

The Ming Dynasty 1402--1449

The Ming dynasty (1368--1644) was the last dynasty ruled by the Han ethnicity. During its three-hundred-year life it continuously faced threat from the surrounding minority groups, but the most anxious one is to the north posed by the Mongols (Wala and Dada) and later the Manchus (Nvzhi). Therefore, it established garrisons along the northern border as a way of defense. Conventional Wisdom has regarded the early Ming as a period of military expansion. However, as shown in the map, the original garrisons were gradually abandoned between 1402 and 1449, and the territory under the Ming contracted.

As shown here, the Ming is much smaller than modern China. Unlike most scholars have assumed, modern China has actually inherited its territory from the Manchu-ruled Qing, the dynasty that followed the Ming.

Each dot represents a person that passed the highest level of civil service examination and became officials. 2,744 people passed the exam between 1402 and 1449. There are many reasons that led to the contraction of the Ming, and one important cause is that most officials of this empire come from its southern part, and therefore, lack the very knowledge about the military, economy, and strategic importance of the northern border regions.

Legend

- Original Garrisons
- Later Garrisons
- People Getting Jinshi Degrees 1402-1449
- Modern China Boundary
- Ming Capital Regions
- Ming Territory_1449
- Ming Territory_1402

0 250 500 1,000 Miles

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Source: <https://worldmap.harvard.edu/chinamap/>
<https://naturalearthdata.com/>

Projection: Asia North Lambert Conformal Conic

