

Ming ("golden") Dynasty China (1368-1644)

*Notes taken from Jerry H. Bentley and Herbert F. Ziegler's *Traditions & Encounters: A Global Perspective on the Past* (Toronto: McGraw Hill, 2006)



Emperor Hongwu (1368-1398)

- Replaced the Yuan Dynasty by driving out the Mongols and restoring Indigenous rule to the empire.
- The first emperor, Hongwu (1368-1398), restored a tightly centralized state. Hongwu made extensive use of mandarins (a bureaucrat scholar in the government of imperial China) who traveled throughout the land and oversaw implementation of government policies.
- Emperor Yongle (1403-1424) launched a series of naval expeditions that sailed throughout the Indian Ocean, even as far as east Africa. Following Yongle's death these expeditions were ended, citing their expense.
- The Ming emperors were determined to prevent new invasions (eradicating Mongol and other foreign influences by creating a stable society in the image of the Chinese past). The emperors rebuilt and extended the Great Wall, ended all Mongol practices and revived Chinese traditions that had largely been ignored by the previous dynasty.

- The government sponsored the study of Chinese cultural traditions, especially Confucianism, and provided financial support for imperial academies and regional colleges. Most importantly, the Ming state restored the system of civil service exams that the Mongol rulers had neglected.

- Portuguese captain Jorge Alvares landed in Macau, a small fishing village, in 1513.
 - In 1552, China granted the Portuguese permission to build drying and storage sheds for their trade goods.
 - In 1557, Portugal received permission to lease land from the emperor and establish a trading settlement in Macau (the Portuguese viewed this as a rental payment agreement between equals, but the Chinese government thought of the payment as tribute – an act of submission – from Portugal).



- Ming state control began to weaken by the mid 16th-century. From the 1520s to the 1560s, Chinese pirates and smugglers operated almost at will along the east coast of China. Ming coastal defense and naval forces could not control the coast, and in 1555 a fleet of 67 pirates went on a 3-month rampage of the region killing more than 4000 people.
 - Suppression of the pirates took more than 40-years, partly because of an increasingly inept imperial government.
- The later Ming emperors lived extravagantly in the Forbidden City, receiving news about the outside world from eunuchs and imperial administrators. Some emperors ignored government affairs for decades while they satisfied their various appetites.
 - Powerful eunuchs won the favour of the later emperors by providing for their amusement. The eunuchs then used their influence to enrich themselves – as their influence increased, corruption and inefficiency spread throughout the government, weakening the Ming empire.
- When a series of famines struck China during the early 17th-century the government was unable to organize effective relief efforts. Peasants in famine-struck regions ate grass roots and tree bark.
- During the 1630s peasants organized revolts throughout China, and they gathered momentum as one city after another withdrew its loyalty from the Ming emperor. At the same time, Manchu forces invaded from the north.
- In 1644 Manchu invaders displaced the Ming Dynasty, founding the Qing Dynasty.