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# The rise of modern international order

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**Chapter 2**

<span style="color:red">The Rise of Modern International Order</span>

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**Framing Questions**

- When did modern international order emerge?

- To what extent was the emergence of modern international order shaped by the experience of the West?

- Is history important to understanding contemporary world politics?

**&lt;end feature&gt;**

**Reader's guide**

This chapter explores the rise of modern international order. It begins by surveying international orders before the modern period, examining how trade and transport helped to tie together diverse parts of the world. The chapter then examines debates about the 1648 Peace of Westphalia, which is often said to mark the origins of modern international order. Next it turns to 19th century developments, ranging from industrialization to imperialism, which played a major role in the formation of modern international order. Particular attention is paid to the main ideas that underpinned modern international order, the 'shrinking of the planet' that arose from the advent of new technologies, and the emergence of a radically unequal international order. The chapter closes by assessing the significance of 19th century developments for 20th and 21st century international relations.

**Introduction**

All international systems are made up of multiple political units. Whether these units are empires, city-states or nation-states, the key feature that distinguishes international from domestic politics is that, in the international sphere, political units are forced to co-exist in the absence of an overarching authority. This means that International Relations (IR) is fundamentally concerned with the issue of 'political multiplicity' (Rosenberg 2010). Its guiding question is how order can be generated in an environment that is fragmented rather than unified.

Political multiplicity, though, is only part of the story. Although international systems are fragmented, this does not stop political units from interacting with each other. These interactions are what make up **international orders:** regularized practices of exchange among discrete political units that recognize each other to be independent. International orders have existed ever since political units began to interact with each other on a regular basis, whether through trade, diplomacy or the exchange of ideas. In this sense, world history has seen a great many *regional* international orders. However, it is only over the past two centuries or so that we can speak of a distinctly modern international order in the sense of the construction of a *global* economy, a *global* system of states, and the *global* circulation of ideas. This chapter explores both historical international orders and the emergence of the modern, global international order to show how world politics has become marked by increasingly deep exchanges between peoples and political units.

One of the most noteworthy aspects of the contemporary international order is the dominance of 'Western' ideas and institutions. 'The West' is usually taken to mean Europe (with particular emphasis on the northern and western parts of the continent) and the Americas (with particular emphasis on the United States). The West looms large in the functioning of the global political economy – just think of the importance of London and New York as financial centers. The West is also central to global political institutions – the

main home of the United Nations (UN) is in New York and most of the permanent members of the UN Security Council are Western powers. Western ideas (such as human rights) and Western culture (particularly music) are well known around the world. But why is this the case? Some people argue that Western power has arisen because of its innate strengths: liberal ideas, democratic practices and free markets (e.g. Landes 1998). These people tend to see Western power as both natural and enduring. Others see Western domination as rooted in specific historical circumstances, many of them the product of practices of exploitation and subjugation (e.g. Hobson 2004). For these people, Western power in the contemporary world is unusual and temporary. This debate is discussed in the **Opposing opinions** feature in this chapter.

For the purposes of this chapter, it is important to note two preliminary points. First, the 'rise of the West' has occurred only relatively recently, i.e. over the past two or three centuries. Second, many aspects of its rise can be traced to *international* processes, such as imperialism and the global expansion of the market. These international dynamics allowed a small number of mostly Western states to project their power around the world. As they did so, they generated a range of new actors that subsequently became leading participants in international affairs: nation-states, transnational corporations, and intergovernmental (IGOs) and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). They also helped to bind the globe together through new forms of transport (such as the steamship) and technologies (such as the telegraph). This chapter explores these dynamics and explains how they helped to shape contemporary world politics.

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**Opposing Opinions: The Rise of the West**

**Was the Rise of the West the result of its own strengths?**

FOR

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***The West alone had inclusive political institutions***. Representative institutions promoted negotiation among elites and heightened links between elites and publics.

***The Enlightenment promoted new forms of scientific thinking***. These ideas fostered an independence of thought and an experimental tradition that, in turn, led to advances in engineering and the sciences.

***The West pioneered a range of new economic practices***. Double entry bookkeeping and comparable innovations allowed for a clear evaluation of profit, thereby enabling companies to provide credit in depersonalized form – the hallmark of commercial capitalism.

***The West enjoyed unusually beneficial geographical circumstances***. For example, British industrialization was aided greatly by the unusual co-location of coal and iron.


AGAINST

***Very few, if any, of the materials that were fundamental to the rise of the West originated from within Western societies***. Most notably, cotton is not indigenous to England. Similarly, Europe's pre-industrial trade with Asia was largely underpinned by gold and silver mined in Africa and the Americas.

***For many centuries, Asian powers were held in respect, even awe, in many parts of Europe***. The West interacted with Asian powers sometimes as political equals and, at other times, as supplicants. Between 1600 and 1800, India and China were so dominant in manufacturing and many areas of technology that the rise of the West is sometimes linked to its relative 'backwardness'.

***European success was predicated on imperialism***. Between 1815 and 1865, Britain alone conquered new territories at an average rate of 100,000 square miles per year. Many of the resources that enabled the rise of the West originated from imperialism: Indian textiles, Chinese porcelain, African slaves and colonial labor.

*European power was premised on multiple forms of inequality*. Particularly crucial was the restructuring of economies into a primary producing 'periphery' and a secondary producing 'core'. Western powers established a global economy in which they eroded local economic practices and imposed their own price and production systems. This allowed Western states to turn an age-old, and more or less balanced system of trade in elite goods, into a global market sustained by mass trade and marked by inequality.

1. Did the 'rise of the West' stem from its own distinct institutions and ideas?

2. To what extent was Western power forged through its encounters with non-Western states?

3. What was the basis for the 'rise of the West'?

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**Historical international orders**

When should we start thinking about the emergence of 'international orders'? Although the term 'international order' is a relatively recent innovation, some accounts trace the historical origins of international orders to the period when nomadic groups first settled and became sedentary communities (Buzan and Little 2000). The earliest recorded example of this process took place around 3-4,000 years ago in Sumer – modern day Iraq. Sedentary communities in Sumer accumulated agricultural surpluses that allowed for year round subsistence. These surpluses generated two dynamics: first, they fostered trade between groups; and second, they put groups at risk of attack. The response of sedentary communities was to increase their capabilities: they got bigger, they developed specializations (such as dividing people into distinct ranks of soldiers and cultivators), and they developed political hierarchies, establishing order through the command of a leader or group of leaders (Buzan and Little 2000). These leaders increasingly interacted with their counterparts in other

groups, establishing rituals that we now know as diplomacy. In the process, these communities generated regularized practices of exchange among discrete political units that recognize each other to be independent – the definition of international orders.

Beyond ancient Sumer can be found a great many historical international orders. Indeed, if we take world history as our canvass, every region in the world has been home to regular, widely shared practices of commerce, war, diplomacy and law. Many of these historical international orders developed through encounters with other parts of the world: the extensive interactions between the Byzantine and Ottoman empires is one example; a second is the early modern international order centered on the Indian Ocean that incorporated actors from Asia, Africa and Europe (Phillips and Sharman 2015).

Most account of international order, however, begin not in early modern South Asia, but in early modern Europe. The majority of accounts date the birth of 'modern' international order to a specific date – the 1648 Peace of Westphalia, which marked the end of the wars of religion in Europe (Ikenberry 2001; Philpott 2001; Spruyt 1994). Westphalia is seen as important because it instituted the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio* ('whose realm, their religion'). This principle, it is argued, acted as a brake on the reasons by which states could go to war. After Westphalia, so the story goes, European states could no longer intervene in other states on the basis of religious belief. In other words, states assumed **sovereignty** over their own territories – first in terms of their right of confession, and later, over other spheres of activity, such as the ways in which they organized their governance and economies. In short: Westphalia is said to matter because it established the principle of 'sovereign territoriality' (a claim to political authority over a particular geographical space).

A number of criticisms of the Westphalian narrative have emerged in recent years. Three of these are worth considering. First, Westphalia was not a European-wide agreement, but a local affair – its main concerns were to safeguard the internal affairs of the Holy Roman

Empire and to reward the victors of the Wars of Religion (France and Sweden). The impact of Westphalia on *European* international relations, let alone *global* affairs, was not as great as is often imagined (Teschke 2003). Second, even within this limited space, the gains of Westphalia were relatively slight. Although German principalities assumed more control over their own affairs after 1648, this was within a dual constitutional structure that stressed loyalty to the Empire and that was sustained by a court system in which imperial courts adjudicated over both interstate disputes and internal affairs (a bit like the modern day European Union). Third, Westphalia actually set limits to the principle of sovereignty established at the 1555 Peace of Augsburg, for example by retracting the rights of polities to choose their own religion. Westphalia decreed that each territory would retain the religion it held on 1 January 1624. For the most part, after 1648, European international order remained a patchwork of marriage, inheritance and hereditary claims. Imperial rivalries, hereditary succession and religious conflicts remained at the heart of European wars for several centuries after Westphalia.

Although Westphalia is usually considered to be the basis for 'modern' international order, it is not the only starting point for thinking about these issues. In part, the choice of when to date the emergence of modern international order depends on what people consider to be the most important components of international order. In the paragraphs above, international orders were described as: 'regularized practices of exchange among discrete political units that recognize each other to be independent'. But what form do these 'regularized patterns of exchange' take?

One type of regularized exchange occurs through economic interactions. Here we might stress the importance of long-distance trade routes in silks, cotton, sugar, tea, linen, porcelain and spices that connected places as diversely situated as Malacca, Samarkand, Hangzhou, Genoa, Acapulco, Manila and the Malabar Coast for many centuries before Westphalia

(Goldstone 2002). Another example emerges from systems of transport and communication. Here, we could highlight the European 'voyages of discovery' during the 15th and 16th centuries, which opened up sea-lanes around Africa, and across the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans (Hobson 2004). As discussed above, when Europeans moved into the Indian Ocean, they found a well-developed international order in place. India's huge coastline, skilled artisans and plentiful traders had long made it a central node in the trans-Eurasian exchange of goods, ideas and institutions. Further east could be found an equally well-developed regional international order, mainly thanks to Chinese advances in ocean-going shipbuilding and navigation techniques, which were in many respects more advanced than those of the Europeans.

It is also possible to combine economic and infrastructural interactions, highlighting dynamics such as the trafficking of African slaves, which fostered a 'triangular trade' in which the demand for sugar in London fostered the plantation system in the Caribbean, which was supplied by African slaves and North American provisions (Blackburn 1997). This vile feature of international order was linked both to increasing trade and advances in transport technologies; it helped to forge the Atlantic into a regional international order. Also important to this process was the increasing number of ecological transfers between the Americas and Europe: maize, potatoes, tomatoes, beans and tobacco were imported from the 'New World', while horses, cattle, pigs, chickens, sheep, mules, oxen, vines, wheat, rice and coffee travelled in the opposite direction. Even more important was the trans-Atlantic transfer of diseases: smallpox, measles, influenza and yellow fever killed two-thirds of the population of the Americas by the middle of the 16th century (Crosby 2004). These examples help to illustrate the ways in which, over time, regularized exchanges among political units generate forms of **interdependence** in which events in one place have a major effect on others. One of

the consequences of the increasingly dense interactions that have characterized international orders over recent centuries has been heightened levels of interdependence.

Despite the plentiful examples of regional international orders in world history, before the last two centuries or so, the ties of interdependence that bound international orders were relatively limited in scope. For example, until the 19th century, the vast majority of economic activities did not take place over large distances, but in 'microeconomies' with a 20-mile circumference (Schwartz 2000: 14). Those activities that went beyond the micro-scale, such as the long-distance trading corridors noted above, were only lightly connected. A journey halfway around the world would have taken a year or more in the 16th century, five months in 1812, one month in 1912, and less than a day in the contemporary world. In general, the pace of change during the period before the 19th century was much slower than the rapid, incessant change that has become a feature of the past two centuries. In this sense, although we can speak of numerous *regional* international orders before the 19th century, we should locate the emergence of a distinctly *modern* international order only in the last two centuries.

What makes the last two centuries such a strong candidate for thinking about the emergence of modern international order? As noted in the previous paragraph, during this period, multiple regional international orders were linked in a global order in which all parts of the world were closely connected. This period is sometimes known as the 'global transformation': a term used to denote the shift from a world of multiple *regional* international systems to one characterized by a *global* international order (Buzan and Lawson 2015). The global transformation brought to an end a long period in which human history was mainly local and contact among peoples fairly light. It replaced this with an era in which human history was increasingly global and contact among far-flung peoples intense. For better or worse, and often both together, the 19th century saw the transformation of the daily

condition of peoples nearly everywhere on the planet (Hobsbawm 1962; Bayly 2004; Osterhammel 2014).

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**Key Points**

- International orders are regularized practices of exchange among discrete political units that recognize each other to be independent.

- It is possible to speak of multiple international orders in world history, perhaps even as far back as ancient Sumer.

- In International Relations (IR), the 1648 Peace of Westphalia is often considered to be the benchmark date from which 'modern' international order emerged.

- More recently, scholars have viewed the emergence of modern international order as the product of the last two centuries, as this is when various regional systems were forged into a deeply interdependent, *global* international order.

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**How did modern international order emerge?**

Up until around 1800, there were no major differences in living standards amongst the most developed parts of world: in the late 18$^{th}$ century, GDP per capita levels in the Yangtze River Delta of China were around 10% lower than the wealthiest parts of Europe, less than the differences today between most of the European Union (EU) and the US. Major sites of production and consumption such as Hokkaido, Malacca, Hangzhou and Samarkand enjoyed relative parity with their European counterparts across a range of economic indicators, and were technologically equal or superior in many areas of production (Pomeranz 2000).

A century later, the most advanced areas of Europe and the United States had levels of GDP per capita between tenfold and twelvefold greater than their Asian equivalents. Whereas in 1820, Asian powers produced 60.7% of the world's GDP, and 'the West' (defined as Europe and the United States) only 34.2%; by 1913, the West held 68.3% of global GDP and Asia only 24.5%. Between 1800 and 1900, China's share of global production dropped from 33% to 6%, India's from 20% to 2%, and what we now call the 'Third World' from 75% to 7% (Maddison 2001). The rapid turnaround during the 19th century represents a major shift in global power.

What happened to generate this shift in global power? There are a number of explanations for what is sometimes called the 'great divergence' between East and West (Pomeranz 2000). Some accounts concentrate on innovations such as the capacity of liberal constitutions in the West to restrict levels of domestic conflict (e.g. North et al 2009). Others, in contrast, focus on the frequency of European inter-state wars: European powers were involved in inter-state wars in nearly 75% of the years between 1494 and 1975 (Mann 2012: 24). The frequency of European inter-state wars, it is argued, led to technological and tactical advances, the development of standing armies, and the expansion of permanent bureaucracies (Tilly 1990). In this way, 19th century European states combined their need for taxation (in order to fight increasingly costly wars) with support for financial institutions that could, in turn, deliver the funds required for investment in armaments. A third set of explanations highlights the role of ideas in producing the great divergence, most notably the scientific advances associated with the European Enlightenment (e.g. Israel 2010). A fourth set of approaches concentrate on the geographical and demographic advantages enjoyed by the West: a temperate climate that was inhospitable to parasites and later marriage habits, which led to lower fertility rates and, in turn, lower population densities (e.g. Jones 1981). Finally, some accounts stress the role of capitalism in generating Western 'take-off', whether this is seen as emerging from favorable

access to credit and bills of exchange (Kennedy 1989), or through the ways in which private property regimes enabled capital to be released for investment in manufacturing and finance (Brenner 1985).

Relatively few of these accounts stress the international dimensions of the global transformation. Yet these were significant. First, European success was predicated on imperialism. Between 1878 and 1913, Western states claimed 8.6 million square miles of overseas territory, amounting to one-sixth of the Earth's land surface (Abernathy 2000: 81). By the outbreak of the First World War, 80% of the world's land surface, not including uninhabited Antarctica, was under the control of Western powers and one state – Britain – claimed nearly a quarter of the world's territory. Germany's colonies in East Africa were forced into producing cotton for export just as Dutch Indonesia became a vehicle for the production of sugar, tobacco and, later, rubber. In a similar vein, after the British East India Company was ceded the right to administer and raise taxes in Bengal, they made the cultivation of opium obligatory, subsequently exporting it to China in a trading system propped-up by force of arms. Through imperialism, European powers exchanged raw materials for manufactured goods and used violence to ensure low production prices. Although the gains from these circuits are difficult to measure precisely, they were certainly profitable. The Atlantic slave trade, for example, returned profits to British investors at an average rate of 9.5% at the turn of the 19th century (Blackburn 1997: 510).

Second, European powers assumed control, often coercively, of the trade of commodities as diverse as sandalwood, tea, otter skins and sea cucumbers, as well as those in silver, cotton and opium. Europeans used silver from the Americas and opium from India in order to buy entry into regional trading systems. This led to radically unequal patterns of trade: while Britain provided 50% of Argentina's imports and exports, and virtually all of its capital investment, in 1900; Argentina provided just 10% of Britain's imports and exports (Mann

2012: 39). It also led to radically unequal patterns of growth: whereas India's GDP grew at an average of 0.2% per year in the century before independence, Britain's grew at ten times this rate (Silver and Arrighi 2003: 338). India provided a 'colonial tribute' to Britain that saw its budget surpluses expatriated to London so that they could be used to reduce British trade deficits. The inequality that marks modern international order is discussed in the final section of this chapter.

Third, Western advances arose from the emulation and fusion of non-Western ideas and technologies. Technologies used in the cotton industry, for example, drew heavily on earlier Asian advances (Hobson 2004). These ideas and technologies were carried, in part, via migration. Up to 37 million laborers left India, China, Malaya and Java during the 19th century and early 20th century, many of them to work as bonded labor in imperial territories. Over 50 million Europeans also emigrated between 1800 and 1914, most of them to the United States. By 1914, half of the population of the US was foreign born. Six million Europeans emigrated to Argentina between 1857 and 1930; at the onset of the First World War, one third of Argentinians, and half the population of Buenos Aires, had been born outside the country (Crosby 2004: 301).

The great divergence was therefore fuelled by a global intensification in the circulation of people, ideas and resources – what was described in the previous section as interdependence. More precisely, it can be linked to three main dynamics: industrialization, the emergence of 'rational' states, and imperialism.

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**Box 2.1: The importance of the 19th century**

'The nineteenth century saw the birth of international relations as we know it today'

*(Osterhammel 2014: 393)*

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During the 19th century, 'social relations were assembled, dismantled and reassembled'

*(Wolf 1997: 391)*

'Nothing, it seemed, could stand in the way of a few western gunboats or regiments bringing with them trade and bibles'

*(Hobsbawm 1962: 365)*

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## Industrialization

Industrialization took place in two main waves. The first (mainly British) wave occurred in the early part of the 19th century and was centered on cotton, coal and iron. Here the crucial advance was the capture of inanimate sources of energy, particularly the advent of steam power, an innovation that enabled the biggest increase in the availability of power sources for several thousand years. Also crucial was the application of engineering to blockages in production, such as the development of machinery to pump water efficiently out of mineshafts. Engineering and technology combined to generate substantial gains in productivity: whereas a British spinner at the end of the 18th century took 300 hours to produce 100 pounds of cotton, by 1830, the same task took only 135 hours; by 1850, 18 million Britons used as much fuel energy as 300 million inhabitants of Qing China (Goldstone 2002: 364).

The second (mainly German and American) wave of industrialization took place in the last quarter of the century and was centered on advances in chemicals, pharmaceuticals and electronics. Once again, new sources of energy were crucial, with oil and electricity emerging alongside coal, and internal combustion engines replacing steam piston engines. The oil industry took off in Russia, Canada and the US from the middle of the 19th century, initially

to provide kerosene for lighting. Before the century's end, pipelines and tankers were bringing oil to a global market, and further advances in distillation and mechanical engineering were opening up its use as a fuel. During the 1880s, electricity began to be generated and distributed from hydroelectric and steam-powered stations. Advances in light metals and electrics, allied to the use of oil products for fuel, provided an impetus to the development of cars, planes and ships.

These two waves of industrialization helped to produce a dramatic expansion of the world market. After several centuries in which the volume of world trade had increased by an annual average of less than 1%, trade rose by over 4% in the half century after 1820 Osterhammel 2014: 726). By the early years of the 20th century, world trade was increasing at a rate of 10% per year, increasing levels of interdependence and heightening practices of exchange. The expansion of the market brought new opportunities for accumulating power, particularly because of the close relationship between industrialization in the West and de-industrialization elsewhere. For example, Indian textiles were either banned from Britain or levied with high tariffs – the British government tripled duties on Indian goods during the 1790s and raised them by a factor of nine in the first two decades of the 19th century. In contrast, British manufacturing products were forcibly imported into India without duty. Between 1814 and 1828, British cloth exports to India rose from 800,000 yards to over 40 million yards; while during the same period, Indian cloth exports to Britain halved. For many centuries before 'the global transformation', India's merchant class had produced the garments that 'clothed the world' (Parthasarathi 2011: 22). By 1850, the English county of Lancashire was the new center of a global textiles industry.

Rational states

The extension of the market was accompanied by important changes in how states were organized. During the 19th century, states began to assume greater control over the use of force within their territory. This was not as straightforward as it might seem when viewed from the vantage point of the contemporary world and its nearly 200 nation-states (see **Chapter 27**). In the 18th century, institutions such as the Dutch East India Company held a constitutional warrant to 'make war, conclude treaties, acquire territory and build fortresses' (Stern 2011). These companies remained influential throughout the 19th century: the British parliament provided a concession of several million acres of land to the British North Borneo Company as late as 1881, while the Imperial British East Africa Company and the British South Africa Company also held state-like powers of governance.

In general, though, after the French Revolution in 1789, armies and navies became more distinctly national, increasingly coming under the direct control of the state. Although nation-states co-existed with other political units – and most Western polities were states and empires simultaneously – there was a general 'caging' of authority within states (Mann 2012). Most notably, states became staffed by permanent bureaucracies, selected by merit and formalized through new legal codes. State personnel in the last quarter of the century grew from 67,000 to 535,000 in Britain and from 55,000 to over a million in Prussia/Germany. During the same period, state-military personnel tripled in Britain and quadrupled in Prussia/Germany. The term 'rational state' refers to the ways in which states become organized less through interpersonal relations and family ties, and more by abstract bureaucracies such as a civil service and a nationally organized military.

Once again, there was a distinctly international dimension to this process: the modern, professional civil service was formed in India before being exported to Britain; cartographic techniques used to map colonial spaces were reimported into Europe to serve as the basis for territorial claims; and imperial armies acted as the shock troops in conflicts in many parts of

the world. Britain deployed Indian police officers, bureaucrats and orderlies in China, Africa and the Middle East, and Indian troops fought in 15 British colonial wars. Other Western states also made extensive use of colonial forces: 70% of the Dutch army deployed in the Dutch East Indies were colonial forces, while 80% of the French expeditionary forces that fought in North and East Africa were colonial conscripts (MacDonald 2014: 39-40). These imperial wars increased the coercive capacities of European states, while requiring that states raise extra revenues, which they often achieved through taxation. This, in turn, fuelled further state development.

Imperialism

Until the 19th century, nearly three-quarters of the world's population lived in large, fragmented, ethnically mixed agrarian empires. During the 19th century, these empires were swamped by mono-racial Western powers. The bulk of European imperialism took place during the 'Scramble for Africa', which saw European powers assume direct control of large parts of Africa. But experiences of imperialism went much further than this. Between 1810 and 1870, the US carried out 71 territorial annexations and military interventions (Go 2011: 39). The US first became a continental empire, seizing territory from Native Americans, Spanish and Mexicans. It then built an overseas empire, extending its authority over Cuba, Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, Guam, the Philippines, Samoa and the Virgin Islands. Other settler states also became colonial powers in their own right, including Australia and New Zealand in the Pacific.

Imperialism took many forms. In the case of the British, their imperial web included direct-rule colonies (e.g. India after 1857), settler colonies (e.g. Australia), protectorates (e.g. Brunei), bases (e.g. Gibraltar), treaty ports (e.g. Shanghai), and spheres of influence (e.g. Argentina). The image of a late 19th century map of the world in which imperial territories

are represented by a single color is, therefore, highly misleading. British India included several hundred 'Princely States' that retained a degree of 'quasi-sovereignty', as did nearly 300 'native states' in Dutch East Asia. Where imperialism was successful, it relied on establishing partnerships with local power brokers: the Straits Chinese, the Krio of West Africa, the 'teak-wallahs' of Burma, and others (Darwin 2012: 178). Two hundred Dutch officials and a much larger number of Indonesian intermediaries ran a cultivation system that incorporated two million agricultural workers. A little over 75,000 French administrators were responsible for 60 million colonial subjects (Mann 2012: 47).

Imperialism was deeply destructive. At times, this destruction took the form of ecocide. Manchuria was deforested by the Japanese in the interests of its mining and lumber companies, while 'wild lands' in India were cleared by the British so that nomadic pastoralists could be turned into tax-paying cultivators. At other times, destruction took the form of genocide. The Belgians were responsible for the deaths of up to ten million Congolese during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In the opening years of the 20th century, Germany carried out a systematic genocide against the Nama and Herero peoples in its South West African territories, reducing their population by 80% and 50% respectively. Similar stories could be told about the conduct of the Americans in the Philippines, the Spanish in Cuba, the Japanese in China, the British in Kenya, the French in Algeria, and the Australians in the Pacific. Overall, the casualty list of imperialism numbered tens of millions (Osterhammel 2014: 124-7).

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**Key Points**

- After 1800, there was a 'great divergence' between some Western states and much of the rest of the world.

- There were three main sources of the 'great divergence': industrialization, the 'rational' state and imperialism. These three dynamics served as the mutually reinforcing foundations of modern international order.

- These dynamics were deeply intertwined with international processes, most notably industrialization with de-industrialization, and rational states with imperialism.

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**Box 2.2: Key dates in the emergence of modern international order**

- 1789/1791: The French and Haitian revolutions begin a long 'wave' of 'Atlantic Revolutions' that lasts until the 1820s. These revolutions introduced new ideas such as republicanism and popular sovereignty, and challenged the central place of slavery in the Atlantic economy.

- 1842: In the First Opium War the British defeat China, perhaps the greatest classical Asian power.

- 1857: The Indian Revolt prompts Britain to assume formal control of the Indian sub-continent, while serving as a forerunner to later anti-colonial movements.

- 1862: The British Companies Act marks a shift to limited liability firms, opening the way to the formation of transnational corporations as significant international actors.

- 1865: The International Telecommunications Union becomes the first standing intergovernmental organization, symbolizing the rise of permanent institutions of global governance.

- 1866: The opening of the first transatlantic telegraph cable begins the wiring together of the planet with instantaneous communication.

- 1884: The Prime Meridian Conference establishes world standard time, easing the integration of trade, diplomacy and communication.

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- 1905: Japan defeats Russia in the Russo-Japanese War, becoming the first non-Western, non-white great power.

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**The consequences of the global transformation**

The previous section examined the main dynamics that underpinned the global transformation. This section explores three of its main consequences: the 'shrinking' of the planet; the emergence of international organizations and non-governmental organizations; and the development of an unequal international order.

Shrinking the planet

As discussed in previous sections, a thin global trading system existed for many centuries before 'the global transformation'. Lightweight luxury goods such as silk, porcelain, spices, precious metals and gems moved across Eurasia and other transnational trading circuits for millennia, although generally at a slow pace. During the 18$^{th}$ century, it took three years for a caravan to make the round trip from Moscow to Peking. This meant that, until the 19$^{th}$ century, international orders tended to be somewhat limited in scale. Two thousand years ago, imperial Rome and Han China knew of each other, and had a significant trade in luxury goods. But their armies never met, they had no diplomatic relations, and the trade between them was indirect rather than direct, taking the form of a relay through a range of intermediaries.

The infrastructural gains prompted by the global transformation generated major efficiency savings: communication times between Britain and India dropped from a standard of around six months in the 1830s (via sailing ship), to just over one month in the 1850s (via rail and steamship), to the same day in the 1870s (via telegraph) (Curtin 1984: 251-2). There

were three main sources that lay behind these efficiency savings: steamships, railways and the telegraph.

During the 19th century, as steam engines became smaller, more powerful and more fuel-efficient, they began to be installed in ships, initially driving paddle wheels, and later the more efficient screw propeller. As a result of these improvements, ocean freight rates dropped by 80% during the century as a whole, with a corresponding expansion in the volume of trade. One million tons of goods were shipped worldwide in 1800; by 1840, ships carried 20 million tons of tradable goods; by 1870, they carried 80 million tons (Belich 2009: 107). By 1913, steam tonnage accounted for 97.7% of global shipping. Steam engines both freed ships from dependence on wind (although at the cost of dependence on coal or oil) and tripled their average speed. Because steamships were not dependent on weather or season, they provided predictable, regular services to replace sporadic and irregular links by sail.

Equally important was the arrival of railways. Widespread railway building began in Britain during the 1820s, spreading to the United States, France and Germany during the 1830s. By 1840 there were 4,500 miles of track worldwide, expanding to 23,500 miles by 1850 and 130,000 miles by 1870; by the end of the century, there were half a million miles of track worldwide (Hobsbawm 1962: 61). As with steamships, the expansion of the railway had a major effect on trade. By the 1880s the cost of transportation by rail in Britain was less than half of that by canals and a sixth of that by road. The figures for the US were even more dramatic, with late 19th century railways between 30 and 70 times cheaper than trade via road in 1800. Investment in railways served to internationalize capital: France invested heavily in Russian railways, while British investors provided the capital for railways in continental Europe, the Americas and Asia. By 1913, 41% of Britain's direct overseas investments were in railways (Topik and Wells 2012: 644).

Railways had two further effects on international order. First, they prompted the emergence of timetables and, in turn, pressed states to regularize time. World standard time was pioneered at the Prime Meridian Conference in Washington in 1884 and the universal day of twenty-four time zones was consolidated at the 1912 Paris International Conference on Time. Second, as railways spread, they became pipelines from continental interiors to coastal ports, linking with steamships to provide a global transportation system. Railways linked Argentinian food producers to the port of Buenos Aires, Australian wool to the port of Sydney, and South African diamonds and gold to the port of Cape Town. This allowed Western states to import food and other primary products in a way that had not been possible before, and they could establish mass production industries such as cotton that depended on raw materials grown in India, Egypt and the US. The combination of railways and steamships underpinned the division of labor between an industrial 'core' and a commodity producing 'periphery' that first emerged as a defining feature of the global political economy during the 19th century.

The final breakthrough technology was the telegraph. During the 1840s, telegraph networks spread throughout Europe and North America, increasing from 2,000 miles in 1849 to 111,000 miles by 1869. By 1870, a submarine telegraph system linked the UK and India. By 1887, over 200,000 kilometers of underwater cable connected (mainly imperial) nodes in the world economy. By 1903, there was a global network in place consisting of over 400,000 kilometers of submarine cabling (Osterhammel 2014: 719). Use of the telegraph was widespread, if uneven. At the end of the 19th century, two-thirds of the world's telegraph lines were British owned. In 1913, Europeans sent 329 million telegraphs, while Americans sent 150 million, Asians 60 million and Africans 17 million (Topik and Wells 2012: 663).

The impact of the telegraph on the speed of communications was dramatic: a letter sent from Paris to St. Petersburg took 20 days in 1800, 30 hours in 1900, and 30 minutes in 1914.

This, in turn, had a major impact on key features of international relations, from war and diplomacy to trade and consumption. Governments could learn about political and military developments almost as they happened, while financiers and traders had faster access to information about supply, prices and market movements. One consequence of this was the formation of command structures over long distances. With instant communication, ambassadors, admirals and generals were not granted as much independence of action, and firms kept tighter control over their distant subsidiaries.

Steamships, railways and the telegraph were the core technologies of modern international order, adding greatly to levels of interdependence and prompting far deeper practices of exchange. In combination, they helped to construct a global economy and a single space of political-military interactions. They also ratcheted up cultural encounters, enabling (and often requiring) people to interact on a previously unprecedented scale. Increasingly, the human population knew itself as a single entity for the first time.

### International Organizations and Non-Governmental Organizations

Technological changes created demands for international coordination and standardization. This resulted in the emergence of intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) as permanent features of international order. The link between these dynamics is made clear by the functions of most early IGOs: the International Telecommunications Union (1865), the Universal Postal Union (UPU) (1874), the International Bureau of Weights and Measures (1875), and the International Conference for Promoting Technical Unification on the Railways (1882). The UPU, for example, responded to the need for inter-operability among state and imperial postal systems that was created by new forms of transport.

As they developed, IGOs and international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) covered a wide range of issue-areas, from religion and politics, to sport and the environment.

By the 1830s, transnational associations were taking part in vigorous public debates on issues as varied as trade policy and population growth. Several prominent INGOs, including the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and the International Red Cross, were formed in the 1850s and 1860s, as were issue-based groups such as those seeking to improve animal welfare, promote the arts, and formalize academic subjects ranging from botany to anthropology. The latter half of the 19th century saw a further growth in INGO activity with the emergence of a number of groups formed in response to the inequities of industrialization and, in the last part of the century, the first industrial era depression. An organized labor movement emerged in the second half of the 19th century. A further tranche of INGOs put pressure on states to enact faster, deeper processes of democratization. A transnational movement for women's suffrage emerged in the last quarter of the 19th century; by the early years of the 20th century, the membership of the International Council of Women counted up to five million women around the world (Osterhammel 2014: 507).

## Inequality

As previous sections have explored, the global transformation generated a deeply unequal international order. This section explores this inequality through two issue-areas: racism and economic exploitation.

### *Racism*

During the last quarter of the 19th century, a new form of racism emerged. **'Scientific' racism** was based on a radically unequal view of world politics. Its proponents argued that it was possible – and desirable – to establish a political hierarchy based on biological markers, either visible (as in skin color) or according to bloodline (as in who counts as Jewish, black or Chinese). Broadly speaking, for 'scientific' racists, lighter skinned peoples inhabited the

highest rung on the evolutionary ladder and darker skinned peoples were situated at the bottom. These ideas allowed Europeans to racially demarcate zones within imperial territories, as well as homogenize diverse indigenous peoples, such as Native Americans, into a single category of 'Indians'. The result was the formation of an international order premised in large measure on a global 'color line' (Du Bois 1994[1903]). This color line, in turn, served as the basis for a global 'standard of civilization' (see **Case Study 2.1**).

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**Case study 2.1: The standard of civilization**

The idea that people around the world could be ranked, culturally and/or racially, was the hallmark of the 19th century 'standard of civilization'. The standard of civilization determined which parts of the world lay outside the 'civilized' realm of white, Christian peoples. Distinctions between the 'civilized' world of the white West, 'barbarians' (mostly light-skinned peoples with an urban 'high culture') and 'savages' (mostly dark skinned peoples without an urban 'high culture') formed the basis for a range of international practices, such as the rules of war. These rules distinguished between 'privileged belligerents' (inhabitants of the 'civilized' world) and 'unprivileged belligerents' (those living outside this zone). During the 19th century, privileged belligerents became subject to rules that determined the scope of legitimate violence, not least that it should be *discriminate* and *proportional*. Unprivileged combatants were considered to be outside such rules – violence in 'uncivilized' spaces took place without legal restrictions.

The standard of civilization was also central to the way in which Western powers interacted with other peoples. This interaction came in many forms: unequal treaties for those polities left nominally independent (like China); partial takeovers, such as protectorates, where most

functions of local government were allowed to continue, but finance, defense and foreign policy were handled by a Western power (as in the case of Sudan); and formal colonization, resulting in elimination as an independent entity (as in India after the 1857 revolt). Those states, like Japan, that sought to emulate European power, underwent both a restructuring of their domestic society through rapid 'modernization' and a reorientation of foreign policy towards imperialism: Japan invaded Taiwan in 1874 (annexing it formally in 1895), fought wars for overseas territory with both China (1894-5) and Russia (1904-5), and annexed Korea (1910). Becoming a 'civilized' member of international society meant not just abiding by European law and diplomacy; it also meant becoming an imperial power.

It is important to note that, in many ways, the standard of civilization was a moving target. When being 'civilized' was considered to be exclusively Christian, majority Muslim polities such as the Ottoman Empire fell automatically outside its scope. However, the shift to an idea of 'civilization' based on the 'modern' capacities of a state meant that, in theory, every state could be 'civilized'. This is one reason why the Ottomans, the Japanese and others embraced 'modernizing' projects – the implementing of legal, administrative and fiscal reforms held out the promise of equal international status. In theory, if less so in practice, 'civilization' was a ladder that could be climbed (see **Box 2.3**).

**Question 1**: What was the basis of the 'standard of civilization'?

**Question 2**: What was the impact of the 'standard of civilization' on the formation of modern international order?

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The global color line and its accompanying 'standard of civilization' were strengthened by mass emigration from Britain to Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa. These emigrations created 'settler' states ruled by white elites who saw themselves as inherently superior to indigenous peoples. The scale of this enterprise is striking: white settlers in Australia increased from 12,000 in 1810 to 1.25 million in 1860; one million white British emigrated to Canada between 1815 and 1865, multiplying the country's population by a factor of 7; in 1831, the white population of New Zealand was little more than 1,000. Fifty years later, it was 500,000; the white population of South Africa doubled during the 1890s alone (Belich 2009: 83). The cumulative effect of these repopulations was significant. Whereas at the beginning of the 19$^{th}$ century, the white English-speaking world was made up of 12 million (mostly poor) people, by 1930, it constituted 200 million (mostly rich) people.

The racism fostered by white emigration forged what W.E.B. Du Bois (1994 [1903]: 61) called: 'the new religion of whiteness'. Settler colonists became a racial caste united by fear of rebellion by the indigenous population and by a sense of their own cultural and racial superiority. As white Westerners became a 'global people', settlers helped to racialize international politics, making the color bar a globally recognized tool of discrimination.

*Economic exploitation*

Industrialization and associated processes, such as the commercialization of agriculture, were global in form. As profits from these processes could only be achieved through higher productivity, lower wages or the establishment of new markets, capitalist expansion was constant, leading to the development of both new areas of production (such as south-eastern Russia and central parts of the United States) and new products (such as potatoes). In 1900,

Malaya had around 5,000 acres of rubber production; by 1913, it contained 1.25 million acres (Wolf 1997: 325). Deindustrialization was equally rapid. As discussed in earlier sections, after 1800, the British government ensured that British products undercut Indian goods and charged prohibitive tariffs on Indian textiles. Within a generation or two, the deindustrialization of India meant that centuries-old skills in industries such as cloth dyeing, shipbuilding, metallurgy and gun making had been lost (Parthasarathi 2011).

The profits that accrued from capitalist expansion helped to forge an unequal global economy. In the cultivation system operated by the Netherlands in Indonesia, Dutch settlers enjoyed 50 times the level of per capita income as indigenous Indonesians. Around half of the revenue collected by the Indonesian government under the cultivation system was remitted to the Netherlands, constituting 20% of the state's net revenue (Osterhammel 2014: 443). This is just one example of the ways in which imperial powers adapted global production to their needs, setting up the modern hierarchy between providers of primary and secondary products. While colonized countries could be the main producers of primary products, as India was with tea, Burma with jute, Malaya with rubber, Nigeria with palm oil, Bolivia with tin, and Brazil with coffee, imperial powers maintained an advantage in high-value exports and finance. This division of labor and its accompanying upheavals was first established in the 19th century; it came to dominate the global political economy in the 20th century. The second **Case Study** illustrates how these dynamics worked.

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**Case Study 2: Imperialism with Chinese characteristics**

At the heart of imperialism was a claim about the material, cultural and moral superiority of the West. As the first case study illustrated, Western powers exacted vastly unequal terms of exchange with those they dominated, even if these polities had once been great empires, as

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was the case with China. Indeed, the decline of China helps to illustrate the ways in which imperialism served to transform international order during the 19$^{th}$ century.

During the 19$^{th}$ century, Western powers pressed China to open up to higher levels of trade. This was particularly important for the British, for whom the (illegal) opium trade was extremely lucrative: by the 1830s, the British were exporting 30,000 chests of opium from India to China each year, each of which carried 150 pounds of opium extract. In 1840, it was little surprise when Britain used the pretext of a minor incident involving the arrest of two British sailors to instigate conflict (the 'First Opium War') with China, which it won easily.

The Treaty of Nanjing that followed the war required China to cede Hong Kong to the British, pay an indemnity for starting the conflict and open up five new treaty ports. The treaty also legalized the opium trade. After defeat in the Second Opium War of 1856-60, which included the sacking of the Summer Palace in Peking by British and French forces, China signed a further series of unequal treaties, including some that guaranteed low tariffs on European imports. If these treaties weakened China, so too did domestic unrest. During the 1850s, a rebellion originating amongst the Hakka minority in Guangxi spread to the Yangtze region and the imperial capital of Nanjing. The rebellion was oriented around a strain of apocalyptic Christianity, blended with elements of Manchu and Confucian thought. Over the next decade, the 'Taiping Rebellion' mobilized over one million combatants and spread to an area the size of France and Germany combined. The conflict severely diminished imperial control. It also destroyed both land and livelihoods: between 1850 and 1873, over 20 million people were killed. War and related dynamics, including starvation, saw China's population as a whole drop from 410 million to 350 million during this period.

The Taiping Rebellion was not the only uprising experienced by China during this period. In 1898, a series of 'modernizing' reforms by the 17-year old Emperor Guangxu prompted a coup by the Empress Dowager Cixi. Cixi fanned a wave of assertive nationalism, including a movement – the Boxer Rebellion – that sought to overturn the unequal rights held by Westerners. The defeat of the Boxers by a coalition of Western forces led to the stationing of foreign troops in China, as well as a range of new concessions. Key aspects of public finances were handed over to outsiders, most notably the Maritime Customs Services, which was used to collect taxes, regulate tariffs and finance the substantial indemnity owed to the Western powers.

All in all, China's experience of Western imperialism was deeply destructive. During this period, Chinese per capita income dropped from 90% to 20% of the world average, while the country's share of global GDP fell from around a third to just 5%. China lost wars with Japan, Britain and France. It saw large parts of its territory handed over to foreign powers and suffered the ignominy of being forced to sign a number of unequal treaties. China went through two major rebellions, including one (the Taiping Rebellion) that produced more casualties than any other conflict during the 19th century. No wonder that this period is known in China as the 'Century of Humiliation'.

**Question 1**: What were the main features of China's 'Century of Humiliation'?

**Question 2**: What do you think are the contemporary consequences of China's experience of imperialism in the 19th and 20th centuries?

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**Key Points**

- A major consequence of the global transformation was the 'shrinking of the planet' via steamships, railways and the telegraph.

- These technologies increased the 'regularized exchanges' that serve as the foundations of international order. These exchanges were increasingly managed by IGOs and INGOs.

- The modern international order that emerged during the 19<sup>th</sup> century was profoundly unequal. The sources of this inequality included racism and economic exploitation.

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**Conclusion**

This chapter defined international order as 'regularized practices of exchange among discrete political units that recognize each other to be independent'. There have been many international orders in world history. However, it is only over the past two centuries that an international order has emerged that is global in scale and deeply interdependent politically, economically and culturally. Not everything has changed over the past two centuries. But the world has undergone a major transformation enabled by imperialism, the emergence of industrialization and rational states. These dynamics have prompted far-reading changes to how international order has been organized and understood. And they have deepened degrees of interdependence to a level that is unprecedented in world history.

The legacies of this period are profound: a global economy; a global system of states; global communication and transportation systems; a huge number of IGOs and INGOs, and more. Even the basic terminology through which we describe much of the contemporary world has 19<sup>th</sup> century origins, from the idea of 'the West', to framings such as 'the Middle

East' and 'Latin America' (Osterhammel 2014: 73-86). Equally important are the legacies of imperialism, racism and economic exploitation that continue to generate resentment in many parts of the world. The West ignores these sentiments at its peril. Although the world continues to be based largely on Western terms, this is changing (see **Chapter 5**). The 'modernizing mission' first undertaken by 19th century Japan (see **Box 2.3**) has now been undertaken in various forms by many of the world's states. Understanding how we got here is crucial to assessing both the shape of contemporary international order and the challenges it faces.

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**Box 2.3: Japan's 'modernizing mission'**

The most spectacular example of a 19th century 'modernizing mission' outside the West was that of Japan. Following the shock caused by the appearance of American gunboats in Tokyo Bay in 1853 and the subsequent signing of unequal treaties, Japan sent over 100 representatives on a mission to 11 European countries and the United States in order to negotiate revisions to these treaties and learn from Western practices. The Iwakura Mission subsequently borrowed extensively from the institutions and technologies of Western states.

The result was a radical reform program known as the Meiji Restoration. The Charter Oath of the Meiji Restoration made frequent references to Confucianism. However, it did so in the context of the need to revive Japanese thought and practices within a new, 'modern' context. Under the slogan *fukoku kyōhe* (rich country, strong military), the Meiji oligarchy sought to erode feudal forms of governance, abolish the Shogunate and replace the Samurai (who numbered over 5% of the population) with a conscript army.

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The Meiji pioneered the idea of the developmental state. They imported industrial technologies (often through 'international experts'), increased military spending (which climbed from 15% of government spending in the 1880s to around 30% in the 1890s and nearly 50% in the 1900s) and mobilized the population through an ideology of (sometimes chauvinistic) nationalism. A new private property regime was introduced alongside new systems of taxation, banking and insurance. The Meiji state built cotton mills, cement works, glass factories and mines, and maintained a leading interest in arms: between 1873 and 1913, Japan constructed the sixth largest merchant marine in the world.

During the Meiji period as a whole, the state was responsible for 40% of the capital investment in the country. This was state-led development with a vengeance. And it served as a model for later such projects around the world.

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**Questions**

1   What are the main components of 'international order'?

2   How important was the Peace of Westphalia to the formation of modern international order?

3   What were the international dynamics that helped Western powers become so powerful during the 19th century?

4   What was the significance of industrialization to Western ascendancy?

5   What ideas sustained 'the global transformation'?

6   What was the 'standard of civilization'?

7   What were the consequences of the 'shrinking of the planet'?

8   Why did IGOs and INGOs emerge in the 19th century?

9    In what ways did imperialism impact the construction of modern international order?

10   What have been the main consequences of the global transformation?

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**Further Reading**

Bayly, C.A. (2004), *The Birth of the Modern World* (Oxford: Blackwell). This is the best place to start for those interested in the global origins of modern international order.

Belich, J. (2009), *Replenishing the Earth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press). This book explores the role of a distinct 'Anglosphere' in constructing key aspects of modern international order.

Buzan, B. and G. Lawson (2015), *The Global Transformation: History, Modernity and the Making of Modern International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press). This book blends International Relations and world history in order to show how 19th century dynamics have impacted contemporary world politics.

Buzan, B. and R. Little (2000), *International Systems in World History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press). One of the only volumes to engage thoroughly with historical international orders before the modern era.

Hobsbawm, E. (1962), *The Age of Revolution, 1789-1848* (London: Abacus). A landmark text arguing that modern international order emerged from two events: the French Revolution and British industrialization.

Hobson, J. (2004), *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press). Argues that many of the institutions we now think of as 'Western' were forged through encounters between East and West, with the former playing a particularly crucial role.

Mann, M. (2012), *The Sources of Social Power, Vol. 3* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press). A major analysis of how modern international order came into being.

Osterhammel, J. (2014), *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century*, Trans. by P. Camiller (Princeton: Princeton University Press). The definitive global history of the 19th century. A long book, but written through bite-sized chapters that allow readers to pick and choose which topics they are interested in.

Pomeranz, K. (2000), *The Great Divergence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press). A breakthrough book making the case that Western powers only became more powerful than their Asian counterparts after 1800. Pomeranz pays particular attention to the role of colonialism in generating Western take-off.

Vitalis, R. (2015), *White World Order, Black Power Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell). Particularly good at explicating how race and racism have been central to the construction of modern international order.

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**Glossary list**

Many of the terms highlighted in the chapter are already in the glossary (e.g. sovereignty, interdependence). The below are those that are new for this edition.

**international order**: regularized practices of exchange among discrete political units that recognize each other to be independent.

**'scientific' racism** is the idea that one can – and should – establish a hierarchy based on biological markers, either visible (as in skin color) or according to bloodline (as in who counts as Jewish, black or Chinese).