

Editor's Note: A course syllabus is available in the online supplements for this issue.

Teaching China in a Global History Survey

By Kenneth J. Hammond

In 1793, the King of England, George III, sent a mission led by Lord George Macartney to the court of the Qianlong Emperor in China. The British were asking for a new arrangement for trade with the Qing empire, which at that point was conducted at a single port, Guangzhou, in the far south of the country, and had to take place through official intermediaries, known to the British as *Hong* merchants. Inspired by the increasing competitiveness of their products, as the Industrial Revolution was just getting underway, and by the rising economic doctrine of Free Trade articulated by Adam Smith and others, the British sought more open ports and the establishment of ongoing diplomatic relations with the imperial government. After some sparring over the ritual protocols for a meeting, Lord Macartney agreed to bend one knee to the emperor, and a formal audience took place at the Qing Summer Palace in the mountains northeast of Beijing. The Qianlong Emperor declined the British requests and sent a letter to George III explaining that while the Qing were happy to allow foreigners to come and buy the things they wanted from China, China had no need for the inferior products of the West. In 1793, this was still a reasonable thing for the ruler of China to say, but things were about to change in the configurations of global trade and power.

This encounter between a British diplomat and the emperor of China at the end of the eighteenth century serves as one moment in the exploration of the history of China as a component of global history, a pivot point just as the realities of global geopolitics were about to be transformed by the Industrial Revolution.

I teach an undergraduate survey course, Global History since 1500, at New Mexico State University. Teaching global history is always a challenge, given the temporal and geographic comprehensiveness of the topic. The richness of the field means that each of us who takes this challenge tailors the specifics of what we do to the realities of our own backgrounds, training, and expertise. I am primarily a historian of China, especially of the Ming dynasty, and while I have worked diligently over many years to broaden and deepen my understanding of the complexity and expansiveness of global history, my practice as a teacher of global history is strongly informed by that background.

The basic design of my survey course, which meets three days a week for fifty minutes, with a typical enrollment of sixty to seventy-five students, combines lectures in class—for which I use PowerPoint slides emphasizing visual content, such as maps, photos, or other graphic imagery, with minimal text—and readings in a textbook and supplemental primary sources. I am currently using James Carter and Richard Warren's *Forging the Modern World* as the textbook. There is a series of short writing

assignments based on analyzing primary sources and using them to discuss the history that is being presented in the class at that point, which I draw from various sources and use in a kind of rotation from semester to semester. I give a midterm exam and a final, each of which includes a map on which students need to mark the location of ten places; a set of identification questions in which I ask them to give the where and when for individuals or events, as well as comment on their significance; and an essay question (two on the final) to synthesize material covered in the lectures and the readings.

The semester begins with a four-week period in which I make a kind of circuit of the globe, establishing a baseline of what the world was like around the year 1500. East Asia is the focus of one of these weeks, with China the topic for two of the three classes. Once the baseline is established, the remainder of the sixteen-week semester is used to trace the changes that have taken place from the sixteenth century down to the early twenty-first. Both in the process of delineating the baseline and as I move through the historical itinerary, narrating major events and ideas, I highlight several themes, including the range and variation of societies, parallels and contrasts among different parts of the world, and deep structural changes that may not be immediately visible in the surface flow of events and people.

In setting the baseline, I discuss Ming dynasty China as both an instance of a deeply rooted imperial order, with an emphasis on the



The Reception, by James Gillray, a caricature of Lord George Macartney taking the knee before the Qianlong Emperor. (The inscription on the bottom says, "The reception of the diplomatique and his suite, at the Court of Peking."). Source: Wikimedia Commons at <https://tinyurl.com/yxqvweb>.



A close-up of the *Catalan Atlas*, depicting Marco Polo traveling to the East during the *Pax Mongolica*.
Source: Wikipedia at <https://tinyurl.com/y62uyra4>.

antiquity of bureaucratic administration and the civil examination system, and a dynamic commercial society with a flourishing domestic economy, also linked into vast networks of global trade. I examine the fluid nature of social and intellectual life in the Ming, and the stresses and contradictions within its economic and political systems. I use the Zheng He voyages to introduce a discussion of China's connections to, and interactions with the Eurasian and African areas, and to mention the ways in which Europeans were aware of the wealth of China, and Asia more broadly, through the writings of Marco Polo, the cleric William of Rubruck, and other travelers from the earlier era of the *Pax Mongolica*. I also note that many of the characteristic features of the Ming period are actually revivals or extensions of processes that initially began under the preceding Song dynasty and introduce the idea that China's early modern period may have begun as early as the tenth century, thus broaching the concept of multiple historical itineraries to the modern world.

My progress around the planet in the first weeks of the semester culminates in Europe, where I then engage with the ways in which Europeans began to be drawn out into the wider world, with the earlier discussion of Marco Polo's writings returning as a link to Columbus's ideas about sailing west to reach China and the Portuguese quest for a route around Africa. I follow the story of European exploration along various tracks, including how the flood of new knowledge about the world coming into Europe contributes to the ideas of the Reformation and the development of the Scientific Revolution. These two topics then provide occasions for moments of cross-cultural comparison with China.

In one class, I present the Protestant Reformation in Europe and the neo-Confucian reformist thought of Wang Yangming in China, especially as elaborated by the Taizhou School, as two examples of how the development of humanistic, individualistic ideas can be understood, at least in part, as manifestations of a rapidly commercializing economy and the agency of individual economic actors. For Europeans, this was a matter of

challenging the role of the priesthood in monopolizing religious knowledge and the production of vernacular bibles to allow for a direct and unmediated relationship with the divine; while in China, Yangming's argument that all people have an innate knowledge of the good, regardless of their class position or educational attainments, promoted a comparable emphasis on individual spiritual agency.

In a later class, I use the Academy of the Linceans around Galileo in Italy and the circle of correspondents in China, including Li Shizhen and Wang Shizhen, to discuss the ways in which the production and circulation of knowledge in the early modern period were similar in these widely separated societies. The emphasis on rational knowledge and the empirical verification of hypotheses was characteristic of both European "natural philosophy" and the Chinese "investigation of things." In both contexts, these developments, can to some degree, be associated with the centrality of rational, verifiable information in their dynamic market economies.

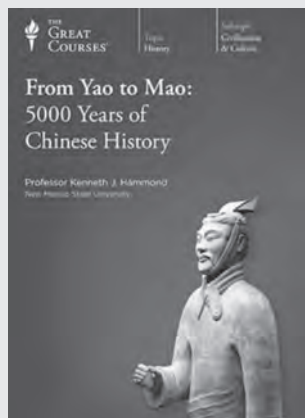
The middle part of the semester includes classes tracing the initial encounters between Europeans and other parts of the world. In contrast to the experience of the Spanish in the trans-Atlantic hemisphere, where the massive mortality of the indigenous populations cleared the path for colonial exploitation and the development of the slave trade and plantation economies, Europeans coming into Asia—first the Portuguese and later the English, Dutch, and others—found that they needed to accommodate themselves to long-established economic and political realities. This situation persisted through the sixteenth, seventeenth, and well into the eighteenth centuries. I use the Manila Galleon trade across the Pacific to discuss the evolution of global trade and the flow of silver into China from New Spain to illustrate the increasing integration of markets and information worldwide. I then present the Macartney Mission of 1793, as noted at the beginning of this article, to illustrate the tensions that had built up over time in the relationship between the rising British Empire and the still-preeminent power of the Qing dynasty. As one of several short, primary source-based writing assignments in the course, I have students read the Qianlong Emperor's letter to George III in response to British requests for open trade and diplomatic relations to show how, even at the end of the eighteenth century, the global order remained much as it had been at the beginning of the period covered by this class.

The Industrial Revolution changed the basic structures of global interactions in the first decades of the nineteenth century. The comparative analysis of the onset of industrialization in England and the factors that led to the Great Divergence between a rapidly industrializing Europe and Imperial China, as presented by Ken Pomeranz's classic work, introduces students to this topic. The final third of the semester is then largely concerned with tracing the rise and fall of Western imperialism and colonialism, and its ramifications in political, social, and cultural life. China features prominently in this narrative, beginning with the transformation of the relationship between China and Britain through the opium trade and the ensuing

The Great Courses

From Yao to Mao: 5000 Years of Chinese History

Professor Kenneth J. Hammond



In a world growing increasingly smaller, China still seems a far-away and exotic land, with secrets and mysteries of ages past, its history and intentions veiled from most Westerners. Yet behind that veil lies one of the most amazing civilizations the world has ever known. For most of its 5,000-year existence, China has been the largest, most populous, wealthiest, and mightiest nation on Earth. And for us as Westerners, it is essential to understand where China has been in

order to anticipate its future. This course answers this need by delivering a comprehensive political and historical overview of one of the most fascinating and complex countries in world history.

Dr. Hammond's lectures are richly detailed and lead you on compelling forays across many aspects of China's story. From a governing perspective, you'll learn how the short-lived Qin dynasty—with "legalism" as its often-brutal ideology of governance—became the first unified empire, laying the basis for an enduring imperial order. And how the implementation of the imperial civil service examination system in the late tenth century gave intellectual issues renewed importance, and made the eleventh century flourish with great debate and discussion about literature, philosophy, government, and art. You'll also learn the eye-opening story of how China was betrayed by the Allies at Versailles, precipitating riots in Beijing and helping pave the way for the emergence of the Communist Party. You'll also explore how select artistic and intellectual events shaped China's history. For example, learn about the great ceramic center at Jingdezhen, which, in the twelfth century, became one of the first true industrial cities in world history, its massive production lines setting the night sky ablaze with the glow from their great kilns.

Source: From *The Great Courses* website at <https://tinyurl.com/y6srzdtm>.

war of 1839–1842. I trace the complex interplay among domestic and international factors in the late Qing crisis, examining the Taiping Rebellion and other uprisings, the reform efforts of the later nineteenth century, and the penetration and hollowing out of the Chinese economy by inexpensive, mass-produced goods from the factories of Europe and America. The significant contrasting responses of China and Japan to the new power of Western military imperialism is also a theme addressed at this point.

As radical critiques of capitalism and imperialism emerged in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, China became one arena for the unfolding of an epic quest for national identity and self-determination. Many Chinese intellectuals and students, inspired by the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia and frustrated with what they viewed as the bankrupt

liberal democracies of the victorious Allied Powers after World War I, who were seen as betraying China at the Versailles Peace Conference, began to search for radical alternatives to both Chinese tradition and Western models of modernity. This trajectory forms part of the wider global processes of anticolonial struggles and of the systemic conflict between the communist and capitalist alliances centered in the Soviet Union and the United States. Students consider the contrasting stories of movements in China, India, Việt Nam, Indonesia, Kenya, Algeria, and Cuba, and the varieties of post-colonial societies that emerged from these struggles. How this process was shaped by the Cold War in the decades after World War II is also explored, with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union forming a transition point to some final themes in recent global history and a culminating retrospective on the semester.

In a final lecture, I use a graph of global GDP percentages based on Angus Maddison's study of economic history to illustrate some fundamental patterns spanning the period covered by this class. The graph shows the proportion of global economic activity taking place in China, India, Western Europe, the US, and the Middle East, covering the period from 1000 CE to 2008, with greater detail in more recent times. It clearly indicates that for many centuries the majority of economic production was concentrated in Asia, with China accounting for between 25 and 33 percent at various times. Beginning at the end of the eighteenth century, as the Industrial Revolution both expanded Western productivity and created new military capabilities, the levels of production began to change, with first India and then China declining dramatically, while Western Europe and then the US rose, reaching a point in the mid-twentieth century where China and India together contributed less than 10 percent, while Western Europe and the US made up nearly 60 percent. But then this again reverses with the end of Western colonialism and the beginnings of market socialist economic development in China. The most recent indicators suggest that as the twenty-first century progresses, with modern industrial productive technologies more evenly dispersed around the world, a global economic order much more similar to that at the beginning of our time period (1500) could once again become the norm.

Teaching China as a part of global history is challenging and rewarding. It is impossible to address every aspect of human history over the past five centuries, so there is always an element of arbitrary selection in terms of the themes and topics covered. I try not to replace a Eurocentric order with a Sinocentric one, but I also aim to be clear that for most of the period from 1500 to the present, China was, and is again becoming, one of the most important places in the world. As a component of a complex planetary community, and as a society with its own special, often-epic, past, China is both an Asian Giant and a global player. ■

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