**9. THE MING DYNASTY (1368-1644)**

Having restored Chinese rule to China, the first Ming emperor tried to model his rule after that of the Han, but the Ming fell far short of the Han's accomplishments. The land under Ming domination was less than under either the Han or the T'ang. The Ming dominion changed little after the first two decades. It was confined mostly to what is known as China proper, south of the Great Wall and east of Xinjiang and Tibet.

In culture, as well, the Ming lacked the Han's creativity and brilliance. Coming after almost a century of foreign domination, the Ming was a period of restoration and reorganization rather than a time of new discovery. In a sense, the Ming followed a typical dynastic cycle: initial rehabilitation of the economy and restoration of efficient government, followed by a time of stability and then a gradual decline and fall.

The emperor Hung-wu modeled his government on the T'ang system, restoring the doctrine and practices of Confucianism and continuing the trend toward concentration of power in the imperial government, especially in the hands of the emperor himself. He tried to conduct state affairs singlehandedly, but the work load proved overwhelming. To assist him, he gathered around him several loyal middle-level officials, thus creating an extra-governmental organization, the Grand Secretariat. The central bureaucracy was restored and filled by officials selected by the examination system. That system was further formalized by the introduction of a special essay style called the eight-legged essay, to be used in writing the examination. In addition, the subject matter of the examinations was restricted to the Five Classics, said to have been compiled, edited, or written by Confucius, and the Four Books, published by Chu Hsi.

In the field of provincial government, the emperor Hung-wu continued the Yuan practice of limiting the power of provincial governors and subjecting them directly to the central government. The empire was divided into 15 provinces. The first capital at Nanjing was in the economic heartland of China, but in 1421 the emperor Yung-Lo, who took the throne after a civil w ar, moved the capital to Peking, where he began a massive construction project. The imperial palace, which is also known as the Forbidden City, was built at this time.

The Ming produced two unique contributions: the maritime expeditions of the early 15th century and the philosophy of Wang Yang-ming. Between 1405 and 1433, seven major maritime expeditions were launched under the leadership of a Muslim eunuch, Cheng Ho. Each expedition was provided with several seagoing vessels, which were 400 feet (122 meters) high, weighed 700 tons (635 metric tons), had multiple decks and 50 or 60 cabins, and carried several hundred people. During these expeditions, the Chinese sailed the South Pacific, the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea, and the Persian Gulf. They traveled as far west as eastern Africa and as far south as Java and Sumatra. But these missions ended just as suddenly as they had begun.

In philosophy, Wang Yang-ming developed a system of thought that ran counter to the orthodox teaching of Chu Hsi. While Chu Hsi believed in learning based on reason and the "investigation of things," Wang Yang-ming believed in the "learning of the mind," an intuitive process.

During the second half of the Ming Dynasty, European expansion began. Early in the 16th century Portuguese traders arrived and leased the island of Macao as their trading post. In 1582 Matteo Ricci, an Italian Jesuit missionary, arrived in Macao. Because of his knowledge of science, mathematics, and astronomy and his willingness to learn the Chinese language and adapt to Chinese life, he was accepted by the Chinese and became the first foreigner allowed to live in Peking permanently. Jesuits followed him and served the Ming emperors as mapmakers, calendar reformers, and astronomers.

Unlike earlier brief contacts with the West or the later Western incursions into China, the 16th-century Sino-Western relationship was culturally oriented and mutually respectful. Both the Chinese and the Jesuits tried to find common ground in their thoughts. The Jesuits' activities produced 300,000 converts in 200 years, not a great number among a population of more than 100 million. Among them, however, were noted scholars such as Hsu Kuang-ch'i and Li Chih-tsao, who translated many of the works that Jesuits brought to China. The Jesuits wrote over 300 Chinese works.

In the last century of its existence, the Ming Dynasty faced numerous internal and external problems. The internal problem was tied to official corruption and taxation. Because the Ming bureaucracy was relatively small, tax collection was entrusted to locally powerful people who evaded paying taxes by passing the burden on to the poor. A succession of weak and inattentive emperors encouraged the spread of corruption and the greed of eunuchs. In the 1620s a struggle between the inner group of eunuchs and the outer circle of scholar-officials led to the execution of about 700 scholars.

Externally, the security of the Ming empire was threatened from all directions. The Mongols returned and seized Peking in 1550, and their control of Turkestan and Tibet was recognized by the Ming in a peace treaty of 1570. Pirates preyed on the east coast, and Japanese pirates penetrated as far inland as Hangzhou and Nanjing. In the 1590s the Ming had to send expeditionary forces to rescue Korea from invading Japanese soldiers under Toyotomi Hideyoshi. The Ming drove back the Japanese forces, but not without depleting the treasury and weakening their defensive network against neighboring Manchuria to the northeast.

In Manchuria the Manchus (Pinyin: Manzhous) had organized a Chinese-style state and strengthened their forces under a unique form of military organization called the banner system. However, it was not the Manchus who overthrew the Ming but a Chinese rebel, Li Tzu-cheng, who became a leader among the bandits who had become desperate because of a famine in the northwest in 1628. By 1642 Li had become master of north China and in 1644 he captured Peking.

There he found that the last Ming emperor had hanged himself, ending the "Brilliant" dynasty. Li, however, was not destined to rule. The rule was to pass once again into the hands of a people from beyond the Great Wall, the Manchus. They were invited into China by the Ming general Wu San-kuei to eliminate the rebels. After driving the rebels from the capital, the Manchus stayed and established a new dynasty, the Ch'ing.

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| **Ming Dynasty (1368-1644)**  Zhu Yuanzhang  **Zhu Yuanzhang**  As noted, the Ming (“bright”) dynasty was the last imperial dynasty ruled by Han Chinese. Once Zhu Yuanzhang (also known by the reign name Hongwu) ousted the main Mongol forces, he declared himself emperor. He moved quickly to gain military control of the whole country, in many ways following Yuan styles of military and government organization. It was not until 1390, however, that the final Mongol holdouts were driven from southwest China. Occasional Mongol raids still perplexed the Ming even in the 16th century.  In order to re-staff and reinvigorate the government bureaucracy, Zhu revived the civil service examinations and set up government-sponsored schools throughout the land to help examinees ground themselves in the Confucian Classics. He also experimented with new tax policies by introducing a system by which local gentry were responsible for tax-collection in their local areas; farm households were organized in groups of ten with mutual responsibility for taxes and labor for public works projects.  **Forbidden City, BeijingForbidden City, Beijing**  **Zheng He's ship and Columbus' shipZheng He's ship and Columbus' ship**  His grandson, the Yongle Emperor moved the capital from Nanjing, in the south, to the site of the former Mongol capital, Beijing. Here, he built the massive [**Forbidden City**](javascript:void(0)) between 1402 and 1421 that still stands beside Tian’anmen Square. Yongle also led a number of military expeditions into the remaining Mongol realms as a deterrent show of force. Besides re-furbishing the Grand Canal system to improve grain transport he commissioned the Moslem eunuch Zheng He on seven voyages across the Indian Ocean to the east coast of Africa and ports in the Arabian Sea. One detachment of his men actually made a pilgrimage to Mecca. Although the massive fleets of over 300 ships – including several huge treasure boats ten times the size of Columbus’ Santa Maria—must have inspired awe and respect in all who encountered them, for some reason Yongle lost trust in the enterprise (and Zheng He) and ordered the fleets burned. China thus lost its initiative as a commercial, sea-faring power. Years later in the dynasty, Japanese pirates would constantly raid the Chinese coast.  Zheng He's seven expedition routes  **Zheng He's seven expedition routes**  Other events marked a shift inward. The Mongols again proved a threat, actually capturing the reigning Ming emperor around 1448. The eventual result was a re-vamping of the Great Wall, which was initially formed from several existing walls and rebuilt and fortified along the borders of the northern steppe. Due to relatively stable times and advances in agricultural techniques, by 1600 the population had reached 150,000,000. New strains of hardier and faster-growing rice were developed and new crops such as the white potato, sweet potato, maize, peanuts, and hot peppers were arriving from the New World via the Portuguese, Dutch and other Europeans who were now taking control of the world’s sea routes.  **Jesuit Matteo Ricci, wearing Chinese scholar's clothesJesuit Matteo Ricci, wearing Chinese scholar's clothes**  Portuguese Jesuit priests (a highly learned sect of the Catholic Church) were the first sea-faring Europeans to arrive in China during the Ming, making contact in 1514. By 1582, the famous Jesuit Matteo Ricci, who (like Marco Polo in the Yuan dynasty) learned Chinese and even wore Chinese clothing. Chinese intellectuals shared knowledge of astronomy and invention with the Jesuits, who in turn introduced aspects of European mathematics and science of the day. Printing became even more widespread than in the past and a wide variety of books, including vernacular short stories and romances, found ready markets in urban areas.  Eventually the combination of a decline of leadership (coupled with corrupt eunuchs around the imperial court), a de-stabilization of the economy due to an influx of foreign silver, population growth, abusive tax policies, and popular rebellion weakened the Ming. Among the rebels was one Li Zicheng, who in 1644 managed to capture the father of a Chinese commander, Wu Sangui. Instead of submitting to Li Zicheng, Wu allied himself with Dorgon. Dorgon was a leader of the Manchus, a people who lived in the rich forests of Manchuria—what is now northeast China and part of North Korea. For several generations the Manchus, descendants of the old Jurched peoples, had been scheming to invade China under capable leaders such as Nurhaci (1559-1626). After Wu Sangui aided the Manchu forces in breaching the Great Wall they entered and soon took command of all China. |