

# The Ming Dynasty: The Forbidden City

The Forbidden City was built under the orders of the powerful Yongle Emperor of the Ming Dynasty between the years 1406 to 1420. More than one million people worked on the construction of the expansive palace. The best materials were brought in from all over China including specially made "golden" bricks, logs of the rare Phoebe zhennan trees, and blocks of marble. When the palace was completed, the Yongle Emperor moved the capital of the empire to Beijing city. The Forbidden City was designed using Ancient Chinese symbolism and philosophy.

Here are a few examples:

- The buildings all faced south which stood for holiness. They also faced away from the north which symbolized the enemies of the Chinese, cold winds, and evil.
- The roofs of the buildings in the city were made with yellow tiles. Yellow was the exclusive color of the emperor and symbolized his ultimate power.
- The ceremonial buildings are arranged in groups of three. The number three represented heaven.
- The numbers nine and five are used often because they represent the majesty of the emperor.
- The traditional five elemental colors are used throughout the design of the palace. These include white, black, red, yellow, and green.
- The roof of the library was black to symbolize water in order to protect the writings from fire.

Source: <http://www.ducksters.com/history/china/>

# The Ming Dynasty: Isolationism

During the Ming dynasty, Chinese society began to change. This change was largely due to the efforts of the Ming emperors. Having expelled the Mongols, the Ming emperors worked to eliminate all foreign influences from Chinese society. As a result Chinese government and relations with other countries changed dramatically. They banned foreign trade and they entered a period called Isolationism, which is a policy of avoiding contact with other countries. In the end, this isolationism had great consequences for China; in 1644 the Ming Dynasty was overthrown. By the 1800s the western world had made a ton of technological advances. The Westerners were able to gain influence in China's affairs, and because of isolationism they were too weak to stop them.

Source: <http://www.ducksters.com/history/china/>

# The Ming Dynasty: Reconstruction of the Great Wall

It wasn't until the rise of the Ming Dynasty in 1368 that the Great Wall of China as we know it today was brought to fruition. The Ming Dynasty had to contend with a great number of attacks by minority tribes, so it made substantial additions to the wall. The complexity and sheer size of the Ming wall outdid all of its predecessors. Not only did the dynasty add length, it also added double and triple walls in some places to reinforce previously built structures and confuse attackers. The Ming Dynasty also increased the military prowess around the wall. Fortresses were placed intermittently along the length of the wall to store military supplies, and beacons were built to provide much-needed light. Another innovation to the wall that the Ming Dynasty introduced was guards. Guard towers were erected at strategic points along the wall from which guards would send out [smoke signals](#) and fire cannons to notify each other of possible hostile attacks. The only major downfall to these guard towers is that humans, who sometimes fell prey to enemies' bribes and allowed them access to the other side of the wall, manned them.

Source: <http://www.ducksters.com/history/china/>

# The Ming Dynasty: Sea Voyages

From 1405 until 1433, the Chinese imperial eunuch Zheng He led seven ocean expeditions for the Ming emperor that are unmatched in world history. These missions were astonishing as much for their distance as for their size: during the first ones, Zheng He traveled all the way from China to Southeast Asia and then on to India, all the way to major trading sites on India's southwest coast. In his fourth voyage, he traveled to the Persian Gulf. But for the three last voyages, Zheng went even further, all the way to the east coast of Africa. This was impressive enough, but Chinese merchants had traveled this far before. What was even more impressive about these voyages was that they were done with hundreds of huge ships and tens of thousands of sailors and other passengers. Over sixty of the three hundred seventeen ships on the first voyage were enormous "Treasure Ships," sailing vessels over 400 hundred feet long, 160 feet wide, with several stories, nine masts and twelve sails, and luxurious staterooms complete with balconies. The likes of these ships had never before been seen in the world, and it would not be until World War I that such an armada would be assembled again. The story of how these flotillas came to be assembled, where they went, and what happened to them is one of the great sagas — and puzzles — in world history.

Source: <http://www.ducksters.com/history/china/>