

Chapter 2

The rise of modern international order

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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?

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 nineteenth-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 nineteenth-century developments for twentieth- and twenty-first-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 coexist in the absence of an overarching authority. This means that the discipline of International Relations 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 centres. 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 (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 (Hobson 2004). For these people, Western power in the contemporary world is unusual and likely to be temporary.

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: 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 and non-governmental organizations (IGOs and 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.

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 13,000–14,000 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 canvas, 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 centred on the Indian Ocean that incorporated actors from Asia, Africa, and Europe (Phillips and Sharman 2015).

Most accounts 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 this sense, Westphalia is seen as important 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 inter-state 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 practices 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 is systems of transport and communication. Here, we could highlight the European ‘voyages of discovery’ during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, which opened up sea-lanes around Africa and across the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans (Hobson 2004). As discussed earlier, 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 to 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 transatlantic transfer of diseases: smallpox, measles, influenza, and yellow fever killed two-thirds of the population of the Americas by the middle of the sixteenth 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 nineteenth 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 usually lightly connected. A journey halfway around the world would have taken a year or more in the sixteenth century, five months in 1812, and one month in 1912. In the contemporary

world, it takes less than a day. In general, the pace of change during the period before the nineteenth 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 many *regional* international orders before the nineteenth 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 nineteenth century saw the transformation of the daily condition of peoples nearly everywhere on the planet (Hobsbawm 1962; Bayly 2004; Osterhammel 2014).

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, 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.

How did modern international order emerge?

Up until around 1800, there were no major differences in living standards among the most developed parts of world: in the late eighteenth century, **gross domestic product** (GDP) per capita levels in the Yangtze River Delta of China were around 10 per cent 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. In 1820, Asian powers produced 60.7 per cent of the world's GDP, and 'the West' (defined as Europe and the United States) only 34.2 per cent; by 1913, the West produced 68.3 per cent of global GDP and Asia only 24.5 per cent. Between 1800 and 1900, China's share of global production dropped from 33 per cent to 6 per cent and India's from 20 per cent to 2 per cent (Maddison 2001). The rapid turnaround during the nineteenth 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 (North, Wallis, and Weingast 2009). Others, in contrast, focus on the frequency of European inter-state wars: European powers were involved in inter-state wars in nearly 75 per cent 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, nineteenth-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 (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. Jones 1981). Finally, some accounts stress the role of capitalism in generating Western 'take-off', whether this is seen as emerging from favourable access to credit and bills of exchange (P. 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 (see Box 2.1). First, European

Box 2.1 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 subcontinent, 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.
- 1905: Japan defeats Russia in the Russo-Japanese War, becoming the first non-Western, non-white great power.

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 per cent 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 per cent at the turn of the nineteenth century (Blackburn 1997: 510).

Second, European powers assumed control, often coercively, over the trade of commodities as diverse as sandalwood, tea, otter skins, and sea cucumbers, as well as silver, cotton, and opium. Europeans used silver from the Americas and opium from India to buy entry into regional trading systems. This led to radically unequal patterns of trade: while Britain provided 50 per cent of Argentina's imports and exports, and virtually all of its capital investment in 1900, Argentina provided just 10 per cent of Britain's imports and exports (Mann 2012: 39). European control of trade also led to radically unequal patterns of growth: whereas India's GDP grew at an average of 0.2 per cent 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 (see **'The consequences of the global transformation'**).

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 labourers left India, China, Malaya, and Java during the nineteenth century and the early twentieth, many of them to work as bonded labour 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.

Industrialization

Industrialization took place in two main waves. The first (mainly British) wave occurred in the early part of the nineteenth century and was centred 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 eighteenth 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 centred 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 nineteenth 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 per cent, trade rose by over 4 per cent annually in the half century after 1820 (Osterhammel 2014: 726). By the early years of the twentieth century, world trade was increasing at a rate of 10 per cent 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 deindustrialization 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 nineteenth 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; 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 centre of a global textiles industry.

Rational states

The extension of the market was accompanied by important changes in how states were organized. During the nineteenth 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 Ch. 26). In the eighteenth century, institutions such as the Dutch East India Company held a constitutional warrant to ‘make war, conclude treaties, acquire territory and build fortresses’ (P. Stern 2011). These companies remained influential throughout the nineteenth 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 coexisted 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: many aspects of the modern,

professional civil service were 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 frontline troops in conflicts around 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 per cent of the Dutch army deployed in the Dutch East Indies were colonial forces, while 80 per cent 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 states to raise extra revenues, which they often achieved through taxation. This, in turn, fuelled further state development.

Imperialism

Until the nineteenth century, nearly three-quarters of the world’s population lived in large, fragmented, ethnically mixed agrarian empires. During the nineteenth 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, the 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 nineteenth-century map of the world in which imperial territories are represented by a single colour 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 2 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 10 million Congolese during the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth. In the opening years of the twentieth century, Germany carried out a systematic genocide against the

Nama and Herero peoples in its South West African territories, reducing their population by 80 per cent and 50 per cent 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).

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 deindustrialization, and rational states with imperialism.

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

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 eighteenth century, it took three years for a caravan to make the round trip from Moscow to Peking. This meant that, until the nineteenth 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 nineteenth 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 per cent 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 per cent 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