

CHAPTER 4: 600 TO 1450 CE

IF YOU ONLY LEARN SIX THINGS IN THIS CHAPTER . . .

1. Like the Foundations period, this time period witnesses a tremendous growth in long-distance trade due to the improvements in technology. Trade through the Silk Road, the Indian Ocean, the trans-Saharan trade, and the Mediterranean Sea led to the spread of ideas, religions, and technology.
2. Major technological developments such as the compass, improved shipbuilding technology, and gunpowder shaped the development of the world.
3. The movement of people greatly altered our world. Nomadic groups such as the Turks, Mongols, and Vikings, for instance, interacted with settled people—often because of their technology—leading to further change and development.
4. Religions such as Islam, Christianity, and Buddhism preached the equality of all believers in the eyes of God. And though patriarchal values continued to dominate, the monastic life of Buddhism and Christianity offered an alternative path for women.
5. The spread of religion aided by the increase in trade often acted as a unifying force, though it sometimes caused conflict. Christianity and the Church served as the centralizing force in Western Europe, and throughout East Asia, the spread of Confucianism and Buddhism solidified a cultural identity. The new religion of Islam created a new cultural world known as Dar al-Islam, which transcended political boundaries.
6. The political structures of many areas adapted and changed to the new conditions of the world. Centralized empires like the Byzantine, Arab Caliphates, and the Tang and Song dynasties built on the successful models of the past, while decentralized areas (Western Europe and Japan) developed political organization that more effectively dealt with their unique issues. The movements of the Mongols altered much of Asia's political structure for a time, and the recovery from that Mongol period introduced political structures, which defined many areas for centuries to follow.

THE BIG PICTURE

1. Interactions between people and the environment

In other words: **How does the environment shape human societies, and how do humans shape the environment?**

Major technological developments shaped the development of the world, including the compass, improved shipbuilding technology, and gunpowder. The movement of people including the Bantus, Turks, Mongols, and Vikings greatly altered our world. One of the worst epidemic diseases in history, the bubonic plague (or Black Death), spread during this period due to the movement of people and the increase in interaction.

2. Development and interaction of cultures

In other words: **How do people express themselves, and what is the impact of ideas?**

The spread of religion during this time period often acted as a unifying force. For example, Christianity and the Church served as the centralizing force in Western Europe during most of this period. Also, the spread of Confucianism and Buddhism throughout East Asia solidified a cultural identity in those areas. The new religion of Islam created a new cultural world known as Dar al-Islam, which transcended political boundaries.

3. State-building, expansion, and conflict

In other words: **How do people govern themselves?**

Following the fall of the classical empires, the political structures of many areas adapted and changed to the new conditions of the world. Centralized empires like the Byzantine, Arab Caliphates, and the Tang and Song dynasties built off the successful models of the past. Decentralized areas like Western Europe and Japan developed political organization that more effectively dealt with their unique issues. The movements of the Mongols altered much of Asia's political structure for a time. Finally, the recovery from the Mongol period introduced political structures that defined many areas for centuries to follow.

4. Creation, expansion, and interaction of economic systems

In other words: **How do economic developments affect the world?**

This time period witnessed a tremendous growth in long-distance trade through the Silk Road, the Indian Ocean, trans-Saharan trade, and the Mediterranean Sea. During the period known as Pax Mongolia, when peace and order was established due to the vast Mongol Empire, trade and interaction were at their height.

5. Development and transformation of social structures

In other words: **How do people identify themselves socially, and what roles do men and women have?**

Although most societies continued to reinforce their patriarchal nature and strict social structure, the spread of universal religions had some effects. Religions such as Islam, Christianity, and Buddhism preached the equality of all believers. The monastic life of both Buddhism and Christianity offered an alternative path for women.

WHY THIS PERIODIZATION?

This unit begins in 600 CE after the great classical civilizations of the Foundations period fell and the world seemed to be in a period of recovery. Both China and Europe went through periods of decentralization in their recovery. China eventually reunited as an imperial empire, but the Roman Empire never successfully reunited in Europe, and regional kingdoms developed there instead.

The new player on the scene was Islam. This new religion and identity had far-reaching consequences culturally, politically, economically, and intellectually throughout the period. Additionally, the world became more integrated than ever—thanks to the movement of nomads like the Turks and Mongols, the increase in long-distance trade, and the continual spread of religion. As the period came to a close in 1450 CE, the world shifted once again as Europeans looked outward and explored the world, with the help of “southern” technology and ideas.

POST-CLASSICAL POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

“NEW” EMPIRES

After the fall of the Han and Roman Empires, a form of political centralization eventually returned in part of the world: China, the former Eastern Roman Empire (now known as the Byzantine Empire), and a new player—the Islamic Caliphates.

TANG DYNASTY (618 TO 907 CE)

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

Following the fall of the Han dynasty, China returned to regional small kingdoms for the next 400 years. It was not until 581 CE that the Sui dynasty reunited China. This short-lived but influential dynasty used Buddhism and the Confucian civil service system to establish legitimacy. In addition, it started the construction of the Grand Canal and launched numerous military campaigns to expand the empire. Rebellions overthrew the empire in 618, but it had laid an important foundation for future dynasties.

The Tang dynasty that followed was more focused on scholars than on soldiers. It did, however, expand its territory beyond China proper to Tibet and Korea. It also completed the Grand Canal and offered support to Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism. The capital, Changan, was a major political center, to which foreign diplomats visited from the Byzantine and Arab worlds. Confucian beliefs were further incorporated into the Chinese government through the examination system.

In the middle of the eighth century, Tang power began to decline as higher taxation created tension within the population. Peasant rebellions led to more independent regional rule and to the abdication of the emperor. After this, there was a period of rule by regional warlords for the next 50 years.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS

The dynasty established military garrisons as far out as Kashgar, which allowed for the protection and security of **Silk Road** trade. An **equal field system** was established, in which all peasants were given land in return for tax in grain and corvée (unpaid labor), and at death they were to return it to the government. Even with this system, however, the Tang had difficulty breaking the power of the large landowners.

Changan was a major trading center and cosmopolitan city. The West Market there flourished with Indian, Iranian, Syrian, and Arab traders and their goods. By 640, its population reached two million, making it the largest city in the world at that time.

CULTURAL DEVELOPMENTS

Culturally, the Tang dynasty was heavily influenced by the spread of **Buddhism**. **Empress Wu**, originally the emperor's concubine, amassed her own personal power, and in 690 was given the title of Heavenly Empress. Concerned (or possibly obsessed) with any possible threat to her power, she had thousands of the emperor's concubines killed and had their sons banned from office. On a positive note, she started a school dedicated to Buddhist and Confucian scholarship. Her support for Buddhism, and in particular its art, increased the religion's influence throughout China.

Buddhism experienced a serious backlash toward the end of the dynasty. This “foreign religion” was attacked for the economic and political power it had obtained. From 841 to 845 CE, an **anti-Buddhist campaign** destroyed many monasteries and seriously weakened the religion’s influence on China. In the wake of this backlash, Neo-Confucianism developed: Confucian scholars wanted a new form of Confucianism that would limit foreign influence. The result was an incorporation of Buddhist and Confucian ideas. Some ideas included individual self-improvement, the idea that human beings are good, and the goal to strive and perfect oneself.

Women’s marriages during the Tang dynasty were arranged within their own social class, but upper-class women could own property, move about in public, and even remarry. If all other heirs had died, women could inherit property. Poetry flourished with such poets as **Li Bai** and **Du Fu**.

INFLUENCE

Neo-Confucianism moved to the forefront of Chinese philosophy and was also very influential in Japan and Korea. Neighboring peoples became tributary states that had to pay honor (usually in the form of gold or agricultural products) to China. Delegations from the “outside,” such as Japan or Siam (present-day Thailand), had to show great deference to the Chinese emperor and performed the kowtow—a prostrate bow during which one touches one’s head to the ground multiple times—in the imperial presence. This furthered the Chinese self-perception of being superior to all foreigners.

SONG DYNASTY (960 TO 1279 CE)

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

By 960, the Song dynasty had reestablished centralized control over China. The civil service exam system retained great prominence during this period. It successfully checked the power of the landed aristocracy and developed alongside a powerful, moral elite. Upward mobility existed through the exam system, but it took place very rarely. The Song deemphasized a military approach to security and instead reestablished the **tribute system** with its nomad neighbors. This was a system of literally “paying off” the nomads with such gifts as bolts of silk to keep the peace.

The Song, however, experienced military and economic weakness. The scholar-controlled professional army was often ineffective, and too much paper money in circulation caused inflation. By 1126, they had lost the northern half of the empire to nomads. The Southern Song continued to flourish until 1274. However, military threats from the north continued, and finally the most powerful of all northern groups invaded in the 1200s, absorbing the Song dynasty into the new Mongol Empire.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Historians often refer to the developments during the Song dynasty as an **economic revolution**. Rice production doubled due to the new fast-ripening rice from Champa. Internal trade from the Yellow Sea and Grand Canal flourished due to the increased number of merchants and the growth

in population, and the capital of Kaifeng became a **manufacturing center** with its production of cannons, movable type printing, water-powered mills, looms, and high-quality porcelain. China had more per capita production than any other country in the world. Minted copper coins were used as cash and eventually replaced with paper currency. Officials collected taxes in cash—not goods—and letters of credit (known as flying cash) were used by merchants.

The Southern Song established their capital at **Hangzhou**, and though this smaller area had less taxable land, commerce soared. With their cotton sails and **magnetic compasses**, the Song had the most powerful navy in the world, and eventually, the availability of more goods for sale. As a result, the dynasty's power shifted from the north to the south, and the Song became the leaders in Afro-Eurasian trade. Song goods traveled to Southeast Asia, India, Persia, and East Africa.

TANG AND SONG INNOVATIONS

- The first use of the compass to aid maritime navigation
- A water-powered clock, demonstrating facility in mechanical engineering
- The invention of gunpowder—first demonstrated during the late 1000s CE, the explosive combination of sulfur and saltpeter would alter weapons technology forever and lead to the first cannons, rockets, and incendiary bombs
- Philosophy—Neo-Confucian thought delved into the ancient texts and further codified traditional Chinese philosophy; it blended Confucianism with elements of Daoism and Buddhism
- Urbanization, with some cities exceeding one million inhabitants
- A printing press with movable type
- Stylized and symbolic landscape painting
- Paper money
- Letters of Credit (Flying Cash)

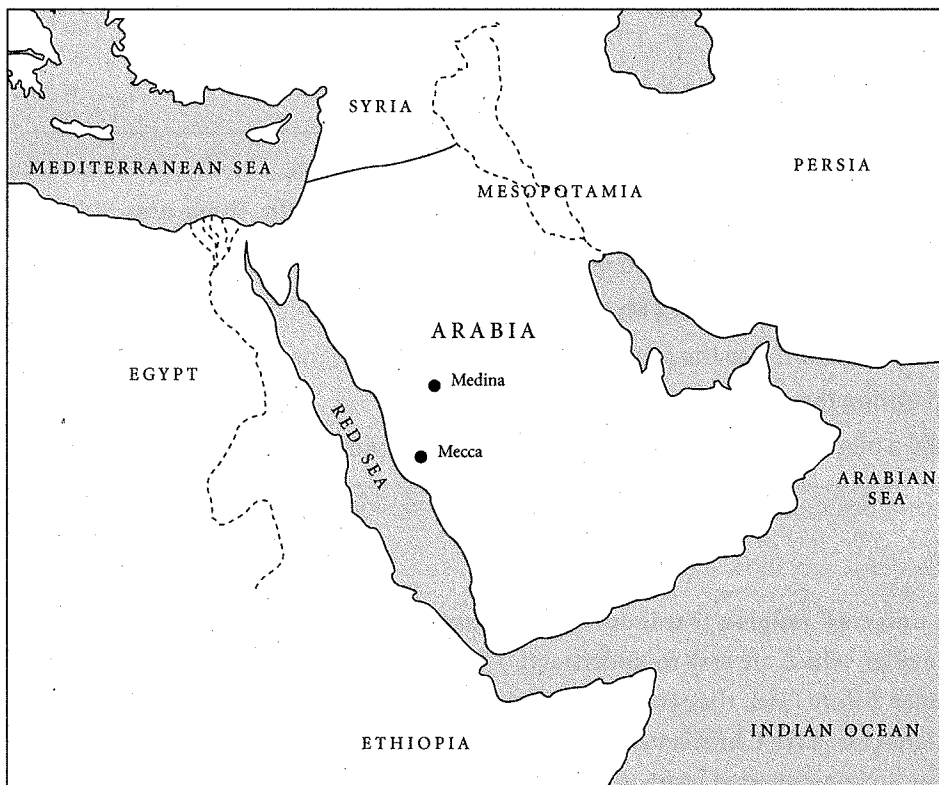
CULTURAL DEVELOPMENTS

During the Song dynasty, women were entitled to keep their dowries and had access to new jobs such as merchants, but they also were the subject of a practice called **foot-binding**. The practice originated with the aristocratic class, copying the emperor's concubines or Turkish dancers at court, and was viewed as a sign of wealth and status. Girls as young as six or seven had their feet bound to create "lily-like" feet in order to secure a better marriage. The result was an increase in the restriction of freedom of women.

ISLAMIC CALIPHATES

ISLAM: THE RELIGION

Prior to the introduction of Islam, Arabs lived in separate, loyal tribal groups and were often involved in overland and maritime trade. Most people practiced an animist type of religion that involved the worship of idols.



Arabia

Muhammad was born in 570 CE in Mecca and later married a merchant widow named Khadija. Together, they traveled on caravans and met Jews, Zoroastrians, and Christians. When Muhammad was 40, the angel Gabriel appeared to him as he was sleeping in a cave and revealed that he had been selected to receive divine inspiration. The message was that there was only one all-powerful and all-knowing God, **Allah**. Muhammad, who claimed to have no supernatural powers himself, was to be God's messenger.

Muhammad preached that all people were to submit to Allah and that everyone was equal in the eyes of Allah. All would face a final day of judgment; those who had submitted to God would go to heaven, and those who had not would go to hell. Muhammad's message was not met with enthusiasm in Mecca, and he fled to Medina in 622, a journey known as the *hegira*.

Muhammad's message was quite popular in Medina, where he was viewed as a prophet and a political leader. Further organizing his new religion, he taught that he was the last of a long line of prophets from the Jewish and Christian scriptures that included Abraham, Moses, David, and Jesus. In 630, he and his followers returned to **Mecca**, captured the city, and destroyed the idols.

After his death, Muhammad's revelations were written down by his followers in the **Quran**, which is believed to be the actual words of God as revealed to Muhammad. The word *Islam* means "submission" to God's will.

FIVE PILLARS OF ISLAM

Islam is based on five duties (called pillars) that define the faith. These are:

1. Statement of faith: There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is his messenger.
2. Pray five times a day facing Mecca.
3. Give alms (charity) to the poor.
4. Fast during the holy month of Ramadan.
5. Make a pilgrimage, or hajj, to Mecca during one's lifetime if able.

Islam is a **universal religion** that is open to everyone. It promises salvation to all who believe and follow the rules, which are easy to understand. Islam appealed to women because they had equal status to men before God, they could keep their dowries as wives, and there was a prohibition on female infanticide. Like Christianity, Islam appealed to the poor and powerless, and it gave the community a strong sense of brotherhood.

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

By the time of Muhammad's death, almost all of Arabia was under Islamic control. There was disagreement, however, over his successor. One group, the Shia, believed that the leader should be a descendant of Muhammad. The other group, the Sunni, preferred that it be the wisest member of the strongest tribe. Because none of Muhammad's sons survived into adulthood, direct hereditary succession was never an option. Therefore, Muhammad's father-in-law Abu Bakr was made the first caliph. Caliphs were both political and religious leaders. Moreover, the split between Shia and Sunni Muslims led to religious and political divisions in the Muslim world that endure to today.

After the first four caliphs, the **Umayyad clan** took control in 661 CE and transformed the caliphate into a hereditary monarchy, with its government centered in Damascus. They continued on to conquer Syria, Egypt, Persia, Byzantine territory in West Asia, North Africa, and Spain.

Their military skills, the soldiers' commitment to Islam, and the promise of plunder helped them in these successful conquests. The Umayyad Caliphate set up a bureaucratic structure in which local administrators governed the conquered areas. All cultures were tolerated as long as they obeyed the rules of Islam, paid their taxes, and did not revolt. Arabic became the language of administration, business, law, and trade.

The **Abbasid clan** overthrew the Umayyad dynasty in 750 CE and moved the capital of the empire to Baghdad, making it one of the most important political and commercial centers of the world. At the time, Baghdad was the second largest city in the world next to Changan. The size of the Abbasid Empire made it difficult to control. Eventually, the remaining Umayyad prince settled in Spain and established a separate caliphate there. Berber tribesmen controlled much of the northern African coast, and the Mamluks revolted and gained control over Egypt from 1250 to 1517 CE. Thus, by the mid-ninth century, the Abbasid political authority had become mostly symbolic, and the caliphate was broken into smaller states. Despite this, the culture of the Muslim world (language, laws, religion, trade, etc.) created a common bond from Spain to many parts of Africa, the Middle East, Central and South Asia, and into the islands of Southeast Asia. The term *Dar al-Islam*, or "all under Islam," refers to these areas in which a Muslim traveler or trader found himself welcome regardless of where he came from.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS

Trade flourished throughout the caliphate and beyond, as Muslim merchants relied on a common set of rules. Improved irrigation led to great production of agriculture and an increase in tax revenues. Artisans flourished in the cities as they became centers for manufacturing pottery, fabrics, and rugs. Paper was imported from China, and soon, paper mills were set up. The vast Islamic empire also spread many types of agriculture, including sugarcane, citrus fruits, and coffee.

CULTURAL DEVELOPMENTS

Mosques, hospitals, schools, and orphanages were built throughout the empire. Intellectual developments took place such as algebra, the concept of longitude and latitude, and the study of Greek philosophers such as Aristotle. **The House of Wisdom**, built in Baghdad in 830, sought out Greek and Persian texts and translated them into Arabic. Universities were established in Cordoba, Toledo, and Granada. In art and architecture, the use of images was forbidden (remember the idol worship), so instead, the use of geometric shapes and calligraphy were used in their works.

INFLUENCE

Even though the Caliphate declined and ended with the Mongol invasions, the influence of Islam continued to spread throughout the period. Islam spread to West Africa through Trans-Saharan trade, to East Africa and Southeast Asia through Indian Ocean trade, to Central Asia and China through the Silk Road, and to India through the migrations of the Turks. By the conclusion of this period, *Dar al-Islam* had developed into one of the most dominant influences throughout the Eastern Hemisphere.

BYZANTINE EMPIRE (FOURTH CENTURY TO 1453 CE)

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

The Byzantine Empire, a continuation of the **Eastern Roman Empire**, was the only survivor from the classical age. The Roman Empire had officially been divided into east and west in 375 CE, with the western half severely weakened because the east produced the majority of grain and controlled the major trade routes.

The most famous emperor, Justinian, who ruled from 527 to 565 CE, tried unsuccessfully to reconquer Western Rome. His laws, however, were a success. His Body of Civil Law (**Justinian's Code**) was based on the Roman Twelve Tables of Law. Justinian controlled both political and religious power in his empire, and he also replaced Latin with Greek as the official language of the empire.

The strong central government was a hereditary monarchy. It made law, had an efficient military, oversaw effective land distribution, and had a bureaucracy that answered to the emperor. The emperor was considered a friend and imitator of Christ, and as the head of the Church, appointed the patriarch. The empire was divided into themes—or military districts—and military generals were appointed to rule. Free peasants were given land for military service.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS

Its location on the Mediterranean Sea contributed to strong trade in the Byzantine Empire. Silk worms were smuggled out of China, which allowed a Byzantine silk industry to develop. Artisans produced glassware, linen, jewelry, gold, and silversmithing.

CULTURAL DEVELOPMENTS

Most subjects spoke Greek, but it was not forced on people. In theory, there was social mobility through the bureaucracy, army, trade, or service to the Church, but in reality, mobility was rare. Constantinople (present-day Istanbul, Turkey) was the political, commercial, and intellectual center, with libraries containing Greek, Latin, Persian, and Hebrew texts.

The Byzantine and Roman Christian churches had been growing apart since the fall of Rome, and a disagreement over the worship of icons—images of saints—seemed to be the final straw. The Pope and the Patriarch excommunicated each other, and in 1054, the church officially split into the **Roman Catholic Church** and the **Eastern Orthodox Church**. This Eastern Orthodox form of Christianity later spread to the Slavic people and Russia.

DECENTRALIZED STATES

WESTERN EUROPE—EARLY MIDDLE AGES (AROUND 500 TO 1000 CE)

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

Compared to Byzantium, China, and the Islamic world, Western Europe was at this time considerably backward. Those other societies were able to build centralized governments supported by a bureaucracy, but Western Europe remained politically decentralized. The Franks came closest to reestablishing imperial control with the leadership of Clovis, and later, the Carolingian Empire of **Charlemagne**. Both leaders used the Roman Catholic Church to strengthen their legitimacy, but were unsuccessful in setting up a political structure that could outlast their rule.

Instead, Europe developed a **feudal system**, in which land was given to vassals in exchange for military service and loyalty. This allowed various lords and vassals to gain and compete for power, but left the central authority quite weak. The one centralizing power in this period was the Church and its ruler, the Pope, and by the 13th century, the Church owned one-third of all the land in Europe.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS

The absence of a strong central authority led many peasants to seek protection on large estates. These peasants became **serfs**; they had the right to work a portion of the land and could pass that right onto their children, but they could not leave the land. They could keep a portion of what they grew, but the majority of their earnings went to the lord. In addition, they paid taxes for use of the lord's mill, were required to work on the lord's lands as well as provide labor in the off season, and had to provide gifts, like chickens, on holidays.

These estates became large walled **manors** that were economically self-sufficient. They maintained mills, bakeries, and breweries. They had their own private armies served by armor-clad knights. The introduction of the heavy plow led to an increase in agricultural production, but the surplus was not substantial enough to sustain cities and towns in the early Middle Ages.

During the Late Middle Ages and early modern period (13th to 17th century CE), European cities began to grow and increasingly trade among one another. As a result, trade organizations developed. One of the most important was the Hanseatic League, which was an alliance of trading cities and their merchant guilds that controlled trade along the coast of Northern Europe.

CULTURAL DEVELOPMENTS

Birth was the determining factor of one's social status. Noblewomen had more power and authority than peasant women and could inherit land if widowed or if without sons. Marriage was the key to political power, and marital alliances were crucial to a family's continued success. Christian nunneries were a way for women to escape their traditional duties, and some women could exercise leadership skills.

Beginning in the 12th century, the code of conduct called chivalry developed. It stressed honor, modesty, loyalty, and duty. As warfare decreased, it incorporated courtly romance and knight participation in tournaments to prove their skills. Chivalry, unlike its Japanese counterpart bushido, was never really effective at controlling the military men's behavior and was more of an ideal than an actual code of conduct.

Christianity was the principal source of religious, moral, and cultural authority throughout the period, and strong papal leadership contributed to this influence. Monasteries were the dominant feature in social and cultural life, and they often had large landholdings. Monks preserved classical knowledge by hand-copying great literature and philosophical works.

COMPARATIVE CLOSE-UP: POLITICAL AND SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS IN WESTERN AND EASTERN EUROPE

	Western Europe	Eastern Europe
Political Institutions	Local authority of lord of manor. Central authority was weak.	Absolute power of emperor as centralizing authority supported by bureaucracy.
Social Institutions	Church as social and cultural unifier. Pope is spiritual head and strong centralizing figure. Latin is the language of the church.	Emperor and patriarch are co-heads of church. Greek is the language of church.

JAPAN (AROUND 600 TO 1000 CE)

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

Japan's geography as a group of islands led to the development of small isolated, independent communities that were often self-sufficient. Clan members cooperated with each other much like a large, extended family. By the 600s, the Yamato clan gained religious and cultural influence on other clans and wanted to copy China's model of empire-building and create a strong, stable state. Its leaders began to call themselves **emperors of Japan**. They were unsuccessful in creating a centralized state, however, and Japan remained divided by its clans. The Fujiwara clan, which dominated between 710 and 785 CE, sent emissaries to China and modeled their capital, Nara, on Changan. They could not, however, successfully introduce a Chinese-style bureaucracy, and a strict hereditary hierarchy developed instead.

During the Kamakura Shogunate, the emperor and his court kept their capital in Kyoto, yet a military dictatorship existed, ruled by powerful landholding clans. A Japanese form of **feudalism** developed in which the **shogun**—supreme general—controlled the centralized military government and divided the land into regional units based on military power. The regional military leaders were the **daimyo**, and the warriors who fought for them were the **samurai**. Over the centuries, the samurai military class developed a strict warrior code called bushido.

The emperor remained in power throughout this period, but served only as a symbolic figurehead. Many Shoguns were overthrown, but the emperor was not.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Japan was a predominantly agrarian society with an artisan class of weavers, carpenters, and ironworkers. Local trade was regulated by clan leaders. Trade and manufacturing developed more in the Kamakura Period, which focused on markets in larger towns and foreign trade with Korea and China.

Most people were peasants who worked on land that was owned by a lord or by Buddhist monasteries. Though their freedom was limited, peasants could keep what was left of their harvest after paying their tax quota. Those unable to pay their taxes became landless laborers known as **genin**, and could be bought and sold with the land. As slaves, they performed jobs such as burying the dead or curing leather.

CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

Japan adopted many foreign ideas, but remained culturally true to its own traditions. According to **Shinto**, the religion native to Japan, everything possessed a spirit, or kami. Natural forces and nature were awe-inspiring, and shrines were built to honor kami. The first ruler from the Yamato clan claimed descent from the supreme Shinto deity, the Sun Goddess.

Japan was also strongly influenced by Korea and China. It adopted Chinese technology, Chinese script, and Buddhism (though Japan developed its own version of Buddhism, which added a strong aesthetic dimension known as **Zen Buddhism**). During the Heian period (794 to 1185), contact with China was cut off, and concentration was focused on expressing Japanese cultural values.

In a lavish court lifestyle, women dominated literature. *The Tale of Genji*, for instance, was written by Lady Murasaki. Wives inherited land from their husbands and often owned land, and priestesses dominated religious life. Over time, however, women began to lose power and influence.

NOMADIC EMPIRES

VIKINGS (DATES OF INFLUENCE—AROUND 800 TO 1100 CE)

The Vikings were a nomadic group who had settled in present-day Scandinavia (Denmark, Norway, and Sweden). In order to supplement their farm production, they conducted seasonal raids into Europe and ransacked towns. Using small and maneuverable boats, they raided and terrorized coastal communities in France, Scotland, Ireland, and England. The Vikings eventually evolved from plunderers into traders, and established communities in Scotland, northern France, and Eastern Europe.

AP EXPERT TIP

Migrations are an important part of world history, even today. Knowing why peoples move (political, economic, cultural, or environmental reasons called push-pull factors) and the consequences of their movements are essential elements in understanding the development of human civilization during this time frame. You should be able to compare the causes and effects of the migrations of the Vikings, Turks, Mongols, Aztecs, and Arabs.

These outstanding seafarers also traded actively throughout the North Sea and Baltic Sea. In the 800s, they colonized Iceland and Greenland, and around 1000, established a colony that lasted only a few decades in Newfoundland, modern Canada. The transplanted Viking settlements in France became known as Normans (or **Northmen**).

In 1066, a Norman lord named William from northern France invaded England with his army. He defeated the Saxons and established Norman power in what is now Britain. Over time, the Normans and Vikings were Christianized and absorbed into the larger European feudal order.

TURKS (DATES OF INFLUENCE—AROUND 1000 TO 1450 CE)

The Turks, a pastoral nomadic group from the **central Asian steppes**, began to gradually migrate out of the steppes at the end of the first millennium. They were often hired by Muslim leaders as mercenaries, or hired soldiers. The **Seljuk Turks**, who had converted to Islam, invaded Abbasid territory and captured Baghdad in 1055. The caliph was left as the spiritual authority of the empire, but the Seljuk Sultan became the secular monarch. By 1071, they defeated the Byzantine Empire and took most of Anatolia (modern-day Turkey).

The **Afghan Turks** were nomads from Afghanistan and began a series of raids into India in the 10th century. They looted cities for gold and jewels and destroyed Hindu temples and then left. It wasn't until the 12th century that they invaded and then started to govern. This started the **Delhi Sultanate**, which ruled northern India from 1206 to 1526. These Turks introduced a strong Muslim presence in India.

MONGOLS (AROUND 1200 TO 1550 CE)

As the chapter began in 600 CE, it would have been difficult to predict that the Mongols, a pastoral nomadic group from the central Asian steppes, would create the world's largest empire. These nomadic herders' lives revolved around their sheep, goats, and yaks for food, clothing, and shelter, their camels for transportation, and their horses for mobility. This clan-based society was organized around bloodlines. The man born Temujin, later renamed **Genghis Khan**, successfully united the various Mongol tribes.

The Mongols' greatest strength was their **mobility**. In times of war, they had total male mobilization. Every male from 15 to 70 had to serve, and each was rewarded with captured goods. The military strategy was extremely effective. Often the Mongol armies would seem to retreat only to quickly turn around and resume the attack. They were also masters at psychological warfare. Genghis Khan is believed to have said, "**Submit and live. Resist and die.**"

A sharp decline in the mean annual temperature may have caused less and shorter grass to grow, and may have forced the Mongols to trade or raid the settled societies. Once his troops were united, Genghis Khan led them into Central Asia, Tibet, Northern China, and Persia. In 1215, the Mongols attacked and destroyed present-day Beijing. The Mongol charge continued into Afghanistan and Persia, yet in 1227, the Great Khan died, and his empire was divided amongst his four sons.

CHINA: THE YUAN DYNASTY

In 1279, Genghis Khan's grandson, **Kublai Khan**, defeated the Southern Song dynasty, and for the first time, China was under foreign rule. Khan created a Chinese-style dynasty, taking the name Yuan, with a fixed and regular tax payment system and a strong central government. Foreigners, not Chinese, were employed in the bureaucracy, and the civil service exam was not used. The Chinese were subject to different laws and were consciously separated from the Mongols.

Connecting Beijing to Vienna (in present-day Austria) was a communication system using horse relays and 1,400 postal stations. In time, overland and maritime trade flourished, and though the Mongols were not directly involved in the trade, they welcomed merchants and foreigners. Merchants converted their foreign currency to paper money when they crossed into China.

THE MIDDLE EAST: THE ILKHANATES

In 1258, Kublai's brother, **Hulegu**, defeated the Abbasid Caliphate. The Mongols in the Middle East employed local bureaucrats in the government and converted to Islam by 1295. The local rulers were permitted to rule, as long as they delivered the tax revenue and maintained order. Though they did not support agriculture, they did facilitate trade, and Mongol culture often mixed with that of the conquered people.

As the Mongols continued west, they met with their first and only major defeat. The armies of the **Mamluks**, a slave dynasty in Egypt, defeated the Mongols in 1260 and stopped the movement of the Mongols in that region.

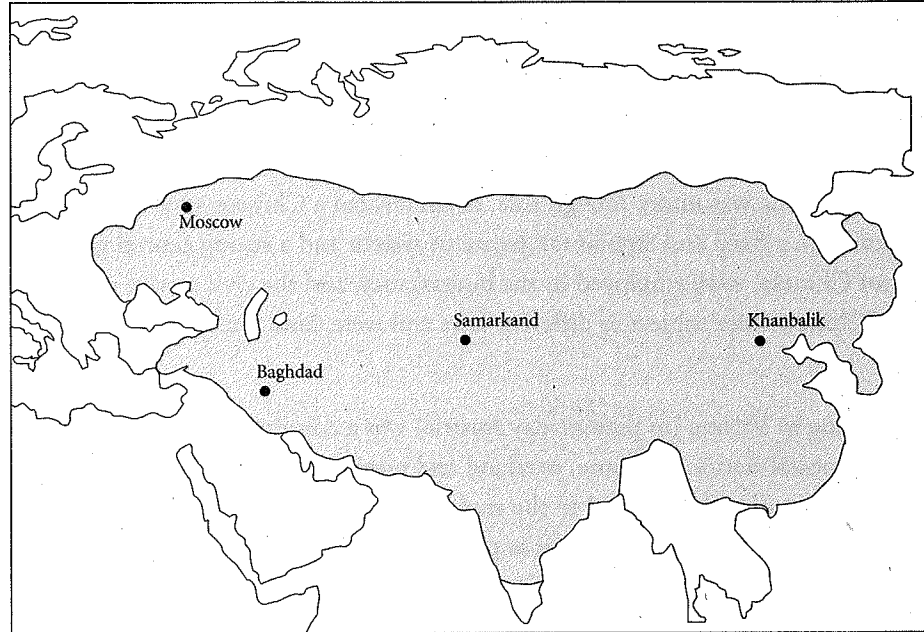
RUSSIA: THE GOLDEN HORDE

The Mongol ruler **Batu** conquered and ruled Russia but kept a large number of the local rulers intact. The taxes on the peasants were heavy, but they were collected by Russian bureaucrats. Trade was supported, and although these Mongols were Muslim and conversion was encouraged, missionaries were allowed to visit.

PAX MONGOLIA

At the peak of Mongolian power, with huge areas of Asia and Europe under one rule, there was a period called the **Mongol Peace**. For about a century, Mongol rule united two continents and allowed for relatively safe trade and contacts between very different cultures. It did so by eliminating tariffs.

During this period, the **Silk Road trade** reached its greatest height. Paper money—a Chinese innovation—was used in many parts of the empire. It was also common for the Mongols to convert to or adopt the local religions, or at least be religiously tolerant.



Mongolian Conquests

MONGOL DECLINE

In 1274 and 1281, the Mongols tried again to expand their empire—they invaded Japan. Typhoon winds destroyed their fleet both times, however. The Japanese believed these kamikaze, or “sacred winds,” had protected them.

Despite great military accomplishment, the Mongol Empire lasted hardly three or four generations. While the Mongols were successful conquerors, they were poor administrators. Overspending led to inflation in different corners of the empire, and after the death of Kublai, leadership was weak and ineffectual. Rivalry among the successors of the great Khan further destabilized the empire, and the vast domain was divided among various generals. By 1350, most of the Mongols’ huge territory had been reconquered by other armies.

IMPACT OF INTERACTION

WEST AFRICAN KINGDOMS

One area that was greatly affected by the increase in interaction throughout this period was the region of West Africa. The introduction of the domesticated camel allowed for an increased flow

of trade across the Sahara Desert, and as a result, Muslim and North African merchants began to establish commercial relations with West Africa.

GHANA (AROUND 500 TO 1200 CE)

Ghana was a regional state around the 400s or 500s CE, and an increase in **trans-Saharan trade** led to its growth in power and influence. It became an important commercial site and a center for trade in gold from the south, which it controlled and taxed. In return, it received ivory, slaves, horses, cloth, and salt.

As Ghana's wealth and power increased, it built a large army funded by the tax on trade, which kept order and trade safe. In the 900s CE, the kings converted to **Islam**, which led to improved relations with Muslim merchants. Islam was not forced on the people, however, and traditional animistic beliefs continued to be important. Those who did engage in the trade often converted to Islam.

After 1000 CE, Ghana found itself under assault from northern Berbers and other tribal groups nearby. It was eventually absorbed by the West African kingdom, Mali.

MALI (1235 TO LATE 1400S CE)

During this period, the trans-Saharan trade in gold and salt continued to increase. Mali controlled and taxed all trade. The rulers honored Islam and provided protection and lodging for merchants. Conversion to Islam was encouraged on a voluntary basis. The **Sundiata** is an epic poem that tells how the first Mali emperor came to power. The poem, a fascinating combination of historical fact and magical story, was composed and recited by Mali griots—storytellers.

The most famous Mali emperor was **Mansa Musa**, who ruled from 1312 to 1337. A devout Muslim, Mansa Musa fulfilled one of the five pillars of faith and went on a pilgrimage, or hajj, to Mecca, unlike most Muslims. He brought thousands of soldiers, attendants, subjects, and slaves with him, as well as hundreds of camels carrying satchels of gold. He also built libraries, Islamic schools, and mosques throughout the kingdom.

Timbuktu was the political capital of Mali, and it was also a regional cultural center of Islamic scholarship and art for all of West Africa. This was the peak of Malian power and wealth. After 1350 CE, provinces began to assert their independence and break away from the empire.

CHRISTIANITY IN NORTH AND EAST AFRICA (BEGINNING IN THE FIRST CENTURY CE)

Many Africans in the northern part of the continent converted to Islam after 700 CE, yet there remained a significant Christian tradition in **Egypt** and **Ethiopia**. It is believed that Saint Mark preached to the East Africans during the Roman period. Ethiopia evolved into a kingdom with strong Christian traditions. It also developed a unique style of art and architecture. There is a strong monastic

strain in both Ethiopian and Egyptian (**Coptic**) Christianity. With the coming of Islam, Christians were allowed to worship freely, and a unique linguistic and artistic expression of Christianity emerged.

EAST AFRICAN CITY-STATES (AROUND 900 TO 1500 CE)

As the trans-Saharan trade was to West Africa, the **Indian Ocean trade** was to East Africa. Bantu people had settled on the coast, and Arabic merchants who traded along the East African coast interacted to create such East African city-states as **Mogadishu**, **Kilwa**, and **Sofala**. These states are often referred to as **Swahili city-states**, named for their language, which was a blend of Bantu and Arabic.

In the 900s, Islamic merchants traded gold, slaves, and ivory for pottery, glass, and textiles from Persia, India, and China. As trade increased, so did the wealth of the city-states. Much like Ghana and Mali, these powerful city-states were governed by kings, who converted to Islam, ruled as caliphs, and taxed and controlled the trade. They built stone mosques and public buildings, and the ruling elite dressed in silk from China.

In the 1200s, the kingdom of **Zimbabwe** created a magnificent stone complex known as Great Zimbabwe, which was a city of stone towers, palaces, and public buildings. The ruling elite and wealthy merchants of East Africa often converted to Islam, but did not completely give up their own religious and cultural traditions. For the rulers, Islam meant legitimacy and alliances.

EUROPE DURING THE HIGH MIDDLE AGES (AROUND 1000 TO 1450 CE)

While the traditional feudal economy was based on agriculture in the countryside, a new pre-modern economy was evolving by the year 1100 CE. During the early medieval period, the old Roman towns shrank in size. Now, after centuries of decline, increased trade began to stimulate the growth of commercial cities in the heart of Europe. Most often located on riversides, these towns grew into marketplaces where goods could be sold. Some representative examples of these new urban centers include:

Bruges: Located in Flanders, Bruges was ideally located on a river system that connected the North Sea with Central Europe along the Rhine. Cross-channel trade brought raw wool from England, which was made into clothing to sell.

Hamburg: Part of a league of cities called the Hanseatic league, Hamburg was a major port on the North Sea. The league regulated taxes and created rules for fair trade among the member cities.

Florence: This central Italian city controlled the flow of goods up and down the peninsula. Called the Republic of Florence, this city-state became a center for banking and commerce by 1300 CE.

Service providers and craftspeople set up businesses in these towns, further stimulating growth. Among those providing services were barbers, blacksmiths, coopers (barrel makers), jewelers, leatherworkers (tanners), innkeepers, and wine/beer merchants. These cities began to plan their growth, regulate business, and collect taxes. Wealthy towns in Italy invested in new buildings and statuary for beautification.

CRUSADES (1095 TO 1204 CE)

The Crusades were a series of Christian holy wars conducted against infidels (non-believers). The most significant was a massive expedition led by the Roman Catholic Church to recapture Palestine (the land of Christian origins) from the Muslims. **Pope Urban II** launched the Crusades in 1095, when he called for Christian knights to take up arms and seize the Holy Land.

After the First Crusade, the Christians captured Edessa, Antioch, and Jerusalem, and carved up that territory into feudal states, but the disorganized Muslim forces reorganized, and retook Jerusalem in 1187. The Fourth Crusade never made it to the holy land. The crusaders, supported by the merchants of Venice, conquered and sacked Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine Empire. They held the city for over 50 years until it was retaken. This severely weakened the Byzantine Empire.

Though the quest for the Holy Land was a failure, it led to great economic developments in Europe; it encouraged **trade with Muslim merchants** and created an increase in European demand for Asian goods. As a result, Italian merchants from places like Venice and Genoa greatly profited, and Europe was reintroduced to the goods, technology, and culture of the outside world.

LONG-DISTANCE TRADE

The period 600 to 1450 witnessed a large increase in the volume of long-distance trade. Overland trade included luxury goods of high value, such as silk and precious stones. The sea lanes were used for bulkier commodities, such as steel, stone, coral, and building materials.

The **Silk Road** linked the Eurasian land mass through trade. **Trans-Saharan trade** connected West Africa to other parts of the Muslim world and beyond. The **Indian Ocean** linked China, Southeast Asia, India, Arabia, and East Africa through ocean trade. The **Mediterranean Sea** linked Europe with the goods from the Muslim world and Asia.

As a result of so much exchange, cities that strategically sat along the trade route grew substantially. Melaka, for instance, served as an important port city on the Indian Ocean. It maintained a safe environment for the markets, welcomed all merchants, and charged reasonable fees. As a result, it thrived, along with cities like Hangzhou, Samarkand, Baghdad, Kilwa, Venice, and Timbuktu in this interconnected world.

Foreign merchants set up their own communities, where they often influenced the culture along trade routes. For example, Muslim merchants in the Indian Ocean region, Chinese merchants in Southeast Asia, and Jewish merchants in the Mediterranean all had diaspora communities in these trade cities.

Cities also grew during this time period because of increased agricultural productivity, increased trade, and slightly warmer global temperatures.

AP EXPERT TIP

Note that spellings for geographic features and cities vary according to sources. For example Melaka is also commonly spelled as Malacca, and Samarkand is often spelled as Samarqand. Use a dictionary to learn how to pronounce names and places correctly.

MISSIONARY CAMPAIGNS**BUDDHISM**

From the start, Buddhism was a missionary religion. **Theravada** Buddhism, the stricter form of the religion, spread to Southeast Asia, while **Mahayana** Buddhism spread to Central and East Asia. The latter form focused more on meditation and rituals and included the worship of holy people, known as bodhisattvas. Also, it had a greater tolerance for prior cultural traditions.

Along the Silk Road, Buddhism traveled to **Central Asia** and adapted to polytheism. In **Tibet**, Buddhism became popular as it combined shamanism and the importance of rituals. In East Asia, monks, merchants, and missionaries adapted Buddhism to the political ideas of Confucianism by including ancestor-worship and a focus on family. They also mixed in Daoist ideas.

Particularly during chaotic times, Buddhism appealed to people as an avenue toward **personal salvation**. Chinese Buddhism spread to **Korea**, where it received royal support, and to **Japan**. In Japan, it was initially resisted by Shinto leaders, but eventually, **syncretism** (the fusion of differing systems of beliefs) occurred after Buddhism blended in the worship of Shinto divinities.

Because Buddhism lacked an organized church, it was able to merge with the local ideas of the people. However, it did become vulnerable to more organized forces. In Central Asia, for instance, Islam eventually replaced Buddhism as the dominant religion. In China, the Tang dynasty turned against it in the ninth century.

CHRISTIANITY

Like Buddhism, Christianity became a missionary religion early on. When the Western Roman Empire was declining, Christian missionary efforts turned toward Northern Europe. The Western Church and the **Pope** sponsored missionary campaigns aimed at converting the Germanic people. The Eastern Orthodox Church also spread Christianity to Eastern Europe and Russia.

As was the case with Buddhism, syncretism aided the spread of Christianity. Pagan heroes or holy figures (the saints) were seen as mediators between God and his people. Polytheistic holidays such as winter solstice were incorporated by placing Christmas on the same day. In Asia, **Nestorian Christianity** spread to Mesopotamia and Persia, where Islamic conquerors allowed Christians to practice their religion. Merchants spread Nestorian Christianity as far as India, Central Asia, and China, but they received little or no support from these areas' rulers.

ISLAM

Islam spread through two main avenues: **military conquest** and **trade and missionary activity**. Through military conquest and political influence, the religion spread because of its **tolerance** for other beliefs (people were rarely forced to convert) and a special tax levied against non-Muslims.

Through trade and missionary activity, the religion spread because of its simple message of what to do and what not to do. Plus, lower-class individuals welcomed their inclusion as spiritual equals as well as Islam's emphasis on charity.

Islam also legitimized the role of merchants. The **Sufis** were the most active missionaries after 900 CE, spreading Islam to Southern Europe, sub-Saharan Africa, Central Asia, India, and Southeast Asia. In sub-Saharan Africa, merchants introduced Islam to the ruling class through trade, where syncretism occurred. The kings still held a divine position, and women continued to have a prominent place in society, as was the local custom. In East Africa, Islam arrived via the Indian Ocean, where it mixed Arabic and African languages to create Swahili. In India, Turks brought Islam in the 11th century when they formed the Delhi Sultanate and used Hindu stories with Muslim characters, attracting both warriors and low-caste Hindus.

AGRICULTURAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL DIFFUSION

The increase in global interaction through this time period led to the spread of agriculture and technology and great changes throughout the world.

Originated	Spread to	Caused
Magnetic compass from China	Europe via the Indian Ocean trade	Increase in maritime trade and exploration
Sugarcane from Southwest Asia	European Crusaders	Italian Mediterranean island plantations and an increase in slave labor
Gunpowder from China	Persia, the Middle East, and eventually Europe by the Mongols	Increase in gunpowder weapon technology

TRAVELERS: IBN BATTUTA, MARCO POLO, AND RABBAN SAUMA

The tremendous amount of long-distance interaction in this time period can be illustrated through the travels of three individuals: a Muslim scholar, an Italian merchant, and a Nestorian Christian priest. Each recorded his observations during his travels.

	Ibn Battuta 1304–1369	Marco Polo 1253–1324	Rabban Sauma 1225–1294
Background	Muslim scholar from Morocco	Italian merchant from Venice	Nestorian Christian priest from Mongol Empire in China
Places traveled	Throughout Dar al-Islam: West Africa, India, Southeast Asia	Over the Silk Road to the Mongol Empire in China. Traveled throughout the empire.	Began pilgrimage to Jerusalem in Beijing, but diverted when sent by Mongol Ilkhan of Persia to meet with kings of France and England and Pope to negotiate alliances against Muslims
Significance	Demonstrated the widespread influence of Islam. Found government positions as a qadi or judge throughout the lands he traveled.	Allowed by Kublai Khan to pursue mercantile and domestic missions throughout the empire. Influenced European interest in goods from the East.	Did not succeed in attracting the support of Christian Europe to the Mongol cause. Europeans never conquered the Middle East, but instead went around it to reach the Indian Ocean.

THE SPREAD OF DISEASE: PLAGUE (1340S TO LATE 1600S CE)

Along with the spread of religion, technology, and goods along the trade routes came disease. The **Black Plague** spread from the Yunnan region of southwest China. It spread by way of rodents: First, it infected the rodent, then the fleas living on the rodents spread the disease to humans. In the 1340s, Mongols, merchants, and travelers spread the disease even farther along the **trade routes** west of China. Oasis towns, trading cities of Central Asia, Black Sea ports, the Mediterranean Sea, and Western Europe were all affected.

Most victims of this devastating disease died in just a few days. As a result, population decreased significantly, causing great **labor shortages** (some scholars estimate that as many as 75 million, out of a world population of 450 million, died). In Western Europe, workers demanded higher wages and peasants rebelled, leading to a decrease in serfdom and a weakening of the feudal system. **Anti-Semitism** also increased, as Jews, used as scapegoats, were accused of poisoning the wells. Some Christians questioned their faith amid all of the death and seemingly senseless destruction.

RECOVERY AND RENAISSANCE IN ASIA AND EUROPE (BEGINNING AROUND 1400 CE)

CHINESE POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

The Ming dynasty might be viewed as China's comeback dynasty after the rule of the Mongols. In 1368, the Mongol Yuan dynasty collapsed, after which Emperor Hongwu started the Ming dynasty. His first order of business was to eliminate all evidence that the Mongols had ever ruled

China. The Confucian education system and **civil service exam** were reinstated, and central authority was tightened.

The Ming relied on mandarins, a class of powerful officials, to implement their policies on the local level. Laborers were conscripted to rebuild irrigation systems, and as a result, agricultural production increased. Though the Ming did not actively promote trade, private merchants traded manufactured porcelain, silk, and cotton. The dynasty lasted until 1644.

EUROPEAN POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

By the 1400s, the regional states in Europe were developing into **strong, powerful monarchies**. They were now in a position to tax citizens directly and to maintain large standing armies. Italy, Milan, Venice, and Florence benefited greatly from the increase in trade, which led to an increase in tax revenues. That, in turn, led to an increase in strength and authority.

Kings in France and England began to successfully assert their authority over their feudal lords. In Spain, Fernando of Aragon and Isabel of Castile married and went on to unite Spain by reconquering the lands formerly controlled by Muslims. The **competition** among these states led to a refinement and improvement in weapons, ships, and technology, setting up these regional states for a more dominant position in the world.

CHINESE INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENTS

During the Ming dynasty, Chinese cultural traditions were strongly promoted, and **Neo-Confucian** schools were established and supported. Confucian values such as self-discipline, filial piety, and obedience to rulers were stressed. Projects were funded that emphasized Chinese cultural traditions, such as the **Yongle Encyclopedia**, which was the work of more than 2,000 scholars and the largest general encyclopedia of its time. It covered a wide array of subjects, including agriculture, art, astronomy, drama, geology, history, literature, medicine, natural sciences, religion, and technology. Popular culture thrived with the increase in printing. Novels such as *The Dream of the Red Chamber* and *Journey to the West* were extremely popular.

Jesuit missionaries such as Matteo Ricci arrived, introducing European science and technology. The Jesuit goal of converting the Chinese population to Christianity proved to be unsuccessful, however.

EUROPEAN INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENTS

The increase in interaction with and interest in the outside world sparked a major intellectual and artistic movement known as the **Renaissance**. Contact with the **Islamic world** reintroduced the ancient Greek and Roman texts that had been preserved and developed by Arabs. From the 1300s through the 1500s, painters, sculptors, and writers drew inspiration from the **Greek and Roman** classical past.

The study of these classical texts became known as the **studia humanitates**, which was usually translated as the “liberal arts.” The philosophy behind the study of liberal arts was **humanism**. Humanism stressed human beings, their achievements, and their capabilities. While medieval scholars and artists focused their work on revealing God, humanist scholars and artists attempted to reveal human nature. In Italy, artists such as Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo used perspective to create realistic masterpieces. Famous noble families, such as the Medici family, had grown wealthy as merchants, since Italy was perfectly located for receiving goods from the Middle East and Asia. This lucrative trade with the Islamic and Byzantine cultures allowed wealthy Italians to become patrons of painters, sculptors, and scientists.

CHINESE EXPLORATION

After reestablishing authority over China, the Ming decided to refurbish the large Chinese navy and conduct a “comeback tour.” From 1405 to 1433, seven massive naval expeditions were sponsored to reestablish Chinese presence in the Indian Ocean, impose imperial control over trade, and impress foreign people with Ming power.

The expeditions were led by the Muslim eunuch **Zheng He**. They involved over 300 ships with 28,000 troops, sailing to Southeast Asia, India, the Persian Gulf, Arabia, and East Africa, with Zheng dispensing and receiving gifts along the way. But in 1433, the voyages ended. Zheng’s records were destroyed and the ships were allowed to rot. Pressure from Confucian officials convinced the emperor that the voyages were too expensive and offered nothing that China needed. Additionally, the age-old concern of a Mongol invasion from the North reappeared, and it was deemed more important to protect that northern border than explore the seas.

EUROPEAN EXPLORATION

In the 1400s, the ideas of the Renaissance pushed some Europeans to look outward and explore. These explorations were not diplomatic, but instead focused on profits, the spread of Christianity, and the desire for adventure. The goods from the East—particularly spices—that Europeans desired were incredibly expensive because of the long overland journey they took to reach Europe.

But what if Europeans could find their own route to Asia by sea and cut out the Muslim middleman’s profits? The **Portuguese** were the early leaders in exploration, under the leadership of Prince Henry the Navigator. He set up schools in his native land and sponsored expeditions along the West African coast.

Competition heated up among European powers, and a race to dominate the seas began. This competition continued well into our next time period, with the European involvement in the Indian Ocean trade and the encounter with the Americas.

AMERICAN CIVILIZATIONS

MAYA (AROUND 300 TO 900 CE)

Borrowing from Olmec traditions, the Mayans developed a large domain and lived in scattered settlements on the Yucatán peninsula in southeastern Mexico. Archaeologists have discovered the following features of their regional culture:

- An agricultural economy
- Distinctive temple complexes and massive pyramids
- A ritualistic polytheism
- Urban areas with thousands of people
- Independent city-states, linked by trade
- A staple diet of maize (corn) and beans

AZTEC (AROUND 1400 TO 1521 CE)

Also known as the Mexica people, the Aztecs were the last great Mesoamerican culture before the arrival of the Europeans. Taking advantage of the Toltecs' decline, the Aztecs used their fighting skills to take control of the Lake Texcoco region. The Aztec culture was characterized by:

- A militant warrior tradition
- Rule by severe despots
- A priestly class to oversee rituals, including human sacrifice
- A ritualistic polytheistic religion with an extensive pantheon
- A large urban capital with 150,000 inhabitants
- An agricultural economy with cacao beans sometimes used as currency
- A decentralized network of city-states that paid tribute

INCA (AROUND 1400 TO 1540 CE)

In the Andean highlands of South America, clans developed a rich and complex culture, which led to the rise of an empire in the 1300s CE. These people—the Incas—conquered a large area and absorbed many groups in central-western South America. In 90 years, the Incan Empire grew into a stretch of land that covered over 3,000 miles from north to south. History remembers the Incas for:

- A centralized empire with its capital at Cuzco (in present-day Peru)
- An extensive, irrigated agricultural economy that adapted to the steep and rugged terrain of the Andes
- Large urban centers

- A polytheistic religion centered around worship of the sun
- A patriarchal society with few rights for women
- A privileged class of nobles, headed by a king, in which royal ancestors were revered and worshipped
- No written language, but a system of recordkeeping called **quipu** that used knotted strings to record such information as tax obligations, census records, and other numeric data
- Impressive achievements in building with cut stone