

# “Soft Gold” Before the Gold Rush: Sea Otter Pelts in the “Competitive Expansion” of Merchant Capitalism and the Creation of a Pacific Ocean Economy<sup>1</sup>

Arturo Giráldez  
University of the Pacific, United States

Analiese Richard  
Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana-  
Cuajimalpa, Mexico

<https://doi.org/10.7440/histcrit89.2023.07>

Received: January 25, 2023 / Accepted: April 4, 2023 / Modified: May 12, 2023

**How to cite:** Giráldez, Arturo y Analiese Richard. “Soft Gold’ Before the Gold Rush: Sea Otter Pelts in the ‘Competitive Expansion’ of Merchant Capitalism and the Creation of a Pacific Ocean Economy”. *Historia Crítica* n.º 89 (2023): 183-207, doi: <https://doi.org/10.7440/histcrit89.2023.07>

**Abstract.Objective/Context:** In this article, we examine how Chinese demand for pelts—of sea otters and other marine mammals—fueled the eighteenth-century competitive expansion of European and later American merchants and explorers in the Pacific islands and along the Pacific coast of North America. Sea otter pelts were a commodity directly linked to the creation of a Pacific Ocean economy, and California’s colonization resulted from imperial dynamics to which this trade gave rise. **Methodology:** Using both primary and secondary sources, we examine how these merchants’ quest to supply the lucrative Chinese luxury market with furs—“soft gold”—brought them into contact with indigenous peoples whose livelihoods and commercial networks would also be recruited into this global market but on quite unequal terms and with devastating consequences. **Originality:** The growth of this Pacific trade throughout the eighteenth century fueled geopolitical rivalries that led to the colonization of California with a system of missions and military garrisons (*presidios*) and, eventually, to a new ecology as a result of plants and animals brought from New Spain before the Gold Rush and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Many, including Marx and Engels, have claimed that the Gold Rush contributed significantly to the dynamics of industrial capitalism; nevertheless, we argue that its conditions of possibility were laid out centuries earlier via the complex geopolitical and ecological connections through which this Pacific economy was articulated. **Conclusions:** During the eighteenth century, the Pacific’s products were extracted and commodified in circuits whose demand center was China. It is precisely the prior existence of these global markets—centered on silver and “soft gold,” or sea otter furs—that explains the presence of Europeans and Americans in California eager to prospect for the yellow metal in 1848.

**Keywords:** ecological imperialism, fur trade, Pacific economy, spanish empire.

## El “oro blando” previo a la Fiebre del Oro: las pieles de nutria marina en la “expansión competitiva” del capitalismo mercantil y la creación de una economía del Océano Pacífico

**Resumen. Objetivo/Contexto:** En este artículo examinamos cómo la demanda china de pieles —de nutrias y otros mamíferos marinos— impulsó en el siglo XVIII la expansión competitiva de comerciantes y explo-

<sup>1</sup> This article derives from the research “Global History of the Anthropocene from North America,” funded by the Department of Humanities of the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana-Cuajimalpa and the Department of Modern Languages and Literature of the University of the Pacific.

radores europeos y, más tarde, estadounidenses en las islas del Pacífico y a lo largo de la costa pacífica norteamericana. Las pieles de nutria marina fueron una mercancía directamente vinculada a la creación de una economía en el Océano Pacífico; y la colonización de California resultó de la dinámica imperial a la que dio lugar este comercio. **Metodología:** Con el uso de fuentes primarias y secundarias, examinamos cómo el afán de estos mercaderes por abastecer el lucrativo mercado de lujo chino con pieles —u “oro blando”— los puso en contacto con pueblos indígenas cuyos medios de vida y redes comerciales también serían reclutados en este mercado global, pero en términos bastante desiguales y con consecuencias devastadoras. **Originalidad:** El crecimiento de este comercio en el Pacífico a lo largo del siglo XVIII alimentó rivalidades geopolíticas que desencadenaron la colonización de California con un sistema de misiones y guarniciones militares y, eventualmente, una nueva ecología, producto de las plantas y animales traídos de Nueva España antes de la Fiebre del Oro y el Tratado de Guadalupe Hidalgo. Muchos, incluidos Marx y Engels, han afirmado que la Fiebre del Oro contribuyó significativamente a la dinámica del capitalismo industrial; sin embargo, sostenemos que sus condiciones de posibilidad se establecieron siglos antes, a través de las complejas conexiones geopolíticas y ecológicas mediante las cuales se articuló esta economía del Pacífico. **Conclusiones:** Durante el siglo XVIII, los productos del Pacífico fueron extraídos y mercantilizados en circuitos centrados en la demanda china. Es precisamente la existencia previa de estos mercados globales —concentrados en la plata y el “oro blando”, o pieles de nutria marina— lo que explica la presencia de europeos y estadounidenses en California, ávidos por buscar el metal dorado en 1848.

**Palabras clave:** comercio de pieles, economía del Pacífico, imperialismo ecológico, imperio español.

### “Ouro macio” na pré-Corrída do Ouro: peles de lontra marinha na “expansão competitiva” do capitalismo mercantil e na criação de uma economia no Oceano Pacífico

**Resumo. Objetivo/contexto:** neste artigo, examinamos como a demanda chinesa por peles — de lontras e outros mamíferos marinhos — impulsionou a expansão competitiva de comerciantes e exploradores europeus e, posteriormente, estadunidenses nas ilhas do Pacífico e ao longo do litoral pacífico da América do Norte no século 18. As peles de lontra marinha eram uma mercadoria diretamente ligada à criação de uma economia no Oceano Pacífico, e a colonização da Califórnia resultou da dinâmica imperial a que esse comércio deu origem. **Metodologia:** usando fontes primárias e secundárias, examinamos como a ânsia desses comerciantes em abastecer o lucrativo mercado de luxo chinês com peles — ou “ouro macio” — os colocou em contato com os povos indígenas, cujos meios de subsistência e redes de comércio também seriam recrutados para esse mercado global, mas em termos bastante desiguais e com consequências devastadoras. **Originalidade:** o crescimento desse comércio no Pacífico ao longo do século 18 alimentou rivalidades geopolíticas que desencadearam a colonização da Califórnia com um sistema de missões e guarnições militares e, por fim, uma nova ecologia, produto de plantas e animais trazidos da Nova Espanha antes da Corrida do Ouro e do Tratado de Guadalupe Hidalgo. Muitos, inclusive Marx e Engels, afirmaram que a Corrida do Ouro contribuiu significativamente para a dinâmica do capitalismo industrial; no entanto, argumentamos que suas condições de possibilidade foram estabelecidas séculos antes, por meio das complexas conexões geopolíticas e ecológicas pelas quais essa economia do Pacífico foi articulada. **Conclusões:** durante o século 18, os produtos do Pacífico foram extraídos e comercializados em circuitos centrados na demanda chinesa. É justamente a existência prévia desses mercados globais — centrados na prata e no “ouro macio” ou peles de lontra marinha — que explica a presença de europeus e estadunidenses na Califórnia, ávidos pelo metal dourado em 1848.

**Palavras-chave:** comércio de peles, economia do Pacífico, imperialismo ecológico, império espanhol.

## Introduction

Two consequential events took place in 1848: gold was found at Sutter’s Mill in the Sierra Nevada, and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo doubled the size of the United States by incorporating

California and other Mexican territories into the emergent nation. The Gold Rush occurred in the context of the Industrial Revolution, converting California into an important node in an expanding global market by stimulating banking, industry, immigration, and communication. It fueled US territorial expansion and fomented commercial and transportation innovations that helped bring about a modern corporate economy. The impact of these two events was noted by Marx, who interpreted them as signs of a “new stage of development” of capitalism, which he would later elaborate upon in *Capital*.<sup>1</sup> Significantly, the Gold Rush would also unleash what has been called the “California genocide,” the wholesale massacre of indigenous Californians by US government agents and private citizens intent on claiming their territories.<sup>2</sup> Together, these dynamics would forever remake the human and natural landscapes of North America’s West Coast.

Nonetheless, to explain why Europeans, Mexicans, and Americans were present in California in the mid-1800s, we must go back several centuries to look at the incorporation of the Pacific coast into the world economy. In this article, we examine how Chinese demand for pelts—of sea otters and other marine mammals—fueled the “competitive expansion” of European and later American merchants and explorers in the Pacific islands and along the Pacific coast of North America. Their quest to supply the lucrative Chinese luxury market with furs—“soft gold” in the words of Hardee<sup>3</sup>—would bring them into contact with indigenous peoples whose livelihoods and commercial networks would also be recruited into this global market but on quite unequal terms and with devastating consequences. Moreover, the increasing presence of foreign agents on the Pacific coast would motivate Spanish imperial authorities toward their own colonization projects in California to protect territorial claims and mining interests in northern New Spain, as well as to secure ports and shipping lanes for the Manila galleon, an economic linchpin of their American empire. While the Gold Rush was crucial to the dynamics of industrial capitalism, we argue that its conditions of possibility were laid out centuries earlier via the complex geopolitical and ecological connections through which this Pacific economy was first articulated.

## 1. Before the Rush

From the times of Hernán Cortés, the West Coast of North America was of interest to Spanish authorities searching for new riches or fearful of foreign competition. They were particularly concerned with protecting the line of communication and trade with the Philippines after Miguel López de Legazpi found Manila in 1571. In 1542, Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo reached today’s San Diego, and in 1602, Sebastián Vizcaíno explored the bay of Monterey, sailing northward to Cape Mendocino. Spanish authorities divided the coast into the peninsula of Lower California, initially considered an island, and the upper territory called Alta California. Despite these voyages and the interests behind them, the crisis of the seventeenth century prevented the Spanish from further expansion into Alta California for 150 years.

- 
- 1 Karl Marx, *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (New York: International Library Publishing, 1904), 14.
  - 2 Benjamin Madley, *An American Genocide: The United States and the California Catastrophe, 1846-1873* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 6.
  - 3 Jim Hardee, “Soft Gold: Animal Skins and the Early Economy of California,” in *Studies in Pacific History. Economics, Politics, and Migration*, edited by Dennis O. Flynn, Arturo Giráldez, and James Sobredo (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 37.

During the second half of the eighteenth century, suspicious of Russian and later British activities, viceregal authorities implemented plans to occupy Alta California. British expeditions like the circumnavigations of William Dampier, the capture of a Manila galleon by Woodes Rogers in 1709, the depredations of John Clipperton and George Shelvocke in the Pacific coast, and the capture by George Anson of the galleon *Covadonga* deepened their unease. Further, published accounts from these voyages with descriptions of strategic ports reached a wide public, stoking long-held European myths regarding a water connection between the Atlantic and the Pacific (the fabled “Strait of Anian”) and a large river between the Great Lakes and the Pacific. The silver mines in the north-central plateau of the Viceroyalty of New Spain posed additional problems. Their distance from colonial population centers and proximity to hostile indigenous groups, as well as rival imperial powers France and Britain, endangered the treasure “which sustained not only New Spain locally, but also made it possible for the viceroyalty to pay the increasing imperial tax requisitions.”<sup>4</sup>

This geopolitical context motivated the foundation of twenty-one missions in Alta California from San Diego (1769) to San Francisco Solano (1823) in Sonoma, two years after Mexico had declared independence from Spain. Alongside the missions, the first military garrison, or *presidio*, was built in San Diego and another year later in Monterey, at the end of a 400-mile frontier. By 1800, there were four *presidios* along the coast: San Diego, Santa Barbara, Monterey, and San Francisco. Thus, Catholic missions, backed by military force, were employed as agents of colonization. Indigenous Californians were not emancipated from the missions until 1833, more than a decade after Mexican independence. This Mission period corresponds chronologically to the period of “primitive accumulation” in western North America, part of “an emerging international contest for resources, markets, and bases around the Pacific.”<sup>5</sup>

## 2. European Competitive Expansion

The technological and socio-economic developments attributed to the Industrial Revolution were fundamental transformations in human history, but these, in turn, depended upon previous centuries of sustained European expansion. In the words of Jan L. van Zanden:

The Industrial Revolution did not just suddenly appear but was the result of a process of growth and structural transformations that had begun in the first decades of the seventeenth century [...]

The driving force behind the first phase of modern economic growth was the world market that emerged in the sixteenth century.<sup>6</sup>

The overseas colonies, wrote Adam Smith, “raise the mercantile system to a degree of splendor and glory which it could never otherwise have attained to.”<sup>7</sup> According to Jan de Vries, this “glorious” global trade generated “a primitive accumulation of bounty which, when transferred

4 John Francis Bannon, *The Spanish Borderlands Frontier, 1513-1821* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1974), 169-170.

5 Stephen G. Hyslop, *Contest for California. From Spanish Colonization to the American Conquest* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012), 114.

6 Jan L. van Zanden, *The Long Road to the Industrial Revolution. The European Economy in a Global Perspective, 1000-1800* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 291.

7 Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (New York: Modern Library, 1994), 676.

to Europe, functioned as the starting point of real capitalist production.”<sup>8</sup> Increased demand, new territories, and subsequent accumulation propelled what Andre Gunder Frank termed a “competitive expansion” of European merchant capitalism.<sup>9</sup> The trade of pelts formed part of this dynamic during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, integrating the Pacific coast of North America into global economy and creating a new geographical area of competition that would later become the grounds for technological and financial innovations driving industrial capitalism and US expansion.

Competitive expansion required exploration, but this was challenging in the Pacific. Before the eighteenth century, reconnaissance expeditions, like the voyages of Ferdinand Magellan or Francis Drake, were sporadic. The exception was the galleons (1565-1815), plying the ocean between Acapulco and Manila, exchanging Chinese wares for American silver. The obstacles to exploration were numerous. The Pacific Ocean covers an area greater than all the land in the world: 9,200 miles separate the Bering Strait in the north from southern Antarctica. It is 10,400 miles wide at the Equator and devoid of islands for thousands of miles. Prior to active trade between East Asia and America, “the Pacific was generally viewed as a prohibitive void rather than an avenue for movement.”<sup>10</sup>

### 3. The Powerful Economy of Eighteenth-Century China

Despite the difficulty of Pacific exploration, Europeans had strong incentives to expand trade with China. The empire’s population tripled between 1680 and 1850, and the Qing dynasty doubled the territory under its hegemony.<sup>11</sup> Demographic growth was accelerated by the introduction of plants from America, such as sweet potatoes, peanuts, and maize. Most were introduced first to coastal provinces, especially Fukien, probably through Chinese merchants trading with the Philippines, and spread rapidly inland from the coast.<sup>12</sup> As Richard von Glahn explains, market expansion continued from the sixteenth century on, with the export of silks and porcelains stimulating industrial production in growing cities like Suzhou, Hangzhou, and Nanjing. In addition to everyday articles, artisans provided luxury goods and new consumer products to satisfy expanding demand. Large cities were connected to market towns that linked rural industries to a vigorous market: “Unfettered development of private commerce promoted a pattern of ‘Smithian growth’ in which greater economic efficiency was achieved through market expansion and specialization of labor.”<sup>13</sup>

A growing money supply—bolstered by Spanish American silver—also contributed to imperial economic expansion. In the eighteenth century, Peru’s silver production more than tripled to

---

8 Jan de Vries, *The Economy of Europe in the Age of Crisis, 1650-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 141, 254.

9 Andre Gunder Frank, *World Accumulation, 1492-1789* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1978), 103.

10 D’Arcy, Paul, “No Empty Ocean: Trade and Interaction across the Pacific Ocean to the Middle of the Eighteenth Century,” in *Studies in the Economic History of the Pacific*, edited by Sally Miller, A.J.H. Latham, and Dennis O. Flynn (London: Routledge, 1998), 21.

11 Richard von Glahn, *The Economic History of China. From Antiquity to the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 322, 347.

12 Francesca Bray, “Agriculture,” in *Biology and Biological Technology Science and Civilization in China*, Vol. 6, edited by Joseph Needham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 427.

13 Von Glahn, *Economic History of China*, 346-347.

surpass seventeenth-century quantities, while Mexico’s figures were twice as large as Peru’s during the same period.<sup>14</sup> China’s immense demand drove the value of silver in the empire fifty percent higher than in Europe from 1700 to 1750. American silver flowed to China in the form of Mexican pesos or pieces of eight. Well over a billion pesos were minted during the eighteenth century alone and used to buy Chinese products and tea that flowed to the Americas and Europe.<sup>15</sup> Diego López Rosado explains the global circulation of the peso:

Use of the Mexican peso had become generalized in southern China, where more Mexican money circulated than in Mexico. The principal cause of this demand, without doubt, was that the Mexican peso contained a known content of silver; for this reason, the captains of North American business employed Mexican pesos to purchase slaves on the west coast of Africa and to bring tea from China to the United States. The Mexican peso was utilized in all islands of the Pacific and the length of the coast of Asia from Siberia to Bombay. Along the British coast of North America, the Mexican peso was the only money the colonists accepted in exchange; this peso also inundated Europe, replacing the florin and other monies in current usage.<sup>16</sup>

Hence, long before the start of the Gold Rush in 1848, a global market linking China to European interests had already been established on the West Coast of North America. This market would grow, and its political, ecological, and demographic consequences in California and elsewhere in the Pacific would deepen along path-dependent trajectories with the expansion of the trade in sea otter pelts, which Jim Hardee has called “soft gold.”<sup>17</sup> The range of the sea otter (*Enhydra lutris*) extended from Hokkaido, the Kuril archipelago, and the Kamchatka peninsula to the Aleutian chain, following the northwest coast of North America before reaching Lower California. This marine mammal has an exceptionally dense fur coat (60,000 hairs per square inch) and a beautiful glossy sheen that made it the most expensive fur worldwide.<sup>18</sup> Adele Ogden reveals its attraction in the Qing empire: “It became the royal fur of China. Otter-skin robes were the style of the day for Chinese mandarins. Ladies in high social standing wore otter capes, and some made belts or sashes of the fur over which pearls were arranged. Tails were much esteemed for caps, mittens, and small trimmings.”<sup>19</sup> China’s unprecedented economic, population, and territorial expansion in the eighteenth century meant that global markets for products under demand in that empire, such as silver and furs, expanded quickly and dramatically. It was this earlier form of capital—“soft gold”—the dynamics of primitive accumulation that facilitated its exchange and the networks through which it circulated that laid the path to the Gold Rush and the Industrial Revolution.

---

14 Mark A. Burkholder and Lyman L. Johnson, *Colonial Latin America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 140.

15 Dennis O. Flynn and Arturo Giráldez, “Cycles of Silver: Global Economic Unity through the Mid-Eighteenth Century,” in *China and the Birth of Globalization in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century* (London: Routledge, 2010), 409.

16 Diego G. López Rosado, *Historia del peso mexicano* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1975), 32.

17 Hardee, *Soft Gold*, 37.

18 James R. Gibson, *Otter Skins, Boston Ships and China Goods. The Maritime Fur Trade of the Northwest Coast, 1785-1841* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1992), 6.

19 Adele Ogden, *The California Sea Otter Trade, 1784 to 1848* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1941), 6.



#### 4. Europeans in the Pacific: “The Age of Cook”

James Cook’s voyages signaled a new era for the Pacific Ocean. On the first expedition (1768-1771), under the command of Joseph Banks, Cook’s ship carried scientific instruments, naturalists, and artists to map the ocean and describe its flora and peoples. Tupaia, an expert navigator-priest from Tahiti, helped guide the vessel from Borabora to the Australs, translated between the Māori and English in New Zealand, and mapped the major Society Islands and archipelagos like the Marquesas, Tuamotus, Australs, and Cooks. These lands were incorporated into British naval charts. Tupaia explained the seasonal westerly winds to the British: “The wind cycle had had long confounded Europeans, unable to understand how voyage by sail to and from the western Pacific could be possible given the prevailing breezes. Understanding the seasonal reversal was as significant as the ancient knowledge of the monsoon winds in the Indian Ocean.”<sup>20</sup> Impressed, the Admiralty sent Cook on a second expedition (1772-1775) to find the Great Southern Continent, a mythical land, but instead, they reached frozen Antarctica. The return voyage sailed through New Zealand, New Hebrides, Tahiti, Tonga, and New Caledonia. The third expedition (1776-1779) tried to resolve the question of the fabled Northwest Passage between the Atlantic and the Pacific located above North America. On his way, Cook encountered the Hawaiian Islands and, sailing north, crossed the Bering Strait to reach the Arctic.<sup>21</sup> In Nootka Sound, today’s Canada, the crews of Cook’s ships *Resolution* and *Discovery* bartered with natives for sea otter pelts. The Captain’s *Journals* recount: “A great many canoes filled with the Natives were about the Ships all day, and a trade commenced betwixt us and them, which was carried on with the strictest honesty on both sides. Their articles were the skins of various animals, such as bears, wolfs, foxes, deer, raccoons, polecats, martens and in particular the sea beaver, the same as is found on the coast of Kamchatka.”<sup>22</sup> In 1779, the skins collected by the sailors brought \$120 each at Canton, an astonishing profit of 1,800 percent.<sup>23</sup> Cook later died in a violent encounter with Hawaiians on the way to the China coast, perhaps in part a result of his sailors’ introduction of venereal diseases, which spread “with unpleasant rapidity from the leeward to the windward islands, [...] the Hawaiians were not such fools that they could not put together cause and effect. They were miserably afflicted, they knew the affliction came from their visitors, there was no antidote.”<sup>24</sup>

While European ships explored the Central Pacific, Polynesian kingdoms experienced population growth as local rulers competed with one another for hegemonic power. Rivalries between regions and chiefs generated internal tensions, “creating special opportunities for outlanders who could trade and exchange prestige goods, weapons, and new forms of spiritual authority.”<sup>25</sup> A case in point is Kamehameha I, the unifier of Hawaii (1758-1819). He was supported by British and American traders, who sold him guns and powder, and by European knowledge of muskets and

---

20 Matt Matsuda, *Pacific Worlds: A History of Seas, Peoples, and Cultures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 137.

21 Matsuda, *Pacific Worlds*, 138-139.

22 James Cook, *The Journals of Captain James Cook. III The Voyage of the Resolution and Discovery 1776-1780. Part One* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 296.

23 Gibson, *Otter Skins*, 22.

24 John Beaglehole, introduction to *The Journals of Captain James Cook*, CLXI.

25 Matsuda, *Pacific Worlds*, 132.

cannons. Under his authority, Hawaiian ports became a pivotal point in the transit to and from Asia to trade sandalwood and otter furs for Chinese products, as well as for crews hunting the sperm whale. In 1787, the first whaler sailed from London, but soon the business was in the hands of Americans out of New Bedford and Nantucket.<sup>26</sup>

Five decades after Cook's death, European and North American ships linked the archipelagos of Oceania to global trade networks.<sup>27</sup> The Pacific islands became the source of local products like sea slugs, sandalwood, and sealskins taken to Canton in exchange for Chinese teas and silks. Initially, European merchants carried silver demanded by the Canton market to purchase the all-important tea and other Chinese wares. Hence, Pacific commodities became a welcome complement to the expensive Mexican coins. From 1757 to 1842, European and North American merchants did business at Canton (Guangzhou) under the Canton System implemented by the Qing.

In John McNeill's words, "From the 1790s to 1850, a world-girdling 'triangular trade' linked the Pacific islands economies and ecosystems to Europe, North America, and China, [...] New Englanders played a prominent role. But China's exports were the prize that energized the entire system."<sup>28</sup> This Pacific "triangular trade" came to an end once the islands' local products were depleted—"China trade had skimmed off the cream of readily exploitable resources."<sup>29</sup> Bengal's opium, a British monopoly, later substituted Pacific products and reduced the quantity of silver required in the Canton market.<sup>30</sup>

The exhaustion of natural resources in the Pacific archipelagos resembled the devastation of Manchurian pearl mussels, the intense harvesting of wild mushrooms in Mongolia, and the depletion of fur-bearing animals along the borders with Russia. Jonathan Schlesinger wrote:

Each of these events belonged to a broader spectrum of commodity booms that swept from the Qing borderlands to Southeast Asia and the greater Pacific in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth centuries. By 1800, that is, fur trappers from Mongolia to California were operating in the same world, facing common problems, and meeting a common demand.<sup>31</sup>

Native societies in Oceania, the Pacific Northwest, California, and numerous Asian locales participated actively in those "booms." Schlesinger remarks on the global fur trade: "Producers like the Uriankhai and Oroncon were enmeshed in networks that extended from Beijing to lake Khövsgöl, the Amur delta, Sakhalin Island, Siberia, Hokkaido, Alaska, and even Baja California."<sup>32</sup> However, their participation in these trading networks did not convert them into capitalists. In the following sections, we discuss how these booms produced complex geopolitical and material

---

26 Matsuda, *Pacific Worlds*, 154, 185.

27 John McNeill, "Islands in the Rim: Ecology and history in and around the Pacific, 1521-1996," in *Pacific Centuries. Pacific and Pacific Rim history since the sixteenth century*, edited by Dennis O. Flynn, Lionel Frost, and A.J.H. Latham (London: Routledge, 1999), 73.

28 John McNeill, "From Magellan to MITI: Pacific Rim economies and Pacific Islands ecologies since 1521," in *Studies in the Economic History of the Pacific Rim*, edited by Sally Miller, A.J.H. Latham, and Dennis O. Flynn (London: Routledge, 1998), 78.

29 McNeill, "From Magellan to MITI," 81

30 McNeill, "From Magellan to MITI," 81.

31 Jonathan Schlesinger, *A World Trimmed with Fur. Wild Things, Pristine Places, and the Natural Fringes of Qing Rule* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017), 4.

32 Schlesinger, *World Trimmed with Fur*, 11.



connections in the Pacific and beyond, connections that would eventually help create the conditions of possibility for the Gold Rush and the Industrial Revolution.

## 5. Russian Advance to the Pacific Ocean

During the eighteenth century, the powerful demand exercised by the China market was responsible for the oft-forgotten expansion of Russia, which gave the Tsars control over the whole of northern Eurasia. The consequences for native populations tragically recapitulated those of other European expansions. Siberians had no weapons comparable to Russian firearms. Reports of new devastating diseases such as smallpox spread by the Russian advance are reminiscent of accounts from the earlier Spanish conquest of the Americas. A 1744 chronicle by Prussian official Heinrich von Fuchs points out: “When they are stricken with smallpox, they die like flies.”<sup>33</sup> Other diseases like measles and syphilis that reduced fertility also contributed to indigenous population decline. As with other colonized populations, alcoholism spread among Siberian peoples.

Expansion into Siberia was financed by an abundance of fur-bearing mammals—in particular, the highly prized sable—which gave the Muscovite government an economic base for the growth of its political power.<sup>34</sup> A richer bounty was farther away along the shores of the Pacific, the pelts of sea otters that produced higher profits in Kiakhta than other furs sold in Europe. Imperial Russia and China signed the Treaty of Kiakhta (1728), which would regulate trade until the mid-nineteenth century, confining exchanges between the empires to this enclave in northern China. Russian explorers would eventually seek new sources of furs beyond Siberia to supply the growing trade.

Once Cossack explorer Kozma Sokolov reached Okhotsk in 1716-1717, it became Russia’s main port in the Pacific, as the sea route to Kamchatka replaced the earlier land route. From Okhotsk, Russian expeditions sailed ever further in pursuit of sea otters. Peter the Great sent Vitus Bering on one such expedition along the Kamchatka coast, reaching what is today the Bering Strait. On June 4, 1741, Bering (in command of the *Svyatoy Pert*) and Chiricov (captain of the *Svyatoy Pavel*) reached the American continent. Bering’s vessel shipwrecked offshore of an uninhabited island, where he died; the remaining crew spent months building another vessel and hunting sea otters. They returned in 1742 to Petropavlovsk with hundreds of skins, sold for fantastic prices in northern China. The demand for furs was so great that sea otters disappeared from the Kamchatka Peninsula by 1750 and from the Kurile Islands by the 1780s. By the 1790s, they were also becoming scarce in the Aleutian archipelago. As highlighted by Richards, “The North Pacific shores of Alaska marked the terminus for the Siberian hunt for furs.”<sup>35</sup>

Russian fur traders launched a “fur rush” reaching the Gulf of Alaska: “From 1743 to 1800, one hundred ventures obtained more than 8,000,000 silver rubles worth of ‘soft gold.’”<sup>36</sup> In 1784, the Russians were trading furs on the island of Kodiak, followed by the foundation of the enclave of Sitka in 1812. In 1799, previous fur trading companies were consolidated into a “gigantic

---

33 John F. Richards, *The World Hunt. An Environmental History of the Commodification of Animals* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 78.

34 Alan Wood, *The History of Siberia. From Russian Conquest to Revolution* (London: Routledge, 1991), 4.

35 In Richards, *World Hunt*, 82.

36 Gibson, *Otter Skins*, 13. 1 silver ruble equivalent to 20.22 grams of fine silver.

monopoly," the Russian American Company, under the Tsar's protection. Company ships carried the kayaks of Aleuts and Kodiaks forcibly recruited to hunt sea otters.<sup>37</sup>

## 6. Fur Trade in the Pacific Northwest

The next indigenous peoples to be recruited against their will into the eighteenth-century model of "primitive accumulation" were the nations of the Pacific Northwest. The region's abundant resources supported large indigenous populations without agriculture. One of the few exceptions was the cultivation of Haida tobacco. According to James R. Gibson, prior to European contact, this region's native "population approached 200,000, making the coast one of the most densely peopled non-agricultural parts of the world."<sup>38</sup> The main economic activity was fishing. In the southern area of the northwest coast, native peoples hunted marine mammals, principally whales, as well as dolphins, sea lions, and seals. This rich diet was supplemented by hunting terrestrial animals like deer and the collection of edible plants.<sup>39</sup> Another important task was the collection of dentalium shells or *haiqua* (*Antalis pretiosa*) that they traded with peoples of the Great Plains, Great Basin, Central Canada, Northern Plateau, and Alaska for a variety of commodities, including macaw feathers from Central America and turquoise from the American Southwest. The shell was used as money "owing to the scarcity, computability (always forty to a string), durability and portability."<sup>40</sup> Extensive trade networks linked to the wide circulation of shell money are an indication of far-reaching connections in the American continent long before contact with Europeans. The demand for *haiqua* was such that American traders tried to pass it counterfeited in porcelain from England. Indigenous people were, of course, not fooled and, in the words of one merchant, "treated the pretended shells with the utmost contempt."<sup>41</sup>

One of the most puzzling features of Northwest native cultures for Europeans and Americans who encountered them was the *potlatch*, a ceremony in which a chief confronted a rival by giving away his family's accumulated property or showing his superiority by destroying valuable objects. This behavior, which appeared unreasonable to mercantile capitalists who observed it in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, occupied anthropologists for decades following Franz Boas' publication of *The Social Organization and the Secret Societies of the Kwakiutl Indians* (1897). José Alcina Franch relates the potlatch to the indigenous political organization: "The accumulation of wealth and its redistribution might allow or give rise to the development of a social stratification and the birth of a stable power concentrated in the chief."<sup>42</sup> In the final years of the nineteenth century, the same period when Boas undertook his observations of Kwakiutl ceremonies, the potlatch underwent an intensification. Rapid population decline coincided with a technological shift, resulting in the adoption of guns, iron harpoons, fishhooks, and carpentry tools to chisel canoes

---

37 Gibson, *Otter Skins*, 14.

38 Gibson, *Otter Skins*, 4.

39 José Alcina Franch, "The Culture of the Indians of the Northwest Coast," in *To the Totem Shore. The Spanish Presence on the Northwest Coast* (Madrid: Ediciones El Viso, 1986), 134-135.

40 James R. Gibson, "The Maritime Trade of the North Pacific Coast," in *Handbook of North American Indians*, Vol. 4., edited by Wilcomb E. Washburn (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1988), 229.

41 Gibson, "Maritime Trade," 229.

42 Alcina Franch, "Culture of the Indians," 140.

and carve items. In Marvin Harris's opinion, that explains why certain elite "Kwakiutl certainly could afford to burn their fish oil, destroy their blankets, or ruin their houses."<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, the intensification of the potlatch in the Pacific Northwest also reveals a more generalized dynamic among peoples drawn into the global economy by the competitive expansion of European and American mercantile capitalism. Trapido argues that rather than a remnant of an "earlier" stage of economic development, this ritualized exchange is the product of intensifying interaction between the capitalist and what he calls (following Graeber and Polanyi) "human" modes of production, where rights in people are the most important form of wealth<sup>44</sup>:

Capitalist demand, in this case for furs, outstripped anything that harvesting natural systems could supply for any length of time, while competition to control the trade, and the imperative to obtain people to replace those who had died of disease, rendered war and slavery more common. In the context of radical instability, frequent and impressive displays of authority became more necessary. As the supply of animal pelts became exhausted in one region, trade routes pushed further inland. Slaves were traded for furs with the peoples of the interior, whose numbers were similarly decimated by disease.<sup>45</sup>

The economic, political, social, and ecological disruptions provoked by the forceful integration of the Pacific Northwest into the global economy via the fur trade produced complex reconfigurations that resembled those experienced by peoples elsewhere in the Americas, Africa, Asia, and the Pacific Islands. Some were recruited forcibly, while others took advantage of new markets for local goods; nevertheless, in most cases, their human modes of production, in which rank and "rights in the labor of others were crucial to accumulating material surpluses,"<sup>46</sup> were often reinforced by articulation to mercantile capitalism. Pelts and other local goods were exchanged for objects that functioned as currency prior to European contact, where the former suppliers of these objects were eliminated by European diseases, or the objects could be sourced cheaply by Europeans from their extensive trade networks. In other cases, European manufactured goods, like firearms, textiles, metal implements, and alcohol, displaced local prestige goods. Articulation did not undermine human modes of production, but rather intensified tensions around social reproduction and undermined local production systems.<sup>47</sup> These same dynamics would also eventually link indigenous nations from this region to indigenous peoples in Alta California in new ways.

Eight years before the American arrival to the Pacific Northwest, a different shell—Californian abalone (*Haliotis*)—met the approval of native Alaskans, another signal of their recruitment into global circuits of trade. The exchange occurred because the Mexico Viceroy, Antonio María de Bucareli, decided to investigate Russian activities on the northern Pacific coast. In 1774, Juan Pérez commanded the first expedition. Accompanying him was Fray Tomás de la Peña, who related the

---

43 Marvin Harris, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory* (New York: Crowell, 1968), 312.

44 Joe Trapido, "Potlatch and the Articulation of Modes of Production: Revisiting French Marxist Anthropology and the History of Central Africa," *Dialectical Anthropology* 40, n.º 3 (2016), 199, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10624-016-9432-7>

45 Trapido, "Potlatch," 202.

46 Trapido, "Potlatch," 202.

47 Trapido, "Potlatch," 212.

encounter with Nootkan people in his diary: "Our people bought several of these articles [otter skins, pointed rush hats, capes, etc.] in exchange for old clothes, shells they had brought from Monterey and some knives; for these and the shells they manifest great liking."<sup>48</sup> The same expedition acquainted the Tlingit and Haida peoples with silverwork: "At first it was not appreciated by the Indians who held copper and iron in higher esteem, but later silverwork became a widespread craft."<sup>49</sup> The abalone exchange appears to have been highly profitable for the Spanish because in 1790, at Clayoquot Sound, the Nootkan gave one sea otter skin for ten Monterey shells.<sup>50</sup>

The first European businessman on the northwest coast was an Englishman who sailed from Canton in 1785. He sold six hundred pelts at an immense profit in China.<sup>51</sup> In 1788, the first New England ship to reach the Pacific Northwest was the *Columbia Rediviva*, which sailed under Captain Robert Gray in a circuit that included South China. Americans gained an advantage in the sea otter trade because Russia was confined to Kiatka by the treaty signed with China in 1728, and the English East India Company exercised strict control over British trade ships. The New England circuit (Boston-Northwest Coast-Canton) was extremely lucrative because its participants profited from transactions in each of these three markets.<sup>52</sup>

In early transactions, the indigenous peoples of the Pacific Northwest demanded iron and copper to craft a variety of articles customarily fashioned from stone, shell, or bone. Soon the Europeans brought firearms and alcohol to trade as well. In the words of James Gibson: "The initial distaste for alcohol (and salt) was overcome by persistent offerings by explorers in a spirit of friendship and by traders bent on ingratiating and habituation."<sup>53</sup> Distillates high in alcohol content accelerated the indigenous peoples' ensuing addiction, much like the Siberians forcibly incorporated into the global fur trade before them.

The sea otter trade generated a demographic catastrophe similar to European colonization in other places. The estimated indigenous population fell from 188,000 in 1774 to about 38,000 in 1784. There were several reasons for this demographic collapse: firearms, the intensified capture of slaves, and the scourge of alien diseases. The most harmful of these diseases were syphilis and smallpox. Another consequence of ecological exchanges linked to exploration was the introduction of new plants. Alarmed by the increasing English, Russian, and American presence in the Pacific, the Spaniards founded a settlement in Friendly Cove on the Nootka Sound to establish territorial dominion. The new plants they brought to the Pacific Northwest prolonged the "Columbian exchange" initiated in 1492.

However, after Commander Esteban José Martínez's seizure of English ships precipitated a crisis between both kingdoms, the Spaniards abandoned Nootka Sound following the 1790 Nootka Treaty. This accord was the first legal admission by Spain that it was not entitled to the Pacific coast based on prior stopovers of Spanish ships. Britain recognized Spanish sovereignty

---

48 Quoted in Robert F. Heizer, "The Introduction of Monterey Shells to the Indians of the Northwest Coast," *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 31, n.º 4 (1940), 399.

49 Alcina Franch, *Indians of the Northwest Coast*, 154-155.

50 Gibson, *Maritime Trade*, 228.

51 Matsuda, *Pacific Worlds*, 187.

52 Gibson, *Otter Skins*, 53-58.

53 Gibson, *Maritime Trade*, 225.

from Baja California to San Francisco Bay but considered “unoccupied” areas to the north as open to international competition.<sup>54</sup>

In the Pacific Northwest, as on the Russian Pacific coast, the sea otter population rapidly declined, and by the mid-nineteenth century, the ecosystem was significantly altered. Sea otters can be considered a keystone species for the coastal fauna. They feed on sea urchins (*Strongylocentrotus plyacanthus*), which eat kelp and other macroalgae that provide food and protection to fish and other species. Consequently, when sea otter populations declined, kelp decreased, reducing fish and other coastal marine animal populations. All these interrelated dynamics impacted local livelihoods, driving social and demographic change. These patterns would repeat themselves—intensified by an “ungulate explosion” related to the establishment of the mission system—as the competitive European expansion of the eighteenth century moved south into Alta California.

## 7. The Colonization of California

California’s varied topography, with its beaches, coastal marshes, valleys, rivers, hills, and mountains, supported a wide range of plants and animals. Its landscape was inhabited by an “astonishing variety of tribespeople [...] belonging to at least a half-dozen major language groups,” subdivided into hundreds of linguistically different tribal varieties.<sup>55</sup> José Longinos Martínez wrote a *Journal* collecting his impressions in 1792 as a member of the Botanical Expedition. He was amazed by the linguistic diversity of the peoples he encountered: “The plains, and still more the mountains, of New California are populated with an infinite number of Indians. Their languages are so many that they are understood with difficulty in the missions, for questions and answers have to pass through as many as three interpreters.”<sup>56</sup> Indeed, California was one of the most densely settled areas of North America. Sherburne F. Cook estimates a population of 310,000 on the eve of the Spanish conquest.<sup>57</sup> Other estimates oscillate between 260,000 and 221,000.<sup>58</sup> The coastal region where missions would be founded had an estimated population of 60,000. A few societies, like the Mohaves and Yumas along the lower Colorado River, practiced agriculture and were led by powerful chiefs. However, the nations along the southern and central coast lived in small groups of 100 to 500 people near wild food sources.<sup>59</sup>

Major climate differences between regions contributed to dietary diversity. The most important native staple was acorn, which has a higher caloric value than wheat. Washed to remove tannins, the meal was processed into bread or gruel. Included in the diet were insects, roots, and bulbs. Animal protein came from fish like salmon and trout, mollusks, and sea mammals—sea lions and

---

54 Stephen G. Hyslop, *Contest for California. From Spanish Colonization to the American Conquest* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012), 127.

55 Hyslop, *Contest for California*, 43-44.

56 José Longinos Martínez, *California in 1792. The Expedition of José Longinos Martínez*. (San Marino: Huntington Library Publications, 1938), 41.

57 Sherburne F. Cook, “Historical Demography,” in *Handbook of North American Indians: California*, edited by Robert F. Heizer (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1978), 91.

58 Brenda J. Baker and Lisa Kealhofer, “Assessing the Impact of European Contact on Aboriginal Populations,” in *Bioarcheology of Native American Adaptation in the Spanish Borderlands*, edited by Brenda J. Baker and Lisa Kealhofer (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), 3.

59 Cook, “Historical Demography,” 91.

otters—as well as from elk, deer, and other game. Food sources were optimized using “an ecology of fire,” pruning, and occasional irrigation. Within forests, clearings were regularly burned to fertilize the soil, encouraging the growth of plants that attracted game animals, promoting vegetation used for making baskets, and cleansing areas to grow tobacco. In 1792, José Longinos Martínez related his understanding of these techniques:

In all New California from Fronteras northward, the gentiles have the custom of burning the brush; this for two purposes: one, for catching rabbits (brush-burning being a form of hunting); two, so that with the first light rain or dew the shoots will come up which they call *pelillo* [little hair] and upon which they feed like cattle when the weather prevents their seeking other food.<sup>60</sup>

Rivers were navigated with reed rafts, while more complex seagoing canoes were crafted from planks fastened with animal sinews and sealed with asphalt. Juan Crespí, from the 1769 Spanish expedition, described these vessels in his *Diary*:

Their skill and ability stand out, particularly in the construction of their canoes. They are made from good pine planks, which are joined together well to form an elegantly shaped canoe with two bows. [...] They use long oars with two blades and row with an indescribable ability and speed. [...] What is most amazing is that the only tools they have for working with wood and stone are tools made of flint.<sup>61</sup>

The native agriculture of the American Southwest did not reach California since the lack of rain during the growing season rendered cultivation infeasible. There was an advantage to being hunters and gatherers, according to Walton Bean: “The Aboriginal California Indian population was in a Malthusian equilibrium. The natural food supply was moderately abundant and well-assured. The attempt to divert labor from hunting and gathering to the unfamiliar and risky techniques of agriculture would have produced a net loss from the disruption of the existing system.”<sup>62</sup>

Indigenous Californians maintained this equilibrium via a variety of measures, including infanticide and abortion. To Spanish missionaries who sought to colonize them, these practices, which helped ensure the long-term well-being of their societies and the ecosystems on which they depended, appeared incomprehensible. Friar Fermín Lasuén wrote in 1795: “The failure of the mission Indians to show a greater increase may be attributed to their great incontinence and the inhumanity of the mothers, who in order not to become old and unattractive to their husbands manage to abort or strangle their newly-born children.”<sup>63</sup> These common demographic strategies of hunters and gatherers contrasted with the Spaniards’ experience of agricultural societies in which a newborn was a future laborer instead of an encumbrance for the group.<sup>64</sup> The contrast with their own cultural ideals of womanhood further inflamed the moral condemnation of their new colonial subjects.

---

60 Longinos, *Journal*, 59.

61 Juan Crespí, “Diary,” in *Lands of Promise and Despair. Chronicles of Early California 1535-1846*, edited by Rose Marie Beebe and Robert M. Senkewicz (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), 121.

62 Walton Bean, *California. An Interpretive History*, 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973), 4.

63 Quoted in Sherburne F. Cook, *The Conflict Between the California Indian and White Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 109.

64 Cook, *Conflict*, 110-11.



Like other indigenous groups in North America, the California native societies participated in trade networks moving goods from east to west and west to east. Salt and obsidian from the eastern Great Basin were traded to the Sierra Nevada and the central valley. Olivella and abalone from the coast were taken eastward. Bows and baskets moved in both directions. In California, “trade centers” did not appear because of the relatively uniform “distribution of resources along the coast and the abundant game and acorn supplies in the immediate interior. Small trading ‘hubs’ or ‘nodes’ linked the numerous linguistic and cultural groups of that region.”<sup>65</sup> These hubs were located between regions with diverse ecological endowments. Money was used in their transactions, as described by José Martínez Longinos:

This currency is fashioned from a kind of snail shell, broken up and shaped one piece at a time into lentil-like beads, which they drill with our needles and then a string, polishing them to the fineness they consider most desirable. The men wear strings of their beads and ours on their heads or around their necks, woven in various patterns. Each man displays his wealth on his head, from which he removes some for gambling or trafficking.<sup>66</sup>

With the Spanish colonization of Alta California, these trade networks, their products, and their currency would soon be inserted into the growing Pacific market, alongside hides and tallow produced by indigenous converts in the missions.

## 8. The Spanish Settlements in Alta California

In the eighteenth century, Spanish concern regarding foreigners’ activities along the Pacific coast grew in tandem with Russian exploration. In 1757, a lengthy book on the subject, *Noticia de la California (News of California)*, was published in Madrid. It was based on a manuscript written by Jesuit Miguel Venegas and edited by another Jesuit historian Andrés Marcos Burriel, with additional historical sources in Spanish. It included excerpts from other accounts about the circumnavigations of Woodes Rogers and George Anson, as well as Arthur Dobbs’ attempt to find the Northwest Passage. An *Appendix* to the book contains a note explaining new Russian knowledge of Siberia and Kamchatka. Burriel included these places in his chart of the Pacific printed with the volume. The work was soon translated into English and other European languages.

The sea otter is mentioned in the very first volume of *Noticia de la California*. It reports that on his 1733 trip to Islas de los Dolores in Baja California, Father Segismundo de Taraval encountered animals he thought were beavers. There is no reference to the animal’s market value, but Taraval shipped some to Mexico City as a curiosity.<sup>67</sup> The *Noticia* was published before the Spaniards decided to occupy Alta California. To encourage such an enterprise, Burriel mentions how helpful it would be to have a port on the coast—he recommends San Diego, Monterrey, or Cape Mendocino—where galleons could stop to get citrus fruits, fresh meat, water, and other supplies

---

65 Bruce Trigger and William R. Swagerty, “Entertaining Strangers: North America in the Sixteenth Century,” in *The Cambridge History of the Native Peoples of The Americas, Vol. I. North America*, Part I, edited by Bruce Trigger and Wilcomb E. Washburn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 329.

66 Longinos, *Journal*, 55.

67 Miguel Venegas, *Noticia de la California* [1757], 3 vols. (México: Editorial Layac, 1944), Vol. 1, 51.

to cure scurvy.<sup>68</sup> The Venegas manuscript mentions the case of a ship that arrived in Cabo San Lucas in 1734, with "many in the galleon touched by the *mal de Loanda* [scurvy] and the only remedy is to jump ashore and to eat pitahaya, citric fruits, and fresh meat." A Jesuit—Father Tamaral of Mission San José—provided the sick passengers with the required food, which resulted in a general improvement.<sup>69</sup>

Other publications during that same period magnified the Spanish unease regarding Russian exploration of the Pacific coast of North America. In 1759, F. Giuseppe Torrubia, a Franciscan friar, published *I Moscoviti nella California* (*The Muscovites in California*) in Rome, with a detailed account of Bering's expeditions and references to other Europeans' forays into territories supposedly belonging to the Spanish Empire. According to Torrubia, the Russians represented an enormous danger to Spain's American empire and, surprisingly, to Italian lands because "the Muscovites are able to navigate from their ports and coasts not only to California, but also to Acapulco, Lima, Panama, Chile, and passing the Strait of Magellan, they could reach the Mediterranean ports and consequently to our Civitavecchia." He also mentioned a communication from a Russian navy officer to the court in which "the letter's author pretends to name New Russia the new territories that Mr. Tschirikov with his Muscovites discovered in the year 1741 to the east of Siberia, with the reason that they were not under any dominion."<sup>70</sup>

In 1761, the Spanish ambassador, Marquis of Almodóvar, communicated to Secretary of State Ricardo Wall the gist of that same letter. The Russian court tried to avoid antagonizing the Spanish king by keeping all reports about Pacific explorations and establishments secret, but without success. In 1773, the Count of Lacy, a new diplomat near the court of Catherine the Great who was privy to Russian reports, wrote to Madrid a detailed note about Russian enclaves in Kamchatka and America, alarmed by their proximity to Spanish domains. In addition, the Count claimed positive evidence of the Northwest Passage from the Atlantic to the Pacific oceans—the Anian Strait in Spanish sources. He added that a professor from the Saint Petersburg Academy had suggested to the Empress dispatching a Russian fleet to Kamchatka via the Cape of Good Hope with the purpose of occupying American territories.<sup>71</sup> Despite all the intrigue, the only Russian enclave ever established in Alta California was Fort Ross (1812-1841), located 90 miles north of San Francisco Bay, where the Spaniards had no power to force them out. It was chosen for its agricultural potential to sustain the people of the fort and the enclave of Sitka in Alaska.

Decades later, these concerns over rival exploration would unite with administrative reforms to intensify Spanish activity in Alta California. The reign of Charles III (1759-1788) produced radical innovations in the management of the Spanish Empire. The secular monopolistic trade system, by which Spain claimed the American markets for its products, was abolished. The law of 1778, in fact, established free trade between American and Spanish ports and simplified the trade tax system. However, trade with Spain covered only a modest portion of the American demand: "Foreign shipping accounted for three-quarters of all the vessels taking part in the American trade,

---

68 Venegas, *Noticia de la California*, Vol. 3, 134-135.

69 Venegas, *Noticia de la California*, Vol. 1, 284.

70 Giuseppe Torrubia, *I Moscoviti nella California* (Roma: Generoso Salomoni, 1809), 67, 82.

71 Enriqueta Vila Vilar, "Los rusos en América," *Anuario de Estudios Americanos*, n.º 22 (1965), 624-625.

and foreign merchandise represented the bulk of goods traded to the New World.<sup>72</sup> During this period, ministers in Madrid legislated to increase state revenues, expand state power, and secure more control over the church, manifested by the expulsion of the Jesuit order in 1767 from Spanish lands, including Baja California missions. New crown monopolies appeared in the Americas on tobacco, alcohol, salt, and playing cards; gaming venues were also taxed.<sup>73</sup> Officials did all they could to revitalize the mining industry. Large sums of money were required to create a modern fleet, build coastal fortifications, and establish a colonial army to confront hegemonic Britain.

Spain had fought the British in the War of Jenkins' Ear (1739-1748) and the Anglo-Spanish War (1762-1763), which coincided with the global Seven Years War (1756-1763). Charles III and Louis XV of France signed the third *Pacte du Famille* in 1761. In this conflict, Britain and France disputed both territories and world hegemony. During the war, British fleets occupied the Spanish ports of Havana and Manila. John McNeill in *Mosquito Empires* affirms: "The heart of Spain's defense system in the Americas was heavily fortified ports, that, together with the ravages of yellow fever, could reasonably be expected to repel even the formidable war machine of Georgian Britain."<sup>74</sup> Yellow fever accounted for most British losses in Havana, but Manila was a different matter due to organized resistance in the provinces. Nonetheless, only limited Spanish forces thwarted the British, and the invading fleet departed in June 1764. Incidentally, during the hostilities, Spaniards learned of the large profits fetched by sea otter furs in China. As a result of this global war, France lost its territories in continental North America. After the Treaty of Paris (1763), Spain abandoned all territories east of the Mississippi and received French Louisiana—returned to France in 1801—as a barrier against British expansion.

Soon, a new Spanish imperial strategy took shape in the form of an expansion to territories in the North Pacific. Behind this effort was the energetic José de Gálvez, sent to New Spain as *Visitador General* (general inspector) (1764-1772) and later appointed to the Council of the Indies (1775-1782). In the Viceroyalty, the *Visitador* reaffirmed royal authority, substantially increased tax revenues, and stimulated the mining industry by lowering the price of mercury. To pursue the northern strategy, the Port of San Blas was founded in 1768, from which ships supplied the Spanish settlements in California. But goods also arrived from elsewhere, with British and French trading vessels exchanging their merchandise for otter skins and mission-produced hides, tallows, grain, and other products. After 1810, the American Wars of Independence interrupted communications with San Blas, and North American ships became paramount in trade and sea otter hunting.<sup>75</sup>

In addition to the San Blas-California sea route, Juan Bautista de Anza pioneered an overland trail from Sonora to California in 1774. The Yuma uprising along the Colorado River in 1781 blocked that route and prompted a punitive campaign, but the trail was later discontinued: "This ominous setback signaled the end of Spain's last great burst of imperial expansion in America, embracing the entire southern tier of what is now the United States, from California to Florida,

---

72 Henry Kamen, *Empire: How Spain Became a World Power, 1492-1763* (New York: Harper Collins, 2003), 470.

73 Matthew Restall and Kris Lane, *Latin America in Colonial Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 251.

74 John McNeill, *Mosquito Empires. Ecology and War in the Greater Caribbean. 1620-1914* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 188.

75 Hubert H. Bancroft, *History of California, Vol. II. 1801-1824* (San Francisco: The History Company, 1886), 63-64.

which Spain regained from Britain by siding with rebellious American colonists in 1779.<sup>76</sup> In a meeting at San Blas in 1768, a Royal Order was read "imparting definite knowledge of the attempts which the Russians have made to facilitate their communication with this America," and instructing the authorities "to observe from there the designs of that nation and to frustrate them as far as possible."<sup>77</sup> Gálvez was to "put into practice the former plans of occupancy with a *Presidio* at Puerto de Monterey, situated on the Great Ocean, on the west coast of California."<sup>78</sup> In 1769, Gálvez organized the first expedition to the north under the command of Gaspar de Portolá. The Dominican Order was assigned to the Lower California missions, and for the Upper Californian expedition, Junípero Serra led the Franciscan friars. Apache hostilities in Sonora kept the Spanish troops occupied; thus, Gálvez "had to turn to missionaries for help because they represented the only group experienced in managing Indians at low cost."<sup>79</sup>

Military victory over the Apaches proved impossible. The *Visitador* urged Viceroy Carlos F. de Croix to increase indigenous dependency via gifts and trade, including firearms and liquor, so that "economic interests and mutual security united Spaniards and Indians."<sup>80</sup> Peace led to a period of prosperity after the 1790s for cattle ranchers, farmers, merchants, and artisans, who moved to newly colonized territories. Their grain, livestock, and textiles supplied reinvigorated the mine districts in Chihuahua and Sonora. In 1769, the first land expeditionary group departed from Lower California with 400 animals, cattle, horses, and mules. These ungulates would change the ecology of California, as well as the lives of its native peoples, in dramatic ways.

Missions, military garrisons, *presidios*, and later Spanish villages or *pueblos* were located along the five-hundred-mile coastal plain between San Diego and San Francisco. The colonizers' numbers were always small: 990 in 1790, about 1,800 in 1800, and 3,200 when the Spanish era ended.<sup>81</sup> The missions gathered the natives living in dispersed settlements into one mission site, where strict labor discipline and Catholic moral codes were enforced by the friars and soldiers. Initially, clothing, shelter, and regular food brought small numbers of natives to the missions. This period of voluntary conversion ended in 1787 when soldiers were employed to force conversions or track down indigenous converts who fled.

Mission life was highly regulated. Converts and missionaries rose with the sun and went to prayers and mass. Mission diets also became increasingly regimented. In response to official inquiries, Fr. Luis Antonio Martínez, from San Luis Obispo, gave a detailed account:

There are three meals a day for the neophyte Indians. In the morning, they receive the *atole* [a rich gruel]. At noon, they have *pozole*, which is composed of a gruel or thick soup of wheat, corn, bean, or horse beans, and meat each. In addition, they have a pottage and countless kinds of wild seeds, which they prepare in their private homes. At night again they have *atole*. The sick have

---

76 Hyslop, *Contest for California*, 107.

77 Hyslop, *Contest for California*, 107.

78 Quoted in Beebe and Senkewicz, *Lands of Promise*, 110.

79 David J. Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 180.

80 Weber, *Spanish Frontier*, 175.

81 Weber, *Spanish Frontier*, 193.

their special food in the hospital where the *atole* of corn tortillas is prepared for them, besides the dish of veal or beef or both together.<sup>82</sup>

Despite missionaries' claims regarding the adequacy of the converts' diet, it represented a reduction in calories and nutritional diversity. Sherburne F. Cook calculated that in 1796, each mission slaughtered nine heads of cattle weekly, which, added to grain and other foods, placed converts' diet at 2,000 to 2,100 calories. Cook concluded that "the low resistance implicit in a high-disease incidence and mortality is in definite conformity with the only moderate caloric intake and marginal vitamin supply which undoubtedly existed,"<sup>83</sup> insufficient to support the working natives. In a report, Governor Diego de Borica attributed the poor health of the neophytes to "the labor which until recently they have performed [...] without regard to their feeble constitutions."<sup>84</sup> Usually, converts worked 30 to 40 hours per week at the mission and military garrisons as laborers and domestic servants.<sup>85</sup>

The mission diet negatively affected Spanish attempts at agriculture. Bancroft observed that "ground squirrels, gophers and rats—these animals having rapidly multiplied since the Indians had no longer need to hunt them for food—were the agricultural pests."<sup>86</sup> Mission agriculture expanded principally due to Spaniards' "[u]nwinning silent armies of pathogens, plants, and animals that rendered them and their institutions nearly invincible."<sup>87</sup> Cattle, horses, and sheep multiplied rapidly in what Elinor G.K. Melville called an "ungulate irruption," accompanied by "an assemblage of Mediterranean weeds tolerant of hot weather with seasonal droughts."<sup>88</sup> Governor José J. de Arrillaga informed the voyager Georg H. von Langsdorff in 1806 that the cattle had become so numerous he had sent out soldiers to kill 20,000. Horses were periodically slaughtered "because when allowed to become wild, they interfered seriously with the more profitable raising cattle."<sup>89</sup> Cattle raising was the mission's main economic activity for producing hides, which were stored in the mission or bartered with vessels plying the coast.

Steven Hackel established a connection between ecological imperialism and the mission system: "The awful, if accidental, genius of Spanish colonization in California, then, was not just in creating a subsistence crisis among Indian communities through introduced diseases, plants, and animals; it was in offering what appeared to be a solution in the form of food Indians raised at mission."<sup>90</sup> During the drought of the mid-1790s, horses, cattle, and sheep ranged ever farther, searching for pasture and eliminating the remaining areas of native grasses. The disappearance of acorns and other seeds obliged native peoples suffering from hunger to turn

---

82 Quoted in Edith Buckland Webb, *Indian Life at the Old Missions* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 40.

83 Cook, *Conflict*, 43, 47.

84 Quoted in Cook, *Conflict*, 55.

85 Cook, *Conflict*, 91, 94, 96-97.

86 Bancroft, *History of California*, 417.

87 Steven W. Hackel, *Children of Coyote, Missionaries of Saint Francis. Indian-Spanish Relations in Colonial California, 1769-1850* (Williamsburg: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 64.

88 Elinor G.K. Melville, *A Plague of Sheep: Environmental Consequences of the Conquest of Mexico* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 6-7, 47-59.

89 Bancroft, *History of California*, 182, 668.

90 Hackel, *Children of Coyote*, 72.

to cattle as a source of food: "Once rains returned, as in 1798, nonnative grasses and introduced livestock solidified their hold."<sup>91</sup> Thus, according to Hackel, there is a "rough correlation" between baptisms and the spread of livestock in Spanish colonial California.<sup>92</sup>

Missions became centers of acclimatization for European crops like grapes, olive trees, fruits, and vegetables. G. H. von Langsdorff, when describing Mission San Francisco, writes: "The only things that grow well in the gardens are asparagus, cabbage, and several sorts of salad, onions, and potatoes. In some fields tolerably sheltered from the wind, peas, beans, Turkish corn (maize), and other pulses (legumes) are cultivated and thrive pretty well."<sup>93</sup> There was a significant exception to this unilateral exchange. When La Pérouse's ships visited Monterey, they were warmly received and to reciprocate, "our gardener gave to the missionaries some potatoes from Chili, perfectly sound; I believe this is not one of the least of our gifts and that this root will succeed perfectly around Monterey."<sup>94</sup>

The other aspect of ecological imperialism was "the unwitting silent armies of pathogens"<sup>95</sup> that killed large numbers of indigenous people, with death rates doubling birth rates in some periods. This high death rate had unexpected consequences, as converts survived their new life only for ten or twelve years: "Since diseases carried off a larger proportion of the young and the old at the missions, unusually high percentages of their resident populations tended to be in their most productive years, between ages nineteen and forty-nine. The mission economies, then, profited from the low ratio between workers and their dependent young and elderly."<sup>96</sup> Three major epidemics occurred during the Spanish period: two respiratory (pneumonia and diphtheria) and a devastating bout of measles. The crowded mission system itself exposed the neophytes to diseases, such as influenza, smallpox, tuberculosis, cholera, and dysentery, "but even the common cold would rapidly develop into some deadly form of pulmonary disease."<sup>97</sup>

Venereal diseases also wreaked havoc on mission converts and indigenous communities farther inland. Longinos attributed poor native health to syphilis:

The cause to which this has been attributed are various, to wit: reducing the Indians to settlements, changing their diet from that which they were accustomed to before their conversion, obliging them to sleep indoors, etc. In my opinion, however, all these explanations are erroneous, and the true cause is syphilis, which, since it was introduced (and is still spreading rapidly), does more damage than it does among people who are inured to it, for these Indians did not know the disease in their wild state, as I have observed in my travels.<sup>98</sup>

Sherburne F. Cook, a physiologist, wrote: "A population thoroughly saturated with venereal disease will fall easier prey to other maladies, whether the latter be chronic or epidemic, and there

---

91 Hackel, *Children of Coyote*, 79

92 Hackel, *Children of Coyote*, 88.

93 Quoted in Beebe and Senkewicz, *Lands of Promise*, 87.

94 Bancroft, *History of California*, 619.

95 Weber, *Spanish Frontier*, 192.

96 Weber, *Spanish Frontier*, 192.

97 Campbell Grant, "Chumash: Introduction," in *Handbook of North American Indians: California*, edited by Robert F. Heizer (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1978), 506.

98 Longinos, *California in 1792*, 3.



can be no question that this increased susceptibility accounts for at least part of the virulence displayed by pneumonia, tuberculosis, and other ailments.”<sup>99</sup> Gonorrhea, also introduced during colonization, was detrimental to pregnancies and newborn infants and reduced the fertility of both men and women. Women, who had been raped or forced into concubinage with Spaniards, also resorted to abortions and infanticide.

In 1798, accounts of the dire situation of native Californians prompted Viceroy Miguel José de Azanza to write to California Governor Diego de Borica, urging him to investigate. The Governor told the Viceroy, “Generally, the treatment given to the Indians is very harsh. At San Francisco, it even reached the point of cruelty.”<sup>100</sup> Fermín Francisco de Lasuén, President of the Californian missions from 1795 to 1803, answered the accusation defiantly: “Here then, we have the greatest problem of the missionary: how to transform a savage race such as these into a society that is human, Christian, civil, and industrious. This can be accomplished only by denaturalizing them to act against nature.”<sup>101</sup> The friars’ “denaturalization” project set in motion the initial demographic catastrophe of the indigenous nations of California half a century before the Gold Rush unleashed what is known today as the “California genocide.”

## Conclusions

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels were quite attentive to economic developments in California and the Pacific in general. In 1852, Engels wrote to Marx about how a re-invigorated international trade was preventing a commercial crisis and thus revolutionary upheavals: “California and Australia are two cases which were not foreseen in the *Manifesto*: creation of large new markets out of nothing.”<sup>102</sup> But, of course, the markets generated by the Gold Rush, which stimulated industrial capitalism, were not created “out of nothing.” As we have shown, they were preceded by centuries of violent European “competitive expansion” via primitive accumulation: a path-dependent process that also produced an accumulation of knowledge about the vast geography and resources of the Pacific Ocean. During the eighteenth century, the Pacific’s products were extracted and commodified in circuits whose demand center was China. It is precisely the prior existence of these global markets, centered on silver and “soft gold,” that explains the presence of Europeans and Americans in California eager for the yellow metal in 1848.

Plants and animals traveled with the newcomers, changing economies and landscapes forever as ecosystems were depleted of commercial species; similarly, new pathogens arrived, unleashing demographic catastrophes. Native peoples on the coasts and archipelagos contributed actively to this trade, whether forcibly recruited or taking advantage of new markets for their products. The articulation between mercantile capitalism and indigenous human modes of production resulted in increased political rivalry and ritual intensification aimed at stabilizing leadership and social reproduction in rapidly degrading circumstances. The unlikely impetus of

---

99 Cook, *Conflict*, 23.

100 Beebe and Senkewicz, *Lands of Promise*, 270

101 Quoted in Beebe and Senkewicz, *Lands of Promise*, 274.

102 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*, Volume 38 (New York: International Publishers, 1975), 57, 165.

this complex global process was an unfortunate sea mammal whose fur was all the rage among the upper social ranks of the Qing Empire.

## Bibliography

### Primary Sources

#### Printed Primary Documentation

1. Cook, James. *The Journals of Captain James Cook. Vol. III. The Voyage of the Resolution and Discovery, 1776-1780. Part One.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967.
2. Crespí, Juan. “Diary.” In *Lands of Promise and Despair. Chronicles of Early California 1535-1846*, edited by Rose Marie Beebe and Robert M. Senkewicz. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001, pp. 118-127.
3. Longinos Martínez, José. *Journal of José Longinos Martínez.* San Francisco: John Howell, 1956.
4. Longinos Martínez, José. *California in 1792. The Expedition of José Longinos Martínez.* San Marino: Huntington Library Publications, 1938.
5. Marx, Karl. *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy.* New York: International Library Publishing, 1904.
6. Marx, Karl, and Frederick Engels. *Collected Works*, Vol. 38. New York: International Publishers, 1975.
7. Ogden, Adele. *The California Sea Otter Trade, 1784 to 1848.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1941.
8. Smith, Adam. *The Wealth of Nations.* New York: Modern Library, 1994.
9. Torrubia, Giuseppe. *I Moscoviti nella California.* Roma: Generoso Salomoni, 1809.
10. Venegas, Miguel. *Noticia de la California [1757].* 3 vols. México: Editorial Layac, 1944.

### Secondary Sources

11. Alcina Franch, José. “The Culture of the Indians of the Northwest Coast.” In *To the Totem Shore: The Spanish Presence on the Northwest Coast.* Madrid: Ediciones El Viso, 1986, 120-157.
12. Baker, Brenda J., and Lisa Kealhofer. “Assessing the Impact of European Contact on Aboriginal Populations.” In *Bioarcheology of Native American Adaptation in the Spanish Borderlands*, edited by Brenda J. Baker and Lisa Kealhofer. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996, 1-14.
13. Bancroft, Hubert H. *History of California.* Vol. II. 1801-1824. San Francisco: The History Company, 1886.
14. Bannon, John Francis. *The Spanish Borderlands Frontier, 1513-1821.* Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1974.
15. Beaglehole, John. Introduction to *The Journals of Captain James Cook. Vol. III. The Voyage of the Resolution and Discovery 1776-1780. Part One.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967, xxix-clxx.
16. Bean, Walton. *California. An Interpretive History.* 2nd ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973.
17. Beebe, Rose Marie, and Robert M. Senkewicz, eds. *Lands of Promise and Despair. Chronicles of Early California, 1535-1846.* Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2015.

18. Bray, Francesca. "Agriculture." Part 2 of *Biology and Biological Technology Science and Civilization in China*, Vol. 6, edited by Joseph Needham. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.
19. Burkholder, Mark A., and Lyman L. Johnson. *Colonial Latin America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.
20. Cook, Sherburne F. "Historical Demography." In *Handbook of North American Indians: California*, edited by Robert F. Heizer. Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1978, 91-127.
21. Cook, Sherburne F. *The Conflict Between the California Indian and White Civilization*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976.
22. D'Arcy, Paul. "No Empty Ocean: Trade and Interaction across the Pacific Ocean to the Middle of the Eighteenth Century." In *Studies in the Economic History of the Pacific*, edited by Sally Miller, A.J.H. Latham, and Dennis O. Flynn. London: Routledge, 1998.
23. De Vries, Jan. *The Economy of Europe in the Age of Crisis, 1650-1750*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
24. Flynn, Dennis O., and Arturo Giráldez. "Cycles of Silver: Global Economic Unity through the Mid-Eighteenth Century." In *China and the Birth of Globalization in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century*. London: Routledge, 2010.
25. Frank, Andre Gunder. *World Accumulation, 1492-1789*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1978.
26. Gibson, James R. *Otter Skins, Boston Ships and China Goods. The Maritime Fur Trade of the Northwest Coast, 1785-1841*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1992.
27. Gibson, James R. "The Maritime Trade of the North Pacific Coast." In *Handbook of North American Indians*, Vol. 4, edited by Wilcomb E. Washburn. Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1988, 375-390.
28. Grant, Campbell. "Chumash: Introduction." In *Handbook of North American Indians: California*, edited by Robert F. Heizer. Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1978, 505-508.
29. Hackel, Steven W. *Children of Coyote, Missionaries of Saint Francis. Indian-Spanish Relations in Colonial California, 1769-1850*. Williamsburg: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005.
30. Hardee, Jim. "Soft Gold: Animal Skins and the Early Economy of California." In *Studies in Pacific History. Economics, Politics, and Migration*, edited by Dennis O. Flynn, Arturo Giráldez, and James Sobredo. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002, 23-39.
31. Harris, Marvin. *The Rise of Anthropological Theory*. New York: Crowell, 1968.
32. Heizer, Robert F. "The Introduction of Monterey Shells to the Indians of the Northwest Coast." *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 31, n.º 4 (1940): 399-402.
33. Hyslop, Stephen G. *Contest for California. From Spanish Colonization to the American Conquest*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012.
34. Kamen, Henry. *Empire: How Spain Became a World Power, 1492-1763*. New York: Harper Collins, 2003.
35. López Rosado, Diego G. *Historia del peso mexicano*. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1975.
36. Madley, Benjamin. *An American Genocide: The United States and the California Catastrophe, 1846-1873*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016.
37. Matsuda, Matt. *Pacific Worlds: A History of Seas, Peoples, and Cultures*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
38. McNeill, John. *Mosquito Empires. Ecology and War in the Greater Caribbean. 1620-1914*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

39. McNeill, John. “Islands in the Rim: Ecology and history in and around the Pacific, 1521-1996.” In *Pacific Centuries. Pacific and Pacific Rim history since the sixteenth century*, edited by Dennis O. Flynn, Lionel Frost, and A.J.H. Latham. London: Routledge, 1999, 70-84.
40. McNeill, John. “From Magellan to MITI: Pacific Rim economies and Pacific Islands ecologies since 1521.” In *Studies in the Economic History of the Pacific Rim*, edited by Sally Miller, A.J.H. Latham, and Dennis O. Flynn. London: Routledge, 1998, 72-93.
41. Melville, Elinor GK. *A Plague of Sheep: Environmental Consequences of the Conquest of Mexico*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
42. Restall, Matthew, and Kris Lane. *Latin America in Colonial Times*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
43. Richards, John F. *The World Hunt. An Environmental History of the Commodification of Animals*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014.
44. Schlesinger, Jonathan. *A World Trimmed with Fur. Wild Things, Pristine Places, and the Natural Fringes of Qing Rule*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017.
45. Trapido, Joe. “Potlatch and the Articulation of Modes of Production: Revisiting French Marxist Anthropology and the History of Central Africa.” *Dialectical Anthropology* 40, n.º 3 (2016): 199-220. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10624-016-9432-7>
46. Triger, Bruce, and William R. Swagerty. “Entertaining Strangers: North America in the Sixteenth Century.” In *The Cambridge History of the Native Peoples of The Americas. Vol. 1. North America, Part I*, edited by Bruce Triger and Wilcomb E. Washburn. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, 325-398.
47. Van Zanden, Jan L. *The Long Road to the Industrial Revolution. The European Economy in a Global Perspective, 1000-1800*. Leiden: Brill, 2009.
48. Vila Vilar, Enriqueta. “Los rusos en América.” *Anuario de Estudios Americanos*, n.º 22 (1965): 569-567.
49. Von Glahn, Richard. *The Economic History of China. From Antiquity to the Nineteenth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016.
50. Webb, Edith Buckland. *Indian Life at the Old Missions*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982.
51. Weber, David J. *The Spanish Frontier in North America*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.
52. Wood, Alan. *The History of Siberia. From Russian Conquest to Revolution*. London: Routledge, 1991.



## Arturo Giráldez

PhD in History from University of Amsterdam and PhD in Spanish and Portuguese from University of California-Santa Barbara (United States). Professor of Spanish and International Studies, University of the Pacific, Stockton, California, USA. He is the author of *The age of trade: The Manila galleons and the dawn of the global economy* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015) and *Metals and monies in an emerging global economy* (New York: Routledge, 2022). [agiralde@pacific.edu](mailto:agiralde@pacific.edu)

### **Analiese Richard**

PhD in Sociocultural Anthropology from University of California-Berkeley. Professor of Humanities, Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana-Cuajimalpa (Mexico). She is the author of *The unsettled sector: NGOs and the cultivation of democratic citizenship in rural Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016). [arichard@cua.uam.mx](mailto:arichard@cua.uam.mx)