

## CHAPTER 22

### *Asian Transitions in an Age of Global Change*

#### CHAPTER SUMMARY

East and southeast Asian early modern trends were highly diverse. Most Asian peoples, except in the islands of southeast Asia, were only marginally affected by the European arrival. India, China, and Japan were not fundamentally reshaped by the West. The peoples of east Asia developed new political and social strengths while following a policy of isolation in response to global trends. Vasco da Gama's voyage to India had opened the way to the East for Europeans, but it soon became clear that Europeans had little to offer Asians in exchange for their desired products. Asians were not interested in converting to Christianity. Asian states were too strong to be conquered by Europeans, but the latter's sea power allowed control of spice exports and regulation of some parts of the Asian trading network. The Europeans participated in the existing economic and political system, rather than attempting to capture it.

**The Asian Trading World and the Coming of the Europeans.** The first Portuguese arriving in India discovered that their products, apart from bullion, were too primitive for profitable exchange for Asian goods. They saw that Muslim traders dominated Indian Ocean and southeast Asian commerce and that Islam blocked the spread of Catholic Christianity. They also saw that political divisions divided Asians who did not understand the threat posed by the new intruders.

**Trading Empire: The Portuguese Response to the Encounter at Calicut.** Since they did not have sufficient acceptable commodities for profitable trade to Asia, the Portuguese used force to enter the network. Their superior ships and weaponry were unmatched except by the Chinese. Taking advantage of the divisions between Asians, the Portuguese won supremacy on the African and Indian coasts. They won an important victory over an Egyptian-Indian fleet at Diu in 1509. To ensure control, forts were constructed along the Asian coast: Ormuz on the Persian Gulf in 1507, Goa in western India in 1510, and Malacca on the Malayan peninsula in 1511. The Portuguese aimed to establish a monopoly over the spice trade and, less successfully, to license all vessels trading between Malacca and Ormuz.

**Portuguese Vulnerability and the Rise of the Dutch and English Trading Empires.** The Portuguese had limited success for some decades, but the small nation lacked the manpower and ships necessary for enforcement. Many Portuguese ignored their government and traded independently, while rampant corruption among officials and losses of ships further hampered policies. Dutch and English rivals challenged the weakened Portuguese in the 17th century. The Dutch captured Malacca and built a fort at Batavia in Java in 1620. They decided to concentrate on the monopoly control of some spices. The English were forced to fall back to India. The Dutch trading empire resembled the Portuguese, but they had ships that were better armed and they controlled their monopoly with ruthless efficiency. The Dutch discovered that the greatest long-run profits came from peacefully exploiting the established system. When the spice trade declined, they relied on fees charged for transporting products from one Asian place to another. They also bought Asian products and sold them within the system. The English later adopted Dutch techniques.

**Going Ashore: European Tribute Systems in Asia.** Europeans were able to control Asian seas but not inland territories. The vast Asian armies offset European technological and organizational advantages. Thus, Europeans accepted the power of Asian rulers in return for permission to trade. Only in a few regions did war occur. The Portuguese and Dutch conquered coastal areas of Sri Lanka to control cinnamon. In Java, the Dutch expanded from their base at Batavia to dominate coffee production. By the middle of the 18th century, they were the paramount power in Java. The Spanish in the Philippines conquered the northern islands but failed in the Islamic South. The Europeans established tribute regimes resembling the Spanish system in the New World. Indigenous peoples lived under their own leaders and paid tribute in products produced by coerced labor under the direction of local elites.

**Spreading the Faith: The Missionary Enterprise in South and Southeast Asia.** The Protestant Dutch and English were not much interested in winning converts. Catholic Portugal and Spain were, but success in Asia was minimal. The world religions of Islam and Hinduism were difficult foes. Italian Jesuit Robert Di Nobili during the 1660s unsuccessfully attempted to win converts among upper-caste members through study of Sanskrit and Indian culture. General conversion occurred only in isolated regions like the northern Philippines. Once conquered, the government turned indigenous peoples over to missionary orders. Converted Filipino leaders led their peoples into European ways, but traditional beliefs remained strong within the converts' Christianity.

**Ming China: A Global Mission Refused.** The Ming dynasty (1368-1644) ruled over the Earth's most populous state. China possessed vast internal resources and advanced technology. Its bureaucracy remained the best organized in the world, and its military was formidable. The return to the examination system ensured the presence of a large and educated elite. The dynasty emerged when (as in chapter 14) Zhu Yuanzhang, a military commander of peasant origins, joined in the revolts against the Mongols and became the first Ming emperor, with the name of Hongwu, in 1368. Zhu strove to drive out all Mongol influences and drove the remaining nomads beyond the Great Wall.

**Another Scholar-Gentry Revival.** The poorly educated Zhu was suspicious of the scholar-gentry, but he realized that their cooperation was necessary for reviving Chinese civilization. They were given high government posts, and imperial academies and regional colleges were restored. The civil service exam was reinstated and expanded. Although family connections remained important, the examination played a greater role than ever before in determining entry to public service. The highly competitive examination system became more routinized and complex, allowing talented individuals to become eligible for the highest posts.

**Reform: Hongwu's Efforts to Root Out Abuses in Court Politics.** Hongwu sought to limit the influence of the scholar-gentry and to check other abuses at the court. He abolished the post of chief minister and transferred to himself the considerable powers of the office. Officials failing in their tasks were publicly and harshly beaten. Other reforms included choosing imperial wives from humble families, limiting the number of eunuchs, and exiling all rivals for the throne to provincial estates. Writings displeasing to the ruler were censored. Later rulers of the dynasty let the changes lapse.

**A Return to Scholar-Gentry Social Dominance.** Hongwu sought to improve the lives of the peasantry by public works aiding agriculture, opening new and untaxed lands, lowering forced labor demands, and promoting handicraft industries supplementing household incomes. The

beneficial effects of the measures were offset by the growing power of rural landlords allied with the imperial bureaucracy. Peasants were forced to become tenants or landless laborers. The Ming period continued the subordination of women to men and of youths to elders. Draconian laws forced obedience. Opponents, including women, had to go underground to improve their situations. Imperial women continued to be influential, especially with weak emperors. Outside the court, women were confined to the household; their status hinged on bearing male children. Upper-class women might be taught reading and writing by their parents, but they were barred from official positions. Non-elite women worked in many occupations, but the main way to gain independence was to become a courtesan or entertainer.

**An Age of Growth: Agriculture, Population, Commerce, and the Arts.** The early Ming period was one of buoyant economic growth and unprecedented contacts with overseas civilizations. The commercial boom and population increase of late Song times continued. The arrival of American food crops allowed cultivation in marginal agricultural areas. By 1800, there were more than 300 million Chinese. Chinese manufactured goods were in demand throughout Asia and Europe, and Europeans were allowed to come to Macao and Canton to do business. Merchants gained significant profits, a portion of them passing to the state as taxes and bribes. Much of the wealth went into land, the best source of social status. The fine arts found generous patrons. Painters focused on improving established patterns. Major innovation came in literature, assisted by an increase in availability of books through the spread of woodblock printing, with the full development of the novel.

**An Age of Expansion: The Zhenghe Expeditions.** Under Emperor Yunglo, the Ming sent a series of expeditions between 1405 and 1423 to southeast Asia, Persia, Arabia, and east Africa under the command of Zhenghe. The huge fleets of large ships demonstrated a Chinese potential for global expansion unmatched by other contemporary nations. But the Chinese were ambivalent about the voyages' worth. Few tangible returns resulted from the costly ventures. National resources, it was argued, were better spent in defending Chinese borders. The voyages were abandoned in the early 1430s.

**In Depth: Means and Motive in Overseas Expansion: Europe and China Compared.** Why did the Chinese, unlike Europeans, withdraw from overseas expansion? The small nation-states of Europe, aggressively competing with their neighbors, made more efficient use of their resources. European technological innovations gave them an advantage in animal and machine power that helped overcome overall Chinese superiority. One answer to the differing approaches can be seen in the attitudes of the groups in each society favoring expansion. There was wide support in general European society for increasing national and individual wealth through successful expansion. Christian leaders sought new converts. Zhenghe's voyages were the result of an emperor's curiosity and desire for personal greatness. Merchants, profiting from existing commerce, were little interested. The scholar-gentry opposed the expeditions as a danger to their position and as a waste of national resources.

**Chinese Retreat and the Arrival of the Europeans.** The Chinese, after the end of the Zhenghe expeditions, developed a policy of isolation. In 1390, the first decree limiting overseas commerce appeared, and the navy was allowed to decline. Europeans naturally were drawn to the great empire. Missionaries sought access to the court. Franciscans and Dominicans worked to gain converts among the masses; the Jesuits followed the *Di Nobili* precedent from India in trying to win the court elite. Scientific and technical knowledge were the keys to success at the

court. Jesuits like Matteo Ricci and Adam Schall displayed such learning, but they won few converts among the hostile scholar-gentry, who considered them mere barbarians.

**Ming Decline and the Chinese Predicament.** By the late 1500s, the dynasty was in decline. Inferior imperial leadership allowed increasing corruption and hastened administrative decay. The failure of public works projects, especially on the Yellow River, caused starvation and rebellion. Exploitation by landlords increased the societal malaise. The dynasty fell in 1644 before Chinese rebels. A political vacuum followed that ended when northern nomads, the Zhurchens, or Manchu, seized control. Their leader, Nurhaci, established the last of the imperial dynasties, the Qing.

**Fending Off the West: Japan's Reunification and the First Challenge.** During the 16th century, an innovative and fierce leader, Nobunaga, one of the first daimyos to make extensive use of firearms, rose to the forefront among the contesting lords. He deposed the last Ashikaga shogun in 1573 but was killed in 1582 before finishing his conquests. Nobunaga's general, Toyotomo Hideyoshi, continued the struggle and became master of Japan by 1590. Hideyoshi then launched two unsuccessful invasions of Korea. He died in 1598. Tokugawa Ieyasu won out in the ensuing contest for succession. In 1603, the emperor appointed him shogun. The Tokugawas continued in power for two and a half centuries. Ieyasu, who ruled from Edo (Tokyo), directly controlled central Honshu and placed the remaining daimyos under his authority. Outlying daimyos, over time, also were brought under Tokugawa rule. The long period of civil wars had ended and political unity was restored.

**Dealing with the European Challenge.** European traders and missionaries had visited Japan in increasing numbers since 1543. The traders exchanged Asian and European goods, the latter including firearms, clocks, and printing presses, for Japanese silver, copper, and artisan products. The firearms, which the Japanese soon manufactured themselves, revolutionized local warfare. Roman Catholic missionaries arrived during Nobunaga's campaigns. He protected them as a counterforce to his Buddhist opponents. The Jesuits, by the 1580s, claimed hundreds of thousands of converts. Hideyoshi was less tolerant of Christianity. The Buddhists had been crushed, and he feared that converts would give primary loyalty to their religion. Hideyoshi also feared that Europeans might try to conquer Japan.

**Japan's Self-Imposed Isolation.** Official measures to restrict foreign influence were ordered from the late 1580s. Christian missionaries were ordered to leave; persecution of Christians was under way during the middle of the 1590s. Christianity was officially banned in 1614. Continued persecution provoked unsuccessful rebellions and drove the few remaining Christians underground. Ieyasu and his successors broadened the campaign to isolate Japan from outside influences. From 1616, merchants were confined to a few cities; from 1630, Japanese ships could not sail overseas. By the 1640s, only Dutch and Chinese ships visited Japan to trade at Deshima Island. Western books were banned. The retreat into isolation was almost total by the middle of the 17th century. The Tokugawa continued expanding their authority. During the 18th century, the revival of neo-Confucian philosophy that had flourished under the early Tokugawas gave way to a "School of National Learning" based on indigenous culture. Some of the elite, in strong contrast to the Chinese scholar-gentry, continued to follow with avid interest Western developments through the Dutch at Deshima.

**Global Connections: An Age of Eurasian Closure.** By 1700, after two centuries of involvement, Europeans had had only a minimal effect on the peoples of south and southeast

Asia. Important new trade routes linking Europe, the Indian Ocean world, the Philippines, and the Americas had opened. The Europeans also had established commercial centers, such as Goa, Calicut, and Batavia, and introduced the concept of sea warfare into a once-peaceful commercial world. Still, the Asian system survived, and Europeans decided to accept rather than destroy existing arrangements. Because of the long contacts between Europe and Asia, the level of exchanges did not match the New World Columbian Exchange, although American food plants introduced by Europeans were important. European ideas, not impressing Asians, had minimal effect.

## KEY TERMS

**Asian sea trading network:** Divided, from West to East, into three zones prior to the European arrival: an Arab zone based on glass, carpets, and tapestries; an Indian zone, with cotton textiles; and a Chinese zone, with paper, porcelain, and silks.

**Goa:** Indian city developed by the Portuguese as a major Indian Ocean base; developed an important Indo-European population.

**Ormuz:** Portuguese establishment at the southern end of the Persian Gulf; a major trading base.

**Malacca:** City on the tip of the Malayan peninsula; a center for trade to the southeastern Asian islands; became a major Portuguese trading base.

**Batavia:** Dutch establishment on Java; created in 1620.

**Treaty of Gijanti (1757):** Reduced the remaining independent Javanese princes to vassals of the Dutch East India Company; allowed the Dutch to monopolize Java's coffee production.

**Luzon:** Northern island of the Philippines; conquered by Spain during the 1560s; site of a major Catholic missionary effort.

**Mindanao:** Southern island of the Philippines; a Muslim area able to successfully resist Spanish conquest.

**Francis Xavier:** Franciscan missionary who worked in India during the 1540s among outcast and lower-caste groups; later worked in Japan.

**Robert Di Nobli:** Italian Jesuit active in India during the early 1600s; failed in a policy of first converting indigenous elites.

**Hongwu:** First Ming emperor (1368-1403); drove out the Mongols and restored the position of the scholar-gentry.

**Macao and Canton:** The only two ports in Ming China where Europeans were allowed to trade.

***The Water Margin, Monkey, and The Golden Lotus:*** Novels written during the Ming period; recognized as classics and established standards for Chinese prose literature.

**Zhenghe:** Chinese admiral who led seven overseas trade expeditions under Ming emperor Yunglo between 1405 and 1423; demonstrated that the Chinese were capable of major ocean exploration.

**Matteo Ricci and Adam Schall:** Jesuit scholars at the Ming court; also skilled scientists; won few converts to Christianity.

**Chongzhen:** Last of the Ming rulers; committed suicide in 1644 as rebels invaded the Forbidden City of Beijing.

**Manchu:** Zhurchen people from region to the northeast of the Chinese empire; seized power and created the Qing dynasty after the collapse of the Ming.

**Nobunaga:** The first Japanese daimyo to make extensive use of firearms; in 1573 deposed the last Ashikaga shogun; unified much of central Honshu; died in 1582.

**Toyotomo (as earlier) Hideyoshi:** General under Nobunaga; succeeded as a leading military power in central Japan; continued efforts to break power of the daimyos; became military master of Japan in 1590; died 1598.

**Tokugawa Ieyasu:** Vassal of Toyotomo Hideyoshi; succeeded him as the most powerful military figure in Japan; granted title of shogun in 1603 and established the Tokugawa shogunate; established political unity in Japan.

**Edo:** Tokugawa capital, modern-day Tokyo; center of Tokugawa shogunate.

**Deshima:** Island port in Nagasaki Bay; the only port open to foreigners, the Dutch, after the 1640s.

**School of National Learning:** 18th-century ideology that emphasized Japan's unique historical experience and the revival of indigenous culture at the expense of Confucianism and other Chinese influences.

**Caravels:** Slender, long-hulled vessels utilized by Portuguese; highly maneuverable and able to sail against the wind; key to development of Portuguese trade empire in Asia.

**Mercantilism:** Economic theory that stressed governments' promotion of limitation of imports from other nations and internal economies in order to improve tax revenues; popular during 17th and 18th centuries in Europe.

**Factories:** European trading fortresses and compounds with resident merchants; utilized throughout Portuguese trading empire to assure secure landing places and commerce.

**Dutch trading empire:** The Dutch system extending into Asia with fortified towns and factories, warships on patrol, and monopoly control of a limited number of products.

**Friars:** Members of Roman Catholic religious orders.