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Gateway to Globalization

Before the year 1840, the cities of Calcutta, London, and Nagasaki stood as beacons of connectivity, acting as headquarters where trades, culture, and population all came together to flourish. Cities like these craved their names into the globe. While being in three different parts of the world continents apart from each other, these cities made their way to the global stage with their vibrant cultural and economic networks. By taking a look at the primary sources from “Traditions and Encounters” and Places of Encounter,” it becomes crystal clear that these three cities occupied unique positions in forming the global narrative at their time and weren’t just dots on the map. Crafting connections that transcended geographical limitations and revamped the route of history. From the perspective of culture, economics, and demographics, this essay delves into the diverse ways in which Calcutta, London, and Nagasaki were linked to the larger world before 1840 and how each city’s distinct characteristics set the motion into them becoming the gateways to a globalized world.

Calcutta, capital of the British India, played a role in connecting the Indian subcontinent to the larger world. Calcutta being a vibrant port city and a center of British imperial influence, portrayed itself as the focal point for mostly all economic, cultural, and demographic interactions. The city's strategic location made Calcutta a vital link for global exchange. Paired with the Hooghly River, which “had brought together villages and towns throughout Bengal and

had drawn Europeans into their world beginning in the sixteenth century.”¹ As this went on and connections being to develop, the “British East India Company established Calcutta as an entrepot,”² a place to exchange and grow. Furthermore, “the East India Company oversaw the production of opium grown in India and shipped it to China.”³ This brought the economic state of Calcutta to a tremendous rising. Which led to the growth of Calcutta in the larger world.

The financial center of the British Empire, London was linked to the larger world through its role in the South Sea Bubble and with its connection to the involvement of Britain in the slave trade. Edward Ward’s “A South-Sea Ballad,”⁴ reflects on the stock market crash that occurred in 1720. The ballad portrays the atmosphere in the financial institutions in London. Where people from all around the world preserved their earnings. London’s wealth came from all around the world as they lured in investors with promises of tremendous profits from trading with South America. And soon people from different walks of life were investing their money. Attracting not just the people of London but foreign investors. Additionally, extracts from John Fielding’s “Such as the Penal Laws”⁵ show how through involvement in the slave trade, London connected itself with the larger world. Fielding's observation that "the immense Confusion that has arisen in the Families of Merchants and other Gentlemen who have Estates in the West-Indies, from the great number of Negro Slaves they have brought into this Kingdom"⁶ points to the involvement of London in the British Empires colonial ventures. It highlights the city's state as the central hub, where people came together grappling with problems of imperial expansion and the

¹ Aran MacKinnon and Elaine McClarland MacKinnon, *Places of Encounter: Time, Place, and Connectivity in World History, Volume I: to 1500* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2012), 11.

² Mackinnon and Mackinnon, *Places of Encounter*, 12

³ Jerry H. Bentley, Herbert F. Ziegler, and Heather E. Streets-Salter, *Traditions and Encounters, Volume 1: From the Beginning to 1500* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2015), 682

⁴ Edward Ward, “A South-Sea Ballad (1720)” in *Places of Encounter*, ed. Mackinnon and Mackinnon, 138-140

⁵ John Fielding, “Such as the Penal Laws (1768)” in *Places of Encounter*, Mackinnon and Mackinnon, 141-142

⁶ Mackinnon and Mackinnon, *Places of Encounter*, 142

consequences of it. The profits of the slave trade went to show the significance it played in shaping the city.

On the southwestern coast of Japan, the city of Nagasaki emerged as a portal to the pre-1840 world. During Japan's policy of isolation during the Tokugawa Shogunate, Nagasaki was able to manage and preserve its vital connections through interconnection with the Dutch traders. Despite the policy, the Japanese showed an interest in learning about the outside world. As evident in primary sources from "Kaempfer's Japan: Tokugawa Culture Observed, by Engelbert Kaempfer,"⁷ offers insights into the Japanese officials and scholars regarding Western knowledge. Which include medicine, customs, and geography. Kempfer engaged with them and provided medicines and imparted knowledge in math and astronomy which fostered curiosity and a culture exchange. Furthermore, Kaempfer's words to describe the Dutch audience with the shogun showed the Japanese curiosity about the Dutch and their medical practices. In Kaemper's, *The History of Japan*, published in 1727, questions came up like "Which internal and external illnesses I considered to be the most serious and most dangerous?"⁸(Mackinnon and Mackinnon, 112). This interest in Western medicine by the Japanese officials opened a gateway for cultural and knowledge exchange between the two parties. As the Dutch shared and brought Western medical texts to Japan, Nagasaki rose to become a center for different cultural learning and bridged a gap between the world.

Calcutta, London, and Nagasaki served as extraordinary portals, enabling the seamless exchanging of concepts and commodities across distant cities. With their unique cultural

⁷Engelbert Kaempfer, "Tokugawa Culture Observed (1999)" in *Places of Encounter*, ed. Mackinnon and Mackinnon, 111-113

⁸Mackinnon and Mackinnon, *Places of Encounter*, 112

economic and demographic features, each of these cities assumed a central role in global connectivity and left an intense impact on the course of history. The capital of British India, Calcutta prospered as a central hub in trade and cultural fusion. London, the beating heart of the British Empire, posed as both economic supremacy and cultural diversity. As the cities position in trade and finance converted it into a center of global connection. And finally, Nagasaki with its special ties to the Dutch East India Company, became Japan's secret weapon to link itself with the world. Over time, the impact of Calcutta, London, and Nagasaki would transform and evolve new cities to ascend to far more importance and alter the world. The imprints of these three cities will remain on the pages of history forever, reminding us how through connectivity we shaped our past and set us on the path to forge our future.