

E. Asia

In the Medieval Era, the Mongols had built the largest empire in World History. In China, Kublai Khan established the Yuan Dynasty between 1215-1294. Kublai Khan created a new capital city: Beijing. During this time, trade and culture achieved even greater heights than it had before. It was during this prosperous time that Kublai Khan greeted the Italian Merchant Marco Polo, who was the first European of the Medieval times to travel from Europe to China and back. Kublai Khan requested that Christian priests and intellectuals come to his courts that he may learn more about their knowledge and religion. Marco Polo returned, full of amazing stories to share about his travels.



Unfortunately, the empire would not last. The Yuan Dynasty made ill-fated attempt to conquer Japan, which was ruined by a typhoon sinking over 1000 Mongol boats. This severely weakened the Yuan, both financially and militarily. Seeing this moment of weakness, the people of Asia organized a series of revolts. Soon, the Mongols were pushed out of China, Korea and Russia. By 1350, the Mongol people had either merged in with other agricultural societies or had been pushed back into the Central Asian steppes.

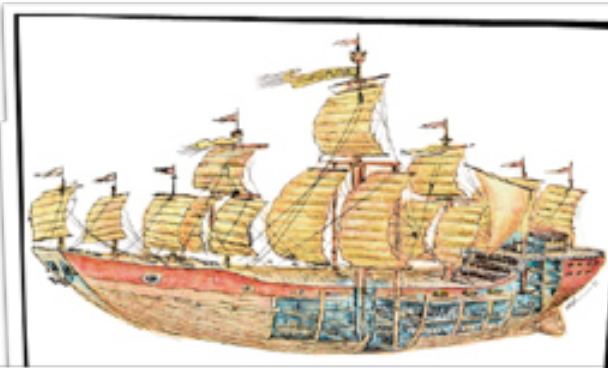
Korea

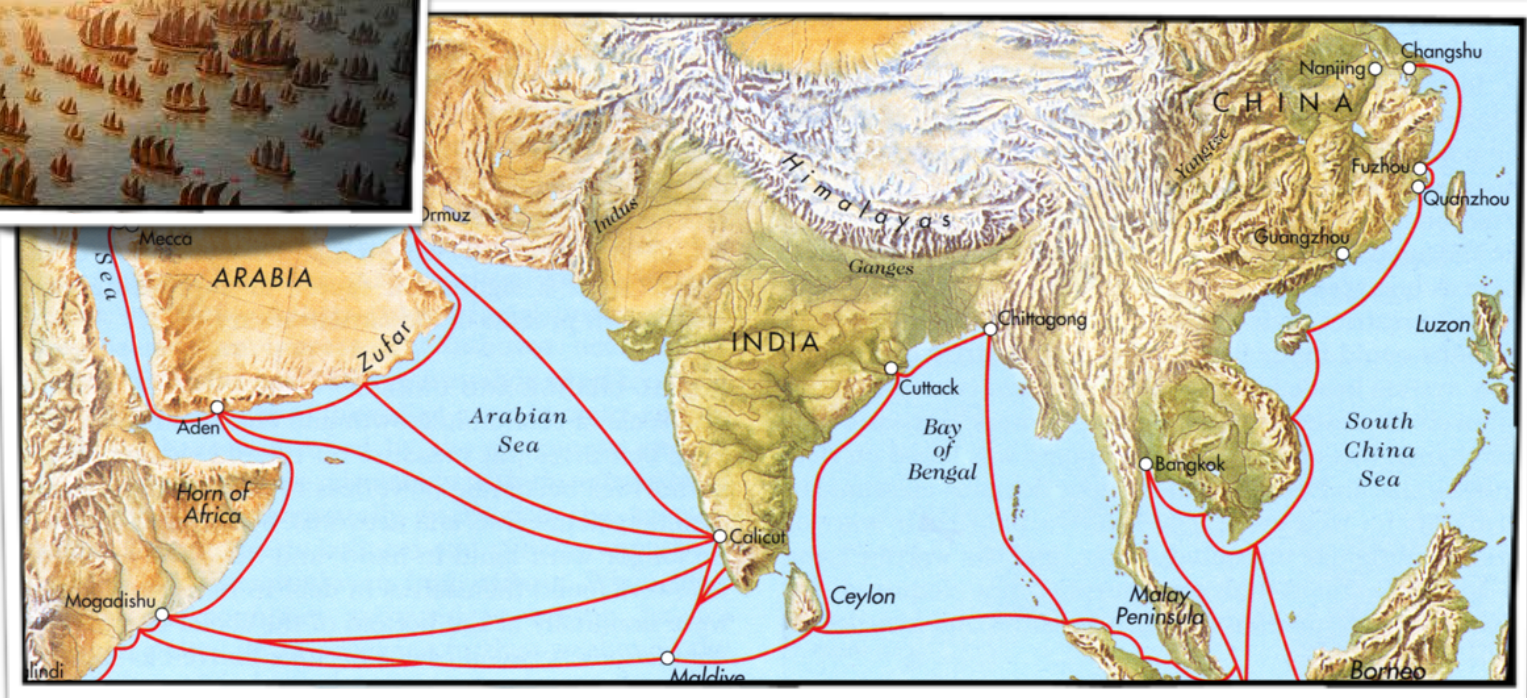
The land of Korea had been dominated by China and its culture for centuries and was also a part of the Mongol Empire. When the Yuan Dynasty began to collapse, the Korean people fought for their freedom, achieving it in 1392. They established the Yi Dynasty that lasted for 600 years. While Koreans had their independence, the Korean culture and writings maintained strong ties to Chinese writing and to the teachings of Confucius.

China

In 1368, the Ming Dynasty arose claiming the Mandate of Heaven, reasserting Chinese rule over Chinese land. One of the great accomplishments of the Ming Dynasty was the Treasure Ships of Zheng He. Between 1405-1433, Zheng He made seven voyages from China, to the Middle East and Africa and back. These were cultural expeditions, exchanging goods and seeking to extend China's fame. The voyages consisted of over 300 ships, the largest being over 400 ft in length (longer than a football field, including end zones). Each voyage travelled over 4,000 miles.

During this time, a dark shadow started to creep across the minds of the Ming leaders. The Ming began to return to the teachings of Confucius. Confucius was against trade, as he felt it watered down the culture and made the country vulnerable to attack. The tighter they began to hold to the teachings of Confucius, the more they began to fear trade and commerce. The Ming became xenophobic: having a fear of foreigners and outsiders. The focus shifted from trading with the outside world to focusing inward. Money shifted from building trade ships to modernizing and extending the Great Wall. The Ming leadership started to rapidly change the economy from being based on trading with other countries to being a farming community. Once Zheng He had finished his last voyage, they dismantled all of the treasure ships. All the records were destroyed and maps put away.





The Chinese had stood on the edge of building a global empire across Asia, Africa, Australia, Europe and the Americas... but they pulled back.

Instead of global dominance the Chinese shifted towards isolationism: closing down all but a handful of trading ports in an attempt to have little contact with the outside world. As the Chinese closed their doors, they were the most powerful country in the world. They were self-sufficient, as in they could meet all of their own needs. They had the largest cities, greatest naval technology, most advanced art, the finest finished goods, the richest economy and a stable government system.

Africa

With the expansion of trade, the fortunes of Africa continued to expand. West Africa continued a very successful Trans-Saharan trade route. As the Indian Ocean trade blossomed, it created even more opportunities to sell salt and slaves to the Asian parts of the world in exchange for finished products and spices.

The Indian Ocean trade route began to effect other parts of Africa. Along the east coast, city-states based on trade began to be established. They would export raw, natural goods (wood, stone, slaves, etc) in exchange for the finished goods (clothing, tools, etc) from the Middle East and Asia.

In Central and Southern Africa, the trade along with the Bantu expansion was beginning to have a major impact. The agriculture and iron that the Bantu people had brought with them helped to establish the Kongo and Shona Kingdoms. The Kongo Kingdom (1300-1500) centralized along the Congo River. They specialized in ivory and animal skins. In the south the Shona Empire (1000-1500) specialized in gold, cattle and other natural resources. Their capital was Great Zimbabwe, with its massive stone walls. The Kongo & Shona kingdoms exported their goods to East African trading cities, where they would be resold to the Middle East and East Asia.



India

As mentioned above, the Indian subcontinent was the central trading hub of the Indian Ocean trade. This gave the region great economic and cultural influence on the surrounding territories.

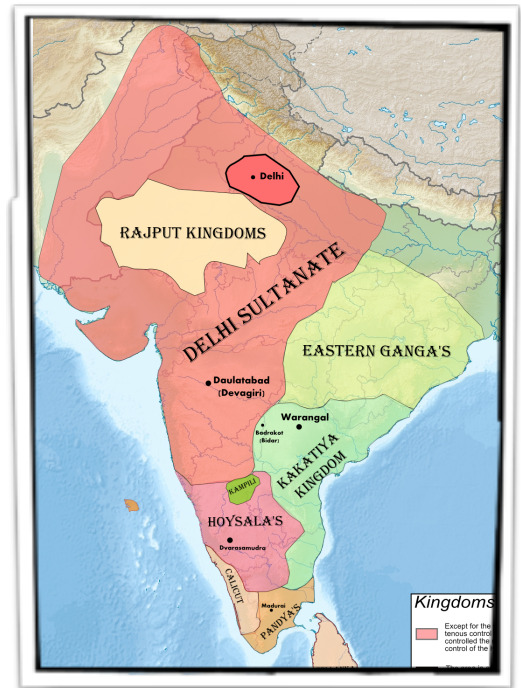
Further examination of the mainland shows a more complex story of a growing religious conflict. For much of the Ancient and Medieval time periods, India had been dominated by Hinduism and Hindu based cultures.

In the 700s, Islam had expanded rapidly throughout Afroeurasia and India was not immune to its influence. Islamic Turks migrated into Northern India and conquered/converted large numbers to the Islamic faith. From 1300-1600, these kingdoms loosely merged together to create the Delhi Sultanate.



The Muslims began to create centralized governments based on Islamic law. The wealthy Muslims were at the top of the system, with influential Hindus receiving land grants and had positions within the Muslim government, and the poor Hindus and Muslims being forced to work the land. Overall, this was a time of great urbanization and craft production flourished along with trade, especially as there began to be a unique fusion of Muslim and Hindu art/architecture.

The arrival and expansion of the Muslims from the north caused a great stir amongst the Hindus in the south. Nothing unifies people more than a shared, common enemy. The presence and spread of Islam caused a great revival (return to the core tenants of the faith) and unification within the Hindu faith, especially southern India. While the people in the south of India were mainly in separate kingdoms, their Hindu faith clearly distinguished them from the Islamic invaders. The group that suffered most from this revival was Buddhism. Buddhism was almost completely removed of India by 1500.

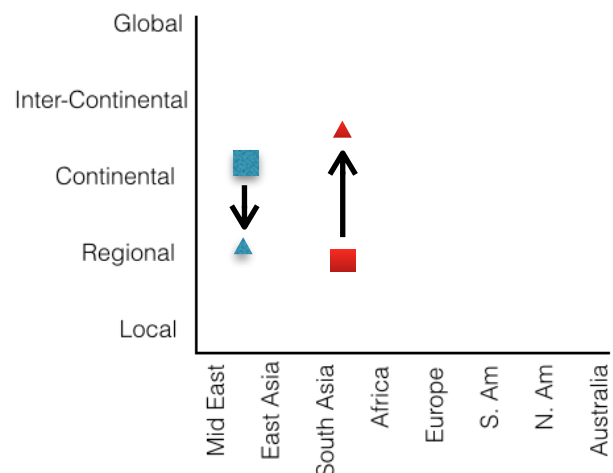
In 1488, India had a relatively small boat arrive on its shore with a strange group of people they had never been in direct contact with before...



ASSIGNMENT

- 1) Read & Update the Content Matrix
- 2) Fill out this chart with the the strengths/positives and weaknesses/negatives of each region.
- 3) Create an impact chart. As you read you are to evaluate each area on the level of impact the people in that region had on the world culturally, militarily, and economically.
 - Rate each area as to how impactful you believe them to be at the at 1300 AD () and at 1500 AD ().
 - Draw arrows to show whether they grew or shrunk in impact and influence.
 - If there is change, ask yourself "What caused them to grow or shrink or stagnate in their influence?" and make note of it on your chart.

Examples



Region	Strengths	Weaknesses
East Asia		
Africa		
S. Asia/India		