

Early modern era essay

[Parts of the World](#), [Asia](#)



The voyage of Christopher Columbus to America reshaped the world by connecting hemispheres permanently. Consequently, it marked the difference between the Early Modern Era and the Intermediate Era. The Early Modern Era was characterised by increased communication and travel across the world which resulted in numerous friendly and hostile encounters between remote communities. Exchange of ideas, technologies, diseases, resources, products and capital took a global scale. Other people also used empires to acquire resources in other parts of the world. It was during this period that empires expanded to geographical scales that were unimaginable before. The empires depended on gunpowder weapons to expand. This explains why empires during this period are referred to as ‘gun powder empires’ by historians. Advanced military and naval technologies enabled European powers to expand and compete for resources in the entire world. The competition for resources in other parts of the world created rivalry among European powers. For example, the Portuguese and the Dutch became bitter rivals because of competing for control over Brazil, Sri Lanka and South Eastern Asia.

During the Early Modern Era, the new empires could only expand to certain limits due to resistance. Despite the advanced military technology of European powers, their powers were limited to the Middle East, Asia, part of the African continent and the Americas. Therefore, there were various centres of economic and political power, what is referred to as polycentrism. The interaction between various people in the world created informational exchange and compromise. For example Africans and Asians adapted ideas from one another whereas the Spaniards and the Inca intermarried in Peru.

During the Early Modern Era, both European powers and China achieved global power for political and economic reasons. However, it is the mode of expansion that was different. Whereas European powers were keen on expanding their empires, the Chinese were pulling back from their maritime expeditions. This is because at that time China already was enjoying budgetary surpluses and did not need foreign trade or colonies to prosper. The Chinese rulers also feared if merchants gained a lot of wealth, it would threaten the state. However, European merchants had full support of their governments. Although gun powder was invented by the Chinese, it was Europeans who developed deadly weapons using gun powder. European powers often used weapons created from gun powder against each other. The Chinese were also not keen on challenging other empires. For example, although the Chinese had naval technology they were not interested in challenging European powers in the Indian Ocean.

Connection of the whole world was formed during this era with the opening of the Pacific and Atlantic oceans. This resulted in the development of a global economy with global trade with European, Asian and African merchants. However, it was Europeans who were the main benefactors. European economies expanded tremendously. For example, the Spanish obtained large quantities of silver from Bolivia, Peru and Mexico during their conquest which expanded their economy. The growth in trade stimulated manufacturing and agriculture which created increased demand for human labour. This created slave trade that further expanded global trade. During this period, world trade dominance shifted from Asia to Europe. Before 1800, Asia dominated world trade with cotton from India, silk from China and

copper from Japan. European-Asian trade tended to favour Asians because Asians were not keen on European manufactured goods as they considered them inferior whereas Asians goods were in high demand throughout the world.

It was also during this era that human activities reshaped the environment. Human beings started extracting iron ore and coal to be used in industrial manufacture. The environment was also affected by the growing population which resulted in expanding settlement and faster spread of diseases.

Spread of diseases was even made worse by global travel. A good example is smallpox which was spread by Europeans to the Americas and claimed several lives.

Question 2

First, some European countries were able to obtain certain resources that were unavailable in other areas of the world such as gold and silver. For example, the Spanish obtained large quantities of silver from Bolivia, Peru and Mexico during their conquest. Secondly, European countries were able to increase their agricultural production through cultivating the vast tracks of land in the Americas. Agricultural products were a major component of global trade. Lastly, Europeans markets had a much wider market which comprised of the Americas which had several Indian communities compared to Asia which relied on its traditional markets.