

Asian Civilization: Ming China & Tokugawa Japan

- So far we have examined the development of new civilizations in the Americas, Africa, Europe, and Central Asia after 1500. The most obvious common feature of all these new civilizations has been the massive and rapid rate of change in these regions, both as a component of the rise of Western influence in the international system and also as a response to this development.
- In East Asia, however, these circumstances are not as prevalent or as noticeable, for one critical reason = 2 well-developed and mature civilizations already exist here; China and Japan.
- For 1500 years, China had dominated East & South-East Asia politically, economically, & culturally.
- Chinese people saw themselves as citizens of Chung Kuo (The Middle Kingdom) a designation that placed them at the center of the world. They saw themselves with considerable justification, as the pinnacle of human civilization and achievement. As we have already seen, most of the technology that would transform the Islamic World & the West - such as printing & gunpowder - originated in China; Additionally, the quality of goods manufactured within

Middle Kingdom ~~s~~ were clearly superior to anything produced elsewhere. These realities encouraged the growth of a culture of superiority among Chinese elites - this perception encouraged glorification of indigenous traditions, customs and practices and discouraged cross-cultural exchange. ⊕ These certainties were soundly shaken by the Mongol invasions of the 1200s, and for 200 years China would be controlled by foreigners. By the end of the 1300s, however, the Mongols were experiencing the same ~~lack~~ of deterioration of their military skills that prompted the rise of Modern Russia; together with increased opposition to their ~~tax~~ oppressive tax measures and a nationalist-peasant rebellion sparked by famine in South China, these circumstances coalesced to enable the Chinese to drive out the hated Mongols & restore local rule. A local military commander, Zhu Yuanzhang defeated all of his rivals and in 1368 proclaimed himself Hongwu, the first Emperor of the new Ming Dynasty that would rule China until 1644.

* Hongwu's first task as Emperor was to remove all traces of the hated "barbarians" Mongol dress, as in Russia, was discarded, Mongol names dropped, and Mongol palaces & buildings were looted and destroyed.
→ Pre-Mongol traditions and practices were

Ming China (cont.)

restored, and the Ming Emperors sought to recreate China's pre-Mongol past in the new era. While this would serve as a source of consolidation and solidification of their rule, it would also have several negative consequences, which I shall consider shortly.

① Hongwu (1368-1398) and his son Yonglo (1403-1424) succeeded in restoring efficiency to Chinese government. The traditional examination system, ~~also~~ that served as the means of bureaucratic entrance and recruitment was restored, as was traditional Chinese law.

* These developments reinstated the power and status of the Mandarins the scholar-gentry who had been marginalized under the Mongols. (see textbook 674)

② Both Emperors sponsored public works & infrastructure projects such as reforestation, repopulation of sparsely settled regions, and water projects. Yonglo reconquered lost territory in modern Vietnam, and both Emperors encouraged foreign trade with Japan, S-E Asia, & India. Chinese migration into S-E Asian regions was also encouraged.

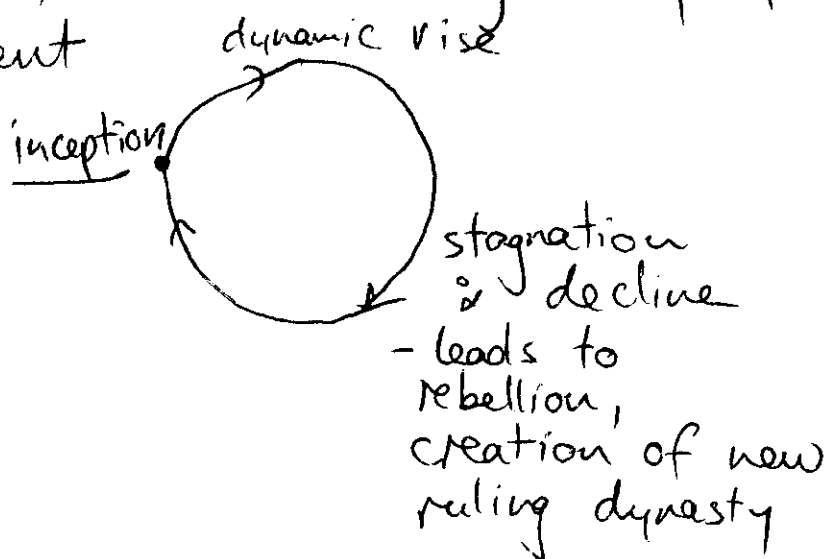
- As a ~~sign~~ symbol of the resurgence of Chinese power, Yonglo sent seven spectacular naval expeditions to the South and West between 1405 and ~~1431~~ 1423. Led by a trusted court eunuch, a Muslim named Zhenghe these expeditions had no precedent in Chinese history.

- The ships involved in these missions dwarfed their later European counterparts in size and scope. These voyages involved dozens of ships (compared to Columbus's 3 ~~and~~ 70 years later) some of which were over 400 feet long and possessed multiple decks & masts (compared to Columbus's caravels of 40-60').

- This technology and nautical skill, developed several decades before European counterparts, demonstrated that the Chinese clearly possessed the skill and power to expand on a global scale about a century before Europe. Had they chosen to do so, modern world history would look very different than it does today. * Why they did not do so is explained well in the textbook on ~~reference~~.

- With the death of Yonglo, powerful court officials convinced his successor that the voyages were an expensive waste of money and time that the Kingdom could not afford. All of the records and ships were destroyed, and China retreated inward into self-imposed isolation. This rejection of an international presence served short-term political goals, but ultimately encouraged a familiar pattern of dynastic decline.

⊕ Chinese view of history - cyclical rather than linear - focused on trajectory of dynastic government



Causes behind Ming Decline

- By the late 1500s, the Ming retreat from overseas involvement had become just one facet of a familiar pattern of dynastic decline. Several ~~facets~~ areas of this process can be identified.

① The Ming predilection for conservatism, particularly in the attempt to re-create an idolized, pre-Mongol past, ~~ultimately~~ ultimately acted as a negative force in Ming society. Despite their attempts at some change, the emperors perpetuated many old bureaucratic sources of corruption and weakness. The power of court ~~and~~ eunuchs grew during the Ming Period, and their struggles with the scholar-gentry weakened the authority and power of the government. Increasingly isolated within the Imperial Quarters of the Forbidden City, the last of the Ming Emperors lost ~~and~~ touch with reality: the last Ming Emperor.

Ming Decline (cont.)

Chongzhen did not even know of the collapse of his regime before rebel soldiers began scaling the Forbidden City's walls. After bungling an attempt to kill his daughter, the ill-fated Emperor retreated to the Imperial Garden and hanged himself.

2) Economically, the Empire was in serious trouble by 1600. Population had rapidly expanded; from less than 75 million in 1400 to over 150 million by 1600. At the same time, public works projects were neglected, and floods, drought and famine soon ravaged the country. Peasants now ate bark from trees or animal feces to stay alive; many sold their children into slavery, while others resorted to cannibalism. In desperation, as in previous eras of decline, many turned to banditry & finally open rebellion.

3) The collapse of official authority was felt acutely within the Imperial military. The armed forces had doubled in size throughout the 16th Century, yet they were badly equipped and poorly-led. The Army was powerless to prevent a rapid increase in attacks and interventions by foreigners, such as the waves of Japanese pirates who mercilessly raided the Chinese coast. Armed only with spears and swords against Japanese gunpowder weapons, these clashes decisively undermined the military's confidence and morale.

Causes of Ming Decline

④

③

Foreign intervention of another sort further undermined Ming authority. The arrival of the Portuguese in 1517 had initially been met with resistance - confined to a small trading and diplomatic mission at the port of Macao, by 1557 the Portuguese had succeeded in gaining access to the lucrative economy of ~~the~~ Coastal China. Soon foreign goods, foods and money, in particular American silver, disrupted the local economy and encouraged rampant inflation, corruption and smuggling. Seeking to escape the desperate conditions in the countryside, tens of thousands flocked to the cities, overburdening local infrastructure and encouraging urban unrest. ^{From} Within this demographic movement grew two classes - the poor, technologically backward countryside, and the wealthy, advanced, yet corrupt cities, principally along the coast. This divide would remain well into the 20th Century.

- With the death of Chongzhen, China collapsed into a power vacuum and civil war. Only foreign intervention, in this case ~~of~~ that of another group of foreign "barbarians" the Jurchens or Manchus, saved China from territorial collapse. The Manchu ~~or~~ Qing Dynasty would be founded in 1683 - it would be China's last, and its demise in 1911 heralded the end of more than 2000 years of Imperial rule.

Tokugawa Japan - Rise of the Shōgun

- The disastrous fate of Ming China was not repeated in Japan. After several centuries of constant civil war between rival daimyo, local lords with private armies who fought among themselves for control of the country one of their number succeeded in defeating his rivals and establishing himself as Shōgun, an office that traditionally bestowed supreme military command of all military forces in times of national emergency. This man Oda Nobunaga, and his most trusted general, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, conquered the powerful daimyo lords and restored central authority to Japan. Although the Japanese Emperor remained an important spiritual and symbolic figurehead, real power lay in the hands of the Shōgun.

* European influence hastened these developments. Since Portuguese sailors had first been shipwrecked in Japan in 1543, European traders and missionaries had arrived in increasing numbers. Acting as intermediaries of Chinese & Japanese markets, Europeans not only reintegrated Japan into the regional economy but also introduced western innovations such as firearms, printing presses, and clocks. Firearms were soon produced locally - noticeably improved within a generation - and greatly contributed to the process of unification.

Tokugawa Japan (cont.)

- Oda Nobunaga was a remarkable leader: a skilled warrior, he combined daring, innovation, and ruthless determination in pursuit of his goal - restoring order and security to Japan.