

# Chapter 19: An Age of Exploration and Isolation, 1400–1800

**CHAPTER OVERVIEW:** "God, glory, and gold" drove Europeans' early exploration of Asia. They controlled Asian trade, with Portugal leading the way. Soon, though, nations of northern Europe took over Indian Ocean trade. Two dynasties in China resisted the growing power of Europeans in Asia, limiting Chinese contact with foreigners. In Japan, a new system of government brought peace and isolation.

## Section 1: Europeans Explore the East

**KEY IDEA:** Driven by the desire for wealth and Christian converts, Europeans began an age of exploration.

For many centuries, Europeans had been largely, though not completely, isolated from contact with people from other lands. That changed in the 1400s. One reason for this change was that Europeans hoped to gain new sources of wealth. By exploring the seas far from Europe, traders hoped to find new, faster routes to Asia—the source of spices and luxury goods. Their goal was to win access to these lands and bypass the Muslims and Italians who currently controlled this trade. Another reason was the desire to spread Christianity to new lands. The Crusades had ended, but bad feelings between Christians and Muslims remained. The Christians of Europe wanted to convert the people of Asia.

Advances in technology made these voyages possible. A new kind of ship, the caravel, was stronger built than earlier ships. It had triangle-shaped sails that allowed it to sail against the wind. Ships could now travel far out into the ocean. The magnetic compass allowed sea captains to better stay on course.

The first nation to develop and use these new technologies was Portugal. That nation's Prince Henry was deeply committed to the idea of exploring beyond the seas. In 1419, he started a school of navigation where sea captains, mapmakers, and navigators could meet, learn, and exchange ideas. Over the next few decades, Portuguese captains sailed farther and farther down the west coast of Africa. In 1488, Bartolomeu Dias led the first voyage to reach the southern tip of Africa. Ten years later, Vasco da Gama led a ship 27,000 miles around Africa, to India, and back. The Portuguese had found a sea route to Asia.

The Spanish, meanwhile, had plans of their own. Italian sailor Christopher Columbus convinced the king and queen that he could reach Asia by sailing west. In 1492, instead of landing in Asia, Columbus touched land in the islands of the Americas, land unknown to Europeans. At first, though, people still thought that he had landed in Asia. Spain and Portugal argued over which nation had the rights to the land that Columbus had claimed. In 1494, they signed the Treaty of Tordesillas. It divided the world into two areas. Portugal won the right to control the eastern parts and Spain the western parts—including most of the Americas.

Portugal moved quickly to make the new Indian Ocean route pay off. In 1509, it defeated a Muslim fleet off the coast of India and thus became the master of Indian trade. Soon, it captured cities in India and the Malay peninsula. Portugal now had power over islands that were so rich in desirable spices that they were called the Spice Islands. Spices now cost Europeans one-fifth of what they had cost before, while still making Portugal very wealthy.

Other European nations joined in this trade. In the 1600s, the English and Dutch entered the East Indies to challenge Portugal. The Dutch fleet—about 20,000 ships—was the largest in the world. These two nations quickly

broke Portuguese power in the area. Then both nations set up an East India Company to control Asian trade. These companies were more than businesses. They were like governments, with the power to make money, sign treaties, and raise their own armies. The Dutch managed to drive out the English and grab the Asian trade for themselves.

The Dutch made their trading headquarters on the island of Java in the East Indies. By 1700, the Dutch ruled much of Indonesia. They had trading posts in many other Asian countries and commanded the southern tip of Africa. At the same time, both England and France finally gained footholds in India.

While the Europeans controlled the trade between Asia and Europe, they had little impact on most people living in those areas. From 1500 to 1800, the people of Asia were largely untouched by the European traders.

## Section 2: China Rejects European Outreach

**KEY IDEA:** Advances under the Ming and Qing dynasties left China self-contained and uninterested in European contact.

Mongol rule in China ended in 1368 when Hongwu led a rebel army that took control of the country. He declared himself the first emperor of the Ming Dynasty, which was to last for almost 300 years. Hongwu began his rule by increasing the amount of food produced, improving irrigation, and raising cotton and sugar cane. He also made changes that improved the government of China. Later he grew suspicious and untrusting. He caused the deaths of many people whom he suspected of plotting against him.

His son Yonglo continued his better policies and also launched a major effort at making contact with other Asian peoples. Beginning in 1405, an admiral named Zheng He led several fleets that journeyed to Southeast Asia, India, Arabia, and Africa. The goal was to impress other people with the power and wealth of China. He also wanted to convince them to pay tribute to China each year. By sending gifts each year, these peoples would recognize that China was superior to them. Gifts did flow to China, but scholar-officials said that the voyages wasted valuable resources. Zheng He's journeys were stopped after seven years.

China allowed Europeans to trade officially at only three ports. China became isolated. However, illegal trade took place all along the coast. Because Europeans wanted Chinese silk and ceramics, the people began making large amounts of these goods. Europeans paid silver for them. Manufacturing never grew very large in China, however. The Confucian ideas that shaped Chinese thinking said that farming was a better way of life, so manufacturing was heavily taxed. Missionaries entered China at this time, bringing both Christianity and technology, such as the clock.

The power of the Ming Dynasty declined because the government could not solve several problems. Rebels from Manchuria—a land to the north of China—took control of the country in 1644 and started a new dynasty called the Qing. At first, the Chinese people did not accept the new rulers, who were not Chinese. However, the Qing emperors won their support by taking steps to improve conditions in the country and by preserving Chinese traditions.

Two emperors were the most effective. Kangxi ruled from 1661 to 1721 and his grandson Qian-long served from 1736 to 1795. They brought China to its largest size, increased its wealth, and sponsored an increase in artistic production.

Qian-long had to face three problems, however. First was the matter of trade. The Chinese insisted that Europeans had to follow certain rules in order to continue trading with them. The Dutch were willing to do so, and they carried on the largest share of trade with China. The British, though, did not agree to follow these rules. This disagreement later led to conflict that broke up China's empire.

In China, the production of rice and the long period of peace gave the people better lives. In the 1600s and 1700s, the number of people in China almost doubled, rising to more than 300 million by 1800. The huge majority of these

people were farmers. Because of the use of fertilizer and better irrigation, they could grow more food. They also began to grow crops newly found in the Americas such as corn and sweet potatoes. As a result, the level of nutrition improved, which helped produce the growth in population.

Women suffered in this period, however. Sons were valued over daughters. It was felt only sons could carry out family religious duties and tend to the family farm. For that reason, many infant girls were killed, and adult women had few rights.

The invasions by the foreigners from Manchuria and the pressure from European traders bothered the Chinese. Artists created books and paintings that showed traditional Chinese values and ideas. At the same time, a feeling of national pride was rising in Korea. That land had long been dominated by China. Its government used Chinese ideas and practices. Starting in the 1600s, though, Korean artists began to show greater interest in images of Korean life.

### Section 3: Japan Limits Western Contacts

**KEY IDEA:** The Tokugawa regime unified Japan and began a 200-year period of isolation, autocracy, and economic growth.

From 1467 to 1568, Japan entered a long, dark period of civil war. Powerful warriors took control of large areas of land. They were called daimyo. They became the most important powers in the country in a feudal system similar to that of Europe's Middle Ages. The daimyo built strong castles. They also had small armies of samurai warriors on horses and soldiers on foot with guns. They fought each other constantly to gain more land for themselves.

In 1568, one of the daimyo took control of Kyoto, the site of the emperor's capital. He was unable to win complete control of Japan, however. Another general, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, continued the work of bringing all of Japan under one rule. Using military conquest and clever diplomacy, he won that goal in 1590. He failed in his effort to capture Korea, however, and died in 1598.

The work of unifying Japan was completed by Tokugawa Ieyasu, who became the shogun, or sole ruler. He moved the capital of Japan to a small fishing village named Edo. Later, it grew to become the city of Tokyo. While all of Japan was ruled by Tokugawa, the daimyo still held much power in their lands. Tokugawa solved that problem by forcing them to follow his orders. He required them to live every other year in his capital—and leave their families in the capital with him during the other years. As a result, no daimyo was able to rebel against his power. Tokugawa died in 1616 and started a family dynasty. All of the shoguns to follow him were from his family. They maintained a strong central government in Japan. This system of rule, called the Tokugawa Shogunate, lasted until 1868.

The new government brought about a long period of peace and prosperity mostly. Peasant farmers suffered greatly during this time, however. They worked long and hard on the farms and paid heavy taxes. Many left the countryside to move to the cities. By the mid-1700s, Edo had more than a million people and was perhaps the largest city in the world.

Women found more opportunities for work in this and other cities than they had in the country.

A traditional culture thrived. It preferred ceremonial Noh dramas, stories of ancient warriors, and paintings of classical scenes. However, in cities, new styles emerged. Townspeople attended kabuki theater dramas of urban life. They hung woodblock prints of city scenes in their homes.

Europeans began to arrive in Japan. In 1543, the Portuguese were first. They brought such goods as clocks, eyeglasses, and guns. Japanese merchants and the daimyo welcomed them at first. They even

welcomed the Christian missionaries who came after 1549, hoping to convert the Japanese to Christianity.

Some missionaries scorned traditional Japanese beliefs, though. Tokugawa became worried. In 1612, he banned Christianity from the country. Over the next 20 years or so, Japan managed to rid the country of all Christians. This effort became part of a larger plan to protect the country from European influence. In 1639, leaders sealed Japan's borders except for one port city. It was open to only the Chinese and the Dutch. The Tokugawa shoguns controlled that port city, so they had tight control over all foreign contact. For the next 200 years, Japan remained closed to virtually all European contact.