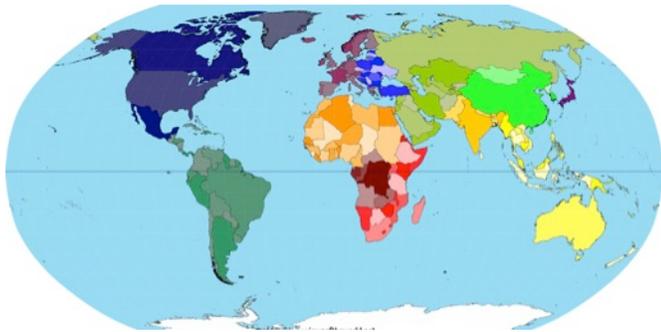


Chapter 3: The Great Divergence

A Clash of Cultures Between East and West (1350 – 1650 CE)

The present-day layout of the world's political map is a product of humanities' endless politico-geographic accommodations and adjustments. A mosaic of more than 200 states and territories separated by boundaries makes the world look like a jigsaw puzzle. Today's view of sovereign states, ruled by central governments, and whose land is inviolable, can be traced directly to the expansion of the powerful Western European empires during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Bolstered by the Age of Discovery, the **Great Divergence** had begun, in which the Western World developed into the most powerful civilization in the world, eclipsing the Chinese, Japanese, and other traditional empires.



The Wild, Wild West

State, Nation, and Nation-state

Human territoriality refers to a country's (or more local community's) sense of property and attachment toward its territory, expressed by its determination to keep it inviolable and defended. A **state** is a politically organized territory, administered by a government, and recognized by the international community. A state must also contain a permanent population, an organized economy, and a functioning internal circulation system (infrastructure). Since certain countries have internal divisions, the solution is to capitalize "State" (e.g., State of Florida, State of Uttar Pradesh India). When used for the formally independent political units, the term *country* and *state* are interchangeable. A **nation**, by contrast, is a tightly knit group of people possessing bonds of language, religion, ethnicity, and/or other shared cultural attributes. Theoretically, a **nation-state** is a recognized country possessing formal sovereignty and occupied by a people who see themselves as a single, united nation. In only a handful of countries do state territories largely coincide with the distribution of people who feel they are part of one nation. In the world today Iceland, Portugal, Denmark, and Poland are often cited as classic European nation-states. These are exceptional cases, and are even less common outside Europe – Japan and Uruguay are good examples.

A World in Flux



In 1492, Spain established a nation-state when the goals of the Reconquista were met, and the Islamic Moors were predominantly expelled from the Catholic territory. In that same year, Christopher Columbus received funding from the Spanish throne for an expedition to reach the East Indies by sailing west across the Atlantic. Soon afterward, the newly formed nation-state of Spain would enter into a golden age of exploration and colonization. Concurrently, the Portuguese opened up an all-water route around Africa and to the lucrative Indian Ocean region as well as East Asia. This discovery enabled the Europeans to slowly circumvent the Silk Road and establish valuable and direct trade routes with the Asian powers of India, China, and Japan, among others.

Other European states, politically based on similar standards would also engage in exploration and colonization, beginning the **diffusion** of the European model of the nation-state to a global scale. The Europeans with their technology, mercantilist values, shipping lanes, guns, and guile, established the first truly global empires – spanning multiple continents. The history of these events underscores a valuable lesson; *those who do not, or cannot, adapt to changing conditions will become weaker, obsolete, or extinct.*

Roots of Rebellion

In the early sixteenth century almost all Western Christians belonged to the Roman Catholic Church. Headed by the pope in Rome and administered by a hierarchy of bishops and cardinals, priests and friars, the Church had long been a source of authority and unity in the West. Soon, however, this authority was challenged, and this unity shattered, by a series of rebellions collectively known as the **Protestant Reformation**.

Unrest in sixteenth century Europe was rooted in two key concerns. One was corruption of the Catholic Church, the institution most Europeans looked for salvation; especially in times where death and disease were common, where your soul ends up is of primary concern. The other concern was political unrest in the **Holy Roman Empire** (962–1806 CE), an assortment of central European states,

loosely united by their rulers' recognition of its Habsburg emperor as their overlord. It was an attempt to resurrect the Western empire of Rome. The pope crowned the first Holy Roman Emperor in 962, who oversaw local regions controlled by a variety of kings, and other officials. This blending of religion and government led to an uneasy but powerful mix of doctrine and politics.



Catholics believed in specific **sacraments**, or rites believed to bestow the grace needed for salvation and entrance into heaven. For instance, through penance, the confession of one's sins with sincere repentance to a priest, Catholics could have their sins forgiven. However, even through the sacraments, believers still had to atone for their sins. If they died without doing so, they would have to endure **purgatory**; a place of suffering that purified the soul so it could enter heaven. Through certain prayers and sacrifices, such as fasts, pilgrimages, and charitable works, a person could earn an **indulgence**, a remission from punishment. Eventually, popes started granting indulgences for *financial* gifts; it began to look as if people could buy their way into heaven.



A sale of indulgences

¹ The Habsburgs were one of the most important royal houses of Europe. The throne of the Holy Roman Empire was continuously occupied by the Habsburgs between 1438 and 1740. The house also produced emperors and kings outside the Germanic states.

The Rising Tide of Rebellion

Where there is money and power, corruption is not far behind. Although the Church was responsible for a great deal of good in Europe through charity, order, and security, there were many abuses that led to corruption. Over the years various individuals dared to condemn such abuses. One was **John Wyclif** (WICK-liff) (1330-1384), a theology professor at England's Oxford University, who denounced the sale of indulgences, and simony, the sale of Church offices. Over time, some popes even asserted that people could purchase indulgences for souls already in purgatory. Wyclif also declared that divine authority resided in the Bible, not the Church. His followers, called Lollards, were vigorously suppressed, and some were even hanged or burned to death.



Lollards being hanged and burned

Another Church critic was **Jan Hus** (yon-hüs) (1369-1415), who promoted similar ideas to Wyclif in Bohemia (now the Czech Republic). In 1415 he was invited to a Church council with the promise of safe conduct but then convicted of heresy and burned to death at the stake. For the time being, the Church thus silenced its dissidents.

Political unrest in Central Europe, the Reformation's other root cause, had spread among the German people. Germans resented the use of money collected through indulgences in wars and ventures of the popes. Furthermore, the heads of Germany's numerous states were anxious to protect their local autonomy against the ambitions of the Holy Roman Emperors.

The Onset of Protestant Reformation

The ideals and innovations of the Italian Renaissance had diffused northward throughout Europe, in no small part due to the printing press. By the late fifteenth century, the **Northern Renaissance** began to occur north of the Alps. With a greater emphasis on religion and spirituality, the artistry and writings of the age inspired a new generation of independent thinkers. Additionally with the growing power of the Holy Roman Emperors, many

German princes and nobles resolved to resist any further Habsburg ambitions.

Into these troubled times entered **Martin Luther** (1483–1546), a devout Catholic German monk obsessed with fears of death and eternal damnation. As a young man he had enrolled into law school, and was caught in a violent storm while on horseback returning to his university from home. After a lightning bolt struck near him, he cried out for help from God and pledged to become a monk.

At the University of Wittenberg, in the central German state of Saxony, Luther became a doctor of theology, and finally developed a doctrine that eased his fears. No one, he concluded, is worthy of salvation. It is not something someone can earn through good works. Rather, it is a gift from God, who freely bestows his grace on those who have faith in Him, and accept the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The doctrine of “justification by faith alone,” implicitly threatened the power of the Catholic Church. If faith alone brought salvation, who would need the sacraments or indulgences?

Trouble arose in 1517 when a friar named **Johan Tetzel** travelled through the Holy Roman Empire selling indulgences to help build the Saint Peter’s Basilica, and pay the debts of a corrupt archbishop (who had purchased his post). He allegedly used slogans like, “As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs.” Appalled, in late October Luther responded by posting the **Ninety-Five Theses** to the door of the Wittenberg castle church, challenging the Church’s power to forgive sins and grant indulgences.



These theses circulated widely, bolstered by the newly-invented Gutenberg movable-type printing press. Luther won fame and support from disgruntled Germans and religious reformers, while evoking Rome’s anger. In truth, Luther not only attacked *abuses* by the Church, but also denounced *doctrines* the Church regarded as inspired by God. While Luther’s intentions were to bring the Church closer to the truths he believed were absolute, his actions set off a series of rebellions and revolutions that tore at the very fabric of the Catholic unity that had held the majority of Europe together for centuries.

Germany and the Five Themes of Geography

As is the case with many events in history – perhaps even most – geography plays a substantial role. The predominantly German-speaking states that made up the Holy Roman Empire proved to be the ideal place for a small religious rebellion to erupt into a massive continent-wide revolution. To categorize some of these reasons, the Five Themes of Geography provides a logical framework.

The theme of **location** helps explain why this event happened where and when it did. The Holy Roman Empire was located relatively distant from the direct influence of the Vatican in Rome. As such, the Church had more control in lands closer to its home base, and less control in lands further away. Due to friction of distance, the cost of travel between the Italian and German states in terms of time and money proved to keep them fairly separated. As a result, a substantial amount of distance decay greatly reduced the interaction between these distant locations.

The speed of travel in the sixteenth century depended on many factors, including the quality of roads, weather, and the nature of the travelling party. One estimate suggested that a small group with horses could move as far as 30 miles in a single day. On the other hand, a larger group that included pack animals, carts, or travelers on foot might make only half that distance. This, however, would not necessarily take into account rest days, bad weather, use of roads, or physical obstacles such as rivers and mountains. In the ages before modern transportation, distance truly did separate.

Considering the theme of **place**, “Germany” in the sixteenth century was actually part of the Holy Roman Empire (which had existed since the tenth century). The Holy Roman Empire contained the German Confederation, which was a grouping of loosely held states. The individual states maintained a degree of **sovereignty** within its borders, meaning each separate territory possessed the full right and power to govern itself without any interference from outside forces.



A German map depicting the fragmented political nature of the Holy Roman Empire.

Germany at that time was a multistate nation, connected through a common language, religion, and ethnicity, but divided into multiple states. One statesman amusingly remarked there was one German state for each day of the year. The Holy Roman Empire did contain a central government with an emperor at its head, but he was relatively weak as compared with most other European monarchs. This situation meant that if a rebellion were to erupt in the German states, the central government would find it very difficult to contain or stamp out. This is precisely what happened with the beginning of the Protestant Reformation in the early sixteenth century.

Without the assistance of technology, a local uprising would remain just that – local. As such, the **movement** of ideas through Johannes Gutenberg's printing press proved to be a conduit that channeled Luther's local protest into a regional revolution. Gutenberg, a German, introduced widespread printing to Europe in the mid fifteenth century. In fact the first major work produced with the printing press was the Gutenberg Bible, printed in Latin, and substantially cheaper than manuscript Bibles. It would be a version of this Bible that Martin Luther would eventually read and continue the process that had started long ago with the Northern Renaissance.

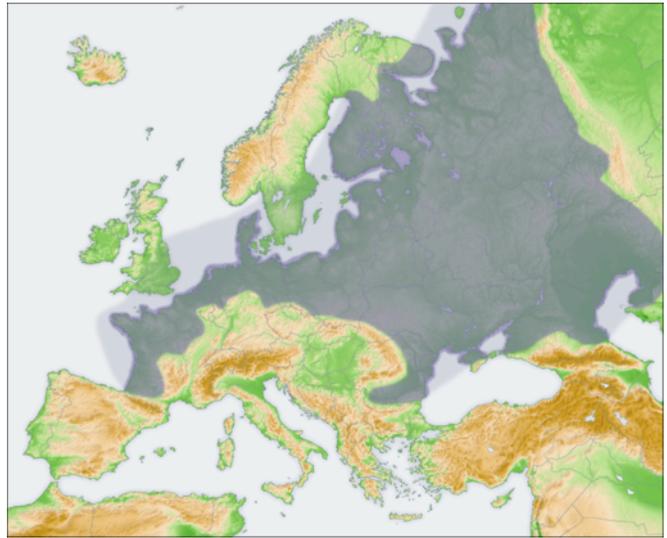


An early printing of one of the Gutenberg Bibles, on display in the New York Public Library.

Luther's ideas were not particularly revolutionary, historically speaking. The preaching and writings of Wyclif and Hus predated Luther by more than a century. The main reason why their ideas did not spread throughout Europe is because they did not possess the technology of the printing press as Luther had. The Church was successful in silencing Wyclif and Hus before their protests gained significant traction outside their localities, however, the Church was unable to contain Luther's ideas due to the power of the printed word.

Another theme of distinction is **region**. Northern Europe was strongly influenced by the Northern Renaissance and its emphasis on reform and religion. The Renaissance-inspired notion to think critically and investigate the classics motivated many theologians to intricately examine the Bible as well as the Church's teachings. The proximity of the German and Italian states generated the proper conditions for these ideas to diffuse through-

out the adjacent areas, as opposed to distant Christian lands in Sub-Saharan Africa, for example.



The European Plain is the largest mountain-free topographical landform in Europe.

With regard to **human/environmental interaction**, the Holy Roman Empire's topography intensified its fragmentation. The northern part of its territory sat across the **European Plain**, with largely flat terrain. The predominantly German lands have always possessed a central location in Europe, with long-established rivals to its east and west, in Russia and France, respectively. The Germans had traditionally been a crossroads, and vulnerable to attack. Historically, it had been one of the most fought over regions in the world, and therefore challenging to maintain under a single political unit. Moving southward, the territory varies between hills, river valleys, and mountain ranges. The physical terrain added to political and cultural division. Coupled with the feudal past of Europe, the Holy Roman Empire – consisting of over three hundred states – evolved as a logical adaptation to the terrain and region.



A modern depiction of Luther caught in a lightning storm.

A final aspect of human/environmental interaction in explaining why the Protestant Reformation emerged in Germany had to do with Martin Luther himself. He was on the path to study law, but when the bolt of lightning struck near him, he diverted from his plans and became a monk. It is arguable that someone else residing within the Holy Roman Empire could have initiated a similar reformation since the conditions for revolution were already in place. Nonetheless, had the storm not occurred when and where it had, everything else that followed would have likely transpired very differently.

The Unwitting Revolutionary

Since Luther denied the authority and divinity of the Church by posting the Ninety-Five Theses, the pope could not stand idly by. However, the Vatican was not the main authority in the distant and fragmented Holy Roman Empire. In the late fifteenth century through marriages and arrangements, **Emperor Charles V** (1519-1556), would inherit not only Austria, the Netherlands, Sicily, Sardinia, Italy, much of Central Europe, as well as Spain and its American empire. The newly established emperor grew alarmed by the danger Luther posed to the Church and his empire. In 1521 he summoned Luther to face the Imperial Diet. Ordered to repudiate his views, Luther held firm. Then, denounced by the emperor as a heretic, he was secretly taken to Saxony under the protection of Frederick the Wise, a German prince dismayed by the corruption of the Church and the emperor's encroaching power.



Martin Luther – the Unwitting Revolutionary – professing his innocence at the Diet of Worms.

There, Luther hid for a year and began translating the Bible into German. By translating the Bible from Latin into the **vernacular**, or language of the common people, the Church would no longer exist as the sole authority of God's word; and the people could see it for themselves – outside of the Church's specific interpretations.

Luther can be viewed as an unwitting revolutionary; he did not intend to establish another branch of the Christian faith, but rather reform the Church into becoming closer to what he interpreted God had intended. Soon, Central Germany was divided between the Lutherans, who adopted these new ideas, and Catholics, who remained loyal to the emperor, pope, and the Church.

In 1522, a dissident priest named **Huldrych Zwingli** (TSVING-LI) began his own movement in Zurich, Switzerland. More extreme than Luther, he rejected anything not literally found in the Bible. Zwingli's role in leading this rebellion against the Church clearly showed the Reformation had diffused outside the borders of the Holy

Roman Empire. Many German nobles wanted land and power, and seized the momentum of this movement to forcibly acquire land at the expense of the Church. Other religious rebels called for radical social and economic reforms, helping to inspire a violent **Peasants' Revolt** against German nobles from 1524 to 1525. Zwingli supported this rebellion, however, Luther did not. Lacking unity and firm leadership, the peasant forces were crushed. In the end, over 100,000 peasants were killed, and few of them gained any true reforms. Their devastating defeat dissuaded further attempts by the peasantry to improve their social and political position.

Diffusion of the Reformation

Unlike the Lutheran revolt, which was rooted in religious doctrine, the **English Reformation** was rooted in royal affairs – quite literally. **Henry VIII** (1509-1547) had been such a staunch Catholic that the pope declared him "Defender of the Faith." However, in 1527 he aspired to end his marriage. The queen had borne him six children, but only one, their daughter Mary, survived. Fearing he would have no male heir, leaving his realm in chaos after he died, Henry sought an annulment of his marriage – since the Church did not permit divorce.

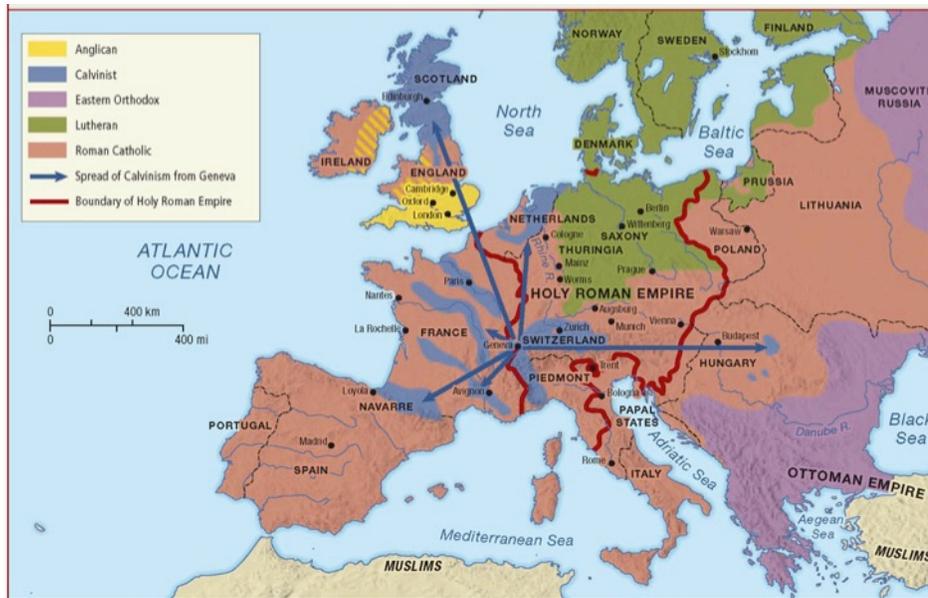


Henry VIII

By 1533, his mistress **Anne Boleyn** was pregnant, so to legitimize his expected heir, Henry married Anne and compelled England's highest cleric to annul his marriage without the consent from Rome. Anne was crowned queen, and months later gave birth; not to the desired son, but to a girl who was named Elizabeth. The next year he persuaded Parliament to name the monarch "supreme head of the Church of England" (the **Anglican Church**), and cut all ties with Rome. Then, over the next five years, he closed the English monasteries and seized their property, selling much of the land to local nobles. In this way, Henry gained support of the nobles in exchange for the loss of institutions that had served as centers of learning and charity for centuries. Regardless of his break with the Church, Henry remained true to most Catholic teachings. Not until after his death did the Anglican Church undergo significant change.



Anne Boleyn



In Switzerland, a new religious rebel further expanded the Reformation. In 1533, **John Calvin** (1509–64) concluded that faith was a gift that God gave only to certain people. He also concluded the Catholic Church was corrupt and should be destroyed. Calvin's teachings focused on **predestination**, the notion that God long ago had decided each person's fate. In other words, free will and personal choice has nothing to do with salvation. Calvin believed only **the elect** – those God had chosen beforehand – would be saved from damnation. Calvin and his followers, the Calvinists, were **puritanical**, promoting a strict moral code and "pure" religious practices. They held simple worship services in unadorned buildings rather than grandiose churches.

Lutheranism and Calvinism spread outward into other European realms. Many secular leaders adopted these ideas as a way to confiscate the property of the Church and gain control of religion in their realms. By the 1560s, Protestantism in various forms had spread throughout northern and central Europe and into parts of France and Eastern Europe. But by then, the Catholic Church, which still prevailed in the South, had launched an effective counterattack and extended its influence far beyond Europe.



John Calvin

The Catholic Counterreformation

After several decades of inability to stem the Protestant tide, Rome finally mounted a vigorous response. In 1545, after years of pressure from Emperor Charles V, the pope convened a great council of Catholic bishops and other Church leaders. The Council of Trent,

which met intermittently until 1563, shaped Catholic doctrine and worship to the present day. The Council affirmed many things that Protestants denied, including the sale of indulgences (but not indulgences themselves), and the Church's power to forgive sins. It insisted that salvation was based on both faith and good works, not on faith alone. It declared that divine revelation was found in both the Bible and Church tradition, not in scripture alone. And to reinforce Church unity, the council affirmed the pope's preeminence. These reforms were designed to purify and strengthen Catholicism for battle against Protestantism, a struggle that lasted far longer than anyone at Trent could foresee.

The Counterreformation's tactics were sometimes extreme. For instance, in central Italy and Spain, where Catholics were in control, they employed **Inquisitions**, church tribunals mandated to investigate, arrest, and prosecute people suspected of heretical beliefs. To extract confessions, inquisitors sometimes utilized torture. Those found guilty of heresy were often burned to death. Using closed trials, secret informers, tortures, and executions, the Inquisitions enforced Catholicism and virtually eradicated Protestantism in Italy and Spain.

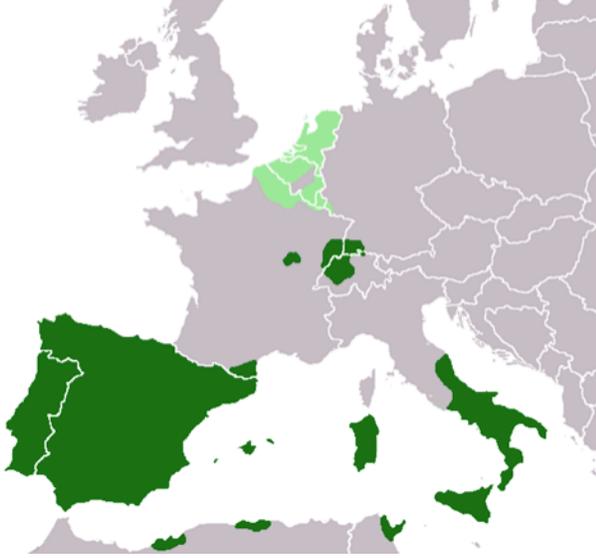
Amid this tumult, the Catholic Church enjoyed a spiritual revival, led by dynamic individuals and new religious orders. The most influential new order was initiated by a Spanish nobleman named **Ignatius of Loyola** (1491–1556). In 1537 he, and other devout Catholics, formed the **Jesuits**. Organized on military lines, they vowed strict obedience to their superiors and the pope. As educators, the Jesuits combined Renaissance humanism with Catholic ideals, promoting both secular learning and religious faith, while creating a network of schools and universities that eventually became a worldwide educational system. As missionaries, they worked tirelessly to convert the peoples of the Americas, Africa, and Asia to Catholicism, helping to transform their European faith into a global religion. They led an intensive anti-Protestant campaign, helping to stem the Protestant tide and even restoring parts of Central Europe to the Catholic fold.

The Spanish Catholic Crusade

In the wake of the Reformation, Europe was ravaged by a century of religious and political conflicts. Bolstered by the riches of their Spanish overseas empire, the Catholic Habsburgs strove to impose their power and faith by force on Protestant regions.

Charles V of the Habsburgs inherited one of the vastest empires in European history; however, over time he grew exhausted and split his lands before retreating to a monastery. **Philip II** inherited the Spanish Habsburgs in

the mid 1500s; he was strongly Catholic and had previously married the equally devout Catholic, Mary I of England. Mary died in 1558, leading to her Anglican sister – and self-proclaimed virgin – Elizabeth I to become Queen of England.



European territories under Habsburg rule around the mid sixteenth century 1580 (with the Spanish Netherlands in light green) on a map showing Modern-Day state borders.

Spain was the mightiest country in world at that time largely due to their American colonies, which provided them with an abundance of gold and silver. The Habsburgs possessed territory in Spain, Italy, and in the Netherlands, whose citizens were primarily Calvinists. Philip sought to expand Catholicism throughout his lands, and due to high taxes as well as religious intolerance, a **Dutch Revolt** broke out in 1568 in which Queen Elizabeth I eventually supported them. Her backing of the Dutch went deeper than ideology; it also had to do with geography. Fearing Spain might prevail and then use the Netherlands as a base from which to attack her country, Elizabeth sent money and troops to aid the Dutch. Philip, in turn, prepared to invade England.

In May of 1588, Philip dispatched the **Invincible Armada**, a fleet of 130 huge ships and around 20,000 men, with orders to land in the Netherlands and escort the Spanish army to England to begin the assault. In July the Armada met the English fleet in the English Channel; the result was a disaster for Spain. The English fleet, though outnumbered, had more maneuverable ships and routed the Spanish, forcing them to retreat northward around England. Upon their return to Spain they encountered a storm that battered and sank around half of the Armada; this storm was later referred to as the **“Protestant Wind.”**

Costly wars drained wealth out of Spain almost as fast as it came in. Additionally, treasure from the Americas

² Mary I was known as “Bloody Mary” since she had over 200 people burned at the stake for primarily religious reasons.

led Spain to neglect farming, industry, and commerce. American gold and silver led to soaring inflation, with prices rising much higher in Spain than anywhere else in Europe. The expulsion of Muslims, and later the Jews, deprived the economy of many skilled artisans and merchants. By the late seventeenth century, France had replaced Spain as the most powerful European nation.

In the mid to late sixteenth century violence spread throughout France, leading to revolts, and eventually into the French Wars of Religion. On one side were the Catholics, who were the majority. On the other side were the **Huguenots**, who were Calvinists. The Huguenots comprised only around seven percent of the population, however, around 40 percent of the nobles had converted to Protestantism. Led by the Bourbon family, they fought Catholic factions in a complex struggle for religious and political power.



French lands divided between predominantly Catholic and Huguenot majorities.

right to fortify these towns with their own troops. This act granting freedom of religion was unheard of at that time in Europe. Henri's tolerant edict did not please everyone, and in 1610 a fanatical Catholic murdered him while his coach was stopped in traffic. Religious animosities did not die as easily as kings.

The Thirty Years' War and the Nation-state

Religion was at the heart of conflict in many places throughout Europe including the Holy Roman Empire, birthplace of the Reformation, where Lutherans and Catholics had for decades observed an uneasy truce. The French philosopher Voltaire noted that, by early modern times, the Holy Roman Empire was neither holy, nor Roman, nor an empire. Instead, it was a patchwork of several hundred small, separate states.

Calvinists, having made inroads in parts of the Holy Roman Empire, joined with Lutherans in an alliance called the Protestant Union. The next year the Austrian Habsburgs, backed by the wealth of their Spanish cousins, created a rival coalition called the Catholic League,

Henri IV of the Bourbon Dynasty was raised a Huguenot, but upon inheriting the throne, he converted to Catholicism. In 1598, Henri passed the **Edict of Nantes (NAHNT)**. This historic document gave the Huguenots full civil rights, the freedom to hold worship services in their own manors and towns, and the

setting the stage for a series of calamitous conflicts together known as the **Thirty Years' War** (1618-1648).

Major Combatants During the Thirty Years' War	
Catholic League Holy Roman Empire, Spain, Austrian Hapsburgs	Protestant Union Bohemia, Denmark, Sweden, Scotland, France

The war began in 1618 after an incident called the "**Defenestration of Prague**" (*de-FEN-ih-STRA-shun*: the act of throwing someone out a window). Protestant nobles in Bohemia, angered by Habsburg efforts to restrict their rights, threw two imperial emissaries out of a high palace window. Despite their survival - credited by Catholics to divine intervention and by Protestants to the fact they landed in a dung heap - the fragile peace was shattered.



A woodcut depicting the Defenestration of Prague.

Several phases of the Thirty Years' War followed, pitting several Protestant European powers against the Holy Roman Empire, Spain, and other Catholics. Bohemia, Denmark, then Sweden each fought their own wars against the Catholics, however, each of them eventually lost. France, a largely Catholic nation, financially backed each of these Protestant states in order to maintain a balance of power in Europe. The French chose this course of action due to their geographic situation and for their own self-preservation; it was located between the two major Habsburg lands and sought to keep them separated. If the Habsburgs were to win the Thirty Years' War, France would be vulnerable to attack from multiple sides.

The last phase of the war from 1635 to 1648, in which the French directly entered the war, resulted in mass devastation. Armies crisscrossed central Europe, assaulting each other and brutalizing the people, while pestilence and famine stalked the land. Plague, typhoid fever, and even a syphilis pandemic broke out leading to sores, rashes, blindness, insanity, and even death in many cases. The German population was devastated, with an estimat-

ed 25 to 40 percent of the population perishing throughout the conflict.

Spurred by pandemics, war, and religious fanaticism, witch-hunts also occurred, signaling the inequality throughout Europe with respect to income and gender. Poor, single, or widowed women were the primary targets of the witch-hunts. Interestingly, even though the Thirty Years' War commenced largely under religious pretenses, Europe actually emerged from the ravages of the conflict less religious. Through the war, the Reformation and increased materialism since the end of the Black Death, **secularism** - or the diminished role of religion - became more prevalent.



Europe in the sixteenth century.

After 30 years of brutal warfare in the Holy Roman Empire, and 80 years of fighting between the Spanish and the Dutch, a series of treaties known as the **Peace of Westphalia** were signed in 1648, ending most hostilities, and initiating a new political system of sovereignty.

Among the legal agreements, many new country borders were established and territorial adjustments were made. Another key decision was that each state within the Holy Roman Empire would possess greater autonomy, and would have the right to determine its official religion - the options being Catholicism, Lutheranism, or Calvinism. Additionally, if a subject's religion was not of the established church, he or she was guaranteed the freedom of worship, which is the right to practice one's faith.

From a geopolitical perspective, the Peace of Westphalia can be seen as the first modern step toward the emergence of the European state, and by extension, the prevailing state model that exists throughout the world today. Each county would be sovereign over its own territory, and have the right to **self-determination**, meaning they could establish their own governments and laws with no external compulsion or interference. The states of Europe agreed not interfere with the internal affairs of other states. Additionally, each state would be legally equal in power to any other state in matters of treaties and international agreements, regardless of land size or population. These essential tenets have established a system of political order known as **Westphalian sovereign-**

ty, and the territorial integrity established then, has persisted as the foundation of international law up to current times.

Globalization of Western Capitalism and Culture

Europe's fragmentation was, paradoxically, accompanied by global expansion. In the 1500s and 1600s, as Europe was torn by ruinous religious and political strife, European Christianity and commerce spread across the globe. As some Europeans globalized their religion, others were transforming the global economy. Western merchants, eager to enhance their incomes, worked to gain control over the production of goods and to establish worldwide trading networks.

For many centuries, Chinese, Muslim, and European merchants had conducted interregional trade, however, the Europeans expanded it to an intercontinental scale. Driven by mercantilism, monarchs of European states and empires sought more power and control. They expanded around the globe to establish colonies in order to acquire gold and silver to create favorable balances of trade. Firms, such as the British East India Company, were supported by their respective governments with subsidies and benefits. Global trading networks supplied European consumers with products from distant lands, while the revenues this trade produced helped European monarchs centralize their governments and increase their royal powers.



Hans Holbein the Younger's *Portrait of the Merchant Georg Gisze*, 1532.

But merchants usually did not manufacture the goods they sold. These goods were typically produced by artisans, who sold the finished goods to customers or merchants, often at prices fixed by artisans' guilds. Merchants were middlemen, transporting the goods between locations; but over time, merchants expanded to control the business-side of global trade. Progressively they worked to own as many of the **means of production** as they could, referring to raw materials, labor, and capital. They bought mines, woodlands, and herds of sheep and cattle, thereby acquiring their own raw materials. They also bought tools and equipment, and then hired their own workers to earn greater profits. Thus arose a dynamic

new class of capitalists: **entrepreneurs** who created and ran enterprises that produced and sold their own goods.

Cottage industries, or "domestic systems," were established, in which entrepreneurs found new ways to work around dealing with town artisans and guilds, further increasing their profits. In this system, entrepreneurs provided some peasants with equipment and raw materials. The peasants, who made up as much as 90 percent of the populations, were paid a fixed low price for making goods in their own homes and cottages. This process helped the entrepreneurs lower costs and make more profit for themselves. In turn, the process helped increase many peasants' livelihoods. They acquired more wealth, leading to an increase in **nuclear families**, which are homes comprising only of the parents and their children. Learning and literacy, too, were becoming more common. The great increase in the number of books produced by the printing press, combined with the Protestant emphasis on individual reading of the Bible, accelerated the spread of education.



A contemporary drawing of a peasant family as a cottage industry, producing clothing for an entrepreneur.

Capitalism and global trade benefited the growing middle class perhaps more than any other facet of society. A sizable number of the middle class population lived in towns (burgs) and cities, and hence were called *burghers* or **bourgeoisie** (*boorzh-wah-ZE*). They included merchants and bankers who profited from increased trade; doctors, lawyers, and others who prospered by serving wealthy people's needs; and artisans and manufacturers who raised prices on their products as more wealth became available.

The beginning of the sixteenth century brought with it a European age of religious upheaval and global expansion, which diminished the role of religion and enhanced the wealth and worldliness of the West. By the late seventeenth century, profiting from connections created by global exploration, expansion, and colonization, the West emerged from its religious strife more prosperous and powerful than ever. The Europeans dominated the globe, diffusing their culture as well as their model of the nation-state worldwide.

The Beasts of the East

In the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries, despite occasional upheavals, the countries of East Asia ranked among the world's most prosperous and stable. China and Japan were especially powerful. Initially, these Asian countries welcomed the Westerners from Europe. However, despite the increased trade, they despised the efforts of the Jesuits and other foreigners in disrupting their traditional beliefs. Nonetheless, even as the East Asian countries sought to maintain stability by limiting foreign influence, they were affected by connections with other cultures. Ultimately, the Great Divergence occurred, in which the Asians were surpassed considerably by Europe in terms of wealth and influence. In sum, *those who do not, or cannot, adapt to changing conditions will become weaker, obsolete, or extinct.*



Sixteenth century map of Japan with a European ship off the coast.

Limitations of the Five Themes of Geography

The empires of East Asia had developed some of the best technologies centuries before the Europeans gained them through trade. The compass, sternpost rudder, gunpowder, rag paper, printing, and many other innovations were invented in China, and diffused into the adjacent regions far earlier than the time they had diffused to the West. It would be logical, therefore, to assume the East Asian empires should have established overseas colonies far earlier than the Europeans. However, this did not happen, and there are several theories as to why the course of events transpired as they did.

Geographically speaking, in the sixteenth century, the Japanese had all the elements necessary to begin an Age of Exploration. Japan was located in *the* core region of the world prior to the ascendancy of Europe. Anchored by China, East Asia was arguably the richest region in the world at that time. Furthermore, Japan was **located** relatively close to China, acquiring the best technology far before other distant lands. Plus, they had to compete with China for power and control of the area, leading them to develop their own innovations.

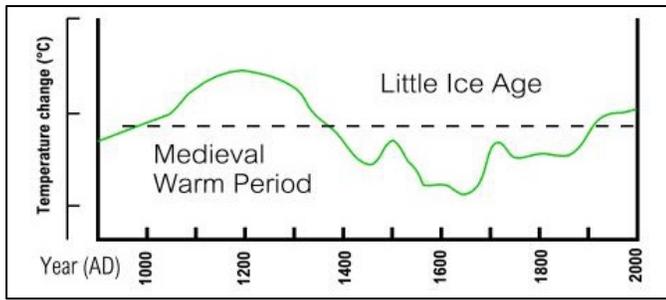
Japan's **place** characteristics were also conducive for exploration and expansion. It is a land with relatively few natural resources, making it much more probable for its people to look to other territories in order to gain wealth. Additionally, Japan is an island, surrounded by the Pacific Ocean, logically giving them a maritime culture through their intense **interaction** with the seas around them. In truth, Japan did have ocean-going vessels, and China did, in fact, engage in massive overseas expeditions. Japan was able to trade for the products from China that were desired by all the countries and empires of the Old World. The **movement** of goods, ideas, and wealth between these regions provided the Japanese – as well as the Chinese – with the means to expand on a global scale far earlier than the West. Since this did not occur, geography alone is insufficient in explaining the course of history. Three key factors – climate, culture, and geopolitics – help explain why Europe, and not East Asia, established worldwide overseas empires.

The Impact of Climate

First addressing the impact of climate, a **Medieval Warm Period** occurred intermittently between 950 and 1250 CE, predominantly in the Northern Hemisphere. These three centuries became one of the most optimistic, prosperous, and progressive periods in history. The productivity of farming improved, and economic activity flourished. Around the world, mankind substantially altered the **cultural landscape**, or the built environment (as opposed to the physical, or natural environment).

Most of the great religious structures and Gothic cathedrals in Europe, requiring immense surplus wealth, were constructed during this period of the High Middle Ages. It was during this time the Vikings founded colonies in Iceland and Greenland. Many other civilizations around the globe prospered as well. Indigenous people of North America pushed farming northward. Throughout South and Southeast Asia, societies thrived, creating elaborate temples and structures. In East Asia, the Japanese expanded their populations further north, and the Chinese arguably became the “richest, most skilled, and most populous country on earth”. While not all places witnessed such positive changes during the Medieval Warm Period, a warmer planet is generally a more productive planet.

The **Little Ice Age**, a period of cooling that occurred between 1350 and 1850 CE followed this time period. Particularly cold intervals were separated by interludes of slight warming over these centuries. While not a true ice age, global temperatures slid, drier climate was pervasive, and the polar glaciers expanded. Modern theories attribute the colder temperatures likely to lower solar activity leading to fewer sunspots, or even due to increased volcanic activity. Regardless of the causes, this time period brought hardship around the globe, as farmlands became less productive, and a bottleneck ensued. The European economic boom halted, massive construction projects stopped, and colonies in places like Greenland were abandoned. Poor weather, very likely, was at the heart of reduced incomes and fortunes worldwide.



The estimated temperature curve over the past thousand years.

The Impact of Culture

Climate alone does not fully explain why the Asian giants failed to establish massive overseas empires. Another key factor, culture, goes a long way to clarify why countries like Japan and China chose not to form colonies during these cooler times - as the Europeans had.

Culture - the sum of attitudes, customs, and beliefs that distinguishes one group of people from another - can be divided into two categories, the material and the non-material. **Material culture** consists of tangible artifacts, for example, things like art, houses, clothing, sports, dance and food. In this regard, the Asian empires certainly had the ability to establish overseas empires, as they were the source of many great innovations for centuries.

China was the hearth of several key innovations, such as printing, the compass, gunpowder, and their ocean-going vessels called **junks**. First constructed in the tenth century, these were arguably the most seaworthy vessels in the world, containing sternpost rudders, as well as square and lateen sails. Europeans did not develop ships to this level of sophistication until the Portuguese caravels of the fifteenth century. While the Chinese sailors likely did not utilize astrolabes, they used kamals, by way of the Arab navigators. A kamal could determine latitude almost as well as an astrolabe. In short, the Asians possessed the necessary artifacts to explore and dominate cultures around the globe far earlier than the Europeans.



A Chinese junk depicted in a seventeenth century woodblock print.

Therefore, it was through the **nonmaterial culture**, consisting of intangible mentifacts that helps to explain the key differences between the European and Asian cultures. **Mentifacts** include things like the beliefs, practices, aesthetics, and values of a society. Of particular interest were the contrasting social hierarchies of the two different cultural regions. Typically, in either region, one was born into a social class and was unable to move up or down in one's life-

time.

The European medieval social structure persisted for centuries with the main Church officials at the very top, and essentially outside the social hierarchy. The aristocracy represented the upper class, the monarchs, nobles, and knights. Next were the merchants who brought goods, and the spice of life to Europe. They were motivated and empowered through the economic system of mercantilism; many became extremely wealthy and powerful, especially by the time of the Renaissance. Next in line were the artisans, the skilled craft workers who produced tools, weapons, and a litany of useful items. At the bottom of the social hierarchy were the peasants who made up around 90 percent of the population; they produced most of the food, and paid the heaviest taxes. They were usually pathetically poor, worked long hours, lived short lives, and were regarded with little appreciation.



The European social hierarchy depicted as a pyramid. The acronym "A MAP" provides a useful mnemonic device for recall (aristocracy, merchants, artisans, and peasants).

In most of East Asia, the teachings of Confucius had a strong influence. Their cultures placed a heavy emphasis on the usefulness of one's position and contribution to society. Considering Japan as an example, their emperor was essentially outside the social hierarchy; he was largely a figurehead with little actual power, but possessed great wealth. Atop their social structure were the samurai, the warrior land-holding class, much like Europe's aristocracy. However, sharply contrasting with Europe, the peasants occupied the next highest social class, favorably regarded because they produced most of the food and taxes. Nonetheless, similar to their European counterparts, they were still poor and destitute. The main difference is the Asian class structure generally emphasized utility above wealth. Next in line were the artisans, and were comparable to those in Europe. At the bottom of the Asian social hierarchy were the merchants; they were considered to be parasites, producing nothing themselves, but pilfering profit off other people's hard work.

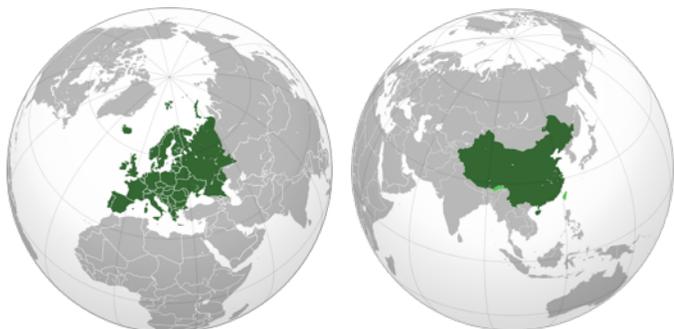
Merchants were regarded as little more than a necessary evil; they were required for a successful economy, but not nearly valued like their counterparts in Europe.



The typical Japanese social hierarchy pyramid (a similar structure existed in China). The acronym “SPAM” provides a useful mnemonic device for recall (samurai, peasants, artisans, and merchants).

The Impact of Geopolitics

Geopolitics, a final factor to consider, provides even further insight as to why the Asian empires did not establish overseas colonies and global networks as the Europeans had. Both regions had benefited from favorable climate for centuries, but faced challenging conditions through the Little Ice Age. The European social hierarchy, favoring the merchant class above the peasants, would prove to be more successful in adapting to the changing global conditions. Furthermore, the political situations of the European states and the Asian empires, provided for yet another contrasting scenario that favored the Europeans at this time above the Asians. Today, the country of China and the continent of Europe are roughly similar in land area, both just under four million square miles. However, China was – and is – a large empire, whereas Europe consisted of hundreds of states and territories.



These two images show the contemporary borders of the relatively equally sized continent of Europe and the country of China.

The European states competed against each other for limited resources and for trade, especially with the Asian empires. As a result of the Little Ice Age, in conjunction with the rising prices of goods, the Europeans focused outward, seeking new land, food, and riches. The European states all possessed relatively equal technology and weapons; had they fought against each other for resources within their own territories, they would have been far less successful. Even a country that was victorious against another would have expended an exorbitant amount of money, and would have lost an excessive number of people in the process. European monarchs understood that warring against each other for riches would not have proven to be a worthwhile endeavor. Rather, the European states – led by Portugal and Spain – explored the oceans for all-water trade routes with the empires of the East. In the process, they expanded into – and dominated – societies around the world, who possessed weaker technologies, enabling the Europeans to reap even greater benefits.

At the same time many European states were expanding, the East Asian empires of Japan and China focused inward. Eventually, Japan became a nation-state and isolated themselves almost completely from the outside world. China had, in fact, engaged in massive overseas expeditions up through the fifteenth century. However, they established a system of tribute – not trade – with the societies they subdued around the Indian and Pacific Oceans. The Little Ice Age impacted the Chinese and Europeans in much the same way, reducing the availability of food and resources. China, in contrast to the European states, was a vast empire seeking to protect what it had developed over centuries. Believing they possessed all they needed within their own lands, the Chinese ended their overseas expeditions, strengthened the Great Wall, and worked to limit foreign influence.

Due to their different geopolitical situations and cultures, the Europeans and the Asians reacted differently to the changing times. Europe and East Asia were two regions - worlds apart - yet connected through trade, and by way of unpredictable and uncontrollable global climate change.

Japanese Isolation

In the fifteenth century, while the Portuguese were commencing their voyages along the Western coast of Africa, Japan was a multi-state nation in chaos. An era of regional warfare called the **Age of Warring States** (1467-1568) descended Japan into civil war, which destroyed all sense of central control. However, by the beginning of the seventeenth century and after years of violence, Japan would start down the path toward becoming one of the most iconic nation-states in the modern world.

The Last Days of Feudal Japan

Japan’s feudal government had persisted for centuries, and in many ways, paralleled the medieval system in Europe. In theory, Japan’s ruler was its emperor; a hereditary monarch revered as a god, who reigned in Kyoto, the capital. By the end of the twelfth century, however, Japan

was actually run by a **shogun**, commander of its samurai armies, who exercised power in the emperor's name. In this way, the shogun was essentially a monarch, an absolute ruler who wielded immense power.



This armor was presented to a samurai warrior in the 1500s by Toyotomi Hideyoshi.

During the Little Ice Age, as food and resources grew increasingly scarce, the Japanese **samurai** - members of the warrior class - repulsed several Mongol invasions. The samurai were analogous to the European knights and lived by a chivalrous code of honor and service to their superiors, known as *Bushido* (literally meaning "the way of the warrior"). As a result of their actions, many samurai expected land grants as reward, following the usual custom. But no land had been conquered, so there was none to distribute. Furthermore, as samurai divided their family estates among various heirs, individual landholdings grew smaller, leaving many warriors impoverished and embittered. As a result, resentful samurai supported various **daimyo** (DĪM-yō), which



Japanese samurai with European muskets.

were analogous to the European nobles, hereditary regional warlords who dominated parts of Japan. By the fifteenth century, Japan was ripe for a rebellion.

During the Age of Warring States, many Japanese daimyo acted as independent rulers, battling each other with their own armies and vassals. However, a new source of instability came to Japan in the south. Strange foreigners eager to trade arrived by sea in the mid sixteenth century. These Portuguese sailors came equipped with deadly weapons the Japanese called "lightning sticks." Although the Chinese had developed gunpowder weapons centuries earlier, Japan's warriors were not directly introduced to firearms until the Portuguese arrived by sea armed with muskets.

came Christians, as missionaries of other Christian denominations poured into Japan. The new faith was professedly peaceful, but some in Japan saw its growing strength as a threat to their traditional ways.

The Unification and Isolation of Japan

Oda Nobunaga (O-dah nO-boo-NAH-gah) (~1534-1582), son of a minor daimyo, set out in the mid sixteenth century to unite Japan under his control. He built a powerful army, equipped it with Western firearms and cannons, placed it under command of a military genius named **Hideyoshi**, and used it to conquer rival daimyo throughout Japan. After capturing Kyoto, he defeated other daimyo and gained control of almost half of Japan's provinces. In 1582, Oda was ambushed by one of his generals and committed suicide to avoid being captured.

Hideyoshi (1536-1598), son of a peasant soldier, was a small man with no class status, no family name, no wealth, and little education, but with exceptional military skills that had made him Oda's leading general. Within eight years of Oda's death, Hideyoshi managed to defeat or gain allegiance from all remaining warlords, completing the country's unification, and gaining a family name from the emperor, **Toyotomi**. After assuming power, he set out to make Japan a true nation-state by expelling Christian missionaries, and engaging in a "sword hunt," preventing the peasants from using weapons or engaging in an insurrection.



Hideyoshi's main ambition, however, was to conquer China. In order to do so, he had to travel through neighboring Korea. Having been denied safe passage through the lands by the Koreans, he invaded them in the late sixteenth century. Korea was essentially a **vassal state** of China, paying China a yearly tribute to remain somewhat independent. The Chinese aided the Koreans with troops and supplies; additionally, the Koreans used their ingenious turtle ships - with iron hulls - to win several key naval battles against the Japanese. As a result, Japan was successfully repelled, and Korea remained dominated by China. Hideyoshi died in 1598 due to complications after contracting the plague, which brought Japan back to a position without a dominant leader.

Tokugawa Ieyasu (Tō-koo-GAH-wah Ē-ā-YAH-soo), an astute old warlord with large estates in eastern Japan,

quickly became the dominant daimyo in Japan. Several western daimyo opposed him, but in 1600 the Battle of Sekigahara ended with a total victory for Ieyasu and his forces. This was the largest battle ever on Japanese soil, involving a total of around 160,000 men. In 1603 Ieyasu forced the emperor to name him shogun, and forced all daimyo to swear loyalty to him. This began an era called the **Tokugawa Shogunate**, in which Japan entered a period of 265 years of isolation, maintaining the status quo until 1868.



A Japanese screen replica dating to 1854, depicting the decisive Battle of Sekigahara.

In order to maintain power, the Tokugawa shoguns outlawed Christianity, and they prevented the daimyo from building castles, who also had to provide manpower for the shoguns. Additionally the daimyo had to spend every other year in Edo (which is Tokyo today), the city in which the shoguns used as their capital. To ensure absolute loyalty, the daimyos' families had to remain in Edo; if any rebellion had been initiated, their family members would have been summarily put to death. Just like the great Chinese general, Sun Tzu, had said in the *Art of War* (around the second century BCE), "keep your friends close and your enemies closer." This arrangement all but guaranteed the shoguns absolute and total control of the entirety of Japan.

During this time period, almost total isolation from the outside world was achieved, with only one Dutch ship allowed to trade with the Japanese once a year. The Dutch were Calvinists, and cared much more about trading than they did proselytizing, due to their belief in predestination. By allowing some trade with the West, the wealthy and powerful could still have access to luxury goods, and the Japanese leaders could remain aware of world around them.

While Tokugawa rule brought unity, stability, and security, it did not prevent change. Commerce and urbanization expanded; as cities and towns grew larger, Japan's urban culture became increasingly sophisticated. Learning flourished, and by the nineteenth century Japan had more than ten thousand schools and almost 50 percent

male literacy. However, Tokugawa culture did little to enrich the lives of women; they were subject to their husbands, expected to stay home, raise children, and take care of household chores. Nonetheless, while changes did occur, the shogunate system ensured that Japan would develop into one of the most cohesive nation-states in the entire world.

Colder global temperatures – the great catalyst of change – had reduced the availability of food and other precious resources during the Little Ice Age. Due to the Japanese nonmaterial culture and political system, Japan progressed into the future in the opposite direction of the Europeans, isolating themselves while Europe expanded.

China's Expansion and Eventual Stagnation

The symbol for China is *Zhongguo*, which means "Middle Kingdom;" as such, the Chinese saw themselves as the center of the world. For centuries, they had possessed arguably the most sophisticated empire in the world. The riches of China, perhaps more than anything else, motivated the Europeans to explore and find more efficient trade routes. However, they were surpassed by the West in terms of wealth and influence by means of the Great Divergence, beginning in the sixteenth century.

Zhongguo is used to refer to all territories claimed by China today, including Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan.

The Ming Ascendancy

It has been scientifically proven by geneticists that the Black Death – and many other European pandemics – had their start in China; the plague ravaged their population and helped lead to a massive uprising against the Mongols who were ruling China. This uprising led to the start of a new dynasty – the **Ming** (meaning "brilliant;" 1368-1644 CE); it was the last dynasty led by the Han Chinese – the most ethnically dominant group in China – making up more than 90 percent of their population today.

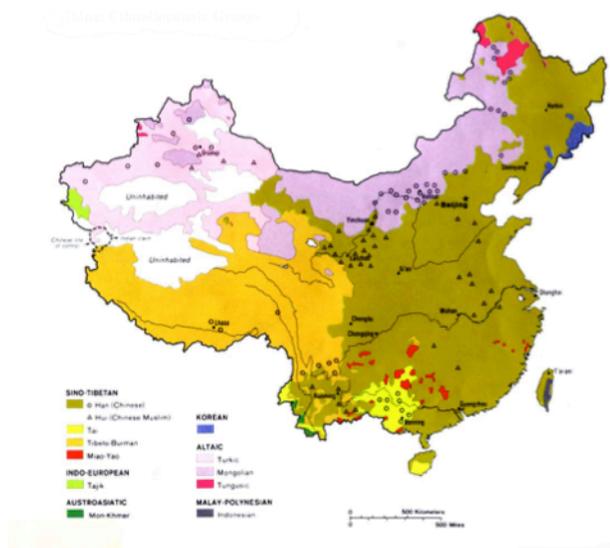


The decoration of two cranes on this man's chest are a "rank badge" that indicate he was a civil official of the first rank.

scholar-gentry were the highest class; they were the

China has always been a multinational state, made up of many different ethnic groups across their vast lands. The Chinese were strongly influenced by Confucian values, and thus, their social structure was similar to the Japanese. Emperors and their families vacillated between growing more or less powerful depending on the individual or dynasty. Nonetheless, the emperor was essentially outside of the social hierarchy. The

landowners who successfully passed civil service exams, which were necessary for them to hold any administrative position.



An ethnolinguistic map of modern China.

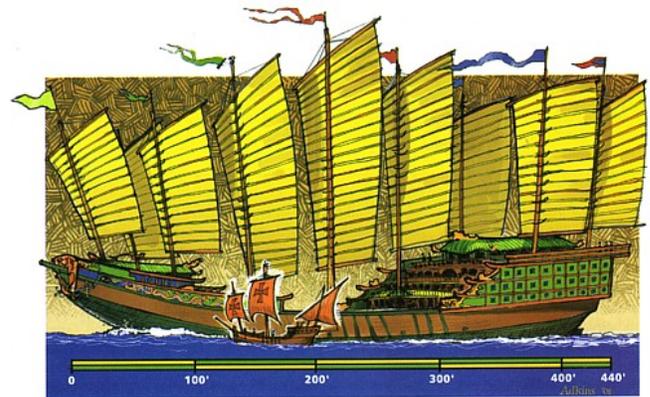
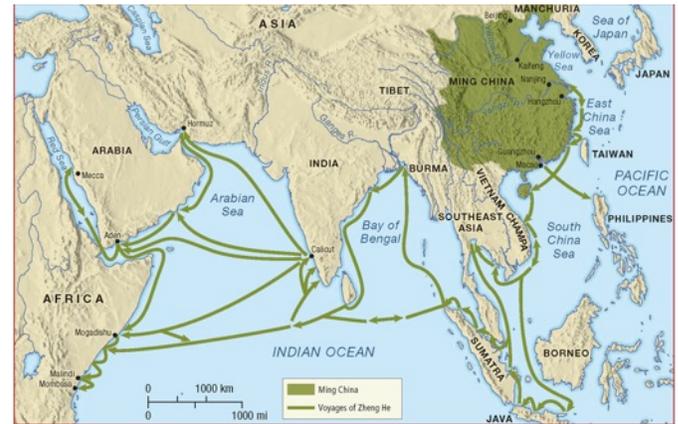
As was similar to Japanese tradition, the peasants occupied the second tier in the social hierarchy, again highly regarded for their usefulness in providing food and paying taxes. The artisans followed them, who were able to engage in their specialized labors due to the productivity of the peasants. Lastly were the merchants, who were regarded with lowly esteem, but became more important as trade increased with the Europeans.

Expansion Under the Ming

In the early Ming dynasty, China was probably the world's mightiest and wealthiest empire. With the Mongol rulers gone and stability restored, farming and commerce flourished, while China's million-man standing army, equipped with cannons and gunpowder grenades, was East Asia's dominant military force. Surrounding states and empires paid a yearly tribute for the right to trade with the Chinese.

Under the Ming, China extended its land westward into Central Asia and eastward into Korea. China expanded as a great naval and commercial power, building huge fleets of large sailing ships and sending out vast expeditions to foreign lands, bolstered by junks. The most extensive expeditions were led by **Zheng He** (JUUNG-HUH), a talented Muslim mariner, commissioned to explore the whole known world. From 1405 to 1433, in seven great voyages with fleets of up to 70 ships and crews of up to thirty thousand men, Zheng He sailed to the Philippines, Southeast Asia, India, Persia, Arabia, and even down Africa's east coast. These expeditions were the largest in human history to that time; however they were mostly political or militaristic, not economic in nature. Chinese society was dominated by the values of Confucianism, far more than the motivations of mercantilism. The Chinese did receive money from land taxes and tribute, but not trade, since they felt they had all they needed. The Chinese found nothing to change their perception

that China's ways and goods were superior to all others. Indeed, Zheng He's expeditions, reaffirmed China's sense of superiority, especially in such areas as commerce, technology, and ocean travel.



Top: Zheng He's seven expeditions from 1405 to 1433 CE; bottom: a comparison of Zheng He's 400 ft. flagship to Christopher Columbus' Santa Maria.

Ming Stagnation

Zheng He's expeditions were finished before the Europeans had even begun to sail much beyond the Mediterranean Sea and into the Atlantic Ocean. However, even though Ming China had vast wealth and advanced technologies, its rulers did not opt to explore further and create connections with the rest of the world. With the onset of the Little Ice Age, China began to look increasingly inward. As a large contiguous empire with vast farmlands as well as great technology and resources, they had the motivation to protect what they had. In relying on time-tested practices rather than innovation, the dynasty slowly lost its vigor, and stagnation set in.

Various factors contributed to Ming stagnation. One was the drain of responding to the continued Mongol threat. Due – in large part - to cooler temperatures, the Mongols to the North continually harassed the Chinese in search of more land, food, and resources. This forced the Ming to rebuild the **Great Wall** as well as to relocate their capital northward to Beijing, and to encourage people to migrate to the north. It was around this time the **Forbidden City** was constructed, becoming the home of emperors and their households as well as the ceremonial and

political center of Chinese government for almost half a century. The move to Beijing and the rebuilding of the Great Wall fortified northern defenses, but exhausted China's resources, since the new capital's northern location left the regime more vulnerable to Mongol attack.



Top: The Great Wall of China at Jinshanling; bottom: the Forbidden City in Beijing, China.

Another key factor in the Ming decline was the traditionalism and anti-commercialism of China's civil service. In the Ming era, as in the past, the imperial administration was staffed with civil servants drawn largely from the sons of the scholar-gentry, the high social class. Steeped in the values of their Confucian past, and protective of a system that gave them power and prestige, the bureaucratic officials resisted innovation and disparaged commerce. Since most scholar-gentry incomes came from agriculture and most state revenues came from land taxes, many bureaucrats saw little to gain from commerce, either for themselves or for the government.

By the fifteenth century, the Ming ended overseas expeditions, and spent valuable resources in expanding the **Grand Canal**. Due to cooler temperatures, wheat crops in the north produced progressively reduced yields, so Champa rice (originating in Vietnam) – which was plentiful in the south – was shipped northward through the Grand Canal, becoming their staple crop. In many ways, due to the Little Ice Age, China ended their exploration of the outside world, focused inward to protect their lands and resources, and began a period of stagnation while the Europeans surpassed them in wealth and power.

Foreign Influence in Mainland China

As China entered the sixteenth century, they were challenged along virtually every major border. Although the Ming officially discouraged foreign trade, merchants from around the Indian and Pacific Oceans often ignored these restrictions, as did many Chinese. Along the South, the Portuguese were the first Europeans to arrive to China in large numbers, eager to gain land, riches, and to spread Christianity. Their disrespect for Chinese laws, the stench of their unwashed bodies, and their purchase of Chinese as slaves led many in China to view the Portuguese as crude "ocean devils."

As time progressed, other Europeans, including the Spanish, increasingly arrived with vast sums of silver, mined primarily from South America. A brisk trans-Pacific trade quickly developed, and China even engaged in the **Columbian Exchange**. Much of the silver mined in the Andes Mountains was delivered not to Spain but to far-away China. The silver-mining city of Potosí, in modern-day Bolivia – surrounded by little more than snow and bare rock – ballooned to the size of London in the space of just a few decades. China also received valuable crops such as potatoes, sweet potatoes, and corn, which grew in areas that were previously minimally **arable**, or farmable. In exchange, silk, porcelain and other Chinese luxury goods made their way eastward toward Mexico and beyond.



East Asian commerce in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

From the East came Japanese, eager to tap into China's great wealth, but increasingly defiant and unwilling to pay the tribute required for official trade. Instead they turned to plunder and piracy on the seas, whilst Japanese samurai landed in China to pillage towns and villages. The Ming fought back by prohibiting trade with Japan, but this ban primarily only led to more smuggling. Then, in the 1590s, came Japan's assault on Korea, led by Hideyoshi. A massive Ming army helped deter the Japanese

assault, but the venture's huge cost further drained China's treasury.

Additionally, the Ming were repeatedly harassed by the Mongols to the North. In the mid sixteenth century, the Mongols breached the Great Wall, pillaged the outskirts of Beijing, and terrorized northern China for years thereafter. The need to protect their borders on multiple fronts drained China's treasury, and led to unrest as well as an increased sense of **xenophobia**, which is a dislike or fear of people from other countries.

Acceleration of the Great Divergence

Regardless of the changing times, the Ming emperors maintained vast courts and wasted valuable tax money by supporting their entourages, living a life of excessive luxury and avarice. In the early 1600s, the Japanese isolated themselves almost completely from the outside world, depriving the Chinese of a valuable trading partner. By the 1630s, during some of the coldest years of the Little Ice Age, a terrible famine ravaged the Chinese countryside leading to massive deaths and revolts. During this desperate time, a commoner named **Li Zicheng** (LE zuh-CHUNG) led a rebellion. As floods, droughts, and smallpox epidemics amplified the human disaster, support for Li Zicheng increased. In 1644 he captured Beijing, while the despondent Ming emperor hanged himself on a nearby hill, thus ending the Ming Dynasty.



A contemporary drawing of Li Zicheng.

The fall of the Ming dynasty resulted, however, not in a new Chinese dynasty led by Li Zicheng but in China's conquest by the **Manchus**, a loosely united group of nomadic people who came from the region northeast of China known as Manchuria. When Li Zicheng's forces took Beijing, the Ming called on the Manchus for help. This invitation backfired, allowing the Manchus to attack and overrun the Chinese capital, expelling and later destroying Li Zicheng's army. The Manchus had no intention of restoring the Ming, instead forming what would be the last imperial dynasty in China, the **Qing** (*CHING*), meaning "Pure," that would reign from 1644 until 1912.

The Qing, although technically foreigners, adopted many Chinese ways and customs. In this way, the Manchu people underwent significant **acculturation**, which is the process of adopting the cultural traits or social patterns of another group. The Manchus, in turn, also influenced the Chinese. For example, Chinese men were forced to wear their hair in a braid – or **queue** – keeping consistent with Manchu custom. Nonetheless, laws and traditions were put into place to avoid excessive **assimilation** of the Manchu people, or the loss of their original cultural traits and traditions. Manchus were given precedence when it came to government positions; additionally intermarriage between the Chinese and Manchus was forbidden.

The Qing engaged in massive military campaigns, subduing resistance in the south, while expanding their territory to the west. They negotiated a treaty with Russia that defined the borders between the two empires in the late seventeenth century. Later, they marched into Mongolia, mastering that region and vastly diminishing the Mongol menace that had plagued China for centuries.



A Chinese man with the typical Manchu queue and hair on the forehead shaved off above the temple.

Aside from territorial gains, the Qing sought to create a more unified nation, suppressing Christianity, as well as the Jesuits. They also outlawed the practice of **foot-binding** – a common practice by the wealthy in some regions of China – in which the arch of the foot of little girls was often broken to make the feet appear small and dainty. But despite their efforts, the effects of the Little Ice Age, the continued isolation of the Japanese, and the rise and expansion of the Europeans, the Qing stagnated for more than a century. By the late eighteenth century a Buddhist-led rebellion broke out, attempting to overthrow the Qing and pave the way for the return of the Buddha. It took the Qing eight years to put down the rebellion, showcasing how far they had fallen from their days of dominance in East Asia.

At the onset of the fifteenth century, there was perhaps no empire in the world as powerful and sophisticated as the Chinese. However, colder climate would prove to be the primary impetus toward the Great Divergence. Many factors, including several not highlighted in this text, caused this significant deviation from the directions the Europeans and East Asians had been travelling. Europe had lagged behind East Asia in terms of technology, prosperity, and power for centuries. However, the politically divided region of Europe, influenced by mercantilism, surpassed the wealth and dominance of the politically united regions of China and Japan, influenced by Confucianism. During this era, the nonmaterial culture, and geopolitical situation of Europe proved to be the superior combination alongside the changing global conditions; and fate smiled upon the Europeans.

Geohistorical Concepts

The Wild, Wild West

Human territoriality
 state
 nation
 nation-state
 diffusion
 Protestant Reformation
 Holy Roman Empire
 sacraments
 purgatory
 indulgence
 John Wyclif
 Jan Hus
 Northern Renaissance
 Martin Luther
 Johan Tetzl
 Ninety-Five Theses
 Five Themes of Geography –
 location, place, movement,
 region, human/environmental
 interaction
 sovereignty
 European Plain
 Emperor Charles V
 vernacular
 Huldrych Zwingli
 Peasants' Revolt
 English Reformation
 Henry VIII
 Anne Boleyn
 Anglican Church
 John Calvin
 predestination
 the elect
 puritanical
 Inquisitions
 Ignatius of Loyola
 Jesuits
 Philip II
 Dutch Revolt
 Invincible Armada
 Protestant Wind
 Huguenots
 Edict of Nantes
 Thirty Years' War
 Defenestration of Prague
 secularism
 Peace of Westphalia
 self-determination
 Westphalian sovereignty
 capitalism
 means of production
 entrepreneurs
 cottage industries
 nuclear families
 bourgeoisie

The Beasts of the East

Five Themes of Geography
 climate
 Medieval Warm Period
 cultural landscape
 Little Ice Age
 culture
 material culture
 artifacts
 junks
 nonmaterial culture
 mentifacts
 geopolitics
 Age of Warring States
 shogun
 samurai
 daimyo
 Oda Nobunaga
 Toyotomi Hideyoshi
 vassal state
 Tokugawa Ieyasu
 Tokugawa Shogunate
 Ming Dynasty
 Zheng He
 Great Wall of China
 Forbidden City
 Grand Canal
 Columbian Exchange
 arable
 Li Zicheng
 Manchus
 Qing Dynasty
 acculturation
 queue
 assimilation
 foot-binding

¹ Labarge, Margaret Wade. *Medieval Travellers*. New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1983. p. 16

² Van Doren, Charles [1991]. *A History of Knowledge: Past, Present, and Future*, New York: Ballantine Books.

³ McNeill, William H. (1982). *The Pursuit of Power: Technology, Armed Force, and Society since A.D. 1000*. University of Chicago Press. p. 50

⁴ The 'Columbian Exchange': How Discovering the Americas Transformed the World. Charles C. Mann. *Der Spiegel*. 16 Sept. 2013. Web 20 Sept. 2013. <<http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/a-923220.html>>