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The Fruits of the Early Globalization

An Iberian Perspective

Edited by

Rafael Dobado-González
Alfredo García-Hiernaux

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Alfredo García-Hiernaux
Editors

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“Most parts of this book were finished under the difficult days of COVID-19 lockdown, 2020. We feel somehow obliged to dedicate it to all victims of the pandemic.”

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Introduction



The Fruits of the Early Globalization: An Iberian Perspective

Rafael Dobado-González and Alfredo García-Hiernaux

INTRODUCTION¹

This volume reflects the increasing interest on the *Early Globalization* among historians and economic historians. By the term Early Globalization we refer to the centuries-long process that multiplied interactions of many types—e.g., biological, demographic, cultural, technological, economic, religious and political—between all the most populated parts of the world at an unprecedented scale.² It started with the arrivals

¹Editors' opinions expressed in this Introduction are not necessarily shared by the rest of authors.

²To the best of our knowledge, among economic historians, the expression “Early Globalization” appeared for the first time in Flynn and Giráldez (2008, pp. 359–387). It was also used independently in Dobado et al. (2013).

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of both Spaniards and Portuguese to, respectively, America—1492—and Asia—1498—and lasted until the disruption of the international economy caused by the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars (1793–1815). This process had an important economic component indeed. Economic interactions within and across continents reached novel levels in trade, circulation of Hispanic American silver, technological transfers, free and forced migration, entrepreneurial creativity, and international mobilization of capital. They deeply changed human history for the centuries to come. Thus, for good reasons, this book is mainly an essay on economic history.

However, we do not overlook other dimensions of the Early Modern Globalization. Some of them are captured by the concept of Columbian Exchange (Crosby 1972). It alludes to the “exchange of diseases, ideas, food crops, and populations between the New World and the Old World” that resulted from the Columbus’s travels across the Atlantic (Nunn and Qian 2019, p. 163). In turn, the transfer of American species—corn, sweet potatoes, peanuts and tobacco—throughout the Pacific has been termed Magellan Exchange.

The notion of “Iberian Globalization” proposed by the French historian Serge Gruzinski privileges the worldwide cultural miscegenation that, especially during the Iberian Union (1580–1640), accompanied the expansion of the Spanish and Portuguese empires (Gruzinski 2010). For instance, as early as ca. 1520, Chinese porcelain from Jingdezhen was already being produced for the Portuguese market—see Illustration 1. A few years before, several tons of Chinese silk and other fabrics were shipped from Kochi—Kerala—to Portugal (Pacheco 2013). In the second half of the sixteenth century, the renting of Macau by the Portuguese increased the flow of Chinese textiles with European motifs to the Iberian Peninsula—see Illustration 2. Since 1598, Chinese folding screens could be found in the interiors of Mexico City houses (Curiel 2012). By the early seventeenth century, screens were already being produced in Mexico City and competed with those imported from Asia (Baena 2012). Some of the domestic-made screens were inspired in the Japanese *nanban* (Southern Barbarians) artistic style, which may be considered the first global art, since it received influences through the Portuguese and Spanish transoceanic routes (see Illustration 3; Rivero 2005). Even one of the most famous pictures ever painted, *Las Meninas* (1656) by Diego Velázquez, depicts the offering to the Infanta Doña Margarita of a *búcaro*, or *barro de Indias*—burnished earthenware from



Illustration 1 Jug with Portuguese arms. *ca.* 1520–1540, Hard-paste porcelain with cobalt blue under transparent glaze (Jingdezhen ware), Helena Woolworth McCann Collection, Purchase, Winfield Foundation Gift, 1961 (*Source* The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Accession number 61.196. <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/202581>)

New Spain. Other European painters, such as Van der Hamen—see Illustration 4, Antonio de Pereda, Andrea Belvedere, and Giuseppe Reco, also showed Hispanic American ceramics in their pictures (Curiel 1994, p. 196). Porcelain, textiles, paintings and screens were not only material



Illustration 2 Textile with crowned double-headed eagles, second half of the sixteenth century. Lampas, silk, Rogers Fund, 1912 (*Source* The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Accession number 12.55.4. <https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/objects?exhibitionId=%7B063a1aa2-5a4e-439a-a332-046e00e8bd73%7D#!?offset=0&perPage=20>)

goods for trade but also cultural artifacts that circulated across continents and frequently adopted mestizo cultural forms. An epitome of this global mestizaje is the folding screen made in New Spain by late seventeenth century—see Illustration 5. It depicts an amazing amalgamation of indigenous—the flying pole and the Moctezuma dance—and Spanish ceremonies—the Catholic wedding—and costumes. The background of the painting, European in style, shows the persistence of the pre-Hispanic transportation in boats, well-adapted to the lacustrine ecosystem surrounding Tenochtitlan/Mexico City. Western quadrupeds are also visible. Idealized syncretism or complex mestizo reality? Likely, a changing combination of both. As Alberto Baena states:



Illustration 3 “The arrival of Europeans to Japan”, first quarter of the seventeenth century, Nanban folding screen, Mary Griggs Burke Collection, Gift of the Mary and Jackson Burke Foundation, 2015 (*Source* The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Accession number 2015.300.109.1, 2. <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/65417>)



Illustration 4 “Still Life with Sweets and Pottery” Juan van der Hamen y León (1596–1631), oil on canvas (*Source* National Gallery of Art. Samuel H Kress Collection. N° 1961.9.75. <https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.46174.html>)

The birth in the seventeenth century of a production of folding screens in New Spain and its export to the rest of Hispanic-America and Europe explain the vitality of the processes triggered by economic exchanges. Similarly, the subsequent development of other local manufactures in Hispanic-America, such as those in Peru, Guatemala or Colombia, reflects the artistic maturity that by the eighteenth century had been reached in the continent. (Baena 2012, p. 58)³

The historical significance of the Early Globalization and the pioneering role played by the Iberian empires from its earliest stages were already recognized by Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations*.⁴ Possible exaggeration apart, “the voyages Smith referred to marked one of the

³Translated from Spanish by the authors.

⁴“The Discovery of America, and that of a passage to the East Indies by the Cape of Good Hope, are the two greatest and most important events recorded in the history of mankind” (Smith 2008, p. 590).