**The Fall of the Ming Dynasty (1557–1644)**

Like the Yuan Empire, the Ming Empire had strong leaders and was prosperous at the beginning. But like the Yuan Empire, at the end there were rebellions and natural disasters, a period of cold and dry climate, the economy was in shambles, people believed that the Ming court had lost the Mandate of Heaven, and the ruling court was ineffectual.

Natural Disasters, Wars and Rebellions

There were great disasters in the last decades that were seen as signs that the dynasty lost the Mandate of Heaven, and people rebelled. The natural disasters, climatic change, plagues and rebellions were eerily similar to those that happened at the end of the Yuan Dynasty and earlier dynasties.

Earthquakes

One of the first big blows was an earthquake in Shaanxi in 1556 that is thought to be the deadliest earthquake in history. It is thought that about 800,000 people died then. It is estimated that it measured 8 on the Richter scale. The earthquake killed about 30 percent of the people in Xi'an.

During the early 1600s, there were an unusually large number of earthquakesalso. From 1621 to 1627 there were two earthquakes above 7 on the Richter scale.

Wars Against the Japanese

Then in the 1590s, a Japanese Shogun tried to conquer the region. Two Japanese campaigns failed, but the war was very costly for the Ming court. It was thought that the court paid 26,000,000 ounces of silver to pay for this war.

The Little Ice Age

In the first half of the 1600s, famines became common in northern China because of unusually dry and cold weather that shortened the growing season. The change of climate occurred throughout the world and is called the Little Ice Age.

Similar climactic conditions had brought disaster to the Yuan Empire about 300 years earlier.

Strangely connected to the dry and cold climate, there were also large floods. These were partly due to mismanagement of flood-control projects or their intentional destruction. There were similar floods at the end of the Yuan era.

Plague

Finally, agreat epidemic started in 1641. It isn't known how many died from the plague, but it is said that 90% of the people in one area died from the plague.

The plague is reminiscent of the bubonic plaguethat struck the Yuan Empire in their last decades.

Misrule

Though the first Ming Emperor banned eunuchs from having power, one of the last emperors secluded himself and surrounded himself with court eunuchs. Wei Zhongxian (1568–1627) who was a eunuch ruled in the emperor's stead. After he committed suicide, other eunuchs continued to cause chaos and weakened the court.

The court also didn't have cohesion or the ability to develop good policies since eunuchs took a lot of the power and terrorized people by torturing them.

Monetary Crisis

The court didn't have funds to help the people or stop the rebellions. Besides the natural calamities and the rebellions that depleted the court's money, the empire faced a monetary crisis.

The flow of foreign money was greatly diminished due to fighting between Spain and the Dutch and English. The Spanish rulers tried to have the silver of the Americas brought directly to Spain instead of being exported to the Ming Empire. This raised the price of silver sharply.

Then in 1639, a Japanese Shogun limited foreign imports as part of his isolationist policy. This further limited the empire's trade and contributed to the Ming Empire's monetary crisis. The value of silver jumped markedly.

Because of the inflation of the price of silver and natural disasters, the farmers had more difficulty to pay their taxes in silver as they were required to do. This damaged Ming court revenues, and the farmers found that paying their taxes in silver as they were required to do was a great burden.

There were great deficits, and soldiers deserted in large numbers because they were not paid.

The Final Rebellions

People rebelled in various places. Many peasants were starving and unable to pay their taxes, and they were no longer in fear of the Ming court. They began to form large rebel bands.

The Ming troops were dispirited and perhaps underfed. A peasant soldier named Li Zicheng (1606–1645) mutinied with his fellow soldiers in western Shaanxi in the early 1630s after the government failed to ship supplies there. His rebel troops had a base of power in Hubei.

In the 1640s, another ex-soldier named Zhang Xianzhong (1606–1647) created a rival rebel base in Chengdu in Sichuan Province.

In 1644, Li Zicheng's troops were allowed into Beijing when someone opened the gates for him to enter. The last Ming emperor hanged himself on a tree. But the rebel troops didn't enjoy this victory.

The Victory of the Manchus (1644)

Facing the rebel army who held Beijing as well as a Manchu army across the border, a Ming general who guarded the Great Wall named Wu Sangui (1612–1678) sided with the Manchus and opened the gates of the Great Wall. In this way, the Manchus conquered Beijing.

However, it took a while for them to conquer the rest of the empire because Nanjing, Fujian, Guangzhou, and other places had Ming strongholds.Koxinga (Zheng Chenggong) set up an anti-Qing base on the island of Taiwan.

The Shunzhi Emperor (1644–1661) was proclaimed the ruler of the [Qing Empire](http://www.chinahighlights.com/travelguide/china-history/the-qing-dynasty.htm) in 1644.