

## I. China on the Cusp of Globalization

1. The story of globalization—the interconnection of all the cultures of the world, especially through trade—begins with the voyage of a young merchant from Venice, Italy, Marco Polo, down the silk road through Asia to China.
2. Polo arrived in China during a strange time. China had been conquered by the Mongols to the north, despite the many centuries of effort to fortify the border with the Great Wall of China. The Mongol rulers had themselves been convinced to adopt Chinese culture, however, in order to be accepted by the people. They had made themselves into the Yuan dynasty.
3. Polo was accepted into the court of the Yuan ruler Kublai Khan, where he lived for seventeen years in the service of the emperor, and, having returned to Europe **c.1300** he wrote about his adventures in *The Travels of Marco Polo*, which inspired many European explorers, such as Christopher Columbus, to seek out China.
4. The Yuan dynasty was eventually overthrown (of course) and a native Chinese dynasty that followed, the famous Ming dynasty, sent a fleet of ships commanded by admiral Zheng on a grand naval tour of the known world, in **1405**, to remind its trading partners of China's greatness.
5. Zheng He, on vessels many times the size of anything European explorers were using during the same period, proceeded at various points during the period around the known coast of Asia past Malaysia to India, Persia, Arabia, and the horn of Africa.
6. The expedition was sufficiently impressive to serve its purpose, as local ruler after local ruler loaded China's ships with tribute/gifts symbolizing their recognition of the Chinese emperor as the overlord of Asia.
7. Despite the great influx of tribute, the expedition actually cost more than it brought in. There was no new trade to be had with the same partners China had known for centuries, so further voyages seemed to serve no purpose, and no exploration beyond the world already well known was pursued.



The Kangnido Map of 1402 (left) show the Chinese view of the world, with China in the middle, Korea on the “left,” Japan, and Southeast Asia on the edge. (The modern map helps us identify the parts.) Even though the Chinese knew about more than this, the map illustrates the “Middle Kingdom” mindset, because they didn’t bother to include it.

## J. The Coming of the Globalizers

1. At the same time as Zheng He was sailing the Indian ocean, the small European nation of Portugal became the first to attempt to reach China by sea based on the inspiring tales of Marco Polo.
2. The Portuguese, under the leadership of Prince Henry “the Navigator,” hoped to circumnavigate Africa and thus be able to sail to Asia and trade directly with China. This would allow them to avoid relying on buying Chinese goods from Arab merchants in the Middle East, who themselves had received the goods from the Persian, and Indians, and a long chain of other “middle men” who each profited from their role as links in the trade between China and Europe, but consequently made Chinese goods very expensive in Europe.
3. The first explorer to achieve the goal of reaching Asia using the route around Africa in **1498**, the Portuguese commander Vasco da Gama, was able to buy a cargo of spices which brought a profit of 60 times the investment in the expedition! Clearly, more explorers were eager to join in the trade with Asia, and to extend it to China.
4. Reaching out still further from the new trading post in India established by Vasco da Gama, the first Portuguese ship, under the command of Jorge Alvares, reached China in **1513**.
5. For many years to follow, the Chinese would occasionally encounter tiny Portuguese (and later, Spanish) vessels off their coast. The ships hardly occasioned their curiosity, given their humble designs, and the barbaric countenance of the men on board.
6. In time, an annual Spanish treasure ship began to arrive in China from the Americas carrying vast sums of silver. Since the Chinese recognized silver as money, they were willing to tolerate the gradual extension of the European trading presence in the centuries to come.
7. Despite the fact that some Europeans had interesting religious and scientific ideas to share, including the missionary Matteo Ricci, who produced the first real world map in Chinese for the emperor in **1602**, the Chinese could not see any reason to seek further contact with Europe. That the barbarians of the “Tai Xi” (Far West) should wish to trade with China was simply seen as a confirmation of their China-centric view of the world.

## K. The Macartney Embassy (1793)

1. The steady, but modest expansion of European trade with China over the course of two centuries after the arrival of Jorge Alvares was not of great concern to the Chinese.
2. They established a single port of trade on the coast, Canton, where Europeans were allowed to seek Chinese goods. Otherwise, they were forbidden to penetrate into the country.

3. Little did the Chinese realize, however, since they were simply not paying attention, that a new and much more ambitious phase of globalization had been initiated by Netherlands, France, and especially Britain, in the early 1600s, so when an embassy was sent by King George III of England to China in **1793**, they did not attach much importance to it.
4. This embassy, led by Lord Macartney, was tasked with establishing a formal diplomatic and trading relationship between Imperial Britain—now a global empire stretching from Canada to Africa, to India and Australia—and Imperial China.
5. To the British, it was natural for two such great nations to have a more extensive trading relationship, which would be mutually beneficial.
6. (By this time in history, despite the fact that British people were already on average about three times as wealthy as the average Chinese, China had over twenty times the population of Britain, and thus was a very large potential trading partner, and, possibly, a customer for British goods.)
7. To China, however, the British were barbarians with little if anything to offer the “Middle Kingdom.” In the words of the emperor: *“Our land is so wealthy and prosperous, that we possess all things. Therefore there is no need to exchange the produce of foreign barbarians for our own.”*
8. When Macartney arrived in China, he was told he would have to perform the “kowtow” to show submission to the emperor. This ceremony involved kneeling to the ground three times, each time touching one's forehead to the ground three times, for a total of nine touches of the forehead to the ground. Lord Macartney refused, saying that he would only show the same *respect* to the emperor that he would show his own king, by kneeling on one knee in his presence.
9. This and other disagreements convinced the Chinese that the British were uncivilized. They decided to ignore the trade request of Britain and merely send a few gifts back to king George with a warning not to send further missions.
10. The hubris of the emperor was captured in his letter dismissing the initiative of King George III: *“You, O King, from afar have yearned after the blessings of our civilization...I have...taken note of your respectful spirit of submission, have treated your mission with extreme favor and loaded it with gifts....Thus has my indulgence been manifested...”*



British ambassador Lord Macartney kneels but does not “kowtow” in his embassy to the Chinese emperor of 1793 seeking trade. The emperor dismissed the British with a warning to “tremblingly obey!”

11. No trade being desired, however, the Emperor warned: *“Should your vessels touch the shore, your merchants will assuredly never be permitted to land or to reside there, but will be subject to instant expulsion. In that event your barbarian merchants will have had a long journey for nothing. Do not say that you were not warned in due time! Tremblingly obey and show no negligence!”*
12. The British could not understand this irrational sense of superiority. They rightly knew that Britain was much more powerful than China already.
13. Britain was occupied by the wars of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars, however, so it was unable to send another embassy until these wars were over.
14. At that point in history, the refusal of China to trade for European goods represented a real problem for the British. They could not count on reselling Chinese goods to Europe at a profit, because their client nations were often enemies in war, and their governments placed such high taxes on trade that the profit was drained from it.
15. If the British were truly going to benefit from trade with China, they reasoned, they needed to create a “balance of trade,” whereby they could buy Chinese goods for themselves (and for resale, if possible) and the Chinese would buy British goods as well. Thus payments of gold & silver (the only money used at that time) would flow both ways, not just from Britain to China.