Yuan, Ming and Qing China
Khubilai Khan, grandson of Genghis Khan and probably the greatest Yuan dynasty leader; he was open to foreign ideas and peoples (e.g., Marco Polo)
Yuan Dynasty (1279-1368)
The last two Chinese dynasties: the **Ming** Dynasty (1368-1644) and the **Qing** (or Manchu) Dynasty (1644-1911)
Ming Dynasty Map
Hongwu (r.1368-1398), aka Zhu Yuanzhang, Founder of the Ming (or “Brilliant”) Dynasty
Hongwu (continued)

-Hongwu ("Vast Martial Achievement") was originally a poor peasant
-During a famine in 1344 in which most of his family died, Hongwu had sought refuge in a Buddhist monastery, where he learned to read and write
-However, Hongwu was forever destined to feel self-conscious about his lack of a formal education; his rather uncouth appearance didn’t help either (a situation compounded by the fact that his family name, Zhu, was a homophone for pig in Chinese, a fact that his critics always seemed to remember)
-Eventually Hongwu joined some rebels and became their leader
-After forcing out the Mongols, he sought to eradicate all traces of their rule
-His reign sees the start of a flowering of culture, a return to Confucian moral standards, and exports of a great quantity of luxury goods like porcelain and silk (in exchange, the Chinese get silver, other precious commodities)
-Hongwu also devotes more resources to agriculture (e.g., peasants are resettled on reclaimed wasteland and given tax exemptions); as a result, the economy thrives
-Politically, though, Hongwu was autocratic, relying on the secret police and torture to curb dissent; he imposed harsh law codes also (sanctionning beatings of corrupt bureaucrats, e.g.)
Yongle (“Perpetual Happiness”) was another important Ming emperor; the fourth son of Hongwu, Yongle had already started to push aside Hongwu’s chosen successor, Hongwu’s 16-year-old grandson Jianwen, from power by 1398; Dynamic and very clever, Yongle was also ruthless in eliminating his opponents.
The Chinese Admiral Zheng He

- Yongle also projected his country’s power overseas by means of naval expeditions
- The most important leader of these expeditions was the Chinese Muslim admiral Zheng He, a eunuch
- Zheng He led 7 great sea expeditions (1405-1433)
- The first of these expeditions involved 62 ships and 28,000 sailors

Altogether Zheng He visited over 50 countries

-Purpose(s): Exploration, trade, tribute, display of power
- Eventually these expeditions were ended. Why?
Zheng He’s Treasure Ship Voyages

Compare Zheng He’s voyages (in terms of distance and goals) with those of Christopher Columbus.
Comparison of a Ming treasure ship to one of Columbus’s caravels
The Ming later focused more on their internal affairs and devoted less attention to foreign trade.

However, other countries, including first the Portuguese and then the English, sought to gain trading privileges with the Chinese. The Europeans were especially interested in porcelain and silk.

Some countries were granted concessions on the eastern coast of China, most notably Portugal, which was given the tiny territory of Macau, which it ruled from 1557-1999. (The Italian Jesuit Matteo Ricci would enter China from there in 1583.) England, incidentally, established a trading post at Canton in 1699.
Ming Era Porcelain Vase – a desirable commodity
In 1421, Yongle moved his capital from **Nanjing** (“southern capital”) to **Beijing** (“northern capital”). In Beijing he constructed a massive palace with 9,000 rooms (the so-called **Forbidden City**) as well as many temples (such as the **Temple of Heaven**).
Old Beijing
The Forbidden City
Tian’anmen, aka The Gate of Heavenly Peace, is the entrance to the Imperial City. This is the place where Chairman Mao delivered many of his public speeches from the 1950s to the 1970s; it also overlooks the square where pro-democracy demonstrators gathered in 1989 to protest against China’s Communist regime, unsuccessfully as it turned out.
In the early 17th century, Ming China experienced many economic problems. There were a series of revolts, including one led by a disgruntled postal worker named Li Zicheng. By 1644 Li Zicheng’s men were able to seize Beijing and compel the last Ming emperor to commit suicide. However, Li Zicheng was unable to hold power once the Manchus invaded China. Helped by their alliance with a Ming general named Wu Sangui, the Manchus defeated Li Zicheng and began a new dynasty, the Qing (or “Pure”) dynasty.
The Manchu Bannerman from the Qing Era

The Manchus in China were divided up into one of eight banners, or social/military/administrative organizations.

Originally the Manchus came from an area northeast of China called Manchuria. They had their own distinctive language and culture and wrote in a script different from Chinese.

Horsemanship and archery were military skills they prized above all.

At the beginning of the 17th century, just before they took over China, a barbarian named Nurhaci (+1626) had organized them into a potent fighting force.

They tried to avoid intermingling with the ethnic Chinese and were not allowed to marry Chinese.

They also forced Chinese men to wear queues to distinguish them from Manchus.

However, the Manchus recognized that they needed Chinese help to rule China and thus they established a dyarchy, in which all administrative positions were shared equally by Chinese and Manchus. They also maintained many elements of the Confucian civil service examination.
The Emperor Kangxi (r.1661-1722)

-Kangxi was a man of many talents
-He was an able administrator, military leader, and patron of the arts
-He was also interested in science and other cultures; for example, for many years Jesuits were welcomed at his court
-Kangxi was untiring in his efforts to rule his country well; instead of staying in his palace in Beijing, he often went on inspection tours of his realm
-He also encouraged support for proper Confucian behavior among all Chinese by issuing the Sacred Edict in 1670
Starting in the 17th century and expanding substantially in the 18th century, the growing of potatoes becomes very important in China.
Emperor Qianlong (r. 1736-1795)

- Grandson of Kangxi, he too was known for his diligence, tolerance, and intellectual curiosity
- Under Qianlong, China reached its greatest size and prosperity
- He was instrumental in expanding China’s borders (incl. Manchuria, Korea, Nepal, Tibet and Burma)
- Throughout his reign, the Manchus remained a minority in China
- Near the end of his long rule, China started to decline; corruption by Heshen (Ho Shen) and other officials rendered the government less responsive to the people’s needs
- Discontented peasants eventually erupted in the White Lotus Rebellion (1796-1804)
While mostly rural, Qing Era China during the 17th and 18th centuries was still a fairly sophisticated society; see for instance *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, aka *The Story of the Stone* (1791), written mostly by Cao Xuexin. This work was perhaps Qing China’s most popular novel.
Painting was also highly esteemed during the Qing Period. Look at these Qing scrolls, for example: Kuncan’s *Wooded Mountains at Dusk* (1666) and Anon. *The Emperor Quanlong hunting a deer* (18th cent.)
High quality porcelain continued to be produced as well, particularly blue-and-white porcelain.
However, some Qing Era practices strike us as repugnant, such as foot-binding or female infanticide in the countryside.
The Qing Dynasty would last until the early 20th century but it would experience humiliation at the hands of foreign powers, in the 19th century above all (see the Opium Wars, e.g.)