

GLOBALIZATION & THE INTERNATIONAL CHILLI TRADE: A BRIEF HISTORIC ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

A common misconception is that the economic system referred to as globalization is a relatively new social invention. It should be noted that there are several earlier trade protocols which might have acted as a precursor for the establishment of this system that is now engrained in today's socio-economic order. A good example of such a historic trade-route being the basis of globalization would be the trans-Atlantic chilli trade established following the European re-discovery of the Americas (aptly named the "New World" by the European explorers) by a Spanish-funded expedition. In less than five centuries since its discovery, the New World spice known as chilli has now become a staple component of several Asian and African cultures and cuisines, shaping their agricultural economies to this day.

KEYWORDS: *History, Globalization, Chilli Trade, Trans-Atlantic Chilli Trade*

INTRODUCTION

It is a common misconception in today's world that globalization is somewhat of a modern economic invention, however recorded history proves otherwise. Globalization can be defined as the process by which businesses and similar organizations develop or start operating on an international scale, in other words it can be worded as the process by which people and goods move easily across borders. Although that it is generally accepted that modern-day globalization found its initial roots in the 18th century with sudden technological improvements in transportation and communication methods, it should be noted that several earlier interpretations of this economic concept had already been established by several European powers.

A good example of this early form of globalization would be the early trans-Atlantic chilli trade established following the re-discovery of the Americas by an ambitious Spanish-funded expedition to identify a new sea-route towards the Indian subcontinent approximately five hundred years ago. The effects of this early trade system can still be felt today when considering the agricultural outputs of various Asian and African nations.

Analysis

Contrary to popularly shared belief, the chilli pepper (the fruit of plants from the genus *Capsicum* which are members of the nightshade family, *Solanaceae*) is not a native of the Old World (continents excluding the Americas), rather it originated from northern Amazon to what is now known as Mexico (with several unique strains being natives of various Caribbean islands and the lush tropical jungles of the Amazon south of Mexico). Although the presence of chilli in the old world for five hundred or so years, it has now become an integral component of most Asian cuisines and cultures.

On August 3rd, 1492, Christopher Columbus, an Italian-born explorer, led an expedition with the blessings and support (both financial and material) of the Crown of Castille (a precursor of modern-day Spain) to find an alternative route across the Atlantic Ocean to the spice-rich lands of the Indian subcontinent. This was a result of diminishing relations and rising religious tensions between the Catholic Spanish state and Muslim Ottoman Empire, which exclusively controlled all major land routes into China and India following the fall of Constantinople (by Ottoman Turks) and the slow degradation of Mongolian influence over these critical areas (European traders had a safe passage of trade to the east during Mongolian Empire's hegemony over Asia). Additionally, the extreme religious zeal of the Spanish Catholic leadership in relation to conversions (and interests to expand the Catholic religious belief to mainland Asia) might have also contributed to their interest in what could have been considered an extremely risky business proposition pitched by a relatively inexperienced navigator/explorer from the Republic of Genoa (now a part of modern-day Italy). It should be noted that this expedition failed in its primary objective, however as history notes, they went searching for copper and discovered gold.

This so-called rediscovery (it should be noted that the first recorded Europeans to visit the Americas were the Nordic-based Vikings) of the aptly named New World resulted by rapid colonization and subjugation of local populations and exploitation of natural resources. A silver lining in this era of history would be the reestablishment of stable global trade, with newly discovered resources being shipped back to the old world with the establishment of a new economic system, one which could be the precursor to what is now known as globalization. This resulted in chillies being introduced to Europe.

Although it is not known who exactly introduced chillies to Asia, it is commonly believed that this spice was introduced to the Indian subcontinent from the New World by Spanish or Portuguese traders (possible via the Portuguese sea-side colony of Goa located on the Western coast of India). It can be concluded that chillies could have been introduced to the East Indies by Dutch traders (this region of the world was controlled by the Dutch East India Company and later the Crown of the Netherlands as an overseas colony). Additionally, it can be inferred that the chilli plant was introduced to China by either Arab or Indian traders, given that the then-ruling Ming dynasty had somewhat of a frost relationship with the rising European nations, refusing to maintain stable diplomatic relations (a good example of this would be the Jiajing Emperor expelling the Portuguese embassy over political disputes in 1521) and severely restricting trade between them and the western powers with the imperial Chinese authorities making it law for local traders to only accepting silver as compensation for any trade transaction from European visitor and merchants.

It can also be inferred that the chilli plant could have been introduced to Southeast Asia such as the Kingdom of Thailand via these established Asian trade connections. Additionally, this American spice could have been introduced to coastal regions of Africa by Portuguese or Dutch traders who maintained strategic ports and trading points across the continent (it could have moved inland via trade between the different groups and nations residing in the African mainland). These European-controlled coastal settlements and colonies were critical components for their sea-routes for trade with Asian nations.

In about 200 years, chillies had become a staple part of Asian society (along with several notable African cultures) with it maintaining a prominent position in cuisine and traditional medicine. It should be noted that quite a lot of fertile parts of the continent of Asia maintained the perfect climate for the cultivation of this spice, making its incorporation. A

good example of this social incorporation of would be the presence of chillies in virtually every Indian and Chinese dish excluding deserts.

By the 21st century, some of these Asian and African nations had become the largest producers of dried chillies as identified by data published and consolidated by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (specific details are as provided in Table 1 shown below).

Based on the data listed above (Table 1), it can be observed that the socio-economic effects of the chilli plant are considerably more dominant in several Asian and African countries (with India dwarfing the rest of the world in overall dried chillies and peppers production as illustrated in Fig 1) when compared to Mexico, the presumed origin of this “exotic” spice plant. This could be attributed to India and other Asian nations having the ideal climate to grow different types of chilli. Additionally, the cultivation of this spice plays a considerable role in their respective economies and employment of their citizens, especially their primary sectors (namely the farming industry).

Table 1: Dried Chillies and Peppers Production by Country in Tonnes (1000 Kg) as Published by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations’ (FAO) Database (FAOSTAT) as of March 2021

	Country							
	Mexico	China	India	Ethiopia	Thailand	Vietnam	Ghana	Nigeria
2019	60706	326040	1743000	313115	348102	101766	126291	71917
2018	60552	320366	2149000	307457	340639	100269	122332	70183
2017	60397	314693	2096000	264723	348235	98745	118372	68448
2016	60242	309019	1520390	329804	372736	97189	114412	66714
2015	60382	305809	1605000	289677	348223	95304	110454	64811
2014	60140	307287	1492000	170766	321395	94992	107430	60459
2013	60000	300000	1492000	179480	243452	93000	102803	60000
2012	60000	290000	1304000	158546	215619	91000	100000	62000
2011	60060	277816	1276301	147181	188138	89187	88000	59000
2010	59786	265000	1223400	136100	158883	87358	90000	57000
2009	59509	260000	1202940	125336	165458	85589	86485	54000
2008	59237	252000	1269850	116216	162637	83903	82741	50000
2007	60000	250000	1294150	112334	159109	82318	81000	49500
2006	58200	245000	1234100	101723	156101	80304	78000	49000
2005	58000	240000	1014600	115837	152164	79318	68640	48000
2004	57000	235000	1185500	102715	150422	78500	60000	47621
2003	56500	230000	1235700	109442	145644	77919	55000	47413
2002	57306	220000	896900	97678	141109	77445	50000	47231
2001	56897	215000	1069000	91389	137182	77000	45000	47555
2000	56540	212000	983700	89404	135470	76500	40000	47512

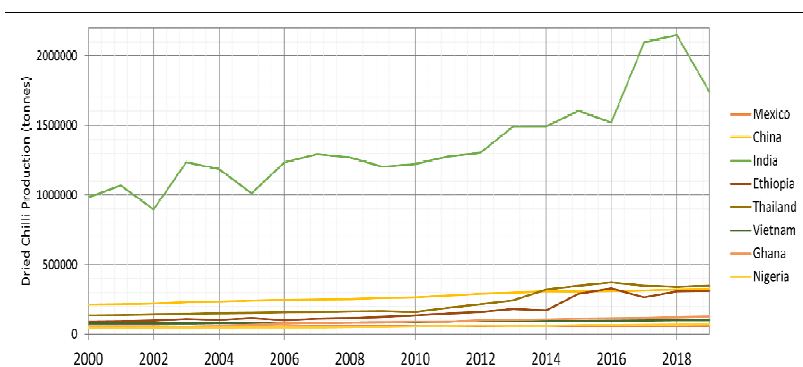


Figure 1: Graphical Representation of the Data Present In Table 1

CONCLUSIONS

Despite our current understanding of globalization as a 21st century economic system being somewhat of a relatively new development, it is important to remember that the implementations of past trade networks like the trans-Atlantic chilli trade was instrumental in establishing the socio-economic system we recognize today. In conclusion, it can be inferred that the seeds of globalization had been planted earlier than commonly believed by most of the academic community.

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