

Networks of Exchange

AP World History ■ Unit 2

AP World History



How could the same connections bring prosperity and loss?

Networks of exchange, c. 1200–1450

Trace a mechanism: an obstacle is addressed → exchange expands → particular people and places experience changes. Compare with evidence from both networks, and qualify claims that say “all” or “only”.

Scope: CED topics 2.1–2.7. Tasks are original; earlier released questions inform historical demands, not the May 2027 paper template.

1

What Made the Networks Grow

Explain an enabler through the obstacle it addressed

WHAT IMPROVED	THE OBSTACLE ADDRESSED	EXAMPLES
COMMERCIAL PRACTICES	carrying precious metal as payment was costly and risky	money economies, credit, bills of exchange
TRANSPORT TECHNOLOGY	limited carrying capacity and difficult navigation	camel saddle; larger ships; compass and astrolabe
STATE SUPPORT	insecurity and fragmented political control	protection and institutions could support travel

Choose a specific mechanism. The same change did not have identical effects everywhere.

Supply and demand: explain why producers expanded

Demand for exports

Growing markets for luxury goods encouraged Chinese, Persian and Indian artisans and merchants to expand textiles and porcelain production.

Production and cities

Iron and steel manufacture also expanded in China. Trading cities such as Kashgar and Samarkand gained from merchants and exchange.

These routes predated 1200. Expansion of volume and range is different from invention of a route.

2

The Silk Roads

The Silk Roads: cargo and transport costs

Silk Roads 丝绸之路

Long overland journeys favoured high-value, low-bulk goods such as silk, porcelain and spices. A valuable small cargo could justify a costly journey.

Explain the relative pattern

The claim is about long-distance economic feasibility, not an absolute ban on other goods. Maritime routes also carried luxuries.

A list of commodities identifies what moved; transport costs help explain the pattern.

Caravanserais and credit addressed different obstacles

Caravanserais 商队旅馆

Lodging and exchange facilities supported merchants along an overland route. They were part of the infrastructure of travel and trade.

Credit 信贷 and payment

Paper money 纸币, banking houses and **bills of exchange** 汇票 supported transactions. Commercial arrangements could reduce the need to carry payment as precious metal.

Do not treat a bill of exchange as a vehicle or a caravanserai as a new ocean-navigation instrument.

Your turn: distinguish two mechanisms

Original practice — attempt before the check

A caravanseraï provides lodging and a place to exchange goods along an overland route. Explain how this could encourage trade, then distinguish it from the effect of a bill of exchange.

Check: infrastructure differs from payment

Worked reasoning

Lodging and exchange facilities support merchants during a long journey. A bill of exchange can reduce the need to carry precious metal as payment. Both could encourage trade, but the first concerns travel facilities and the second commercial transactions.

Simply writing “both made trade easier” leaves the particular mechanisms unexplained.

3

The Mongol Empire

State building: conquest and successor khanates

How expansion happened

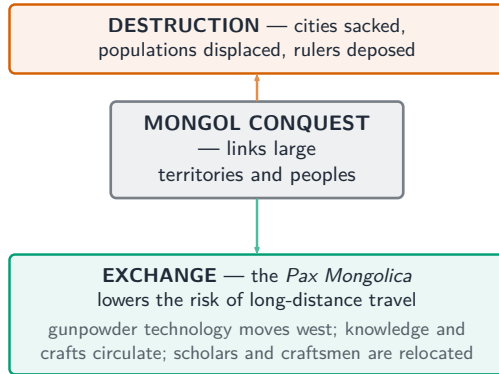
Organised military force and effective cavalry tactics supported Mongol conquest as rival states weakened or fragmented. Conquest could displace people and depose rulers.

Khanates 汗国

Successor states included Yuan China and the Ilkhanate in Iran. Distinct settings and political divisions matter; there was no single uniformly peaceful state throughout 1200–1450.

State building and decline are part of this topic, alongside effects on exchange.

Mongol expansion: destruction and exchange could coexist



Explain the effect asked about. Contrasting consequences are evidence to weigh, not a compulsory answer formula.

Communication and cultural transfer require mechanisms

Connections and institutions

Large linked territories drew new peoples into trade networks. Protection and trade-friendly practices could support travel; relay stations helped official messages move. The term **Pax Mongolica** 蒙古和平 does not mean universal peace.

Contacts and local influences

Movement of specialists and crafts helped knowledge circulate. Adoption of Uyghur script and transfers of Greco-Islamic medical knowledge illustrate cultural and technical connections.

Mongol rulers also adopted local traditions: influence moved in both directions.

Your turn: explain communication and culture

Original practice — attempt before the check

Explain one way Mongol expansion supported communication and one reason cultural practices could spread through the khanates. Use a distinct mechanism for each relationship.

Check: connect each result to its mechanism

Worked reasoning

Linked territories and relay stations helped official messages travel long distances. Greater contact, movement of specialists and rulers' adoption or toleration of traditions could encourage cultural transfers.

A statement that the Mongols conquered a large area is not yet an explanation of every cultural consequence.

4

The Indian Ocean

Cargo, environment and navigation

Ships and larger cargoes

Ships could carry bulkier cargoes such as timber and grain as well as textiles, spices and other luxuries. Greater carrying capacity lowered transport cost per unit.



A dhow under lateen sail; original licensed photograph.

This photograph illustrates a vessel and rig; it is not a photograph of a medieval voyage.

Monsoon knowledge and instruments did different jobs

Monsoon winds 季风

Seasonally changing winds helped merchants plan outward and return journeys. Environmental knowledge helped choose the time to sail.

Technology and navigation

Larger ship designs increased capacity. The **compass** 罗盘 helped indicate direction; the **astrolabe** 星盘 supported celestial observations. A **lateen sail** 三角帆 was one sailing technology.

Technology and environmental knowledge worked together; instruments did not control winds or eliminate risk.

Your turn: separate environment from technology

Original practice — attempt before the check

A merchant plans outward and return Indian Ocean journeys around seasonal wind changes. Explain the role of environmental knowledge and why a compass is a different kind of enabler.

Check: timing is not direction

Worked reasoning

Knowledge of monsoons helps time journeys to seasonal sailing conditions. A compass helps indicate direction. The merchant can use both, but the instrument does not cause or control the seasonal winds.

Explain how the named factor affects travel rather than treating every enabler as interchangeable.

Trade and political growth could reinforce one another

Growth of states

Indian Ocean exchange supported states on the Swahili Coast, Gujarat and the Sultanate of Malacca. Trading centres could gain resources through commerce.

State-supported contacts

Early-fifteenth-century Ming voyages led by Zheng He encouraged diplomatic and cultural contacts across existing networks.

Trade networks were already established. Zheng He did not create all Indian Ocean exchange from nothing.

Diasporic communities: cultural influence in both directions

Diasporic communities 侨居社群

Arab and Persian communities in East Africa and Chinese merchant communities in Southeast Asia maintained connections to places of origin while living in trading regions.

Local interaction

Merchants introduced traditions and were also influenced by local cultures. Cultural exchange was not necessarily wholesale replacement of one culture by another.

Movement included free merchants and coerced labour. Do not assume every sailor or merchant had the same legal status.

5

Trans-Saharan Trade

Crossing the desert: technology and organisation

Camel saddle 骆驼鞍

Improvements to saddles supported transport across desert routes.

Organised **caravans** 商队 brought merchants and animals together for long journeys.

Cargo and conditions

Gold moved north from West Africa and **salt** 盐 south. The desert imposed different constraints from a monsoon sea route.

Transport equipment helped; one invention alone does not explain all political and commercial growth.

Mali: connect state activity to exchange

Mali 马里帝国

Expansion brought more people into its economy and trade networks. Control, protection and taxation could connect political power with trade.

Wealth and wider contacts

Mansa Musa's pilgrimage demonstrated Mali's wealth and connections to the Islamic world. Commercial and religious contacts could overlap.

State support could facilitate exchange; do not assume every empire protected every trader equally.

6

Cultural and Environmental Consequences

Cultural diffusion: specify what moved and where

Example

Connection to explain

Religious traditions

Buddhist influence in East Asia; Hindu and Buddhist influence in Southeast Asia; Islam across parts of Africa and Asia.

Technical knowledge

Gunpowder and paper from China circulated through interregional contacts.

Local interaction

Traders, travellers and specialists could carry knowledge; local adoption could change how it was used.

Diffusion is a process of transmission and adoption, not proof that every receiving society changed identically.

Traveller accounts are evidence to interpret

Travellers 旅行者

Ibn Battuta, Marco Polo and Margery Kempe wrote accounts as connections intensified. A traveller's experiences offer a particular view, not a census of everyone.

Questions for a source

Who wrote it, for whom and why?
What could the writer observe directly? How might position and purpose shape the description?

Do not invent a quotation or assume a traveller's claims are automatically representative.

Your turn: reason about a supplied source description

Original practice — attempt before the check

Original fictional source description: a merchant writes to potential partners praising a port's profitable markets. Identify a plausible purpose and explain one limit of using the account to represent life in the whole city.

Check: purpose affects what a source can establish

Worked reasoning

The writer may aim to attract business partners, so profitable commerce is especially relevant to the intended audience. The account can reveal a merchant's perspective, but praise of markets alone does not establish the experiences of every resident.

This is an invented source exercise, not an attributed medieval quotation.

Crop diffusion: connect movement to possible effects

Example

Bananas in Africa

New rice varieties in East Asia

Citrus in the Mediterranean

Historical relationship

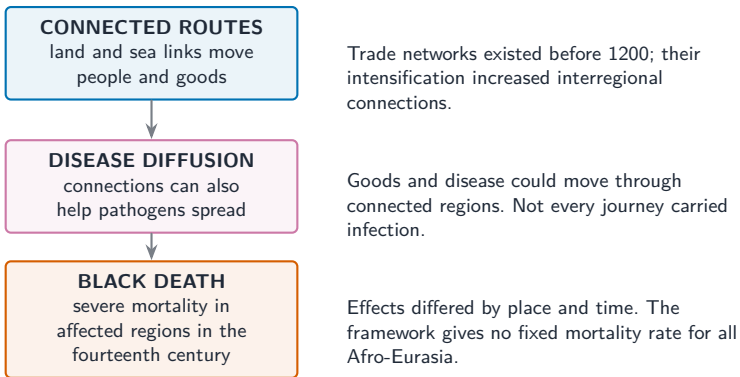
Crop movement could widen available agricultural resources.

Adoption could support production and population growth where conditions allowed.

Networks helped plants move across regions; local environments still mattered.

Do not infer an identical harvest or population outcome from the mere arrival of a crop.

Connected routes could also help disease spread



Severe losses were uneven. Urban change had several causes, not a universal four-step sequence.

The fate of cities varied

Growth

Rising productivity and expanding trade supported some commercial centres. Kashgar and Samarkand illustrate cities connected to the Silk Roads.

Decline

Warfare, epidemic disease or changing routes could damage cities. Different cities experienced different combinations and timings.

Connectivity could bring resources and exposure to risk. Growth in one place does not prove universal prosperity.

7

Comparison of Economic Exchange

Compare the same feature across networks

Silk Roads	What it carried silk, porcelain, spices high value, low bulk	What enabled it caravanserai, paper money, bills of exchange	What it changed wealthy route cities; artisans expand output
Indian Ocean	What it carried textiles, timber, grain bulk and luxury goods	What enabled it monsoons; compass; astrolabe; larger ships	What it changed Swahili states and Malacca; diasporic communities
Trans-Saharan	What it carried gold north, salt south	What enabled it camel saddle, organised caravans	What it changed Mali: route protection and taxation

Relative patterns, not exclusive cargo lists or identical outcomes

These are relative patterns and illustrative evidence, not exclusive cargo lists.

Your turn: make a supported cargo comparison

Original practice — attempt before the check

Explain one difference in typical cargo between the Silk Roads and Indian Ocean networks during 1200–1450. Refer to both networks and explain a transport mechanism.

Check: evidence from both, then the relationship

Worked reasoning

Both carried luxuries, but long-distance overland transport favoured high-value, low-bulk goods such as silk. Ships also made bulk cargoes such as timber and grain more feasible because larger carrying capacity lowered transport cost per unit.

This is an original worked explanation, not a guaranteed full-score answer to every exam question.

Your turn: test an overgeneralised argument

Original practice — attempt before the check

Assess: “Between 1200 and 1450, growing exchange brought only benefits.” Use one cultural or economic example and one environmental example, then qualify the judgement.

Check: qualify a claim with contrasting evidence

Worked reasoning

Expanded trade supported cities and circulation of cultural or technical knowledge. It also helped epidemic disease move, with severe human losses. Benefits and harms varied by people, place and time, so the universal claim is not defensible.

These are building blocks for an argument. A complete essay must respond to its actual prompt and rubric.

8

Exam tips

Match the response to the command

Command

What the response needs

Identify

A relevant development in the requested period.

Explain

Information about how or why a development or relationship occurred.

Evaluate

A defensible judgement supported by relevant evidence and reasoning.

The word “because” earns no automatic credit; the historically accurate reasoning matters.

Grounding and exam-format honesty

Sources read

Local CED topics 2.1–2.7, PDF pp. 61–70 (printed 54–63). Local 2024 set 2 SAQ 3 and scheme informed state-building, communication and cultural-transfer demands; 2025 set 2 SAQ 3A and scheme informed gunpowder diffusion before 1500.

Course content is unchanged for May 2027; exam presentation changes. Earlier no-stimulus questions inform historical demand, not the current paper template. Full source links are in the handout.

Check yourself

- 1 Explain how a bill of exchange differs from a camel saddle as an enabler.
- 2 Compare monsoon knowledge with a navigational instrument.
- 3 Explain one cultural-transfer mechanism under Mongol rule.
- 4 Use evidence from both networks to compare a common feature.
- 5 Qualify the claim that expanding connections benefited everyone.