

# Asian Transitions in an Age of Global Change

## The Asian Trading World and the Coming of the Europeans

- The Asian trading network linked the Pacific and Indian oceans in three commercial zones. The Arab zone, including the Red Sea and Persian Gulf, furnished glass and textiles from the Middle East. From the Indian zone came cotton textiles, and from China paper, porcelain, and silks. Valuable spices still dominated the trade, coming from Ceylon and Indonesia. Coastal routes were preferred by all. At the time the Portuguese arrived in the region, no central power controlled trade, and military power was rarely used. The Portuguese changed the rules.
- Lacking goods desired in the East, the Portuguese resorted to force to obtain the spices they came for. From 1502, when da Gama first entered Asian waters, the Portuguese used their advantage to capture ports. To fortify their growing network, they took **Goa** and **Ormuz**. The Portuguese aimed to establish a system in which they would control all traffic in the Indian Ocean.
- The Portuguese were never able to extend the monopoly they desired, even by using the most brutal measures. The Dutch and English arrived in the 1600s, with the Dutch taking an early lead. They built the port of **Batavia** on Java, well positioned for the spice trade. The **Dutch trading empire** followed the same lines as the Portuguese. Yet the Dutch eventually turned to peaceful cooperation, concentrating on transporting goods.
- In general, the Europeans remained on the coastlines, with a few exceptions. For example, the Dutch controlled the north of Java, installing coffee plantations. The Spanish conquest of the Philippines in the 1500s, starting with **Luzon** and the nearby islands, failed to take **Mindanao** and the northern islands. Tribute systems were established, leaving local rulers in place.
- Converting Asians to Christianity was made difficult by the secure position of Islam in many areas. **Francis Xavier**, a Jesuit missionary, made headway in converting low-caste Hindus. **Robert di Nobili** learned Sanskrit, to help convert high-caste Indians, but had little success. Spanish work in the Philippines led to more converts. Christianity there, however, was a Filipino blend of traditional and Christian beliefs. Great continuity of customs and religious practices in the Philippines mitigated the impact of Christianity.

## Ming China: A Global Mission Refused

- The Ming dynasty was founded by Zhu Yuanzhang, of peasant stock. Influenced by time spent in a Buddhist monastery, he led a rebel group and defeated the

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Mongol ruler. He claimed the title of **Hongwu** emperor in 1368, and began a purge of Mongol influences.

- The Ming emperors reestablished and extended the examination system.
- Hongwu cleaned up corruption at court. In addition, he tried to rid the palace of intrigues of royal wives and eunuchs.
- His programs included public works, improving agricultural irrigation and encouraging farming on abandoned lands. The increasing power of the landlords greatly lessened the impact of these improvements. This gentry class created its own culture to justify its increasing power. Under the Ming emperors, the low place of women and the young was intensified.
- Agricultural expansion and imports from the Spanish and Portuguese stimulated an economic boom. Maize, sweet potatoes, and peanuts were imported and became staples. The high demand for Chinese goods meant an influx of American silver. Foreign traders were allowed only on **Macao** and **Canton**, and Chinese merchants fared well. In imitation of the gentry, merchants invested in land. The fine arts flourished as well, mainly along traditional lines. The novel achieved its classic form.
- Under Emperor Yunglo, admiral Zenghe led seven expeditions to the west. The size and scope of these undertakings demonstrated the Chinese capacity to undertake global expansion.
- Yet the Chinese retreated instead, closing themselves off more firmly than ever. Missionaries to China such as **Matteo Ricci** and **Alan Schall**, chose to convert the country from the top down, but they met with little success.
- Toward the end of the 16th century, the Ming court was weakened by corruption, and the rulers distanced themselves from the people. Public works lapsed, and disaffected farmers turned to banditry. Rebellion brought the Ming dynasty down in 1644, when the last emperor hanged himself to avoid capture.

### **Fending Off the West: Japan's Reunification and the First Challenge**

- A series of military rulers brought an end to daimyo warfare in Japan. The first, **Nobunaga**, used European firearms to depose the Ashikaga shogun in 1513. After his death, **Toyotomi Hideyoshi** pursued his predecessor's killers. Ambitious as well as able, Hideyoshi undertook the conquest of Korea, but failed. His successor, **Tokugawa Ieyasu**, was acknowledged shogun by the Emperor. Ruling from **Edo**, the Tokugawa shoguns ended daimyo warfare.
- European contacts with Japan were increasing in the period of unification, and indeed influenced events. In their own way, firearms and commerce each helped the Tokugawa rulers. Nobunaga patronized Christian missionaries, hoping to lessen the power of militant Buddhist orders. However, under Hideyoshi, Christians came to be seen as a threat.
- Hideyoshi expelled the Christian missionaries and then persecuted their converts. Ieyasu went further, attempting to rid the islands of all Europeans. By the mid-17th century, European contact was limited to Dutch trade on **Deshima** island. In this climate, the **School of National Learning** focused on the uniqueness of Japanese history and culture.

### Multiple-Choice Questions

1. When the Portuguese arrived in India in 1498, they
- (A) found they had little to offer in trade, but could get rich by using force.
  - (B) quickly integrated themselves into the Asian trade system.
  - (C) exchanged their European goods for Asian luxury items.
  - (D) were unwelcome.
  - (E) established cordial relations with Muslim merchants.
2. The periphery of the Indian Ocean trading network around 1500, specifically Africa, Southeast Asia, and Japan, furnished what items to the network?
- (A) slaves
  - (B) cotton textiles
  - (C) carpets and tapestries
  - (D) porcelain and silks
  - (E) mainly raw materials
3. The highest prices in the Asian network were paid for
- (A) cotton textiles.
  - (B) spices.
  - (C) bulk items such as foodstuffs.
  - (D) silk and porcelain.
  - (E) gold and silver.
4. The largest portion of Asian trade by volume in the Early Modern Era was the trade in
- (A) silk from China to the Middle East.
  - (B) cottons from India to the Middle East.
  - (C) bulk items, usually foodstuffs, exchanged within each of the main zones.
  - (D) spices from the East Indies.
  - (E) slaves from Africa.
5. Rather than try to control trade in the Indian Ocean as had Portugal, the Dutch
- (A) attempted to monopolize the spice trade from the East Indies.
  - (B) cooperated with the Muslim and Hindu merchants.
  - (C) signed trading agreements with local rulers.
  - (D) abided by the traditional practices of the region.
  - (E) concentrated on trade in India.
6. Europeans learned that the greatest trading profits in Asia could be made by
- (A) allying with the Hindus and warring on the Muslim states.
  - (B) transporting other peoples' goods and providing services as middlemen.
  - (C) seizing lands and creating land-based empires.
  - (D) peaceful cooperation with and integration into existing Asian trade networks.
  - (E) piracy and raiding other nations' merchant ships.
7. Europeans learned that the most successful missionary work in Asia occurred by
- (A) having missionaries use local languages and become acclimated to native cultures.
  - (B) forcibly converting the Muslims and Hindus to Christianity.
  - (C) converting the poorest and lowest social classes first.
  - (D) converting the elites first; the other classes would follow.
  - (E) converting areas that had not been converted to Islam.
8. Following the defeat and expulsion of the Mongols from China,
- (A) a legalist regime was established.
  - (B) the Ming Dynasty arose.
  - (C) peasants were granted equality with the scholar-gentry and noble classes.
  - (D) China converted to Buddhism.
  - (E) the civil service exam system of the Mongols was ended.
9. The first Ming emperors of China attempted to end all of these abuses EXCEPT:
- (A) the position of chief minister, who had

- too much power.
- (B) dishonesty, disloyalty, and laziness.  
 (C) court factions and conspiracies.  
 (D) the influence of the Emperor's wives and their relatives.  
 (E) the influence of the scholar-gentry.
10. In the 17th century, the Japanese dealt with the long-term European challenge by
- (A) allying with the Portuguese against the other Europeans.  
 (B) permitting the Jesuits to convert the Japanese to Christianity.  
 (C) permitting the Europeans to establish a trading monopoly in Japan.  
 (D) self-imposed isolation and forbidding most contact with Europeans.  
 (E) adapting European customs and technology.

### Free-Response Question

*Compare the balance between internal development and European influence in China, Japan, and the Philippines. What factors made some countries more resilient and less susceptible to external pressure?*

## ANSWERS AND EXPLANATIONS

### Multiple-Choice Questions

- 1. (A) is correct. There was no demand in India for European goods, so the Portuguese used force to make themselves a place in the regional commerce.
- 2. (E) is correct. B, C, and D—all luxury finished goods—were supplied by the three major zones of the region, but the Indian Ocean periphery supplied mainly raw materials.
- 3. (B) is correct. The region exported silk and porcelains, costly goods, and cotton textiles, of less value, but the most profitable commodity was always spices.
- 4. (C) is correct. While foodstuffs were not practical for longer distances, within the Asian commercial zone, the bulk of trade was mostly in foodstuffs.
- 5. (A) is correct. The Dutch focused on the spice trade, rather than other luxury commodities.
- 6. (D) is correct. While B and E occurred, peaceful cooperation with Asian nations was the most profitable.
- 7. (E) is correct. While all of the techniques except B were used, the only real success is where Islam—which had so much in common with Christianity—had not taken hold.
- 8. (B) is correct. The Ming dynasty was founded by Hongwu, responsible for overthrowing the last Mongol emperor.
- 9. (E) is correct. The first Ming emperors addressed the problems in A through D, but reinforced the role of the scholar-gentry.
- 10. (D) is correct. By about 1650, the Japanese had limited contact with Europeans to contact with the Dutch on Deshima island.

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### Free-Response Essay Sample Response

*Compare the balance between internal development and European influence in China, Japan, and the Philippines. What factors made some countries more resilient and less susceptible to external pressure?*

Sheer size and power appears to be one of the most important factors modulating the impact of Europeans, at least in the first period of imperialism. For instance, China was too large a country for Portugal to take on, and the Chinese were easily able to control interference. The Philippines, on the other hand, were not able to maintain their independence. Religion was another determinant: where state religions existed, missionaries had little impact. In India, missionaries made some inroads among low-caste Hindus. The lure of certain commodities increased European assaults, and spurred them to take areas of great commercial values. Finally, internal dissension, or, conversely, internal unity, was decisive. In Japan, for instance, Europeans initially made inroads during a period of division, but were then locked out when Japan was more stable. Surprisingly, given the Europeans' *raison d'être* in the area, they were met by a complete lack of demand for their goods. Until they created a dependent market in India, no one wanted what they had to sell.