across Europe.

In many instances, the tales told by travel accounts were tall ones, and we should not regard them as faithful reports of facts. *The Travels of Sir John de Mandeville*, for example, describes monsters in Egypt who have the torso of a man, but the abdomen and legs of a goat. And on islands in southeast Asia, different peoples have either ears that hang to their knees, or small holes for mouths, or no heads, or horse feet, or possess both female and male sexual organs. Some scholars

doubt that the most famous account, *The Travels of Marco Polo*, describes the Venetian merchant's actual experiences, but instead reflects his awareness of the profit in a good story. Polo's account also came with tales of dog-faced men and all sorts of exotic women. Regardless, *The Travels of Marco Polo* attracted wide popularity, firing the imagination of merchants, missionaries, princes, and popes. These embellished travel narratives exerted a powerful pull on Europeans' imaginations and propelled them on a quest to find more efficient routes to the lands of the great Khan. In fact, Christopher Columbus had in his possession a copy of *The Travels of Marco Polo* when he ventured out into the Atlantic in 1492.

Thus, the appearance of the Mongol and Timurid empires from the 1200s to the 1400s made central Asia the epicenter of a dynamic movement of peoples that rippled across Eurasia. The rise and fall of this great empire prompted four critical Eurasian developments: the establishment of extensive Muslim empires from the Mediterranean Sea to the Ganges River basin; the Russian conquest of Siberia to the Pacific Ocean; the inland, western push of the Ming and Qing dynasties; and the European voyages of exploration. These four events fueled the exchanges that integrated the civilizations of the world in time and space.

Before embarking on the journey of exploration into this fascinating period, it is important to consider several concepts and problems that have figured into the study of the early modern period. For even though the story of global interaction might seem like a fairly straightforward affair, scholars disagree on a range of issues that influence general interpretations about the period.

Problems and Possibilities in Early Modern World History

Analyzing societies from a genuinely global framework presents a number of difficulties for scholars. The professional study of history developed first in Europe and the United States from the mid-1800s to the early 1900s, a time when Europe dominated world affairs and when an aggressive nationalism gripped western nations. It is not surprising, then, that history books and articles, written by European and American historians, either explicitly portrayed western culture as the highest expression of human achievement or tacitly assumed the superiority of

western values. In addition, histories cast Europeans and Americans as forward-moving, dynamic agents of change, whereas non-western societies were passive and nonchanging, always responding to western incursions and initiatives. Until the last forty years or so, a fairly brief period in the development of historical research, these assumptions underlay much of western scholarship. As a result, western institutions and value systems became the standard models by which scholars evaluated the rest of the world. Historians became absorbed with questions associated with the rise of the West and the attendant failure of African and Asian societies to industrialize and develop democratic forms of government. Despite a wide variety of perspectives, most explanations emphasized that European (and by extension North American) culture was exceptional in important ways. Whether more disciplined, more industrious, more inventive, more acquisitive, or simply more predatory, Europeans had something that other peoples did not possess.

Beginning in the 1960s, a number of scholars began to contest the notion of European exceptionalism. This occurred as history departments around the world started to increase the number of their faculty significantly, offer graduate programs in a wide variety of non-European regions, and stress the utility of social science disciplines, especially sociology and anthropology. Consequently, academically trained historians in non-western fields began to expose the depth of "Eurocentric" assumptions about the past and to challenge them. For example, Marshall Hodgson, a historian of Islam at the University of Chicago, disputed the idea that Europeans possessed any superior cultural disposition, but argued that most achievements attributed to Europe actually originated much earlier in the eastern hemisphere. He pointed out that most historical accounts at the time (he wrote in the 1950s and 1960s) glossed over the cultural achievements of Asian societies and the extent to which they influenced European history. Rather, traditional historical writing presented world history as a narrative about the inevitable rise of western civilization over Asia, Africa, and America, whose insularity bound them to outmoded patterns of thought. Further, Hodgson argued that studying civilizations, whether western or eastern (i.e. Asia), in isolation from one another unavoidably laid stress on essential, unique traits of that society at the expense of all others who were categorically different and foreign.

A conviction that informs newer methods today is the need to study peoples and societies from around the world in relation to one another. This global perspective has helped us move past short-sighted interpretations that treat civilizations as self-contained categories. One method that scholars have used to ground their analyses in the values of diverse cultures is comparative study of similar patterns in different parts of the world. For example, Victor Lieberman has compared parallel political, institutional, and economic developments at various ends of Eurasia: Japan, Burma, Siam, Vietnam, France, and Russia. Having identified striking resemblances in territorial consolidation, political integration, and military innovation, Lieberman observes that "commercial, communications, and patronage circuits" across Eurasia were leading to "more sustained interaction" among different peoples. Intense research in non-western areas has complemented long-range comparative studies and has shown that economic vitality in east Asia paralleled European levels and illustrated that "urban and commercial vigor, trends toward political absolutism, emphases on orthodox, textual religions" were just as much a feature of Asian societies as they were European ones. Anthony Reid in particular has drawn attention to the economic and political dynamism throughout southeast Asia from 1450 to 1630.

Another fruitful strategy for pursuing a more balanced global approach has come from scholars who focus on points of contact between different societies. Jerry Bentley has championed the study of cross-cultural processes, like trade, mass migration, and imperial expansion, to understand the development of societies across space and time. From this perspective, the external interaction of groups, such as the Portuguese and Kongolese, the Chinese and Japanese, or the Indian and Arab, plays a vital role in the internal changes that take place in a society. In a period of intense exchange, the examination of the interconnections between peoples offers a means to relate local developments to global movements.

It is from this vantage point of contact and interconnection that the idea of an early modern world makes the most sense. The "early modern" periodization comes directly out of European history, as scholars over the past thirty years have used this terminology to refer to the era from the Renaissance to the Industrial Revolution. Since the late 1980s or early 1990s, historians have also applied "early modern" to