Cross-cultural trade in world history

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Preface

Most historical writing fits into known categories of time, place, and subject matter. This study is somewhat unorthodox. First of all it lies in a no-man's-land between recognized disciplines in the social sciences where historical economic anthropology is as convenient a label as any. But of the three disciplines represented, its first commitment is to history. It also lies in the small but growing field of comparative world history – "comparative" because it abstracts particular phenomena having to do with cross-cultural trade and looks for similarities and differences; "world" because it tries to avoid a Western ethnocentric outlook, not because it will try to "cover" what went on everywhere; "history" because it is concerned with change over the very long run of time. It is also history because it asks the historians' question. How and why did human societies change through time? But it is also concerned with the kinds of change economists and anthropologists deal with. It therefore borrows from their conceptual toolbags.

Using this combination of attitudes about history and borrowing from other disciplines also exacts a price. This book is not about a number of other things that may be of equal or greater importance. First of all, it is not a history of world trade. It looks at aspects of commercial practice at several times and places between the agricultural and commercial revolutions. In so doing, it contains a thread of development over time, but it does not seek to "cover" all important traders or trade routes. The principle of selection is to find examples that illustrate the variety of cross-cultural trade – not those that were important for the quantity of goods carried, or those that had the greatest impact on other aspects of history. The overland trade routes across Asia, for example, or the overland trade between Russia and China are barely mentioned, not because they were insignificant, but because the evidence about these commercial practices is not so rich as other evidence about other times and places. Many cultures are therefore slighted, and many time periods are given less attention than they properly deserve. Another historian, even one

asking these same questions, might well have made another choice of examples.

Another important aspect of history this book will *not* cover is the history of trade *within* major culture areas. The price paid for limiting its scope to *cross-cultural* trade is the omission of the immensely important rise of internal commerce in Song China a little after 1000 A.D., or the equivalent rise of commerce within Western Europe.[1]

A third price to be paid is a decided neglect of political history and the affairs of individual men and women. Nor is this study much concerned with the sequences of events so central to conventional historical writing.

The other side of that coin is a concern with patterns – sometimes repetitive patterns or regularities. Without seeking anything so formal or iron-clad as historical "law," it is nevertheless worth noting in what circumstances particular patterns of behavior are likely to recur. Looking for patterns implies abstraction. All historical writing is, indeed, an abstraction from the full body of knowable data about a particular time and place. I will be concerned here with only a narrow part of human affairs, that is, the way people exchanged goods with other people who had a different way of life.

I have tried for a non-Europe-centered view of the human past, though even that attempt involves an important problem. Every social scientist is caught in the web of his own culture and his own time. Even with a conscious effort to rise above our natural ethnocentrism, history has to be expressed in a Western language, using the social science concepts common to Western culture of our time. Just as inevitably, it is limited by the kind and extent of information now available, and this is changing constantly. Well over half of the most valuable authorities I consulted were published after the early 1970s, when the idea of writing this book first began to take shape.

The range of examples is also limited by linguistic constraints. I know only a few of the more common languages of Western Europe and North America. With a good reading knowledge of Russian or Armenian or Chinese, this study could have been considerably more authoritative in several areas. On the other hand, to have taken the time necessary to learn all relevant languages would have meant that it would never have been written at all.

[1] For alternate treatments that do some of this, see Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism: 15th–18th Century, Volume III, The Wheels of Commerce* (New York, 1982); William H. McNeill, *The Pursuit of Power: Technology, Armed Force, and Society since A.D. 1000* (Chicago, 1982); Mark Elvin, *The Pattern of the Chinese Past* (Stanford, 1973); Tapan Raychaudhuri and Irfan Habib (eds.), *The Cambridge Economic History of India*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1982).

One final statement of intent. Both historical and social scientific knowledge have grown so much in recent decades that scholars have become more and more specialized. They therefore tend to write within the framework of a specialized subprofession, which implies a small but select audience. I have tried here to write from the conviction that it may well be possible to say something new to the historical and social scientific community, and yet have it be comprehensible and relevant to the educated public as well. Only they will know whether I have succeeded.

The many friends, colleagues, and students who have contributed to this book through discussion, suggestions, and conversation are far too numerous to mention. I should, however, recognize the yeoman service of the Inter-Library Loan Department of the Eisenhower Memorial Library of the Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. I am also especially grateful to Patricia Romero Curtin, Richard Hellie, Allen Isaacman, Paul Lovejoy, William H. McNeill, Anthony Reid, John F. Richards, William Rowe, and A. J. R. Russell-Wood, who were kind enough to read all or part of the manuscript and to give me detailed criticism. Needless to say, I alone am responsible for the result, especially in those instances where I persisted in error in spite of their good advice.

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Trade diasporas and cross-cultural trade

Trade and exchange across cultural lines have played a crucial role in human history, being perhaps the most important external stimuli to change, leaving aside the unmeasurable and less-benign influence of military conquest. External stimulation, in turn, has been the most important single source of change and development in art, science, and technology. Perhaps this goes without saying, since no human group could invent by itself more than a small part of its cultural and technical heritage. Take as simple an example as the manufacture of this book. The English language is derived from one of those that came into Western Europe with German immigrants, combined with elements of Latin, originally imposed by imperial conquerors from the south, plus other borrowings. The alphabet came from the Phoenicians. The page numbers are "Arabic," which actually means that the Europeans learned about them from the Arabs, who had borrowed them in turn from the Indians, who invented positional notation in the first place. A few years ago, a book like this would have been printed with movable type, which would have given it a possible Chinese heritage as well.

On the negative side, cross-cultural trade and communication pose special problems. People with a different way of life are strangers by definition; their ways seem unpredictable, and the unpredictable is probably dangerous as well. Communication itself is difficult. Even after an appropriate medium comes into existence, like a second language in common, understanding is hard to come by. Strangers may appear not to be hostile, but they are still not to be trusted in the same full sense that neighbors and kinfolk can be trusted. These problems in cross-cultural understanding in general have meant that cross-trade has almost always been carried out through special institutional arrangements to help guarantee the mutual security of the two sides.

Trade diasporas

The earliest phases of cross-cultural trade are lost beyond any possibility of historical reconstruction. Even the recent customs of people with the

least-developed technologies, like the Stone Age hunting and gathering peoples whose way of life was relatively untouched by outsiders till a century or so ago – even these "primitive" ways are not necessarily a good guide to the distant past. But it is possible to imagine that the earliest cross-cultural trade took place during random encounters of hunting bands, or that it was mixed with phases of warfare. One can also imagine that the earliest trade between different communities took place at the border between them. Linguistic evidence suggests that this was the case in ancient Greece, and later on, Hermes was both the god of trade and the god of the boundary markers separating one city from another.[1] But this early phase of boundary markets ended for the Greek cities by the eighth century B.C. If similar institutions existed elsewhere in the ancient world, they disappeared with the earliest phases of urbanization. Early urban markets tended to appear near the heart of the city, not on the outskirts, presumably because the traders wanted to have the best possible access to potential customers.

Whatever the earliest forms of cross-cultural trade, the most common institutional form after the coming of city life was the trade settlement. Commercial specialists would remove themselves physically from their home community and go to live as aliens in another town, usually not a fringe town, but a town important in the life of the host community. There, the stranger merchants could settle down and learn the language, the customs, and the commercial ways of their hosts. They could then serve as cross-cultural brokers, helping and encouraging trade between the host society and people of their own origin who moved along the trade routes. At this stage, a distinction appeared between the merchants who moved and settled and those who continued to move back and forth. What might have begun as a single settlement soon became more complex. The merchants who might have begun with a single settlement abroad tended to set up a whole series of trade settlements in alien towns. The result was an interrelated net of commercial communities forming a trade network, or trade diaspora – a term that comes from the Greek word for scattering, as in the sowing of grain.[2]

[1] Norman O. Brown, *Hermes the Thief: The Evolution of a Myth*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1969), pp. 38–46; Jean-Christophe Agnew, "The Threshold of Exchange: Speculations on the Market," *Radical History Review*, 21:99–118 (1979), pp. 101–3.

[2] The term "trading diaspora" originated with the anthropologist Abner Cohen, who defined it as "a nation of socially interdependent, but spatially dispersed communities," in "Cultural Strategies in the Organization of Trading Diasporas," in Claude Meillassoux (ed.), *The Development of Indigenous Trade and Markets in West Africa* (London, 1971), p. 267. Other anthropologists tend to use "trade networks," with less attempt at such a precise definition. See Lloyd A. Fallers (ed.), *Immigrants and Associations* (The Hague, 1967); Karl A. Yambert, "Alien Traders and Ruling Elites: The Overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia and the Indians in East Africa," *Ethnic Groups*, 3:173–98 (1981).

Trade communities of merchants living among aliens in associated networks are to be found on every continent and back through time to the very beginning of urban life. They are, as we shall see, one of the most widespread of all human institutions over a very long run of time, yet limited to the long period of human history that began with the invention of agriculture and ended with the coming of the industrial age. Some of the best evidence of how they worked comes from Africa between the seventeenth century and the nineteenth, but other examples are as various and familiar as the chains of Phoenician and Greek trading towns that spread westward from the Levant or the Aegean coasts. Or, some two thousand years later, merchants from Cologne on the Rhine settled along the trade routes leading down the Rhine and then eastward along the coast of the North Sea and the Baltic, laying the foundations for what was to become the Hanseatic League of independent trading towns.

Some trade diasporas moved overland or followed inland water courses. Among the most familiar are the North American routes up the Great Lakes, pioneered by the French-Canadian *coureurs de bois*, whose pursuit of the fur trade among the Indians carried them to the Mississippi and beyond. Archaeological evidence suggests the probable existence of trade diasporas in the Middle East as early as 3500 B.C. By 2000 B.C., clay tablets covered with cuneiform inscriptions give detailed evidence about the commercial operations of an Assyrian trade settlement in Cappadocia in Asia Minor.

These networks were organized in many different ways, some so informally that the individual settlements were linked by little more than the solidarity of a common culture. Others, like the great European trading firms of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, were formally organized, chartered by European states, granted certain monopoly rights, empowered to govern as well as trade, and to use their own military and naval forces.

Life histories: trade diasporas over time

In the search for testable hypotheses about the way people have conducted cross-cultural trade through time, one immediately striking generalization is that trade diasporas tend to work themselves out of business. They began because cultural differences created a need for mediation, but centuries or even decades of mediation reduced cross-cultural differences and hence the need for cross-cultural brokers. Where at first, trade at a distance required a kinsman or at least a trusted fellow-countryman to act as agent, with time, a variety of other agents came to be available. In the longest run of time, Western commercial culture became

the common culture of commerce throughout the world in an era of multinational corporations.

But, under the cover of this first and largest generalization, individual trade diasporas worked themselves out of business in quite different ways. Some withdrew to their cultural homeland, leaving people of their host society to carry on in their former role. This pattern was typical of the trade diasporas that sprang up in the European Middle Ages. Formal commercial settlements abroad tended to be withdrawn by the end of the sixteenth century. The Hanseatic League, for example, gave up its special trade enclave in London, called the "Steelyard." Calais, in northern France, was an English possession until the middle of that century. It had served as the principal point for the distribution of English raw wool to the Continent, but it then returned to French control. The English Company of Merchant Adventurers, the main outlet for English woolen cloth sold abroad, originally had its headquarters in Antwerp rather than in England, but Antwerp lost its special status in the 1550s, as English cloth began to be sold through a greater number of Continental cities. Indeed, the institutions of the "factory system," the semipublic establishment of separate premises for foreign merchants or factors, which had first evolved in medieval Flanders, began to disappear in Europe in the sixteenth century, just as it began to reappear as a common way of dealing with European trade with Asia and Africa.³ Within Europe, international trade came to depend much more on local commission agents, rather than having each merchant house maintain agents of its own nationality in a foreign city. Tudor London, for example, had a large group of resident Italian merchants at the beginning of the century, but they gradually decreased in numbers even as Anglo-Italian trade increased. It was simply cheaper by this time to use the services of commission agents.⁴

Other trade diasporas, however, left a legacy in the form of cultural minorities in foreign lands, even though these minorities no longer devoted themselves to long-distance trade. The beginnings of Chinese settlement in Southeast Asia go back to trade diasporas that started to operate in the first centuries A.D., though they were later supplemented by contract laborers and other kinds of immigration. In the twentieth century, these overseas Chinese no longer ran a trade diaspora, though they kept much of their commercial tradition and still tend to dominate wholesale and retail trade. This is one of several instances where cultural minorities left over from a trade diaspora were able to use their original

³ Kristof Glamann, "European Trade, 1500–1750," in Carlo M. Cipolla (ed.), *The Fontana Economic History of Europe,* 6 vols. (London, 1974), 2:514.
⁴ M. E. Bratchel, "Italian Merchant Organization and Business Relationships in Early Tudor London," *Journal of European Economic History,* 7:5–32 (1978), pp. 6, 29.

commercial bent, and their community solidarity, to establish a partial monopoly over the commercial life of the host society.

Indian trading communities in Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda had a similar experience. Their commercial importance dates only from the nineteenth century, but they dominated the retail trade of all three colonies till the coming of independence. Although the Indians in Uganda were largely driven out, those who remained in Tanzania, and especially in Kenya, have been able to move from retail trade into many other sectors of the economy, as the Chinese in Southeast Asia began to do a century or so earlier.

Merchants and their hosts

One of the most striking variables in the comparative study of trade diasporas is the wide range of possible relationships between the trade community and the host society. In some circumstances, rulers of the host society treated the traders as a pariah caste, to be exploited or robbed at will, whose presence was tolerated only because it was useful. With many local variations, this was often the situation of Jewish merchants in medieval Europe. Other merchants sought successfully to establish themselves as autonomous, self-governing communities, often by a self-conscious pacifism and neutrality toward all political struggles. The Ja-haanke in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century West Africa are a successful example of such a policy. At the extreme end of this spectrum were the European trading-post empires in Asia from the sixteenth century through the eighteenth. They not only sought to have trade enclaves under their own military control; they also tried to use coercion to control Asian trade and to shift the terms of trade in their favor. Toward the end of the eighteenth century, they had used force so effectively that at least the British East India Company in India and the Dutch East India Company on Java had stopped being militarized trade diasporas and became true territorial empires that were to be the nucleus of the British *raj* in India and the Netherlands East Indies, respectively.

Whatever the balance of power between the traders and their hosts, the relationship was necessarily asymmetrical. The traders were specialists in a single kind of economic enterprise, whereas the host society was a *whole* society, with many occupations, class stratification, and political divisions between the rulers and the ruled.

The occupation of merchant was also somewhat special in the outlook of many societies. Professional traders were necessarily a minority in preindustrial societies, where the vast majority of the people were needed to work the land. Since they were not, in any very obvious way, a productive class, they tended to earn the suspicion of others who either

worked the land or carried out some other, apparently necessary function like political rule or intercession with the gods. Some such sentiment as this may well lie behind the fact that commerce was often a low-status occupation in societies as distant from one another as ancient Greece and Tokugawa Japan. The unpopularity of merchants as a class could easily be reinforced, if they were simultaneously people of great wealth as well as low status. And merchants in long-distance trade had obvious and unusual opportunities to make extraordinary profits at extraordinary risk.

If people tend to be suspicious of merchants, they are even more suspicious of foreigners; yet some societies actually encouraged foreign merchants. Where commerce was regarded as such an unpleasant occupation, it was seen as better left to foreigners; and this was a common attitude in some circles in ancient Greece, even though the role of Greek merchants through history has been extremely important. In much the same way, the Christian Europeans of the Middle Ages preferred to leave moneylending to the Jews: In any case, long-distance trade required *someone* to go abroad and become a foreigner. Envy and suspicion of foreigners, as such, could easily reinforce the envy and suspicion of merchants.

Norman O. Brown has worked out some of these relationships for classical antiquity by tracing the myth of the god Hermes through its various literary manifestations.[5] The earliest Hermes was god of the boundary stones, but he gradually became the god of the merchants, the professional boundary crossers. At the same time, he was not quite as respectable as the other gods – a messenger, but also a trickster and a thief, a marginal god for people who were marginal to Greek society. Plato himself disliked trade, which, like other professions based on a search for profit, was hardly compatible with a life of virtue, as he understood it.

In the Christian Middle Ages, the theme recurs at the upper end of the intellectual spectrum in Thomas Aquinas's suspicion that merchants may well have a hard time attaining salvation because of the temptation to sin inherent in their occupation. At the lower end, many merchants carried a thief's thumb as a talisman; Saint Nicholas was the patron saint of thieves and merchants alike.

Merchant settlements and their relations with one another

Relations between the individual nodes of a trade diaspora are a second important variable, and the range of variation is extremely wide. Some-

⁵ Brown, *Hermes the Thief*, esp. pp. 82–7. See also Agnew, "The Threshold of Exchange," pp. 100–5.

times the scattered settlements of the same culture had no formal ties of any kind. They were united only by the solidarity that could be built on the sentimental ties of a common religion, language, or distant kinship. At the other extreme were trade diasporas that were founded as political entities, with each node under central control. The Estado da India, the sixteenth-century Portuguese empire in Asia, is one example, where the Viceroy in Goa ruled over the subordinate bases like Mozambique in East Africa, Melaka near the present-day Singapore, and Macao in southern China.

To a degree, relations between nodes varied with relations between the host society and the merchants in a single node. That is, where the host society dominated, the merchants were unlikely to develop formal political relations with other merchant communities. At the same time, where the merchants controlled a settlement and its neighborhood, it was at least possible – indeed likely – that they could have political relationships of some sort with other, equivalent settlements.

But many other variations were also possible. Sentimental ties might be strong, even where political ties were weak. Greek trading settlements sometimes grew into independent city-states, though they looked with respect to the metropolis – literally the "mother city" – with which they might or might not have continued religious and political ties. In some cases, the parent could disappear from the system. This happened with the original Phoenician homeland of Levantine trading cities like Tyre and Sidon. They first fell to foreign conquest and were later assimilated into the greater Hellenistic world created by the successors of Alexander the Great after the fourth century B.C. This left the Phoenician colonies in the western Mediterranean on their own, though Carthage came in time to take the place of the original mother cities.

The Hanseatic League of northern German cities illustrates another kind of relationship between the points of a trade diaspora. That network began with merchants from Cologne, who spread outward in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries – first to Bremen and Hamburg to the west of the Jutland peninsula, then to Lübeck farther east, and a string of port towns along the south shore of the Baltic. The towns of the league reached a peak of wealth and influence in the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, when trade reached from London and Bruges in the west, north to Bergen in Norway, and east as far as Novgorod, deep inside Russia. In spite of the economic strength of the league, each settlement was independent of the rest. When, with the passage of time, Cologne dropped from the picture, Lübeck became the chief Hanse city, but it was not a capital in any effective political sense. The Hanse was a league of independent cities, never a sovereign state. It fought wars,

but each war was fought by an alliance created for that occasion, with nothing more than informal pressure to force any city to participate.

At the opposite organizational extreme were the tightly controlled trade diasporas of the chartered European trading companies in eastern seas. Here the European metropolis was at once a political capital and the management center of a trading firm, in contrast to the thousands of independent Hanseatic firms operating out of dozens of independent cities.

The full range of possibilities along this spectrum was still more complex. Settlements along a trade diaspora were specialized cities or parts of cities. They therefore partook of the set of wider relationships governing cities in general. Urban theory recognizes that cities are not merely dense concentrations of people, though they are that too; they are also concentrations of people doing different things, and their urban character derives more from that variety of activity than it does from sheer numbers.[6]

At an early stage in human material life, hunting and gathering peoples had to spread out across the landscape in order to survive. Even with early agriculture, concentration in villages and hamlets was limited by peoples' need to get to the fields. More specialized functions, however, could be carried out almost anywhere, but they tended to be carried out at a central place. It may have begun with a temple to serve the gods, which would also attract crowds. Crowds would have drawn merchants and retail traders. The temple, the crowds, and the traders would all be a source of attraction for political rulers, courts, and tax gatherers. The order of appearance is not significant. The point is that specialized functions tended to cluster, forming urban settlements where many different things took place. Having these things take place was, in turn, essential to the continuing life of the whole society of which the cities formed a part. But a city was related to its hinterland in a one-sided way. It alone tended to perform the rarest and most specialized functions, whereas villages and smaller centers did fewer things – and much the same range of things, like tending herds or raising crops.

Even among cities, some were more multifunctional than others. Cities were therefore related to one another in much the same way each individual city was related to its own hinterland. Cities that did more things had an advantage over others that did fewer, just as the smaller cities had an advantage over the countryside. The most multifunctional cities, and they alone, performed some functions that were essential for the whole society. As a result, with or without the political framework

6 Eric Lampard, "Historical Aspects of Urbanization," in P. M. Hauser and Leo F. Schnore (eds.), *The Study of Urbanization* (New York, 1965).

of the state, cities came to constitute an urban network arranged in a hierarchy of multifunctionality.

In this rudimentary form, the model is simple, but it has important implications for the changing relationships between cities through time, and these implications extend to relationships between settlements of a trade diaspora. The model suggests two theoretical hypotheses: first, that the functional dependency of the less multifunctional cities on the more multifunctional can be the basis for economic and political dependency as well; and second, that the more technically proficient a society, the greater its range of multifunctionality. Hence, the passage of time, which tends in human societies to bring with it a more complex technology, will also increase the potential dependence of the places low in the hierarchy on those higher up.

The use of the term "dependence" suggests a possible relationship to a body of recent theory and empirical research sometimes called dependency theory. It has been extensively developed by scholars like André Gunder Frank, Arghiri Emmanuel, and Immanuel Wallerstein, among others.[7] Scholars of the dependency school, however, are concerned mainly with relations between the developed, capitalist countries and the less-developed countries in recent centuries. As neo-Marxists, they have been concerned with relations between the "center" and the "periphery" of a world dominated by capitalism. My hypotheses about relations between cities are quite different. These relations are not governed by particular economic systems set in specific chronological eras. Nor are they always a dominant force in "making" historical change. They are only one influence on the course of history, among many. They are derived mainly from some of the geographical concepts known somewhat loosely as "central-place theory," or as location theory in economics.[8] Relations of potential dependency among cities can cause two different kinds of conflict. One kind involves cities at different levels in the hierarchy of multifunctionality. The second has to do with rivalry between

7 The literature of the dependency school is large and diverse. As a sample see Charles K. Wilber (ed.), *The Political Economy of Development and Underdevelopment*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1979); Arghiri Emmanuel, *Unequal Exchange: A Study of the Imperialism of Trade* (New York, 1972); Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System*, multivol. (New York, 1974–).

8 The theoretical groundwork began to be laid in the 1930s in Germany, notably in the work of Walter Christaller, translated as *Central Places in Southern Germany* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1966), and of August Lösch, translated as *The Economics of Location* (New Haven, Conn., 1954). The pioneering application to historical analysis is the work of G. William Skinner, "Marketing and Social Structure in Rural China," *Journal of Asian Studies*, 24:3–43 (1964), followed by G. William Skinner (ed.), *The City in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, Calif., 1977). Historical application to trade and trade routes is found in Allen M. Howard, "The Relevance of Spatial Analysis for African Economic History: The Sierra Leone-Guinea System," *Journal of African History*, 17:365–88 (1975).

cities at the same level. These tensions can be conveniently illustrated from North American history in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The highest point on the hierarchy of multifunctionality was London, and London continued to dominate in economic matters even after American independence. Lower down were the main ports of entry on the East Coast, which were both dependent on London and rivals of one another for influence over their common hinterland. Montreal had the special advantage of the Saint Lawrence valley as a natural water route to the Great Lakes. In response, New York built the Erie Canal; Baltimore built the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad; other port towns around to New Orleans responded in their own ways, or were simply left behind.

Sometimes these rivalries were dominant over the resentment of London they all shared – but sometimes not. In the events leading to the American Revolution, port towns from Charleston to Boston joined in opposing London with a solidarity based on their common status as colonial towns. Montreal, however, remained loyal, in part at least because of its special hold on the Saint Lawrence route and the fur trade of the West, though it also had a history of earlier rivalries with the cities to the south. Similar rivalries turn up later in time and farther into the interior. Frontier resentment of the metropolis was chronic in circumstances as diverse as the Whiskey Rebellion or rural, populist resentment against the banks, the railways, and "the East" in general. Other rivalries, like that between Chicago and New Orleans, had a place in the more complex patterns that went into the American Civil War, though in that case it was a minor theme.

This simple conflict model is useful to help point up recurring themes, but actually was, as always, much more complex. Even as a model, it requires qualification, first of all because the hierarchy of multifunctionality is not the same in all spheres of life. With American independence, for example, London dropped out of the political hierarchy, but it remained at the top of the economic hierarchy for some decades. The hierarchy of religious functions was again different – and different for each different religion. Take the example of Islam, beginning with a small village in the Moroccan Atlas Mountains. The religious life of villagers was partly self-sufficient in that they could pray to God in their own way, but other religious needs had to be met elsewhere. Among the higher centers would be other villages inhabited by the *shorfa*, or descendants of Muhammad. These men were necessary, in the local version of Islam, for certain judicial and religious functions that only they could perform. Beyond the shorfa villages were local holy towns and pilgrimage centers, like Moulay Idris. Still further up the urban hierarchy was Fez, a Moroccan center of religious knowledge and education. At a greater distance, Cairo served as the intellectual center for

Muslim learning throughout North Africa, and beyond Cairo were the holy cities of Mecca and Madina, centers for the pilgrimage enjoined on every Muslim at least once in his lifetime. Obviously, a similar hierarchy can be identified for other religious communities, most clearly for Anglicans, Roman Catholics, and Mormons, but also present in a more amorphous form for Hindus, Buddhists, and Baptists.

Similar patterns in the several different realms of human affairs appear in the relationships between the nodes of a trade diaspora. Political dependence down the hierarchy is clear enough. Its formal structure embodied in an institution like the Estado da India ran from Lisbon to Goa, to Macao, to Timor, and a religious hierarchy ran parallel to it. In more informal relations, like those between Greek city-states, religious, economic, and political hierarchies could be quite distinct.

Cultural blends

People of a trade diaspora were not only members of an urban society; they were also members of a plural society, where two or more cultures existed side by side. In most instances, this was a source of stress – alongside the other tension between merchants and other occupations. With the passage of time, cultural differences in a single society would be expected to disappear. Indeed, this was part of the process by which a trade diaspora worked itself out of existence. But the actual course of cultural integration was extremely variable. Some trade diasporas tried very hard to protect the integrity of their original culture. In spite of their role as cross-cultural brokers, they developed intricate systems of social control to prevent their traveling merchants from "going native." One of the most elaborate systems of this kind was that of the Mizabi religious and trading community with its oasis base in southern Algeria. Though they traded for centuries with the towns of northern Algeria, they held firmly to their own peculiar version of Islam and their own Berber language.[9] (See Chapter 3.)

In other circumstances, men who went abroad to trade without wives from home ended by marrying abroad, which could speed the process of culture change. On eighteenth-century Java, for example, the intermarriage of Chinese merchants with local women led to the creation of a new mixed culture called *peranakan* – partly Javanese and partly Hokkienese from southern China – but the new, mixed culture then stabilized. By the nineteenth century, it had its own quarter in most Javanese towns, its own special status in Dutch colonial law, and its own occupations.

[9] L. Vigouroux, "L'emigration mozabite dans les villes du Tell algerien," *Travaux de l'institut de recherches sahariennes*, 3:87–102 (1945), pp. 95–7.

pational specialization in retail trade and petty commerce, though most of its cultural forms were drifting gradually toward the Javanese pattern.

Although some diaspora merchants sought only to protect their cultural integrity, others tried to convert their hosts. Their success was sometimes spectacular. Hindu merchants from India carried not only their religion but also a lot of Indian secular culture to Southeast Asia. Later on, Muslim Indians carried Islam throughout island Southeast Asia. Although the merchant settlers abroad usually went out in order to learn how to function as cross-cultural brokers, they might or might not have learned as much about the host culture as some people in the host society learned about theirs. Along the West African coast in the era of the slave trade, for example, few of the Europeans in the trade enclaves ever learned African languages. Instead, the local African merchants learned European languages, mainly creole Portuguese or English, though other aspects of the culture of commerce were as much African as European.

Alternate models of cross-cultural trade

The idea of a trade diaspora is comparatively new to economic anthropology or historical studies generally, at least under that name. Historians have written about trading-post empires for decades; institutions like the Hanseatic League or the Phoenician trade network in the Mediterranean were too important to be overlooked, but they were rarely associated explicitly with the special problems of cross-cultural trade.[10] Cross-cultural trade was, however, discussed in several other contexts.

One of the oldest is Herodotus's description of silent trade somewhere on the northern or western coast of Africa. Here, and in many similar descriptions by later travelers, traders from a distance are described as bringing their goods to an accustomed place of exchange in the countryside, away from towns or villages. They deposited the goods and went away. Local traders then appeared, deposited a quantity of their own goods and went away in their turn. When the first traders returned, they judged the value of the goods they found. If they thought an exchange was equitable, they took the new goods and left their own. If

[10] The exception is Africa, where a number of trade diasporas have been studied in some detail. See P. D. Curtin, *Economic Change in Precolonial Africa: Senegambia in the Era of the Slave Trade*, 2 vols. (Madison, Wis., 1975), 1:59–66, 68–76, 92–152; Richard Roberts, "Long Distance Trade and Production: Sinsani in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of African History*, 21:169–88 (1980); Paul Lovejoy, *Caravans of Kola: The Hausa Kola Trade, 1700–1900* (Zaria, 1980); Robert W. Harms, *River of Wealth, River of Sorrow: The Central Zaire Basin in the Era of the Slave and Ivory Trade, 1500–1891* (New Haven, Conn., 1981); Stephen B. Baier, *An Economic History of Central Niger* (London, 1980).

not, they adjusted the quantity of their offering and went away again, to await a silent response from their trade partners.[11]

The account is interesting for its recognition of the special problems of cross-cultural trade, even more so for its ingenuity in showing how such trade might take place without brokers or spoken communication, indeed, without the trading partners' even seeing each other. It has been repeated with variations as having occurred in many different parts of the world, perhaps a clearer indication of the story's inherent fascination than of its accuracy. The empirical evidence for any of these accounts is extremely weak. Whoever wrote them down either heard about silent trade at second or third hand, or else the "silent" trade described was silent only in the kind of communication used in bargaining. In a loose sense a present-day auction is "silent" when the bidder accepts a price with a nonverbal indication. Many nonverbal signals are used in face-to-face bargaining in many cultures, but this is not the same as the no-contact, cross-cultural trade found in Herodotus's account. And Herodotus's model, taken full strength, is improbable on the face of it. To bargain with such elaborate avoidance, yet to assume that total strangers will act with honesty and good faith, calls for an unusual degree of cross-cultural understanding from both parties – and to believe it requires unusual credulity from the reader.[12]

Still another model of cross-cultural trade is the "port of trade" introduced in three separate articles by Robert B. Revere, Anne Chapman, and Rosemary Arnold in an important volume on early trade chiefly inspired by Karl Polanyi.[13] "The port of trade in this sense is not simply a port where trade often took place. It was held to incorporate a whole set of institutional practices typical of cross-cultural trade in premodern societies. The port of trade was a town or small state, not necessarily on the seacoast. It was recognized as a neutral spot in the struggles of

[11] Herodotus, *Histories*, IV. 196. Other accounts of silent trade are discussed in P. J. Hamilton Grierson, *The Silent Trade: A Contribution to the Early History of Human Intercourse* (Edinburgh, 1903).

[12] For recent controversy about silent trade see Lars Sundstrom, *The Trade of Guinea* (Lund, 1965), esp. pp. 22–31; P. F. de Moraes Farias, "Silent Trade: Myth and Historical Evidence," *History in Africa*, 1:9–24 (1974); John A. Price, "On Silent Trade," and Schinichiro Kurimoto, "Silent Trade in Japan," both in George Dalton (ed.), *Research in Economic Anthropology*, 3:75–108 (1980).

[13] Karl Polanyi, Conrad M. Arensberg, and Harry W. Pearson, *Trade and Markets in Early Empires* (New York, 1957), pp. 38–63, 114–53, 117–87. The concept was later elaborated and given a more rigorous definition by A. Leeds, "The Port of Trade as an Ecological and Evolutionary Type," in *Proceedings of the 1961 Annual Meeting of the American Ethnological Society* (Seattle, 1961). Some of Polanyi's articles in this area are conveniently collected in George Dalton (ed.), *Primitive, Archaic and Modern Economies: Essays of Karl Polanyi* (New York, 1968). The literature on both sides of this argument is very large, but S. C. Humphreys, "History, Economics, and Anthropology: The Work of Karl Polanyi," *History and Theory*, 8:165–212 (1969), is a convenient summary.

larger states and kept that way intentionally. Long-distance trade, moreover, was closely controlled by the state and subordinated to state ends. The state established the terms of exchange, fixed prices, and maintained them over long periods of time. The institution of a price-fixing market was explicitly excluded. Prices were not allowed to fluctuate with the influence of supply and demand.

The port of trade was one element in a more extensive controversy between Polanyi and his school (sometimes called substantivists) and those who follow the main traditions of Western economic theory (the formalists). The substantivists hold that formal theory is mistaken in concentrating on the way people economize in allocating desirable goods and services. This emphasis leads to a value theory based on the play of supply and demand, exerted through the market bargaining of buyers and sellers. Substantivists prefer to regard price-fixing markets as a recent innovation in human experience, hardly important before the eighteenth century. For the past, they place more emphasis on the way the economic processes are "imbedded" in noneconomic institutions – and on the importance of nonmarket exchanges through reciprocity (mutual gift giving) and redistribution (where goods are passed to a central authority and then passed out again on the basis of social values). The formalists argue, in return, that the play of market forces is of overwhelming importance, even in setting the values attributed to gifts or other forms of exchange.

The controversy has not been especially enlightening. Some substantivists write as though formalists believe their theoretical models are reality, rather than a mere representation of some aspects of reality. Some formalists in turn write as though the substantivists deny any role at all to the play of market forces. In fact, the best social scientists on either side recognize that both market and other forms of exchange have a role to play. The problem is to measure the influence of each in specific situations.

Aspects of the controversy inevitably recur here and there in the chapters that follow. These and other theoretical possibilities, however, will have to be examined in the light of particular circumstances of individual trade diasporas, seen over the long run of time and on a worldwide basis. Before going back to the earliest evidence, however, it is useful to begin by examining African trade diasporas in recent centuries, where available evidence is comparatively detailed. Some observations from the recent past may then strike chords or suggest interpretations that may help us to understand the thinner evidence from the distant past.

2

Africa: Incentives to trade, patterns of competition

Sub-Saharan Africa remained isolated from the main currents of world trade far longer than most of the rest of the Afro-Eurasian landmass. Even though Asian sailors reached much of the eastern coast by about 200 B.C., North Africans regularly crossed the Sahara by about 800 A.D., and European sailors reached the western coasts in the fifteenth century, much of the interior remained comparatively isolated until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – cut off by the aridity of the Sahara and its own patterns of disease environment. Tsetse flies and the trypanosomes they carried made pack animals useless through much of the African tropics, thus impeding long-distance trade. Other diseases, especially falciparum malaria and yellow fever, were so fatal to humans from other disease environments that Africa remained the continent least known to outsiders until the second half of the nineteenth century.

Textbooks and other summary treatments of African economic history sometimes illustrate the "penetration" of Africa with maps showing arrows leading from the coasts into the interior – from Egypt up the Nile valley, from the east coast into the highland lake region, from the Maghrib across the Sahara to the western Sudan, from the Atlantic coast into the Congo basin. Such maps are accurate enough to show the flow of foreign goods. Arrows in the opposite direction could also show how African goods and people moved along trade routes to the outside world. But intercontinental trade was only part of the whole. In Africa, as elsewhere in the world, local exchange was more important than long-distance trade. As a general proposition, the longer the distance, the more trade had to be confined to products of comparatively high value and low bulk, though bulkier goods could be carried farther as the technology of transportation improved over time.

Overemphasis on external trade can also lead to an overemphasis on external initiative. One of the myths of African history is the old view that commerce in Africa was largely pioneered by outsiders who penetrated a stagnant continent. In fact, trade beyond the village level began

11

The twilight of the trade diasporas

It is often said that trade diasporas tended to work themselves out of existence, as commercial ties reduced the cultural differences that called them into being in the first place. But the Westernization of world commerce between about 1740 and 1860 was something new. It not only deprived the existing Western trade diasporas of an effective role; it ended once and for all the long era in history when trade diasporas had been the dominant institutional form in cross-cultural trade.

Industrialism and the shifting balance

The root cause of all this was not just the long-term trend toward more and larger areas of ecumenical trade; it was even more the birth of the industrial age. The new technology made possible a fundamentally new kind of human society, with much higher levels of production and consumption than ever before – but bringing with it new problems, environmental pollution, pressure on nonrenewable resources, weapons powerful enough to wipe out most of the human race.[1]

In the first instance, the new industrial age was also the "European age," if only because the Europeans got the new technology first, and with it the ability to conquer and dominate others at comparatively small cost. The balance of military power had begun to shift somewhat earlier. The "gunpowder empires" of the sixteenth century were a general Afro-Eurasian phenomenon. By the middle of the eighteenth century, a second phase in artillery gave the Europeans a lead over others, based on field artillery that was light, cheap, and could be fired by a crew of trained artillerymen as rapidly as a single soldier could load and fire a musket. Field artillery in conjunction with volley firing by trained in-

[1] For a recent treatment of the technological aspects, see David S. Landes, *The Unbound Prometheus* (Cambridge, 1969); or for a more general treatment see volume III of Carlo M. Cipolla (ed.), *The Fontana Economic History of Europe* 5 vols. (London, 1973).

fantry meant that European troops – or European-trained troops appropriately armed – could now defeat Asian or African armies several times their size.[2]

As early as the 1740s, these new military techniques began to influence the way European trading-post empires could behave toward their Asian neighbors. And that shift in relative power began a transition away from the trading-post empires of the recent past, toward the kind of territorial rule represented by British India in Bengal or the Netherlands Indies over Java. The trading firms had used force principally as a way of increasing profits. They had paid protection money and they had collected it, but they had rarely made important decisions on mainly political grounds. This began to change as the comparative power of the Europeans increased. It also began to change as the frequent wars between France and Great Britain spread overseas; war in Europe meant automatic war between the French and the English East India companies in Indian waters and on the Indian subcontinent.

It was this rivalry between English and French that set the English East Indian Company on the course that led to a gradual transition from trading-post empire to real, territorial control – first over parts of India, then (directly or indirectly) over all of it. Anglo-French competition became serious in the 1740s, as the French Compagnie des Indes in southern India began to play on the rivalries between Indian states. It began arming and training Indian troops in European methods of warfare, including the use of field artillery and volley firing. It also brought more European troops to India, and the English Company was forced to do the same in self-defense. These military commitments were expensive. One obvious way to pay for them was to do what Indian rulers did to raise money for their armies, that is, to collect taxes, especially land taxes from the peasantry.

The English company increased its authority by stages, in step with its increasing military power. Its military supremacy in Bengal is usually dated from the battle of Plassey in 1757, but the date is more symbolic than real, and the battle itself was little more than a very impressive artillery bombardment. It nevertheless opened the way for gradual but steady encroachment by the company on the authority of its Indian neighbors. It first began to collect certain land rents on the authority of the *nawab*, or ruler, of Bengal, who had become a company puppet. Then, by 1765, it forced the nawab to make the company, in its collective capacity, his chief revenue officer, or *diwan*. At first it exercised the

[2] Carlo M. Cipolla, *Guns and Sails in the Early Phase of European Expansion 1400–1700* (London, 1965), esp. pp. 143–8; Gale B. Ness and William Stahl, "Western Imperialist Armies in Asia," *Comparative Studies*, 1912–29 (1977); William H. McNeill, *The Pursuit of Power: Technology, Armed Force, and Society since A.D. 1000* (Chicago, 1982).

powers of the office of diwan through Indian agents, but in 1772 it began to do so openly through its own paid officials, collecting the revenue and managing the financial affairs of the three provinces closest to Calcutta: Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa. This was a considerable area, including all of present-day Bangladesh as well as West Bengal, which remained part of the Republic of India. With that, the East Indian Company was no longer a mere trading firm. It was also a government, and the British Parliament recognized as much in 1773 by passing a "Regulating Act." This was, in effect, the first in a series of measures that gradually took the company's political functions away from its board of directors and gave them to royal officials.

This transition from trading-post empire to territorial empire over India lasted to 1858, in theory. In practice, British officials ruled most of India much earlier, even though the conquering armies were officially those of the East India Company, and the bureaucrats who ruled were officially its servants. Indeed, in 1813, it lost its right to monopolize trade between India and Europe, having long since given up the effort to monopolize the trade of the Indian Ocean itself. In 1834, it lost its monopoly over British trade to China, and for all practical purposes, it stopped being a trading company at all. It became, instead, the branch of the British government designated to rule over British India. The British government finally disbanded the company in 1858, after a serious mutiny by its Indian soldiers – the soldiers whose European armament and training had made Britain dominant over India in the first place.

Meanwhile, British rule had long since begun to spread British commercial culture throughout the country. The old trade diasporas and commercial contacts continued, but their methods followed the Western mode more and more closely. And a new Western-run, Western-style economy grew up alongside the old commercial order, with banks, insurance companies, railways, telegraphs, and a growing sphere for such new institutions as the managing agency. The old patterns occupied a smaller part of the growing economy, even though some aspects have continued to the present.

The VOC passed through a similar transition from trading-post to territorial empire, with a similar basis in the new European military power. The transition grew out of local circumstances on Java. In the first half of the seventeenth century, one kingdom, Mataram, ruled virtually the entire island. It was outwardly centralized and strong, and the king's theoretical power was limitless, but centralized power barely survived the death, in 1645, of Agung, its founder. Even earlier, considerable authority remained with local subrulers, who would not always obey

the central government. From Agung's death, power shifted even more decisively to potential successor states with a local base – including the VOC in Batavia and a few centers of Bugis and Chinese power, which had also begun as nodes of a trade diaspora.

In spite of the VOC's desire to avoid territorial rule, it had military power available in Batavia, and political disorder was bad for business. From the 1670s, a patterned interaction came into existence. When a sultan of Mataram was unable to suppress rebellion he called for Dutch help. Out of gratitude, or under Dutch pressure, he would cede territory to the VOC. The Dutch then ruled it through the same chronically insubordinate officials who had ruled it for Mataram. In this way, over a century or so, one territory after another passed from the control of Mataram to that of Batavia. By 1757, the Dutch were masters of almost the entire island. But their territorial rule over Java was even more indirect than early British rule in India. Most of the island was administered by men the Dutch called regents – still the descendants of those who had ruled under Mataram. In effect, the Dutch could give orders in certain spheres, mainly those affecting their economic interests, such as the production and export of coffee. Otherwise, the regents ruled as they chose. The VOC thus had made a kind of transition to territorial empire, but not to the kind of territorial empire that was to come with nineteenth-century colonialism. It was still more Javanese than Western. In 1799, the VOC sunk to its end in commercial failure in spite of (perhaps, because of) its territorial rule on Java.

In the first decades of the nineteenth century, the former territories of the VOC passed through a sequence of different jurisdictions, including a period under Napoleonic France and a few years of British rule. In 1816, the Dutch government took over and set up a colonial regime called the Netherlands Indies. These various European masters tried to make something real out of their fictional dominance over Java, but their efforts were neither systematic nor successful. They were enough, however, to arouse a Javanese reaction against Dutch control and foreign ways. The result was a major rebellion that ran through the period 1825 to 1830 – a crisis of empire like the Indian mutiny. But more than the Indian mutiny, this war combined what had been, for India, the initial takeover with a later, xenophobic reaction to European rule. The Dutch faced a choice between pulling out or fighting a real war of conquest. They chose to fight and then created for the first time a true colonial administration that could give orders and see they were obeyed.[1] In the commercial sphere, this led to a near-monopoly over the export

[1] Michael Adas, Prophets of Rebellion: Millenarian Protest Movements against the European Colonial Order (Chapel Hill, N.C.: 1979), pp. 3–11 and passim.

trade, vested in a Dutch government trading company. It therefore differed from the gradual introduction of Western commercial institutions, as in India where Indian merchants were still allowed to operate. Here, local merchants were left with local trade only, which meant in effect that it fell into the hands of a few local Muslims, Chinese, and Bugis left over from the earlier diasporas.

These transitions to territorial empire in Bengal and Java are only two of many possible examples of the way Europe's new industrial power impinged on the non-Western world. The new strength of European influence was less obvious in commerce than it was in politics, but it was immense. Where, in the era of the companies, the Europeans had been involved in elaborate forms of cross-cultural brokerage, cross-cultural brokerage was no longer in much demand, when one party could call the tune.

Distant reflections of the industrial age: secondary empires in Africa

Nor were the European trading companies the only institutions to receive a windfall of power as a result of European industrialization. Between about 1780 and 1880, Africa passed through a transition analogous to the economic and military transition in Asia, only in Africa the Europeans were fewer on the ground. Increasing trade and supplies of arms from Europe tended to go, in the first instance, to those who controlled trade and had access to arms. We have already seen how increased trade, increased traffic in slaves, and more arms imports into East Africa led to rising levels of violence from the 1780s onward (see Chapter 2). These tendencies increased through the first half of the nineteenth century. After about 1850 and especially after the 1870s, African traders began to turn themselves into rulers, even as the European traders had done in parts of Asia almost a century earlier.

European weapons, rather than a European presence, underlay these changes. After the 1860s European firearms changed rapidly, from muzzle-loading muskets at midcentury, through variant innovations in rifling, cartridges, breech loading, and rapid-fire magazines. All of these found their way into African hands – though the machine guns the Europeans began using in the early 1880s did not. An African trader or ruler who could acquire a supply of the latest European weapons before his neighbors had them at his mercy. One result was that African political boundaries, especially in eastern and central Africa, were redrawn by the creation of new political units, which are sometimes called secondary

empires because they drew their strength indirectly from the industrial technology of Europe.[4]

Afro-Arabs were among the builders of secondary empires in these decades, but they were not alone. Yao traders set up a small kingdom in Tumbuka, west of Lake Malawi, even before Swahili merchants appeared in the vicinity.[5] A Nyamwezi trader-adventurer founded a kingdom in the copper-bearing region of Shaba in Zaire, and an Afro-Arab founded one on the upper Congo centered near the present city of Kisangani. Even nontraders like the kings of Buganda could become expansionist, so long as they could persuade traders to sell them later model guns. But the phase of secondary empire was comparatively brief in East Africa. The first wave of the European invasions reached even into the heart of Africa by the 1890s.

At least one variant of the several ways a trade diaspora could become a secondary empire can be illustrated with the example of a trade network that began on the Nubian reaches of the Nile to the north of Khartoum and ended with conquests in the late nineteenth century that extended south into present-day Zaire and west to Nigeria. The Nubian stretches of the Nile were typical of the date-camel complex (see Chapter 2), and this passage of the Nile through the desert had been a corridor between Mediterranean and sub-Saharan Africa for centuries. It had been ruled by Pharaonic Egypt, by Rome, and later by Islamized and assimilated settlers from Arabia. By the eighteenth century, the people of southern Nubia thought of themselves as Arabs, though they remained more Nubian than Arabian in descent. Those of the southernmost reach of the Nubian Nile, the first long reach after the White and Blue Niles join at Khartoum, identified themselves as Arabs. More specifically, they were Ja'aliyyin, tracing their descent back not only to Arabia but to Abbas, the Prophet's uncle.

The first decades of the nineteenth century were especially prosperous. Southern Nubia was politically independent as a kingdom centered at Shendi. The Ja'aliyyin operated trade routes in all directions: south to the borderlands of Ethiopia, east to the Red Sea at Suakin, west through Kordofan to the sultanate of Darfur. Darfur was, indeed, a secondary center for their activity, with one branch route running directly south to the equatorial forest and another northeast across the desert to the westward bend of the Nile and continuing on north to Egypt. This was the historic Forty-Day Road from Darfur to the Nile. Both this route and the one along the Nile itself were important for a

⁴ For secondary empires generally see Philip D. Curtin et al. *African History* (Boston, 1978), pp. 332–61, 404–17.

⁵ Leroy Vail, "Suggestions Towards a Reinterpreted Tumbuka History," in B. Pachai (ed.), *The Early History of Malawi* (London, 1972), pp. 148–67.

northward flow of goods from the Sudan, the forest, and the desert – ivory, ostrich feathers, slaves, copper, tamarind, gum arabic, and camels for the Egyptian market.[6]

After 1820, the situation changed rapidly. First, the Egyptian government conquered Nubia and the Sudan immediately to the south. These conquests marked the first success of a new Egyptian secondary empire, built with the new power of troops trained in the European fashion, using the latest European weapons, and often serving under European mercenaries as well. The first result was favorable to Ja'ali trade. Many Nubian merchants moved to Khartoum, the new capital of the Egyptian Sudan and the center for an expanding trade that attracted many other merchants, such as Copts from Egypt, Levantines, and even a few Europeans.

In 1839, the Egyptians discovered a new opening to equatorial Africa. Up to this time, the Nile south of the Sudan was an extensive papyrus swamp, called the *sudd*, and it seemed impassable by boat. At first the new route was confined to government boats, but after 1851 it was open to all merchants. In this period of rising ivory prices, traders spread along the maze of waterways above the sudd, into the Bahr al-Ghazal district of the Sudan and farther south into the present northeastern Zaire and northern Uganda. Beyond the sudd, however, the Egyptians made little effort to establish civil government, and the preexisting local governments were too weak to control the influx of alien traders. As a result, the merchants of the diaspora began first to govern their own trade enclaves, like a conventional trading-post empire, and then to govern the surrounding region till they had created, in effect, a secondary empire on the frontiers of the Egyptian secondary empire.

The process moved by stages. First, the traders set up armed camps, called *zariba* and protected by their own military force of slave-soldiers armed with the latest European weapons. Then the men of the zariba moved from self-defense to intervention in local affairs, which brought new levels of violence and local anarchy, and an increase in the numbers of slaves for sale. But anarchy was bad for trade, and at the next stage, the rulers of the zariba began to establish order in the vicinity, thus shifting gradually from the forms of a trading-post empire to those of a small secondary territorial empire.[7]

These militarized trade diasporas of the 1850s and the early 1860s were

6 P. M. Holt, "Egypt, the Funj, and Darfur," in Richard Gray (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Africa*, vol. 4 (Cambridge, 1975).
7 P. M. Holt, "Egypt and the Nile Valley," in John E. Flint (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Africa*, vol. 5 (Cambridge, 1976), pp. 35–7; Richard Gray, *A History of the Southern Sudan 1839–1889* (Oxford, 1961), pp. 45–69; Richard Hill, *Egypt in the Sudan 1820–1881* (London, 1959).
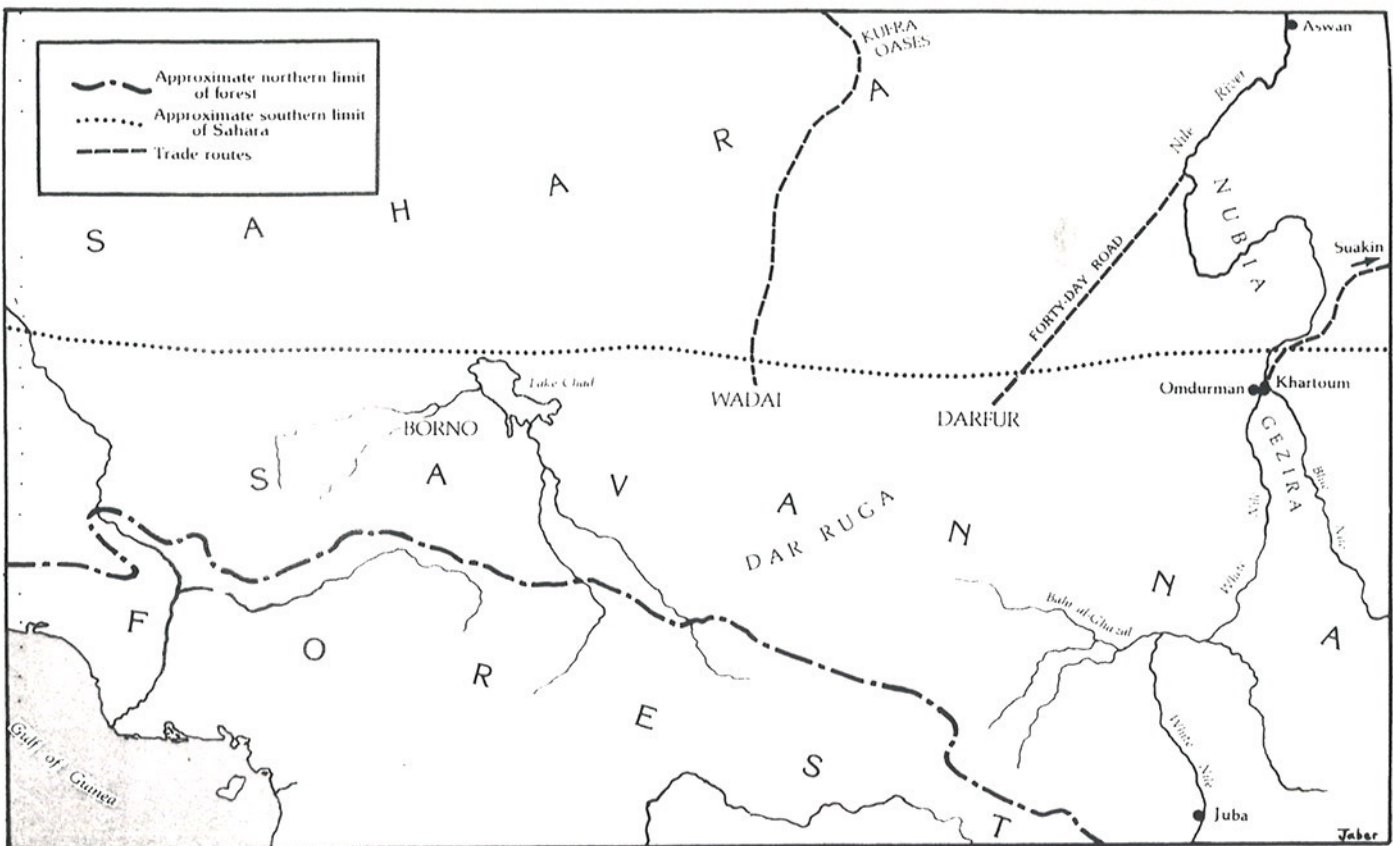
Map 11.1.   Eastern Sudan (names in parentheses indicate later establishment than text references)

international in management, though most were based in Khartoum and recruited most of their personnel from the Ja'aliyin living there – this being the reason they were sometimes called "Khartoumers." By the second half of the century, other Ja'aliyin found themselves forced to leave the Nubian Nile because of population pressure. They often joined the secondary empires as subordinates of the original merchant founders. By the late 1860s and 1870s, their penetration to the southwest had gone so far that they began to compete with other Ja'aliyin who had earlier established themselves in Darfur. In the schematic model of central-place hierarchy, Darfur and Khartoum were equally subordinate to Cairo and at about the same level in the commercial hierarchy, though Darfur was still an independent sultanate. One result was bitter competition between the two second-level cities, as each tried to strengthen its control over its own hinterland. The conflict was heightened somewhat as the leadership of the Khartoum network became more Levantine and Coptic, which meant that they had closer ties to Cairo than Ja'ali were likely to have.[5] Figure 11.1 illustrates these tensions in schematic form as of about the 1860s.

Given the fact that all participants were armed with European weapons, and none were under close control of the Egyptian government, it was only natural that some of these tensions should lead to violence. The attack came from the traders on the frontier south of Darfur, in effect, those at a third level in the hierarchy of dependence on Cairo. The leader was a Ja'ali named al-Zubair Rahma Mansur, who began as a merchant in the Bahr al-Ghazal in the mid-1850s. During the 1860s, he shifted from commerce to political and military leadership over the other Ja'ali of the region. In 1874, he was strong enough to turn north and conquer the sultanate of Darfur.[9] In effect, he began to build a secondary empire, not merely within the shell of the Egyptian secondary empire, but completely independent of it. That was too much for the Egyptian government. In 1878, it sent a force that captured him and ended once and for all both his trade network and his political sphere.

His followers still had the option of escape, and they had the modern weapons that made them invincible against those who still did not. Al Zubair's son, Rabih Fadlallah, mustered a force that had a core of Ja'aliyyir augmented by slave-soldiers purchased or captured in his father's campaigns. They set out for the west with their breech-loading rifles, into a zone where even smooth-bore, muzzle-loading muskets were rare.

[5] Gary, *Southern Sudan*, pp. 70–86; Holt, "Egypt and the Nile Valley," in Flint (ed.), *Cambridge History of Africa*, 5:35–8; Jay Spaulding, "Slavery, Land Tenure and Social Class in the Northern Turkish Sudan," *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 15:1–20 (1982).

[9] Gray, *Southern Sudan*, pp. 120–5.
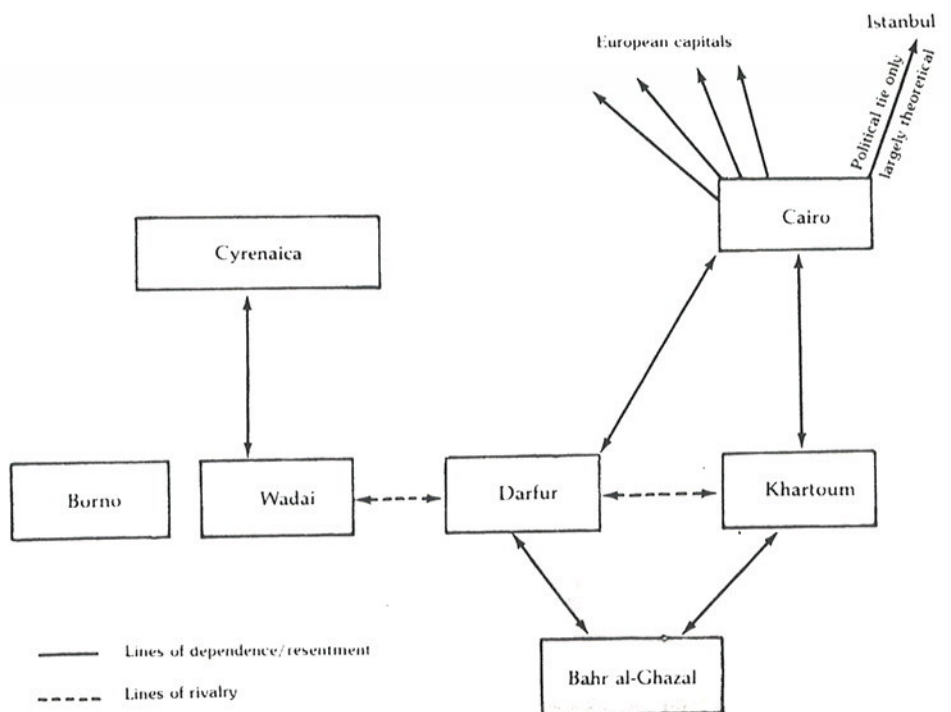
Figure 11.1. Relations between nodes of Sudanese trade diasporas, circa 1860

Rabih made first for the slave-supplying region south of Wadai (the next kingdom to the west of Darfur, now in eastern Chad). There he remained until 1893, with a tenuous political hold over a small territory, and supported by slave raids beyond its frontiers. This kind of quasi-state, however, threatened local stability and the position of others farther up the central-place ladder of multifunctionality. As Egypt had rooted out his father, Wadai sent a force to root him out. He defeated the Wadai army and escaped to the west, this time to seize the kingdom of Borno, west of Lake Chad. But success was short lived. The era of independent African states was coming to an end. A French force defeated Rabih in 1900 – with much the same timing as the British takeover of the Egyptian secondary empire in Nubia and the Sudan in 1898. The Ja'aliyyín were already too militarized to survive in the new, colonial conditions. Only a few African trade diasporas, for that matter, were able to adjust to the Western commercial culture that was about to be imposed on them.

Informal empire and the new trading posts: Singapore

Somewhat earlier in the nineteenth century and in spite of the territorialization of trading-post empires in Bengal and Java, the Europeans overseas were moving in new directions. Just as they avoided overt conquest in Africa until the 1880s, conquest and administration were not the normal goals of European powers anywhere in the non-Western world untill late in the nineteenth century. One possibility – and probably the dominant goal through the first three-quarters of the century – was to exert influence based on the new European power, but without the forms of a colonial government. The Europeans of this period preferred "informal empire" because it seemed to protect all interests that were really vital or profitable without the considerable cost of ruling over an alien society. [10]

The ways and means of informal empire could vary greatly. Sometimes, the economic power of the industrialized countries was enough by itself to give them inordinate influence in the capitals of less fortunate countries overseas. If required, suggestions could be backed by implied threats – or real threats. The most skillful "gunboat diplomacy" succeeded without actually using force, though all parties knew it was available in case of need.

One new device for exerting power and influence with minimal force

[10] John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson. "The Imperialism of Free Trade." Economic History Review, 6(n.s):1–15 (1953).

was a new kind of trading-post empire, developed most effectively by Great Britain in East Asia. Instead of using a chartered company as a semiofficial but armed trade diaspora, it was even more effective, in the new context of European power, to establish government-run trade entrepôts. They could serve as a naval base, a point of safety for warehousing and distributing the new output of the industrial revolution and for bulking raw materials for European industry. Incidentally, they furthered the new patterns of ecumenical trade in the Western mode.

In Southeast Asia, the British returned Java to the Netherlands, but they kept Melaka and seized the island of Singapore. Sir Stamford Raffles, who had ruled Java for the British, was the chief architect of the new policy. Seeing the sultanate of Johor under confused cross-pressures from Dutch, Bugis, and other interests, it was no great problem to detach the island itself, initially as the property of the East India Company. The British government's interest was clear, however. The base was not to further the company's trade alone, it was to protect all British trade. Raffles wanted Singapore to be a place for "the resort of independent trade and trade of our allies." [11] Partly through his influence, as well as Bugis precedent, Singapore was a free port from the beginning. It sought prosperity by maximizing the trade, in Singapore, of all nations, not the exclusive trade of one. In the early nineteenth century, however, it was taken for granted that a fair proportion of the goods traded would be British made.

In 1826, the British government transferred Singapore from the East India Company to the Colonial Office, to serve as the capital of the new colony, namely, the Straits Settlements, including Melaka and Penang. Singapore soon became the most important of the three, with more than 35,000 people by 1840. Only a small minority was British. The rest were representatives of all the trade diasporas that had recently traded in the region: Arabs and Parsees from the far west, Bengalis and Klings from eastern India, Bugis and Javanese from what was to be Indonesia, but most of all Chinese. These were mainly merchants at first. Then they began to invest in plantations just beyond the frontiers of the Straits Settlements, and in tin mining elsewhere in peninsular Malaya. Economic growth quickly outran the available labor supply. The Chinese merchants then turned to their own homeland for contract workers, and the Chinese trade diasporas became the takeoff point for a much larger stream of Chinese contract emigration under private sponsorship. British Singapore thus moved through stages. It first became a major node for Cantonese and Fujianese trade diasporas, among others. Sec-

[11] Raffles, quoted in Rupert Emerson, Malaysia: A Study of Direct and Indirect Rule (New York, 1937) p. 81.

ond, it began to serve as a base for the economic enterprise of local Chinese capitalists exploiting the resources of mainland Malaya. Third, it became a place of settlement and farther movement into Malaya for colonists from southern China. These stages moved on Chinese, not European, initiative, but even though the capital and labor were Chinese, the ultimate consumer was industrial Europe. At a later stage, the Straits Settlements became the springboard for a British advance to territorial empire over Malaya, though that step came only in the last third of the century. From the 1870s, British informal influence became more and more formal, till Singapore's informal empire became the Malay States governed from Kuala Lumpur.[12]

Hong Kong and the treaty ports

The evolution of a trading-post empire along the Chinese coast took a different course. In the eighteenth century, the Chinese system of tribute trade with the outside world continued in theory, if not in practice. It had been a legal fiction for centuries, but now the vast majority of trade through Canton, still the official port of entry, passed through other channels. It was the Chinese custom to regulate many forms of economic enterprise by assigning them to specific merchant guilds, which were then collectively responsible to the imperial officials. Three different groups of licensed brokers (*ya-hang* in Chinese) were appointed to deal with aspects of Canton trade. One of these, which the English called the *hong* merchants, was charged with the trade of the Europeans, giving the hong, in effect, a monopoly over cross-cultural brokerage with Europeans at that port.

Chinese officials imposed many other restrictions on foreign merchants in Canton. They could not live within the city walls but had to live in a merchants' quarter along the Pearl River. At certain times of the year, the Chinese ordered them to leave Chinese territory altogether, which was done easily enough by retreat to the conveniently nearby but officially non-Chinese territory of Macao – still under Portuguese control in the late eighteenth century.

At that time, foreign merchants were more numerous than ever before, largely on account of the tea trade. The East India Company was the largest purchaser of tea, which meant that its local representative could act as an English equivalent to the head of the hong merchants. But the company was only active in the trade to Europe. Imports into Canton that gave it the capacity to buy tea were carried by the "country" trade from India – much, but not all, in the private hands of the company's

11 See Steinberg et al., *In Search of Southeast Asia* (New York, 1971). esp. pp. 134–40.

officials. Cotton from Bengal was the main import, though silver was also significant, and opium from India grew in prominence with the passage of time.

By the 1790s, the old system no longer fitted in well with the new facts of power in the world. Both Britain and the Netherlands tried to get the Chinese court to recognize them as equals, but failed. In the early nineteenth century, the old Canton trade system came under increasing strain. The number of private traders grew, and some of the most important British firms began to act under the cover of being tributary representatives of minor European states like Sardinia or Denmark, which confused the fictional aspects of tribute trade still more. Innovations came from abroad, such as the Indian system of agency houses, which were willing and able to buy, sell, bribe appropriately, arrange for insurance, or provide banking services. As trade grew, the trade in opium grew fastest of all, even though it was illegal to import or to use opium in China. Opium became important to the East India Company out of all relationship to its actual value, though that value was enough to pose a threat to the health and well-being of the Chinese Empire. For the company, it provided the main source of foreign exchange for the return trade in tea bound for Europe, which was, in turn, its primary source of commercial revenue. The company also profited from taxes on the production of opium in India and on its export overseas.

When Chinese restraints on trade frustrated the foreigners, they, and especially the dominant British, were tempted to threaten military action. In 1834, the British sent Lord Napier to Canton as superintendent of trade with orders to end the fictitious tribute system and to insist that Britain be recognized as an equal of the Chinese Empire. The Chinese rejected the demand, even though Napier backed it with a naval assault on the Chinese shore batteries at Canton. The British and Chinese merchants in Canton arranged a compromise and resumed their trade, but the old trade system no longer worked, not even as badly as it had done in the recent past. European traders were now to be found in many different Chinese ports, but without legal recognition and with increasing friction between foreign sea captains and local officials, bribed or not.

By the late 1830s, the scene was set for a more forceful "opening" of China to the new, Western system of open trade, relatively free from restriction by non-Western authorities. But the change required force, not just the threat of force, and the resulting violence erupted as the Opium War of 1839–42.

Behind the conflict was a double opposition. The Chinese were apprehensive about the inflow of illegal opium, not only for its own deleterious effects, but also because these rising imports had begun, in the

late 1830s, to produce an alarming outflow of silver. That, in turn, seemed to threaten a monetary crisis. The British, meanwhile, became more and more resentful of the Chinese refusal to treat their diplomats as representatives of an equal government. China was determined to stop the opium traffic. Britain was determined to do away with the ancient fiction of tribute trade, not merely for the sake of opium sales, but also to achieve free entry into the Chinese market for British manufactures in general.

The resulting war was extremely lopsided, even though the British fought it mainly with the forces of the East India Company, without bothering to call in royal troops or the Royal Navy. It was a clear confrontation between the new military technology of the industrial age and the comparatively old-fashioned equipment available to the Chinese. The differences had become so great that the British won with a few thousand men and one or two crucial warships. The significant innovation was the first appearance of steam-driven, iron warships, notably the shallow-draft iron steamer. *Nemesis*, which could move up the Chinese rivers with impunity, silencing the shore batteries as it went. In the opening of China to Western trade, "gunboat diplomacy" was more than a figure of speech.[15]

The peace settlement gave the British the right of entry they had wanted, including special privileges associated with informal empire in the nineteenth century. The initial Anglo-Chinese treaty of 1842 ceded the undeveloped island of Hong Kong, granted the British rights of residence and trade at five other ports, and promised a large indemnity to be paid in silver dollars. Other treaties followed between China and the United States, France, and other European powers. They promised "most favored nation" treatment to each European power in turn, so that the treaty structure originally laid down between 1842 and 1844 came to be a general bundle of rights granted by China to the Western world as a whole. In some ways, the Chinese concessions were little more than the privileges Mediterranean nations had been granting to foreign trade communities for centuries. The Europeans could reside in the Chinese ports and could have their internal disputes settled by their own leaders – in this case, the consular representatives of the foreign power. But these treaties went much further: They also sheltered foreign merchants from the effects of Chinese law. In time, the treaty system

15 John K. Fairbank et al., *East Asia: The Modern Transformation* (Boston, 1965), pp. 140–4; Daniel R. Headrick, *The Tools of Empire: Technology and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 1981), pp. 105–14. For more detail see Frederick Wakeman, Jr., "The Canton Trade and the Opium War," in Denis Twitchett and John K. Fairbank (eds.), *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 10 (Cambridge, 1978).

gave similar legal protection even to the Chinese who happened to work for European firms.[14]

In effect, the Opium War imposed the Western commercial culture on China, at least on the part of China that traded with the West. Resident traders were followed by the full set of Western commercial institutions – banks, merchant houses, and insurance firms; in time, railways built by Western capital carried the entering wedge of Western economic order into the heart of the country. Hong Kong and the treaty ports were like Singapore in their superficial resemblance to nodes of a preindustrial trading-post empire, but the function was very different. Rather than serving the narrow interests of a particular nation or trading group, they were open to the full impact of international capitalism on the Western model. And the ecumenical trade on that model was not confined to Europeans. Indian merchants of many descriptions had been in the opium trade and went on to participate in the opening of China, just as Chinese and Arabs, Bugis, and Indians were involved in the fortunes of Singapore from the beginning. As of 1851, the "British" community in Canton included far more Indians than natives of Great Britain. Indeed, it counted more Parsees than Britons.

Consular representation

In the unequal treaties that followed the Opium War, officials with the title of Consul appear, exercising extraterritorial jurisdiction for European states. The office was another innovation of this transitional period, but its origins lay far back in the history of preindustrial trade diasporas. One common feature of these trade diasporas was the resident broker who had stayed long enough to act as intermediary between his original fellow-countrymen and members of the host society. We have seen it under the names *maigida*, *wakil al-tujjar*, one variant of the term *shabandar*, or simply as "chief," "governor," or "consul," who belonged to and spoke for a national segment of diaspora merchants in a trade center. In the Mediterranean basin during the European Middle Ages, *consul* was the term that caught on. But these early consuls were not different from the other kinds of community chief. They represented, not a government, but only the merchant community that chose them. Governments might ask for their services at times. It is possible that the occasional use of consuls as diplomatic agents was one origin of a kind of government-to-government representation associated with the office of am-

14 Fairbank et al., *Modern Transformation*, pp. 96–9; John King Fairbank, *Trade and Diplomacy on the China Coast: The Opening of the Treaty Ports 1842–1854* (Cambridge, Mass., 1964); Yen-Ping Hao, *The Comprador in Nineteenth-Century China: Bridge Between East and West* (Cambridge, Mass., 1970).

bassador toward the end of the Middle Ages. But, whereas ambassadors became regular government representatives by the early sixteenth century, consuls remained private until the eighteenth.[15]

Then, and in the early nineteenth century, consuls emerged from the diaspora communities to enter the government service. France was the first to recognize and appoint consuls to act for French commercial interests, and to consider them part of the state apparatus, whether paid or not. The practice was gradually taken up by other European states. Britain established a regular consular service in 1825, France in 1833. In time, the consular service was integrated into the older and more prestigious diplomatic service, though its prestige remained low far into the twentieth century. Many countries still filled out their network of consular representation by appointing honorary consuls, that is, a merchant of appropriate nationality who happened to live in a foreign city and would take over consular tasks on a part-time basis.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the consular corps formed a network that could act pervasively to create an internationally recognized body of commercial law and custom. In the non-Western world in particular, consuls were the cutting edge of commercial Westernization. And European attitudes about other cultures had changed by this time from the more tolerant views of the past, to an intense cultural arrogance. Where the HBC or the Compagnie des Indes might once have adapted its ways to local usage, even in bookkeeping, by the nineteenth century the goal of efficient exchange was universally understood to be achieved by making the "natives" do it in the European manner.

The consul's position sometimes went well beyond mere representation of national commerce. Consuls were prime agents of informal empire, with the military on call if necessary. The title of consul could sometimes be deceptive, however. It was often a euphemism to satisfy diplomatic niceties; for example, Britain governed Egypt through an official called British Agent and Consul General, whose actual powers were not far different from those of the viceroy of India. Other consuls held less real power, but nevertheless had great influence. In Africa before the European conquests of the 1880s and 1890s, consuls were important agents of informal empire. The British stationed a consul on the island of Fernando Po in the 1850s and 1860s as their principal agent for opposition to the continuing slave trade along the nearby African coastline. A British consul on Zanzibar in the 1870s and 1880s had a similar role.

[15] W. H. Moreland, "The Shabandar in the Eastern Seas," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 28:517–33 (1920), pp. 520–1. Donald E. Queller, *The Office of Ambassador in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, N.J., 1967), pp. 66, 69.

Consular representation in the Ottoman Empire passed through another kind of transition. The Ottomans had dealt with foreign merchants through their consuls as the standard and thoroughly Ottoman way of doing things. And the early consuls had no rights against the Ottoman state. They were simply there to keep the peace and settle disputes among their own people. With the growth of European power in the nineteenth century, however, the consuls of Continental European powers began to gain authority, especially in Egypt. The growth of extraterritorial jurisdiction was similar to the transition in China under the unequal treaties. Where consuls once tried cases involving their own nationals only, they began to try disputes between their own nationals and Egyptian subjects – and finally, cases involving other foreigners and Egyptians. From the 1850s on, consular jurisdiction so deeply penetrated the Egyptian judicial system that most cases involving international business were tried by consuls.[16] Similar developments in Turkish territories, including the Maghribi outliers of Tunisia and Libya, assured that Western commercial norms had already gained a strong foothold, even before colonial rule began.

Fringe Westernization

Normally, communities of a trade diaspora learned about the culture of the host society, not the other way round. But some people in the host society had reason to learn from the visitors as well. On occasion, they have assumed the role of cross-cultural brokerage in competition with the "stayers" of the diaspora community, even replacing them altogether in that role. This tendency was exceptionally strong along the coasts of tropical Africa, where the death rate among European visitors kept them from staying long enough to acquire a very deep knowledge of the local culture.

The sequence of trade patterns at the mouth of the Gambia River is indicative. At the beginning of maritime contact with Europe, the Portuguese traded from their ships, but they soon began to put men ashore between voyages. Some took local wives, so that a community of Afro-Portuguese, racially and culturally mixed, had come into existence by the end of the sixteenth century. They and their children handled cross-cultural brokerage very adequately until the late seventeenth century. Increasing trade in slaves and gold, and increasing international competition among the Europeans, encouraged a shift to the fortified enclaves of competing trading-post empires, in this instance both French and English. But to man the forts was expensive. European interlopers,

[16] David Landes, *Bankers and Pashas* (Cambridge, Mass., 1958), esp. pp. 82–102.

without the fixed expenses of the chartered trading companies that ran the forts and factories, were more competitive, especially when local Africans could offer brokerage services. By the 1760s, the African kingdom of Niumi at the river's mouth had established a regular system to control trade entering the river. It charged tolls, which the Europeans normally resented, but paid. It also provided services, at a price, including that of African interpreter-brokers who would travel upriver with the ships and conduct business on behalf of the captain with any shoreside sellers or caravan leaders the ship might meet. As a result, when the French captured and destroyed the English fort at James Island in 1779, it was not rebuilt. It had become cheaper to rely on African brokerage, until a new phase of growing trade brought the Europeans back in force after 1816.[17]

Elsewhere along the coast in the late eighteenth century, African trade communities also tended to adopt some elements of Western culture. In the Niger delta, for example, the Europeans had never built fortified factories, but had carried on trade from unfortified hulks anchored in the rivers. There, as on the Gambia, the Africans made it a point to learn the English ways of business – and, of course, the English language. It was not uncommon for an African slave trader to send a son or nephew to England for a few years of education so that he could become literate and learn commercial arithmetic. Here and there Africans sponsored schools in Africa itself to preserve and transmit what had been learned. In the 1780s, Antera Duke, an African slave trader at Calabar in present-day Nigeria, wrote a diary in English, which has been preserved and published in a critical edition.[18]

In the early nineteenth century, the British anti-slave-trade campaign become another source of fringe Westernization. The Royal Navy began to intercept slavers at sea. It used a new colony at Sierra Leone as a place to land the slave cargoes. Sierra Leone then became a center for Western missionary activity and public education for the ex-slaves. Fourah Bay College, later a university, began as a secondary school as early as the 1820s. Samuel Crowther, a recaptured slave and an early graduate of Fourah Bay, became the first African bishop of the Anglican church. Many others with a similar background went into trade, and many of those who had originally come from Yorubaland in present-day Nigeria returned to their homeland – if not precisely to their original hometowns, then often to Lagos, the new British-controlled seaport on the coast, where their cross-cultural skills were more valuable.[19]

17 Philip D. Curtin, *Economic Change in Precolonial Africa: Senegambia in the Era of the Slave Trade*, 2 vols. (Madison, Wis., 1975), esp. 1:296–7.
18 Daryll Forde (ed.), *Efik Traders of Old Calabar* (London, 1956).
19 Jean Herskovits Kopytoff, *A Preface to Modern Nigeria: The "Sierra Leonians" in Yoruba, 1830–1890* (Madison, Wis. 1965).

Still others were able to make their way from American slavery back to Africa. Among them was Thomas Joiner, a Gambian who was sent as a slave to Virginia. He returned in the first decade of the nineteenth century. By the 1830s, he had become the most important shipowner in the trade of the Gambia River. In that capacity he was instrumental in choosing the site of Georgetown, the first upriver base of a new trading-post empire that grew into the British colony of the Gambia and later into the independent state.[20] But returnees from Brazil were far more common than those from North America. Many were Yoruba, like the "Sierra Leonians," and they also set out for Yorubaland and its vicinity. By the early colonial period, they had become the most important single commercial community in the French colony of Dahomey.[21]

An African's personal course toward Westernization could be highly various, but a number of Africans appeared on the Western side of the cultural line before the beginning of the colonial period – not merely Samuel Crowther, the Anglican bishop, but also an Anglican chaplain in a slave-trade post before the end of the eighteenth century, an acting governor of the Gold Coast, an important medical officer, and scores if not hundreds in lesser posts. Some of these Westernized Africans also remained in commerce, like the Brew family of Cape Coast in Ghana, which became a commercial dynasty of importance from the middle of the eighteenth century past the middle of the twentieth.[22]

Similar fringe Westernization was equally impressive elsewhere, especially in the Indian Ocean trade world, where a common culture of commerce already flourished before the end of the eighteenth century – and that culture became more and more Western through the nineteenth. The sons and grandsons of the banians who had served as cross-cultural brokers in the eighteenth century, came, by the early nineteenth, to be full partners in Western-style businesses in Calcutta, including banking, insurance, shipping, and the agency houses. In the second half of the century, their descendants tended to move out of the Bengali world of commerce – replaced to some degree by British capital generated in the industrial revolution, and in some degree by new men from other communities of Indian merchants. But important banian families, like the Tagores, continued to be a force in the intellectual and social life of British India, some of them culturally more Western than otherwise. A

20 Curtin, *Senegambia*, 1:137–9.
21 Pierre Verger, *Flux et reflux de la traite des nègres entre le golfe de Bénin et Bahia de todos os santos du dix-septième au dix-neuvième siècle* (Paris, 1968), esp. pp. 599–632.
22 Robert W. July, *The Origins of Modern African Thought: Its Development in West Africa during the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (New York, 1967); Arthur T. Porter, *Creoledom: A Study of the Development of Freetown Society* (London, 1963); Margaret Priestley, *West African Trade and Coast Society: A Family Study* (London, 1969).

number of distinguished writers with this background, for example, published in English, not Bengali.[23]

Some of the Armenians who drifted into the orbit of Western trade made a similar transition. The transition of the Edward Raphael family from New Julfa to the British House of Commons is a spectacular example, (see Chapter 9, Communities of the Armenian diaspora). Similar shifts across cultural lines had taken place at all phases in the long history of trade diasporas. In the nineteenth century, drift toward the industrializing West was an obvious current. In earlier centuries, it might go the other way. Individual life stories often went unrecorded, but several people are known to have made the shift from Western to non-Western cultures and to have reached high office. One example on the West African coast is the Corker or Caulker family, founded by an English trader in the seventeenth century. After generations of intermarriage with the local African gentry, the Caulkers became rulers of a small chiefdom. In due course, the British annexed it to the colony of Sierra Leone, and several members of the family went on to become members of the Westernized intellectual elite in that colony and in the independent state that succeeded it.[24]

Similar movement also took place in China. The Polos are an obvious and early example of people who reached high office and returned to the West. In the nineteenth century, the drift was opposite, in spite of official resistance to Western influence. Pidgin or "business," English was already the lingua franca in Canton before the Opium War, using a Chinese word order, but with loanwords from Arabic and Portuguese as well as English. The Pidgin for money changer was shroff, from Arabic. The Pidgin for agent – that is, for a Chinese broker who did what the banians had done in Bengal – was comprador, from the Portuguese word for buyer.[25]

In the first half of the nineteenth century, Chinese, not Europeans, were the principal cross-cultural brokers on the Chinese coast, especially the compradors. This cultural interchange was especially complex because the original compradors first became associated with European firms in southern China. As the treaty ports opened up to the north in the 1840s and later, the European firms moved north with a whole raft of compradors, servants, and hangers-on – almost all Cantonese, if not Southeast Asian in origin. Since their language was unintelligible in the northern treaty ports, they found themselves acting between two cultures, both of which were alien. But they could often claim the same

23 Dilip Basu, "The Banian and the British in Calcutta, 1800–1850," Bengal Past and Present, 92:157–70 (1973).
24 Christopher Fyfe, A History of Sierra Leone (London, 1962), p. 10 and passim.
25 Fairbank, Trade and Diplomacy, pp. 14, ff.; Hao, The Comprador, passim.

judicial and other privileges as the Europeans themselves, partly on account of their foreignness.

The abolition of the hong monopoly also made way for new institutions, and the existing compradors were able to take advantage of the opening. Many early compradors had been quite minor servants, but the class rose rapidly in importance. Some carried out the entire Chinese aspect of a foreign firm's business. An important comprador needed a whole staff of subordinate translators, shroffs, porters, and boatmen. It was the compradors who gained an intimate understanding of Western capitalism – not the heads of foreign firms who learned about China. Compradors also supervised the penetration of Western trade into the interior, while the Europeans remained in the ports.

As they accumulated capital, some of the compradors not only acted as agents of Western-style capitalism; they also became Western-style capitalists in their own right. Sometimes they worked alone, sometimes in partnership with Western firms. In 1862, one such enterprise with American leadership, but mostly Chinese capital, introduced the first commercial steamship service on the Yangtze, between Shanghai and Hangkow.

Some recent historical writing suggests that the compradors were guilty of a kind of economic treason in helping to introduce Western capitalist institutions into China. Many no doubt did take advantage of their position as honorary foreigners. Their knowledge of the Western world probably allowed them to take advantage of the foreigners as well. Praiseworthy or not, they were the principal carriers of the new, world-wide culture of commerce on the Chinese coast in the nineteenth century.[26]

The tools of European dominance

Many personal aspects of cross-cultural brokerage had been at work for centuries, building more ecumenical patterns of trade. From the mid-eighteenth century, institutional changes in the international economic order speeded the process in banking, finance, transportation, and communication. These changes rested, in turn, on the triumph of industrial technology, which made it virtually impossible for any non-Western society to resist Westernization, at least in the field of trade and exchange. Estimates of total world trade measure the weight of the change – from U.S. $700 million in 1700 to U.S. $38,150 million in 1914. The most rapid expansion was a ninefold increase between 1820 and 1880,

26 Fairbank et al., Modern Transformation, pp. 154–5, 346–8, and 354–5; Fairbank, Trade and Diplomacy, passim.

generated by the spread of the industrial revolution to most of Western Europe and the United States.[27]

Among the most important of the technological changes for world trade were those in ocean shipping. Europeans had been world leaders in maritime technology since at least the middle of the sixteenth century. But their lead was not great enough to displace Asian shipping in Asian waters. In the mid-nineteenth century the shift to steam and steel began. By the outbreak of the First World War, the combination of iron hulls, high-pressure steam engines, and screw propellers guaranteed the preponderance of steam over sail on almost all long-distance ocean routes. Ocean freight rates dropped by 80 percent over the nineteenth century. But the new ships required, first of all, much more capital than most non-Western economies of the period could provide. They also required the special industrial know-how that, at that period, was narrowly located in the British Isles. As late as 1910, more than 60 percent of the tonnage passing through the Suez Canal was not merely European; it was British. Even the ships that were not British owned were often driven by British marine engines cared for by the ubiquitous Scottish marine engineer.[28] By 1900, anyone who wanted to ship goods competitively by sea had to do so in European ships, and this implied the acceptance of the whole international culture of Western shipping – from bills of lading to charges for demurrage.

The new technology hit even sooner in long-distance communication. Both the Dutch and the English East India Company were pretty much limited to the speed of sailing ships, and so were their Asian competitors. Up to the 1830s, a letter from Europe to India took five to eight months to round the Cape on a sailing ship. To receive an answer might take as long as two years. By the 1850s, the combination of train and steamer could bring a letter from London to Calcutta in thirty to forty-five days. By the 1870s, submarine cable had been laid and a message from Britain to India could be answered in the same day.[29] It was not just that Europeans had the tools; they also controlled access to them. Anyone who wanted to communicate at that speed had to follow the bureaucratic rules of the cable office. These were, needless to say, the rules of Western commerce.

For a non-Western country, the international postal service was open only to whose who conformed to the practices of the Universal Postal

[27] William Woodruff, "The Emergence of an International Economy 1700–1914," Carlo M. Cipolla (ed.), The Emergence of Industrial Societies (London, 1973). PP. 658–9.
[28] For a summary treatment of extremely complex changes see Headrick, Tools of Empire, pp. 129–49. A. J. H. Latham, The International Economy and the Underdeveloped World, 1865–1914 (London, 1978), pp. 26–32.
[29] Headrick, Tools of Empire, pp. 129–39.

Union, founded in 1874. Many non-Western countries had had reasonably efficient postal services – for the needs of a preindustrial society. China, for example, had had a good one, but in the nineteenth century, it no longer served the interests of foreign business efficiently, nor those of Chinese business as efficiently as Westernized Chinese businessmen wanted it to do. The result was a reconstruction of the postal service on the Western model, completed before the end of the century. Elsewhere, Europeans established their own post offices on foreign territory, when they thought the local service was inadequate, as several did in Tangier in Morocco and elsewhere.

One could pursue the theme of Western technological superiority and its impact on the world of commerce into the fields of banking, insurance, international monetary exchange, and much else. But, for trade diasporas, the conclusion is obvious. They could survive for a time in some places beyond the fringes of the international economy, but they had long since served their purpose in uniting an extremely diverse world. Their disappearance was itself a sign of their long-term success.

None of this should be taken as a sign that all human culture is to be homogenized under the impact of the West, that the "Cocacolanization" of some people feared a few decades ago will inevitably take place. In some fields of human activity, to be sure, change is very hard to avoid. Where the West dominates world commerce, and in circumstances where competitive success or failure depends on using appropriate technology, the sweep of industrial technology is undeniable, and it has ended the era of the trade diaspora in cross-cultural trade.

Other aspects of the commercial culture, however, may well survive. This is especially the case within cultures. West African traders using trucks and telegrams may nevertheless keep important aspects of older kinship relations in the organization of the firm, just as Japanese industrial enterprise has retained its peculiarly Japanese way of going about things, even though it uses, and has even invented, some of the most up-to-date technology. Some of the old techniques are still competitive as well: The abacus and the electronic calculator are used side-by-side in Japanese retail shops. Religion is obviously much less affected by technological change than long-distance trade is; it may be worth-while reflecting on the fact that the muezzin, who calls the faithful to prayer throughout the Muslim world as regularly now as ever in the past, normally does so through a public address system.

A final caveat should be added. In a study like this, which traces institutions through a long run of time and across many cultural boundaries, there are also costs. One price paid for following cross-cultural trade is an inability to deal adequately with anything else. A historian's implied

omniscience was one of the less admirable aspects of an older tradition of historical writing. An unstated assumption that went with writing within a time-space unit like "England to the Norman Conquest" was that the author would tell about *all* the important events that fell within that framework. That was never possible, but for a comparative study like this one it is not even attempted. At best, this study presents one of several different ways of looking at the human experience, to be supplemented by others that abstract some other element from the total pattern of our known past.

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This list of works consulted is arranged by chapter or pairs of chapters. This means that the division is sometimes geographical and sometimes temporal. Some works contributed to two or more chapters, but that happened seldom enough to repeat the listing. They are listed where the weight of their evidence seemed greatest. Cooperative works, such as conference reports and contributed volumes, are cited by individual author in the footnotes, but they are listed here only under the editor's name if a substantial number of articles from that volume is relevant to this study.

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