



How Did the World Become Interconnected?

New trade networks caused an explosion in the trade of goods, but also in ideas, technologies, and diseases. These networks were also essential to collective learning.



<p>0:00</p> <p><i>A purple and pink world map zooms in to dots connected by white lines.</i></p>	<p>In the Paleolithic era, exchange networks were tiny, linking hundreds or, at most, thousands of people most of whom lived pretty similar lifeways. In the Agrarian era, they got much larger. As populations grew and as the number of settlements expanded. They also got much more diverse as people began to specialize, so they can bring different types of information to the exchange networks, and all of this speeded up processes of collective learning.</p>
<p>0:37</p> <p>Montage of images and pictures with white text overlaid starting with ancient writings, a horse drawn carriage, men on a boat, a tower, and roads on a hillside.</p>	<p>Improvements in technologies of communication did a lot to enhance the power of networks of information exchange. The invention of writing 5,000 years ago was particularly important because what writing did was to lock in information over many generations. Improved technologies of transportation also made a huge difference. The use of horses, of oxen, and camel to transport people and goods revolutionized both transportation and warfare. Meanwhile, in Southeast Asia, new boat building technologies and new navigational techniques allowed people to start migrating into the Pacific Ocean. And finally, the great empires of Persia and China started developing road systems and courier systems and those systems provided the most efficient ways of moving information until modern times.</p>
<p>1:36</p> <p>A black world map on a blue screen. Lines in various colors are added to the world map.</p>	<p>In Africa and Eurasia long distance trading systems developed and what they did was they connected regional and local exchange networks. The first of these carried goods, people, and ideas by sea from China around India to Africa and the Mediterranean and backwards. The second is known as the Silk Roads, it carried goods, people, and ideas by land connecting China, Central Asia, India, and the Mediterranean world.</p>
<p>2:12</p> <p>A video of yellow thread being wound followed by a montage of paintings of people making paper. Followed by a montage of paintings of people being sick overlaid with white text.</p>	<p>As a result of these networks, 2,000 years ago silk was being traded all the way from China through Central Asia to Rome and Egypt. And also, papermaking traveled through central Asia to the Mediterranean and to Europe. But diseases also traveled these routes and devastating diseases. We know that 1,800 years ago there were smallpox epidemics in Rome and almost certainly these were transmitted through the silk roads. But worst of all of course was the Black Death in the 1400s. This seems to have traveled from China through central Asia to the Mediterranean and Europe and wherever it arrived it decimated populations in the great hub regions of Eurasia. But over time what these disease exchanges also did was to strengthen immune systems just as exchanges of ideas strengthen the technologies of the hub regions of Eurasia.</p>
<p>3:11</p> <p>A montage of images starting with a man farming, a map of Africa, a map of the Middle East, and a map of China.</p>	<p>But throughout the Agrarian era there was a clear limit to the size, the extent, and the power of these exchange networks. That's because the world was in effect divided into four great world zones between which there was hardly any connection. It's almost as if human history had taken place on four separate planets.</p>
<p>3:29</p> <p>White and purple world map on a grey screen interrupted by two Egyptian drawings, two meso-American</p>	<p>By far the largest and the oldest of these world zones was the Afro-Eurasian zone, this extended all the way from Eastern Siberia to southern Africa. Within this zone, from as early as 4,000 years ago, technologies such as the domestication of animals and the use of metals diffused over wide areas. These technologies had their greatest impact in the hub zones, those were the zones where there were large populations and very</p>



drawings, an Australasian drawing, a Pacific drawing, and a video of waves on a seashore.

diverse connections. In the Afro-Eurasian world zone, the major hub zones were the Mediterranean and Europe, Mesopotamia and the Muslim world, Northern India, and Eastern Asia. The second largest of the world zones was the American zone. This was settled from about 15,000 years ago but within it there emerged two major hub zones with agriculture and agrarian civilizations in Meso-America and in the Andes region. These however had smaller populations and much smaller and less powerful networks than in Afro-Eurasia. The third great world zone was the Australasian zone. Here until very recently most people, the vast majority of people, lived as foragers, except in the highlands of Papua New Guinea where they were farming communities. The final world zone was the Pacific. This was settled by mariners from Southeast Asia from about 3,500 years ago to form what was at least geographically speaking by far the largest of the world zones. Some of the islands such as Tonga and Hawaii were quite large and they had quite large societies and chiefdoms but on the whole the distances between islands were so vast, populations were so small, that the exchanges of information and goods and technologies were very, very limited much, much more limited than in the Afro-Eurasian world zone.