

Ming and Qing Empires
AP World History
Kienast

The Ming Dynasty was the ruling dynasty of China for 276 years (1368–1644) following the collapse of the Mongol-led Yuan dynasty. The Ming was the last dynasty in China ruled by ethnic Han Chinese.

In 1369 a Chinese man named Zhu Yuanzhang [joo yawn zhong] was able to defeat Mongols in China and established Ming Dynasty. The Ming was known for rebuilding the Great Wall into its modern form and for the voyages of an explorer named Zheng He. [joong ha] The dynasty turned away from trade almost completely in the 1500's before eventually allowing limited trade with Europeans in the late 16th century, mainly as a way to acquire silver from the Europeans.

In the early 1400's the Ming was ruled by an emperor named Zhu Di, also known as Yongle. Zhu Di wanted to send a Chinese fleet out into the world on a voyage of discovery. The motive for this mission is still disputed. Some claim that the Chinese were trying to create order in China by giving the nation a mission that would inspire national pride, while others believe that Zheng He's mission was simply a treasure expedition. Whatever the reason, in 1405 the great Ming armada weighed anchor in Nanjing, on the first of seven epic voyages as far west as Africa—almost a century before Christopher Columbus's arrival in the Americas and Vasco da Gama's in India. Even then the European expeditions would seem paltry by comparison: All the ships of Columbus and da Gama combined could have been stored on a single deck of a single vessel in the fleet that set sail under Zheng He.

The fleet commanded by Zheng He counted as many as 62 gargantuan treasure ships, called *baochuan*, which some nautical experts believe may have measured up to 400 feet (122 meters) in length and 170 feet (52 meters) across the beam—with nine masts, 50,000-square-foot (4645 square meters) main decks, and a displacement of at least 3,000 tons (2,722 metric tons), ten times the size of Vasco da Gama's flagship. Scholars disagree on the *baochuan*'s actual size, but even at far more modest estimates they were surely the largest wooden ships ever launched. The *baochuan* were escorted by 370-foot-long (113 meters), eight-masted "galloping-horse ships," the swiftest in the fleet, 280-foot (85 meters) supply ships, 240-foot (73 meters) troop transports, and agile 180-foot (55 meters) combat junks, according to interpretations of Ming sources. More than 300 vessels are believed to have sailed on Zheng's main voyages to what the Chinese call Xi Yang, the Western Ocean. The ships were manned by nearly 30,000 sailors and marines, seven grand eunuchs and hundreds of other Ming officials, 180 physicians, five astrologers, and ranks of geomancers, sailmakers, herbalists, blacksmiths, carpenters, tailors, cooks, accountants, merchants, and interpreters.

When Zhu Di died in 1424, only one other treasure mission was attempted. Future emperors wanted to keep exploring, but the emperors' advisors argued against the costly voyages, and eventually all overseas expeditions were halted. Chinese authorities decided that they needed to concentrate on problems within China. Invasions from steppe nomads were becoming more commonplace and food was in short supply due to the Little Ice Age which led to a decrease in crop production. The Ming government instead finished Great Wall, improved interior roads, and tried to strengthen government through traditional state Confucianism. The problem with

these decisions was that China became increasingly isolated. China would not really open up to the rest of the world for the next 400 years, leading to a stagnation of their culture and technology.

Eventually the Ming was taken over due to these weaknesses. A people from what is now northeastern China called the Manchus took over Beijing in 1644. These Manchus ruled as the Qing Dynasty. At first the Manchus were ruthless and insensitive to the Chinese, ordering all to dress and act like Manchus. Eventually the Manchus blended their culture with Chinese culture, adopting the Confucian Chinese political system and dividing political administration between Manchus and Chinese. The Qing is well-known for being the last dynasty in Chinese history. The Qing had extremely poor relations with the west, mainly due to the forcefulness of westerners in China. The first serious contacts with westerners were with Christian Jesuit missionaries. The Jesuits were a Catholic missionary group that was intense about their desire to convert people around the world to Christianity. Their forcefulness was disturbing and offensive to the Qing Chinese, leading to a decline in relations between China and the west. Eventually the isolationism of the Qing hurt the empire, which led to western conquests in China.