Period III: Regional and Trans-regional Interactions (600 CE TO 1450)

**Rise of Post-Classical Empires**

Centralized political rule was eventually restored in many parts of Eurasia following the period of chaos after the decline of Classical Civilizations. Matching the Classical Era pattern of short-lived organizer leading to larger and more lasting dynasties, the short-lived Sui Dynasty restored centralized rule to China, leading to the expansive Tang and the scholarly Song Dynasties. China’s neighbor Japan was a patchwork of feudal kingdoms. In Europe, the highly centralized Byzantine Empire continued some Roman traditions in the East Mediterranean, but West Europe devolved into feudal kingdoms united only in Christianity. Islam inspired the formation of a massive Empire encompassing all of the Arabian Peninsula, North Africa, and parts of Southern Sicily and Spain. Islamic invaders rode into and ruled parts of Northern India, leaving India divided into a series of Hindu and Islamic regional kingdoms during the Post-Classical Era. Regional kingdoms grew and flourished in West Africa and East Africa saw the rise of city-states on the Swahili Coast.

The Aztecs (Mexica) similarly built a large tributary state in Mesoamerica in the middle of this era. An alliance of tribes also created the Inca Empire in the Andes (South America). Chinese (Ming), European, and Islamic (Ottoman) states recovered and rose to kick-out the Mongol Invaders and restore more traditional forms of rule towards the end of the era.

Key Concept 3.1 Expansion and intensification of Communication and Exchange Networks

**Improved transportation technologies and commercial practices led to an increased volume of trade, and expanded geographical range of existing and newly active trade networks.**

* Existing trade routes, including the Silk Roads, the Mediterranean Sea, Trans-Saharan and the Indian Ocean basins, flourished and promoted the growth of powerful new trading cities (such as- to mention just a few- Novgorod, Timbuktu, Swahili city-states, Hangzhou, Calicut, Baghdad, Melaka and Venice, or in the Americas, Tenochtitlan or Cahokia).
* The growth of interregional trade in luxury goods (such as silk and cotton, textiles, porcelain, spices, precious metals and gems, slaves or exotic animals) was encouraged by significant innovations in previously existing transportation and commercial technologies, including more sophisticated caravan organizations (such as caravanserai or camel saddles); use of the compass, astrolabe and larger ship designs in sea travel; and new forms of credit and monetization (such as bills of exchange, credit, checks or banking houses).
* Commercial growth was also facilitated by new state practices (such as the minting of coins or use of paper money), new trading organizations (such as the Hanseatic League) and new state-sponsored commercial infrastructures like the Grand Canal in China.
* The expansion of existing empires- including China, the Byzantine Empire and the Caliphates- as well as new empires (such as the Mongols) facilitated Trans-Eurasian trade and communication as new peoples were drawn into their conquerors' economies and trade networks.

**The movement of peoples caused environmental and linguistic effects.**

* The expansion and intensification of long-distance trade routes often depended on peoples' understanding of a particular regional environment and their subsequent technological adaptations to them (such as the way Scandinavian Vikings used their longships to travel in coastal and open waters as well as in rivers estuaries, the way the Arabs and Berbers adapted camels to travel across and around the Sahara, or the way Central Asian pastoral groups used horses to travel in the steppes).
* Some migrations had a significant environmental impact, including the migration of the agricultural Bantu-speaking peoples in forested regions of Sub-Saharan Africa, and the maritime migrations of the Polynesian peoples who cultivated transplanted foods and domesticated animals as they moved to new islands.
* Some migrations and commercial contacts led to the diffusion of languages throughout a new region or the emergence of new languages (for example, the spread of Bantu languages, the new language of Swahili that developed in East African coastal areas, or the spread of Turkic and Arabic languages).

**Cross cultural exchanges were fostered by the intensification of existing, or the creation of new, networks of trade and communication.**

* Islam expanded from the Arabian Peninsula to many parts of Afro-Eurasia due to military expansion and the activities of merchants and missionaries.
* In key places along important trade routes, merchants set up diasporic communities where they introduced their own cultural traditions into the indigenous culture (such as Muslim merchant communities in the Indian Ocean region, Chinese merchant communities in the Southeast Asia, Sogdian merchant communities throughout Central Asia or Jewish communities in the Mediterranean, Indian Ocean basin, or along the Silk Roads).
* The writings of certain interregional travelers (such as Ibn Battuta, Marco Polo or Xuanzang) illustrate both the extent and the limitations of intercultural knowledge and understanding.
* Increased cross-cultural interactions resulted in the diffusion of literary, artistic and cultural traditions (such as the influence of Neo-Confucianism and Buddhism in East Asia, Hinduism and Buddhism in Southeast Asia, Islam in Sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia or Toltec/Mexica and Inca traditions in Mesoamerica and Andean America).
* Increased cross-cultural interactions also resulted in the diffusion of scientific and technological traditions (such as the influence of Greek and Indian mathematics on Muslim scholars, the return of Greek science and philosophy to Western Europe via Muslim al-Andalus in Iberia or the spread of printing and gunpowder technologies from East Asia into the Islamic empires and Western Europe).

**There was continued diffusion of crops and pathogens throughout the Eastern Hemisphere along the trade routes.**

* New foods were adopted in populated areas (such as bananas in Africa, new rice varieties in east Asia or the Muslim Agricultural Revolution).
* The spread of epidemic diseases, including the Black Death, followed the well established paths of trade and military conquest.

Key Concept 3.2 Continuity and Innovation of State Forms and Their Interactions

**Empires Facilitated Trade and Diffusion**

As with the Classical Era, large and powerful Post-Classical Empires facilitated vast increases in trade. Large and culturally diverse trade cities grew within Post-Classical states, such as Baghdad, Venice, Timbuktu, Hangzhou, Samarkand, Tenochtitlan, and Melaka. Growing populations led to expansion of trade along existing trade networks (Silk Road & Indian Ocean). East African Swahili city-states participated in flourishing Indian Ocean trade. The rise of kingdoms of Ghana, Mali, and Songhay in West Africa led to the growth of trans-Saharan trade. Powerful and long-lasting Chinese Empires (Tang and Song) promoted Silk Road trade from the East, which the wealthy and powerful Byzantine and Islamic Empires promoted Silk Road trade from the West.

Trade and Islam had a symbiotic relationship in this Post-Classical Era. Trade brought Islamic merchants in contact with people all around Afro-Eurasia. And, Islam promoted fair trade between Muslims, encouraging merchants to convert to Islam. The pilgrimage to Mecca created massive flows of travelers and traders on a yearly basis. Kings and merchants converted to Islam in both West Africa and on the Swahili coast of East Africa. Trade and Sufi missionaries also aided conversion to Islam in India. While Afro-Eurasia was buzzing with exchange of goods, ideas, and diseases, West Europe was out of the loop and disconnected from global trade doing their Feudal thing.

Aztec and Inca Empires in the Americas practiced some trade within empires/regions but did not trade across regions or into the Eastern Hemisphere.

**Empires collapsed and were reconstituted; in some regions new state forms emerged.**

* Following the collapse of empires, most reconstituted governments, including the Byzantine Empire and the Chinese dynasties- Sui, Tang and Song- combined traditional sources of power and legitimacy (such as patriarchy, religion or land-owning elites) with innovations better suited to the current circumstances (such as new methods of taxation, tributary systems or adaptation of religious institutions).
* In some places, new forms of governance emerged, including those developed in various Islamic states (such as the Abbasids, the Muslim Iberia or the Delhi Sultanates), the Mongol Khanates and city-states (such as in the Italian peninsula, East Africa or Southeast Asia).
* Some states synthesized local and borrowed traditions (such as Persian traditions that influenced Islamic states or Chinese traditions that influenced Japan).
* In the Americas, as in Afro-Eurasia, state systems expanded in scope and reach: Networks of city-states flourished in the Maya region and, at the end of this period, imperial systems were created by Mexica ("Aztecs") and Inca.

**Interregional contacts and conflicts between states and empires encouraged significant technological and cultural transfers** (for example, between Tang China and the Abbasids, across the Mongol empires and during the Crusades).

Key Concept 3.3 Increased Economic Productive Capacity and Its Consequences

**Mongol Conquest Toppled Aging Empires**

Genghis Khan temporarily unified the Mongol tribes during the middle of the Post-Classical Era, leading to the largest land empire in world history. These unified tribes of Central Asia kicked-butt and took names, conquering and devastating all that resisted them. The Mongols toppled the weak and aging Abbasid Islamic Dynasty along with the faltering Song Dynasty in China. After toppling these declining states, the Mongols integrated Eurasia in a de-centralized tributary state. The Mongols used and relocated people of talent to rule the various parts of their empire, often leading to improved systems of law, exchange, and taxation for conquered subjects. There is no doubt that the Mongols devastated and brutally killed hundreds of thousands of people, but they also established competent and thoughtful rule in their empire, respecting and supporting a variety of religions.

Mongol conquests (approximately 1250 – 1350) initially disrupted trade but eventually united large quantities of Eurasia. The Mongols facilitated trade and cultural exchange on the Silk Roads by uniting such a vast area of land and by literally stopping bandits on horseback.

**Innovations stimulated agricultural and industrial production in many regions.**

* Agricultural production increased significantly due to technological innovations (such as Champa rice varieties, the Chinampa field systems, *waru waru* agricultural techniques in the Andean areas, improved terracing techniques or the horse collar).
* In response to increasing demand in Afro-Eurasia for foreign luxury goods, crops (such as sugar and citrus) were transported from their indigenous homelands to equivalent climates in other regions.
* Chinese, Persian, and Indian artisans and merchants also expanded their production of textiles and porcelain for export; industrial production of iron and steel expanded in China.

**The fate of cities varied greatly, with periods of significant decline, and with periods of increased urbanization buoyed by rising productivity and expanding trade networks.**

*Note: Students should be able to explain the cultural, religious, commercial and governmental function of at least two major cities.*

* Factors that contributed to declines of urban areas in this period included invasions, disease, the decline of agricultural productivity and the Little Ice Age.
* Factors that contributed to urban revival included the end of invasions, the availability of safe and reliable transport, the rise of commerce and the warmer temperatures between 800 and 1300. Increased agricultural productivity and subsequent rising population and greater availability of labor also contributed to urban growth.
* While cities in general continued to play the roles they had played in the past as governmental, religious and commercial centers, many older cities declined at the same time that numerous new cities took on these established roles.

**Despite significant continuities in social structures and in methods of production, there were also some important changes in labor management and in the effect of religious conversion on gender relations and family life.**

* As in the previous period, the main forms of labor organization included free peasant agriculture, nomadic pastoralism, craft production and guild organization, along with various forms of coerced and unfree labor and government-imposed labor taxes and military obligations.
* As in the previous period, social structures were shaped largely by class and caste hierarchies. Patriarchy persisted; however, in some areas, women exercised more power and influence, most notably among the Mongols and in West Africa, Japan and Southeast Asia.
* New forms of coerced labor appeared, including serfdom in Europe and Japan and the elaboration of the *mit'a* in the Inca Empire. Free peasants resisted attempts to raise dues and taxes by staging revolts (such as in China or the Byzantine Empire). The demand for slaves for both military and domestic purposes increased, particularly in central Eurasia, parts of Africa and the eastern Mediterranean.
* The diffusion of Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and Neo-Confucianism often led to significant changes in gender relations and family structure.

**Recovery and Resurgence of Powerful States**

The end of the Post-Classical Era saw the recovery and rise of various Afro-Eurasian states. Europe gradually emerged from the “dark ages” with the help of Asia. Connections to the Islamic world in Sicily, Southern Spain, and during the Crusades, made the Italian Renaissance possible. Feudalism gave way to powerful centralized states in France, England, Spain, and Russia. European cities and universities grew during the High-Middle Ages, and European states taxed a free peasantry to get economically and militarily stronger. In the mid 1400’s, European states found themselves yearning for Asian goods, masters of technologies borrowed from Asia, and financially able to sponsor voyages of exploration to get those goods. Thus, starting in the late 1400’s, European explorers set out to sail to Asia, load their boats full of Asian goods, and get rich beyond their wildest dreams. Christopher Columbus felt he had reached the promised land when he wrote back to the Spanish king that he had discovered “Indians” on his epic voyage of 1492.

Chinese efforts to re-build after the Mongol “catastrophe” led the Ming Dynasty to restore Chinese honor and tradition. The Ming government kept successful elements of Mongol (Yuan) rule and reverted back to traditions like Confucianism and the Examination System. In an effort to announce to the world the revival of the great Chinese Dynasty, the Ming sent 7 voyages of trade, diplomacy, and exploration out into the Indian Ocean between 1405 and 1433 under the leadership of Muslim Admiral, Zheng He. The massive Ming explorations demonstrated the might of the Chinese Empire, reached far-away lands, but ultimately ended due to the wishes of Confucian scholars at court.

In the wake of the declining Mongols, Nomadic Turks from Central Asia re-established a strong Islamic state. Osman Bey founded the Ottoman Islamic Empire in the mid 14th century, blending Central Asiatic Turkic tradition with Islamic faith. The Ottomans created an expansive Islamic state centered on the Anatolian Peninsula that would last unto after World War One.