[SQUEAKING]

[RUSTLING]

[CLICKING]

TRISTAN BROWN: Lot to do today. I want to get through as much of it as possible. Here's the game plan. So today, we'll do the-- we'll do the Ming. I'll take you through the 1400s, the 1500s. We'll see how far we get.

On Wednesday, we do the 1600s, as you can imagine, the end of the Ming dynasty, which is a really, really epic story in and of itself. And I will record it. And you have to understand something of-- I would say, one of the highlights of the semester. When I think about the whole semester and I think about highlights, like writing systems and everything like that, the death of the last Ming emperor, his totally dramatic suicide, is on Wednesday. So you'll watch a video of me talking about that. Unfortunately, it won't be in person. But that's, I think, one of the highlights of the semester.

And then next week, we come back, and it's the Qing dynasty pretty much until the end of the class. All right, so let's get started. So the establishment of the Ming dynasty, this is where we kind of picked off. I just want to say, this is not super great resolution there. But I'm going to show you this photo, this painting, again.

That's a painting of Zhu Yuanzhang, the first Ming emperor. And there's something-- when we always talk about, what's the Mongol legacy of the early Ming, I that was a question for you this week in your discussion post. And you go, OK, there he is. He's wearing his yellow, big imperial costume. He's the emperor and everything like that.

But look at this carpet. You know what I'm saying? Do you ever look at that-- that's obviously a Persian, Central Asian carpet. So think about it like that. I'll show you that image later today, where you can take a good look at it. And just remember, the Mongols really changed China.

And he's coming back. He's established the Ming dynasty. And he's going to, of course, say, I'm going to get rid of all these foreign influences. Of course he's going to say that. Of course the founder of the Ming dynasty would say that. Ming is, in a sense, reacting to Mongol rule. But they've already adopted so much from Mongol rule that it goes without saying.

Just think about what even 80 years does. Think about what the United States was 80 years ago, vis-á-vis today. That would put us in, what, the 1940s, and the culture of the 1940s versus the culture today. So that's a serious amount of time that the Mongols were in China. And, as you know, parts of China, they were in there for a longer period of time.

All right, so to just say something really quickly about the fall of the Yuan dynasty. Basically, I already covered this last week. But just to give you some highlights here, there's a series of civil wars that break out breakout in the South. You can see Chen Youliang was a big contender against Zhu Yuanzhang. But Zhu Yuanzhang, basically he takes over. He's ultimately successful. This is his territory that he consolidated early on.

So basically, the Mongols are going to basically be driven out, back beyond what is now the Great Wall, into Mongolia. But then it's this question of the power play in South China that actually is going to render Zhu Yuanzhang successful. I'm going to talk a little bit about the technologies that might have aided in his success in doing that, in consolidating his rule.

He, I think, ultimately defeats Chen Youliang at this Poyang Lake. And so that's where he basically becomes unrivaled in South China. This is an interesting story of, we don't usually have the South unified first and then conquering the country. It's usually the North goes South. This is a case where the South did it first. That's why his capital is at Nanjing.

Now, the one thing I'll just say here, the fall of the Yuan dynasty, it doesn't totally go away. There's this thing we sometimes call the Northern Yuan, which is sometimes called a rump state. Basically, the Mongol line of the Yuan goes back into the steppe. And they're, at various points in the aftermath of the Mongol Empire, unified. Sometimes they're less unified.

But one of the things that I will say here is that, if you look at-- by the time you get to the 1500s, the Mongols are becoming a serious geopolitical player again. And in particular, what one of-- and this is a story I'm just telling you right now because we're not really going to focus on it today. But starting in the 1500s-- even the late 1400s, but 1500s for sure-- the alliance between the Mongols and the Tibetans, and especially with patronage for Tibetan Buddhism.

So it's in this period that you're going to have Altan Khan, who's going to be the most powerful Mongol of his day, basically create institution of the Dalai Lamas. That happens during the Ming period. And that happens with the Mongol-Tibetan connection. Ultimately, when you see 1635 right there, what happens to the Mongols up there? What happens to this Northern Yuan? What happens to all this? Basically, they're going to get incorporated, most of them, into the Manchu project, which will be the Qing project.

So next week, when I talk to you about the Qing, where it comes from and everything like that, I can catch you all up on the details of the Tibetans and the Mongols and that alliance and everything like that. But just realize, when the Ming is doing this thing, this-- the Tibetans and the Mongols stuff, that's a really important story.

All right, when we talk about Zhu Yuanzhang and his victory and his establishment of the Ming-- Ming and bright, brightness; Ming, clear, something like this; that's what this title means-- he kind of followed in the Mongol tradition of, where do you get your reign name from? Where do you get your dynastic-- sorry, dynastic name from? And the Mongols had picked from the *Classic of Changes.* They would pick a nice name-- Yuan-- this nice character out of that classical text. So he picks Ming-- also nice, auspicious, prosperous, everything like that.

Do I-- I'll show you in just a second. But one of the things that he is going to-- possibly ascribes his victory to is basically weaponry, in particular gunpowder-based weaponry. This is a fascinating text that is written during his reign as the first emperor of China. And it's basically the fire dragon classic. And by the way, of course, "classic" here is a nice way, polite way, very nice way to call an important book. But it is not a classic. It is a 14th-century text.

It claims to have commentaries and such, or knowledge, from Zhuge Liang. Of course, remember, this is all strategic. Anytime you write something new, you have to pretend it's old. And 'Zhuge Liang knew all about these strategies,' blah blah blah. 'He knew all about'-- no, he didn't. There was no gunpowder during the Three Kingdoms period. Zhuge Liang did not write a preface for this book.

This is a late 14th-century book, but it's really interesting because you get to take a look at, this is a-- what do you think this is? It's a bomb. So this is a bomb that was used during the Ming wars of their establishment. And look at this. This [CHINESE] shen huo jian pai-- this is this 'heavenly fire' arrow, this kind of thing, lighting them all at once. This kind of art-- this weaponry and artillery-- there's all different images of the weapons that were used in the 14th century.

This was composed by two members, two officials, who had supported Zhu Yuanzhang in his conquest of China and the establishment of the Ming. One of them later got executed. You will see Zhu Yuanzhang executes a lot of people. But this is this book. Two famous people wrote it.

And you could just kind of see here, this is from Ming Taizu, Zhu Yuanzhang's reign. That's a Ming bronze firearm. You can see what the primitive firearms look like at this time. But they were used. And we will see, of course, references.

Later in the Ming dynasty, we'll actually see the appearance of overseas cannon, especially when Macau opens in 1557. You'll see overseas cannon. But there was, right from the very start of the dynasty, firearm, artillery, et cetera. What we can say is that, from the creation of this book by some prominent officials in the early Ming, probably these weapons were ascribed by Ming Taizu as having helped them consolidate their rule, when they were fighting before 1368.

All right, so here he is. That's a better image-- better, more clear image. Look, that's him. He was not known as an attractive man, I have to tell you. He had very bad skin. They think he had some sort of-- I don't know what that is, but a pockmarked face. He was not a particularly attractive person, according to the annals.

He was super intense. You got to understand, this is a guy with a huge chip on his shoulder. He was truly one of the people who founded a dynasty in Chinese history from absolute poverty, from really absolute poverty. So you've seen that kind of, like, we say Liu Bang, from the founder of the Han dynasty. That's another time we saw something like that. But with Ming Taizu, we know more about him.

Just take another closer look right here. Look at this beautiful Persian, Central Asian carpet right there, just totally there-- totally there, totally under not even a comment. 'I'm the emperor of the Ming. This is my new dynasty. And look at that carpet.' So again, it just gives you a sense of that cultural moment in that late 14th century.

That's his name, Zhu Yuanzhang. He picks his era name. What's his era name going to be? He picks this name, Hongwu. So what does Hongwu mean? Kind of gives you a sense of what he's all about.

AUDIENCE: Martial.

TRISTAN BROWN: Yeah, overflowing martial valor. So he sees himself-- when you pick a name like that for being your reign title-- and by the way, just realize reign titles in the Ming and the Qing become more important because they don't change during a dynasty anymore. Let me just explain what I mean by that.

During the Tang, like Wu Zetian, she comes to the throne, and she'll basically say, OK, here's the name of the era. And they'll use it for a few years. And then Wu Zetian will say, here's the name of the new era. So during her reign, there will be multiple era names. She can change them. They all could change them.

But in the Ming and the Qing, you pick one era name, and that's the era name that you have as long as you're emperor. So Hongwu is Hongwu the whole way through. And you'll see that throughout the Ming and the Qing. So picking a name like that is kind of saying, like, I'm full of martial valor, which, of course, was true. That's how he came to power. But it's also going to give you a sense of his attitude because, remember, what is the complement to the Wu?

AUDIENCE: Wen.

TRISTAN BROWN: Wen, right? So he does not pick a name with "Wen" in it. That's something to just be aware of. Remember, all of these words of what the leaders pick will always tell you something about them. When Xi Jinping picks, I don't know, "Zhongguo meng" or something like that-- "Chinese dream" or something like that-- in hindsight, you'll go, oh, I see why that made sense. What they pick matters.

There he is, the 13 provinces of the Ming. The Ming is never going to reach the territorial heights of the Tang. It's not going to reach the territorial heights of the Yuan. It's kind of boxed in, especially towards that northern region. But it's serious. It's powerful. And it's so important in ways that I'm going to try to explain to you today. It's so important not just for Chinese cultural history-- intellectual history, economic history.

During the Ming dynasty, this is really where we're really going to start talking about the global economy. The Ming is presiding over a truly-- before this, Tang dynasty, you go, oh, Silk Road, blah, blah, blah. Yeah, OK-- overland, camels, takes forever to get stuff anywhere. But we get maritime trade here. And we also get-- during the Ming, you really get Chinese living overseas in Southeast Asia. There's all of these big things that happen during the Ming.

And the Ming is also-- it lasts for a long time, like 277 years, something like that. Any dynasty that lasts that long, you got to tip your hat to that. They did something right. So let's take a look. Well, they did a lot of things wrong. But let's take a look at what they did right.

All right, so one of the things he does when he comes to power, he outlaws foreign elements. He comes to power, and he says, you can no longer use foreign names, Mongol names. You got to use Chinese names. He says, if you're a Mongol or you're a [Chinese] si mu, I think he basically says, you have to marry a Han Chinese-- tries to get involved with who you marry.

Now, of course, what is it all about? It's all about this assimilation process. In other words, of course that's what he was going to do. After you're living under Mongol rule for over 70 years-- parts of China longer than that-- you're going to want to have a reaction like this, reestablishing who we're all about. This is the standard. You got to wear-- remember, he says, wear Tang dynasty dress. Don't wear Mongol dress. Well, what was Tang dynasty dress? Did people know what that was? OK, whatever.

The point is, he's got this kind of aspect to him. But what's also really interesting about Ming Taizu is he's also very tolerant in some surprising ways. Remember, I told you all those [Chinese] si mu ren that came into the country, and they were establishing themselves? Many of them were Muslim. So Ming Taizu famously says, I'm OK with Islam. They can have their mosques. The Jews can stay in Kaifeng. I'm OK with all of that. Just dress in the Tang dynasty style. You know what I mean? So it's like, what's the line? What's the line for him?

So I don't want you to think that it's this kind of, like, reactionary xenophobia. It's more complicated than that. He wants to reestablish Chinese identity, no doubt. And he has an idea of what that is. But he's also dealing with a very, very changed social landscape from the fall of the Mongol era. And you got to deal with all these people.

There's millions of Muslims now living in your country. What are you going to do? You're going to kick everybody out? So no, he keeps them in. And he says, OK, I'll do edict of toleration, [INAUDIBLE] mosque, do all this stuff. But there's some things they police and some things they don't police.

I told you his capital is Nanjing. Please visit Nanjing. It's a beautiful city. Remember the Salted Duck? Yeah, good? Salted Duck? Yeah? This was his capital. It's the capital very shortly, just basically during his reign. It's also going to be the capital of China in the early 20th century. Nanjing has this fate of never being a very long capital. But it is a capital city twice in the last-- wah-- 700 years, for short periods of time.

Ming Taizu is buried in Nanjing. So he is the only Ming emperor, as far as we know-- I don't think we know where the body of his grandson-- I'll tell you about that in a second. I'm getting ahead of myself. He's the only Ming emperor that we know who's buried in Nanjing. Everybody else is buried in the Ming Shisanling, the 13 Ming tombs outside of Beijing. That's after the capital is moved to Beijing.

It's a beautiful city. The other thing he does is he builds this wall. He builds the city wall of Nanjing, fortifies it. That makes Nanjing really interesting because it's one of the few Chinese cities, especially provincial capitals-- Xi'an is one of them; Nanjing is one of them-- that still has their old city wall. You got to realize Beijing used to have its city wall. It was torn down in the 1950s. Communists torn it down. Kind of a tragedy, to be honest with you.

I realize there are some people-- it's like, are you a developmentalist? We got to change things. The wall made Beijing seem so small and so quaint, and I get it, I get it, I get it. But it was the whole atmosphere of the city. Nanjing still has its wall. This wall is really interesting, too, if you're interested in the history of World War II-- how the wall served in fortifications against the incoming Japanese army, the gates that the Japanese army marched through when they were taking the city, and, of course, all the scenes associated with what was later called the "Rape of Nanjing." So the wall is really, really interesting to see, to experience.

Now, you could kind of guess Ming Taizu hated the scholar establishment. He does use this-- I mean, it's kind of fitting for our most recent presidential election, if I may say. Ming Taizu hated the establishment. Who was the establishment? The Confucian scholars who thought they were better than everybody. And he was not formally educated. So he kind of had a little bit of a chip on his shoulder.

So one of the things he does, which is kind of, like, take it as you will, he orders every county in the empire to open a school. Now, how well-funded these schools were or how long did they last-- you can have a school on paper. But after 20 years, it becomes a tavern for drinking or something like that. It doesn't necessarily always work out. But he did want everybody to have access to some education. So he's kind of got this bent to him.

He halts the civil service examinations in 1373, after complaining that the 120 scholar officials who obtained a jinshi degree were incompetent ministers. So he basically had a graduating class. They came. He goes, you guys are just awful. I'm just going to stop these exams. So it's fascinating how you say to yourself, wait, I thought the exams were so important. Aren't the exams so important? Who would dare end them? And it tells you a lot about Ming Taizu, that he would just be like, yeah, just forget about it. Just, we're not going to do it.

And then he brings it back. And then, when he brings it back in 1384, he executes the chief examiner, who-- when it was discovered that he had only allowed candidates from the South to be granted degrees. That's, I thought, always a funny-- and I remember we were talking about this, I think, after class last week-- very funny episode. I mean, it's kind of tragic. Don't get me wrong. This is an execution. But when he looks at the list and he goes, they're all Southerners, what are you doing?-- executes the chief examiner.

He executes supposedly about 100,000 people who were affiliated with the government and their families. This guy executed probably more people than most emperors in Chinese history. He was paranoid. He was always thinking that people were going to overthrow him, all of that. And then he resettles over 14,000 wealthy families from Zhejiang and Jiangsu to Nanjing.

One of the things that he does is-- because you had these wealthy families, especially in South China. They had big, landed estates. He tries to weaken their power base a little bit. One way to do that is to send them to the countryside, make them move somewhere else, or send them to a military colony far away, or send them to his new capital in Nanjing, where he's close to them, taking them away from their inherited estates. So he kind of does-- take that as you will. This is how he reigns.

Now, I want you to understand something about the Ming. The Ming we separate into the beginning of the Ming dynasty, the middle of the Ming dynasty, and the end of the Ming dynasty. Now, that might sound like the most boring movie you've ever seen. Of course, it has a beginning and a middle and an end. But no, in this case, you got to really pay attention to it.

Ming Taizu is really unique. There's only one Ming Taizu. All the stuff that he does, it doesn't follow through in the later reigns. Some stuff remains consistent. But it's a reign unto its own. Yongle is sometimes seen as the re-establishment of the Ming. He does his own thing. It's kind of a reign into its own.

Then you get into a bunch of emperors that nobody remembers. And that's the middle of the Ming. And then when things really start to get bad at the end of the dynasty, that's the end of the Ming. So beginning, middle, and end. Beginning is basically Ming Taizu and his son, the Yongle emperor. And we're going to get to the Yongle emperor in a second.

So for instance, he has huge turnover in his cabinet, as you could imagine. It kind of reminds you of the first Trump presidency, if I may say. It was kind of like, he had this guy, Hu Weiyong, who was the prime minister. And Hu Weiyong helped him purge a bunch of other people. But then Hu Weiyong was implicated in some plot against him. And then he executed Hu Weiyong and a bunch of other people in 1380.

And then he just abolished the post of prime minister. He said, I don't even need a prime minister. I'm not going to fill it. So he just didn't fill it. This is the last prime minister in Chinese history. So remember all those people in the Song dynasty? We talked about Wang Anshi, Sima Guang debates. What is Wang Anshi doing? He's like a prime minister. He's going to be the chief official guiding the emperor in policy. Ming Taizu just says, forget about it. So this is a move, in a way, you could say, to autocracy in Chinese history. That's sometimes what it's seen.

The Song dynasty kind of gives us this moment. Remember when Ouyang Xiu says, hey, why don't we have political parties? Remember, they tried [CHINESE] Su Shi because of poetry. The Song dynasty is this remarkable time and place where you really have officials who are openly debating stuff and talking about all this stuff like that. This is like a slow turn towards something that's much more centralized in terms of that regulation.

That being said, the Ming is kind of remarkable in the degree to which officials challenge the emperor. And I'll show you that. But not Ming Taizu. Don't challenge Ming Taizu. The other ones, you can.

Basically, here's his six maxims. This is totally what you'd expect. But what I just want to point out here is, again, this is something that goes well back in Chinese history, where you'll say, during the one-child policy, 'one child is great, two is too many. Don't even think about three.' There'll be these phrases. And so this goes well back.

Ming Taizu, he's got these phrases. "Be dutiful to your parents." And you might say, isn't that obvious? Yeah, but his object is he's talking around the literati scholars. Remember, he doesn't like the scholarly establishment. He doesn't like those gentry. He doesn't trust them. So he wants to talk directly to the [CHINESE] lao bai xing. He wants to talk directly to the common people. So he comes up with, here's my six maxims. "Live in harmony with your neighbors," blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

OK, so here's what happens. He dies in 1398. And the way that Ming's succession rules worked was that it would go to the eldest-- it would go to the son of the primary empress. Now, that guy who was designated to inherit the throne passed away, meaning that, in the succession line, it would go to his son, which was the grandson of Ming Taizu, who's going to be the Jianwen emperor.

Now, the Jianwen emperor, you go, I've never heard of him. Yeah, he's erased from Chinese history because Ming Taizu's son, his uncle, is going to overthrow him almost immediately. So the Jianwen emperor comes to the throne, the grandson of Ming Taizu. He's kind of like, OK, what are we going to do? What are we going to do? I got to consolidate. I got to be a new emperor. How are you going to follow up Ming Taizu? All of that stuff like that.

And this guy, Zhu Di, the Yongle-- who's going to be the Yongle emperor, he's not having it. He's not having it. Now, this guy, this is Zhu Di. This is the guy who's going to take over. He's the son of Ming Taizu. But he wasn't in line for the throne, technically. So his brother was in line for the throne.

So this guy, his power base is in Beijing. Now, let me just stop right here for a minute and explain what this means. In the Ming dynasty, one thing that makes the Ming unique is that the sons of Ming Taizu were enfeoffed as princes. And they were given territories all around the empire. So there was a prince of Shu, Sichuan. There was a Prince of Nanchang in Jiangxi. There were princes that belonged to the royal family all across the empire.

The Manchu Qing will not do this. But the Ming did do this. And there were reasons they did this-- for succession, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. So the line that he comes from was he was given a state by his father in the Beiping area. That's the old territory seat of Yan. That's basically greater Beijing. This was very, very close to the Mongol frontier. So this is a very, very important region in terms of geopolitics, considering that the Mongols had just retreated.

So this is where he was enfeoffed as the Prince of Yan. Now, Jianwen comes to the throne. And Jianwen is kind of saying, I want to-- one of the things that we're going to try to do is lessen the military independence of the princes, including the Prince of Yan. Well, basically, you can imagine this guy wasn't having it. And when they come to basically confiscate his army, he just says, I'm going to try to overthrow this, and he does. This is the first of many-- of not the only princely rebellion during the Ming, but it is the most successful one.

What he does is he basically marches down the Grand Canal with his armies, causing tons of destruction along the way, until he takes Nanjing. He takes Nanjing. The Jianwen emperor-- I don't know what happened to his body. That's what I was saying. Where's his grave? Nobody knows. He's probably burned in the palace, whatever. All the evidence was destroyed. His name was removed completely from all the history books. It didn't exist, didn't happen. So the second emperor of the Ming dynasty is Yongle.

AUDIENCE: So how do we know that--

TRISTAN BROWN: Because, of course, the records say it euphemistically. And it was widely reported, let's say. You couldn't miss this. You couldn't miss this. But it's a short-lived reign. But he tries to eliminate them. Remember, it reminds me of Henry VIII. When he executed his wife, he would try to purge her. He tried to purge her.

And I remember one of the most fascinating things I've ever saw, in Cambridge-- in King's College, Cambridge-- there's this big altar screen. And it's like, all across England, Henry VIII ordered every reference to Anne Boleyn to be destroyed after he had her beheaded at the Tower of London. But the one emblem-- and it was "HA"-- after they got married, it was "HA," Henry and Anne. And all of those emblems were all over the country, like propaganda.

And there was this one church altar that was a little bit too high in King's College Chapel. And nobody bothered to take it down. And then nobody-- it's kind of hard to see. But remember, you go there, and you go, oh, my God, that's Anne Boleyn. It's just, nobody took it down. And it's like, thank god nobody took that down.

It's kind of like what we're dealing with here. It was like, delete the Jianwen emperor. It never happened, never happened, never happened. But you couldn't delete Anne Boleyn, especially-- Elizabeth was Anne Boleyn's daughter, right? Am I right on that? Elizabeth was able-- so you can't delete Jianwen, but he tried.

So then Yongle comes to the throne. Yongle is going to totally take the country in a different direction. What is one of the things he's going to do? He moves the capital back up to Beijing. Yeah? That was his power base. So it makes sense to move it back up to Beijing, especially if you want to have a muscular foreign policy.

He does the Zheng He voyages to Southeast Asia and the Middle East. He rebuilds the Grand Canal after having destroyed it during his military campaign. He spends tons of money, but he's much more outwardly focused. Now, for those of you who are in my modern China class, you will remember this next slide that I'll give you. But now you'll see it from a whole new perspective.

So I was thinking about the resonance of Chinese history in China today. That's Ming Taizu. Who was he? He was a Southerner from a peasant background who came to power by overthrowing foreign rule in China. He then established a, let's say, kind of populist-- if we use that word-- agrarian-- first-- anti-foreign merchant, very inward-looking rule over China.

You then have the Jianwen emperor, who comes in very briefly, before being overthrown by the Yongle emperor, who takes the country in a completely different direction-- outward-looking, basically totally pursuing a different policy direction than his father. OK, you know where this is going. There you go.

So who is Mao Zedong? Mao Zedong is a Southerner from, let's say-- whatever it was. He was from a pretty decent family, actually, but reasonably medium-- I don't know if he's [CHINESE] fu nong-- wealthy peasant family, let's say, who kicks out foreign influence from China, establishes this, let's say, inward-looking, kind of populist, against the gentry, against the scholarly establishment, pro farmers, all of that. He dies. You get a very, very short interlude with Hua Guofeng, who comes in as the paramount leader before he gets deposed by Deng Xiaoping, who then does reform and opening up.

So you say, wow, the PRC is kind of like Ming China. And I think it kind of is. Out of all the dynasties of Chinese history, the one that the PRC reminds me most about is Ming, actually. So that's another reason to care about the Ming dynasty. So there you go. That's your story. Mao, Hua Guofeng, and Deng Xiaoping. All right, let's go on.

All right, ooh, the Tibetan Karmapa-- ugh, why did I put this here? So basically, look, what I'm just trying to show you is that there's stuff-- there's moments of Ming history that are so intriguing that you wouldn't even believe them. So for instance, after Yongle comes to the throne and he's like, hey, hey, I want to have-- I want to be outward-looking, I want to be-- I want to be powerful in that way, of being outward-looking, he actually hosts the Tibetan Karmapa, who is the head of one of the Tibetan religious lineages.

It's like, the Sakya order had the-- that we talked about during the Mongol period. The Karmapa was one of the heads of the Kagyu order. And then the Dalai Lama becomes the head of the Gelug order. So he hosts in Nanjing. So it's just incredible to think about, in Nanjing, Southern China, the Ming emperor hosting the Tibetan-- the head of the Tibetan religious establishment. But this is some of the things that Yongle was trying to do.

You know that, of course, the big thing of what he was trying to do-- another thing, more prominent, architecturally prominent-- right there, the Forbidden City. He constructs it, basically takes every remaining big-- what is it?-- rosewood log-- the Hongwu, the redwood-- the redwood tree logs from Yunnan and Sichuan provinces. And they basically ship them down the Yangtze River and then up the Grand Canal after he's repaired the Grand Canal. So he basically gets all those logs up from South China to build this.

You can see-- think about this in Chinese architecture. In theory, that's a log. That's a log-- all the timbers, all the stuff used to construct this. So that's what he constructs. And you can see, this is the Forbidden City, inner city-- the nei cheng and then the wai cheng, where a lot of, let's say, the common people might live. By the way, take a look. Take a look. This is-- what was this going to say? That, to me-- I was going to say, where's the Temple of Heaven? I think--

AUDIENCE: North.

TRISTAN BROWN: Temple of Heaven is south. Temple of Heaven is south of the palace. It's to the southeast of the palace. I have it later. I was just going to say, I think that--

AUDIENCE: It's southeast of the palace.

TRISTAN BROWN: This is the palace. So this is south.

AUDIENCE: It should be in a line, right?

TRISTAN BROWN: It's kind of a line. Yeah, no, Beijing is totally a line. I think this is Tiantan. I think that looks like it. That looks like Tiantan to me.

AUDIENCE: Also, looks like it's kind of the right shape.

TRISTAN BROWN: It kind of looks like the right shape. Yeah, I agree with you. It kind of looks like the right shape-- the bell tower, the drum tower, all that stuff. You can still visit this stuff. I'm going to skip over the next slide in the interest of time. What was the government like? Trust me, it was interesting.

[LAUGHTER]

There was 13 provinces, local county officials, heads of the provinces, and the central government. But what I really want to just say to you is you can think about it like this. Like we had in dynasties past, there's the central government. And then there's local officials. And it's basically about the center and the local. That is the constant theme in Chinese history.

I'm going to get back. Don't worry, I know many of you are thinking about, where's Zheng He? We're going to get to Zheng He in just a few moments. But before I do that, let me just say something broadly about the nature of the Ming government as it was created, let's say, by this time.

When you look at Beijing, as we were just talking about-- this is why I premised it here-- Beijing is laid out as a very religious, cosmological city. You never would guess that, especially if you see its layout today. Not only do you have-- the palace there, the inner city there, that's the Temple of Heaven to the south. Up to the north-- north of the city-- do you know what you have? What altar do you have right there? Take a guess. Take a guess.

AUDIENCE: [INAUDIBLE]

TRISTAN BROWN: No. No, no, no. So temple of the Earth, the Ditan, is north. And then over here to the east, over here to the west-- east-- I think it's sun. It's the Ritan. And then the moon. Yeah, sun, moon, Earth-- or this could be-- I think this is moon.

Yeah, you can go, and you can go visit. They're all now parks. You can go basically visit them as parks, all laid out there. It's really, really cool to think about this. Again, you think about Beijing. It's a capital city, everything like that. It had a logic. It had a real spatial cosmology to it.

Every county in China from the Ming dynasty to the Qing dynasty is going to basically have these three things. They're going to have a Confucian temple, which is a kind of bad translation for a wenmiao, which is basically the miao dedicated to wen-- culture, civilization, all of that. That will be associated with the local scholars, the examination system as it is practiced in the county, in the most local of the administrative districts.

There's also a wumiao. Every county will have a wumiao. And the wumiao is kind of where the military candidates go. Remember, there's also military exams in China. So it's not just the civil exams. There's also military exams if you want promotion in the military. So you have the wenmiao, wumiao. And you will see these. If you go to China today, you can see-- they'll have a really well preserved wenmiao, wumiao, and everything like that.

And then you'll have the chenghuangmiao-- city god temple. Just a question-- chenghuangmiao, the city god temple, literally the temple of walls and moats. But who is the city god? Who is his counterpart? Take a guess. Ideas?

AUDIENCE: The local mayor?

TRISTAN BROWN: Yeah, the local official. So basically, this is what I want you to think about. You go, was China a secular state? Or was China a religious state? Well, again, these are words that don't make sense in the Chinese context because China was both at the same time. You could totally say, oh, I don't believe in the deities. I don't think any of this works. I think this is all superstition. That's fine to say.

On the other hand, the state maintained a very, very elaborate system of rituals and sacrifices and temples that were state temples, so the state temple to wen, the state temple to wu, the state temple of the chenghuangmiao. So this is really, really important scenes because, for instance, if the local people are really upset at the performance of a local official, well, you can't go over and protest it at the local official. But what you can do is you can protest it at the city god.

So we have examples of people taking the city god out of his temple and whipping him. And it's like, why are you whipping the city god? And the people say, well, because I think the city god is doing a really bad job at the administration of our county right now.

[LAUGHTER]

So you see, religion is really an important realm of speech in voice. Villages in local places tend to have a tudigong, an Earth god shrine. So literally, again, this goes into what you've seen from the very beginning of the Daoist movement in China, of the gods and the celestial bureaucracy mimicking the human bureaucracy. And this is now basically become, to a certain extent, the state, the way that the state orthodoxy is organized. And of course, you even have, of course-- houses can have a kitchen god, which is really the god of the house, something like that.

So as I was telling you last time-- I think sometime before-- as we get into this topic, Chinese religion is not identitarian. It's all about doing. It's all about action. That's the real question. Rather than saying, 'what are you?' 'I'm a Buddhist,' 'I'm a Daoist,' people didn't really usually talk like that. Here's my outline of it for you.

Confucian "orthodoxy" and the imperial state cult at the top. So Confucian orthodoxy by the Ming period basically means the five classics and the four books with Zhu Xi's commentaries. That's Confucian orthodoxy. Plus, the imperial state cult, which is, over the calendar year, there are some deities and some festivals that just have to be celebrated. And the government basically says, we recognize these. So that could be like, at this point, Guan Yu from the *Three Kingdoms.* He's in the state cult. Many, many other deities are in the state cult.

Then, that's Temple of Heaven, blah, blah, blah. Go down. OK, Buddhism, religious Daoism. So I want you to think about it like this. You might say, hey, wow, Buddhism was really important in Chinese society. Daoism was really important in Chinese society. Yes, those are true. I won't disagree with those statements. But just realize, how are most people in China experiencing this religious landscape? It's not really like Buddhist, Daoist.

The Buddhists are there. There are monks. They read sutras. You can go and hang out with them. You can even become a lay Buddhist and be a vegetarian, stuff like that. There are real religious Daoists who are priests, who have mastered the Daoist canon and various texts associated with Daoism, going all the way back.

But for most people, it's a combination. For most people, it's a combination. And this is sometimes, for lack of a better word, we call popular religion in China, basically just meaning religion that everybody does. Or everybody-- paper money. You know what I'm talking about when I talk about paper money?

AUDIENCE: Yeah.

TRISTAN BROWN: What do you do with paper money?

AUDIENCE: You burn it.

TRISTAN BROWN: You burn it, and you basically send money to either ancestors in the afterlife who need a little bit of cash, or you bribe gods to treat them well. So this is the whole thing of paper money. And even, I have over here-- I think somebody in Taiwan was burning a car. Oh, they were sending a car to their ancestor.

AUDIENCE: Paper car, paper microwave, and paper TV, and paper phone.

TRISTAN BROWN: Yeah.

[LAUGHTER]

AUDIENCE: Paper house.

TRISTAN BROWN: Yeah, just making sure they're doing well. And I also think it's so fascinating that Chinese religion and the religious practices tell you so much about Chinese history. It's like, when you see paper money was a super widespread practice for bribing gods and you say, why would you bribe gods, it's because the people bribed officials all the time. So they were saying, of course the gods accept bribes. What god wouldn't take a bribe, right? I got to send him the money and make sure my grandfather's OK.

So there you go. So there you go. And then on the other end of it, you got to understand-- you go, but what does the Chinese state say about this? Isn't the Chinese state cracking down on religion, blah, blah, blah? Look, it's complicated, but here's the point. Illegal secret societies and cults-- of course, the government always rails against illegal worship of such and such deity, illegal cults, secret society, blah, blah, blah. They always talk about it.

But the thing is, is that you say, when do people actually get caught? When do they actually get brought in? When there's a rebellion or something. So ultimately, this is-- you see how this is a spectrum? It's not like, this is the correct one. This is the incorrect. No, it's fluid. And it's all open to interpretation.

One thing that I've often noticed as a scholar of Chinese religion is that, towards the end of dynasties, lots of gods get promoted by the state because they're just running out of fumes. And it's like, hey, our famine-relief protocols have totally failed. So we just got to pray for rain right now.

So you will see if you-- I would love somebody to actually do a digital analysis of, when do gods get promoted in Chinese history? And if you look, at the end of dynasties are a really ripe time where the dynasty, on its last leg, says promote Guan Yu, promote Guan Yu, we need him, we need him, we need him. At the founding of dynasties, they go, oh, no, we're strong and powerful. We're good. Just Temple of Heaven will cover it. So it's really, again, a sight to watch.

And then this will be more for Qing, but Tibetan Buddhism, it's its own thing. The state always does have a space for Tibetan Buddhism. I was talking about how the Ming-- Yongle takes the Karmapa in. Also, Islam-- tolerated with exceptions. So that's another, it's there, it's on the landscape. It's not widely practiced among people in terms of the general public; mainly by Muslims. But it is there, as well. Yeah, go ahead.

AUDIENCE: So if Islam is over there, is the principal that Chinese religion is still largely not identitarian [INAUDIBLE]? Or were people like--

TRISTAN BROWN: So Muslims, Jews-- Muslims, Jews were exceptions to this. They were exceptions to this. That's why they stood out in Chinese society to a certain extent, because it was an identity, meaning it wasn't like, oh, I'm going to the mosque today, maybe I'll go to that temple tomorrow. It was like, they always went to that mosque. You know what I mean?

And they had certain culinary dietary restrictions that set them apart, especially like not eating pork for Muslims and things like that. So this is what I was actually just talking about right here. Ultimately, the Ming is the era where you see the emergence of the Hui Muslims in China. These are the people today who are going to be called Hui zu. They're basically Chinese-speaking-- they're, frankly, culturally Chinese. But traditionally, they practice Islam.

Increasingly, you'll see a lot of Hui are secular today, especially if they live in Beijing or Shanghai or whatever. But you will still see a lot of religious Hui. And like those are-- I think this is Niujie, if I'm not mistaken. That's the big mosque in Beijing. So again, Islam was tolerated. It was OK to do it. It was OK to build mosques and stuff like that. But there were restrictions, of course, on what the buildings could look like and everything like that.

It's an interesting topic. Now, you might say, why am I bringing this up? Why is this so important? Because probably one of the most famous Muslims of Chinese history is this guy, Zheng He. I don't know if you recognize or even knew that he was Muslim, but he was. And that's part of what makes his story so interesting, because he is captured as a child, I think, from Yunnan province, as the Ming is basically coming in and conquering the rest of Southeast China.

He's taken as a child captive. And he's, of course, castrated. So he becomes a eunuch. And then, when Yongle gets to the throne and he's saying, OK, I want to do this big overseas expedition, which is going to be the first of the seven voyages of Zheng He, he's like, who am I going to pick to lead this up? And he picks Zheng He. Now, why would you pick Zheng he?

Part of the reason, I suspect, that he picked Zheng He is because having a Muslim do this job, especially in the early Ming, was definitely an advantage for the state. So Zheng He probably was familiar with a lot of the places in Southeast Asia. He knew Islam. He might have known Arabic a little bit. He might have known Persian a little bit. These were knowledges. And part of the scene that the Ming government recognized was important for foreign diplomacy. So it's like, let's send Zheng He.

Zheng He, on one of his voyages, ends up, we think, going to Mecca, actually. But you could basically see what he does. He goes down. He goes basically into Southeast Asia. He goes down to Java in a few of the voyages. He goes through the Strait of Malacca.

He ultimately gets to Kolkata-- well, gets to Southern India, gets into the Strait of Hormuz. Those are the seven voyages. They were super expensive. They involved ships that were, again, huge, so we think. So they required tons of timber to build, like the palace that Yongle was building at the same time he was doing this.

And so that's the story of Zheng He. Now, one of the things that I'll just say-- this is kind of a fun thing-- anybody know-- I was going to say there's a really fun story with Zheng He, when Zheng He brings back an animal from one of his voyages. And all the animals he brought back, all the stuff he brought back would have to be classified by the imperial government. What is it? What did you bring back?

And so they classified one animal he brought back as a qilin. So now, qilins are mythical animals. They look kind of like that-- or one example of qilin. And what animal do you think he brought back that they classified as such?

AUDIENCE: A lion.

TRISTAN BROWN: No, you would think lion, but it was actually the giraffe.

[LAUGHTER]

It was like, he brought back a giraffe. And then they were like, what is this animal? And then they were like, oh, that's the qilin. It lives in Africa. So there you go. So Zheng He delivered on his promise. And Yongle probably thought it was totally worth it.

So now, this is the question. And I was going to ask you this. We were talking about this at the end of class last week. Why do expensive voyages happen? And why do they stop? And when I always think about Zheng He, I do think about the NASA space program and sending people to the moon and all the money that took and all the technology that took, and, of course, the risk that was involved with doing that, and the very high publicity with it.

And it's kind of one of those things that we did from the late 1960s through the 1980s, but then just kind of stopped doing it. And it's like, I don't know. So what do you think? I mean, how do you read the whole Zheng He episode in history? I mean, do you see other historical parallels? Yeah?

AUDIENCE: I guess if we're comparing it to the US moon launch, to establish superiority over the Soviet Union.

TRISTAN BROWN: Yeah.

AUDIENCE: I guess you can compare this to establishing superiority in the rest of the world.

TRISTAN BROWN: Yeah, no, but it definitely was. This is a great point. I'm glad you brought this up. So what are they trying to do with the Zheng He voyages, do you think, in terms of the geopolitical situation? Any idea? What do you think? So you're right on the track. So the US was competing against the Soviets. Ming is competing against Mongols.

The thing about Mongols is they just had a world empire. They had influence all across Eurasia. And then you can't go up to the North, if you're the Ming, and go on your geopolitical campaigns that way. The North is really dangerous. You have to go South. So the South, into Southeast Asia, that was their opening to basically say, hey, let's do trade. Let's get some relations going. Let's get some recognition going.

Yongle also-- I think we have to consider this, as well-- he's a guy who usurped the throne. This is always kind of tricky. If you inherit the throne the fair and square way, nobody ever questions you. But if you kill your nephew and steal the throne and everybody knows it-- and by the way, some officials were pretty disgusted with Yongle for doing that. They refused to serve him. That did happen early in his reign.

So he's constantly trying to show, no, I'm serious emperor stuff. I'm serious emperor material. Look at the Grand Canal. Look at the palace in Beijing. Look at my fabulous voyages. I think there is a little bit of that going on, too. So, I mean, it's one of those things of, we don't do it all the time, this kind of thing.

The other thing that Zheng He is constantly compared to, of course, is the European, Portuguese, Spanish exploration stuff, which happened later in the same century that Zheng He did his thing. But what do you see as the difference? What's the difference between Vasco da Gama or whoever and the Zheng He stuff? Yeah?

AUDIENCE: I think for a lot of the [INAUDIBLE] that they do is they eventually want to set down roots and establish trade routes and all of this stuff. And it becomes a whole economic thing, where it's the beginning of this establishment of foreign relationships and colonialism. But there's no real major colonization that seems to happen and occurs, and also no real type of economic or trade thing that results from this, which is what I think all of the Portuguese and all of them intended to do, was to go to India and East Asia and trade and get various goods and stuff.

TRISTAN BROWN: I know what you mean. Yeah, there's such an emphasis with the Zheng He voyages on relations between the countries. It's like, we want the Ming to be recognized. So I agree with that. What else? Yeah?

AUDIENCE: [INAUDIBLE]-- sorry, so the European voyages were mostly for commercial reasons, to circumvent the Ottoman blockade of the spice route.

TRISTAN BROWN: Yeah.

AUDIENCE: And that's mainly for like, I want paprika or saffron or whatever. Zheng He was just like-- Yongle was like, I don't know, man, I need to build my prestige. Give me a giraffe.

TRISTAN BROWN: Right. Well, this is a very good point. And I think you're definitely on the right track here, which is to say a lot of the, quote, unquote, "European" voyages are basically private people who get charters from a royal family to say, OK, go abroad and do this. And if you find something in the name of the crown, claim it, or something like that.

In the case of Zheng He, it's a state mission. It's a real state-directed mission. So the state is involved with paying for everything. This isn't about sharing the booty, sharing the money, sharing the spoils. It's not about that. This is a state mission, state ships, state-directed voyages. So it kind of has that aspect of it, which basically meant it was very expensive for the state in a way that Columbus-- how expensive was that voyage? I mean, I'm not saying it was cheap. But I'm just saying-- you get what I'm saying?

So it basically makes it-- I think that the private enterprise element of it may have-- and the profits focused of it-- may have made some of the European voyages, even though they had high risk, more sustainable. Whereas in the case of Zheng He, the problem is there was no constituency within China who was going to defend these voyages after Yongle left the throne. What constituency would want these to continue? The Confucian literati, you can imagine, they were like, this is a waste of money. Don't do it.

The military officers were like, eh, I don't see a huge military use for this. So it's like just gonna happen. It's like, why did the space-- why did the moon stuff end basically? I know it's not technically ended, but it's a pale shadow of what it was like decades ago. Why did it end? Well, the geopolitical threat from the Soviets kind of disappeared. And the federal budget's got-- it's really big. And it's very expensive to do these big government-funded projects. Maybe we could do other projects.

It's an interesting question of, if we're talking about interplanetary space travel, how much would that-- how much state support will that require to sustain over the long term? Because it's not one thing that you could do, like oh, I'm coming in as president, let's do this for four years, and then we'll do something else after he or she leaves office. You got to do this for decades in order to actually see results from it.

So it might be that basically you have to just make travel to Mars tourism, like private tourism, that it will actually happen. You know what I mean? And then, I don't know, that's just-- anybody else have any thoughts on this? Just something to think about. Yeah, it's a fascinating moment.

But let me just say-- and I want to make this really, really-- I don't want to overstate the connection between these things. But since we're on this topic of Zheng He, I do want to say, in the centuries after Zheng He, specifically the 1500s, this is really where you start to see the overseas Chinese communities. And when I say "overseas Chinese communities," at this point I'm not talking about Canada, North America, or Australia. I'm talking really about the first places people in China went, which were Taiwan and Southeast Asia, with big Chinese populations.

So the thing is, for these communities, a lot of them-- when I was in Malacca in Malaysia a few years ago, just after COVID, the Chinese community there makes a big deal about Zheng He. Zheng He's a big deal for them because Zheng He is kind of a symbolic beginning of their community and why they're there and their presence in this Malaysian society.

But they don't come with Zheng He, per se. What happens is, in the decades and centuries after Zheng He, private Chinese merchants do go out to Southeast Asia. And they do establish roots in Southeast Asia. It's just that they don't have state support. They do so kind of illegally or under quasi-legal gray areas. They go abroad and do that.

So one place that they go-- and I'll just tell you this. We'll get into this in the next few weeks more because Taiwan really comes on the map here. So the Chinese, the Fujian province, and the coastal areas in particular, they want to go abroad. They go basically right across the Straits of Taiwan. And Taiwan starts to see a Chinese community.

I know, in Chinese history books, they'll say, in the Song dynasty, there was already an expedition. Whatever, guys. Look, the bottom line is it was in the 1500s, really, that you have a community there, that you can really say that was a community. Same thing with Southeast Asia.

Indonesia is going to have a big Chinese community. Malaysia is going to have a big Chinese community. I mean, Malaysia in the early 20th century, like 1900, it was a third Chinese or something. It was an absolutely massive Chinese community in Malaysia. That number goes down because Singapore became independent. And many of the Chinese were in Singapore. But still, Malaysia still has a very large Chinese community.

This is a really, really fascinating history. So you could do Chinese communities. You could do timeline projects for any of those countries if you're interested. So I will say-- let me just put that there for right now. And let me just go to early Ming key takeaways.

The early Ming, under Ming Taizu and Yongle, reacted against the years of Mongol rule, but also adapted critical elements from it. The Ming dynasty sees the birth of a group of people who consider themselves Han Chinese, different from Mongols, Tibetans, et cetera. This is what I was saying of, like, Han comes out at this time for reasons that you can clearly think about. Same thing of Hui comes out at this time.

So a lot of those identities that you're going to see tossed around in 20th-century China come out of this Ming moment, this post-Mongol moment. But the Ming can't be simplified as a reactionary Han dynasty. Ming Taizu and Yongle supported and recognized the rights-- "rights" is kind of an overladen legal word there. But it's still, they recognize Muslims to live in China and employ them in their governments. Zheng He is actually an example of that.

The Zheng He expeditions were hugely important. Zheng He made contacts with countries in the Middle East and Africa decades before Columbus or Magellan set sail. After the Zheng He voyages, no subsequent government will express great interest in overseas expeditions or learning until the 19th century. But Chinese themselves in the following centuries started to move abroad, to Taiwan, to Southeast Asia, and beyond.

So it's not that-- I want to just reemphasize-- it's not that Zheng He goes on his voyages and he brings all these Chinese with him. No, it's that Zheng He goes on the voyages. Then they stop, and nothing happens.

And then private Chinese from Fujian and Guangdong, they start going to Southeast Asia. But they do so without state support, which is why there are no Chinese colonies in Southeast Asia. You get what I'm saying? With the very, very interesting possible exception of Singapore, which is a Chinese state in the middle of Southeast Asia.

Of course, I understand that's not the Singaporean story. Singapore has its own unique identity. It was carefully crafted over the 20th century. But you get what I mean. If you wanted to push it, that's what you could push. Questions? Good? All right, 17 minutes left. Let's use it.

So let's talk about this really incredible crisis. So in the post-war Yongle era, the voyages stop. The government's in Beijing. And we kind of settle into a more status-quo Ming. And I kind of promised you, the Ming is going to have basically some of the worst emperors of Chinese history-- just really incompetent people, one after another. Some of them are just absolutely off their rockers.

So this individual involved with this crisis becomes emperor twice in a story that you just have to hear to believe. So he comes to the throne as the Zhengtong emperor. He serves. And then the Mongols, under his reign, basically cross over into Ming territory. And not only does he want to meet them and kick them out, he wants to personally go into battle against them.

So he goes. He leaves Beijing with his army. And then at the Fort of Tumu, right here, he is surrounded and captured by the Mongols. So you have right here a Chinese emperor on the throne, who is now captured by the Mongols and taken back to Mongolia. That's embarrassing. That's really bad. That would be as if the Canadians took Biden.

[LAUGHTER]

It's like, what are you going to do? So then what happens is that there was this big official. I want to say he's from Zhejiang, but you could kind of guess. If you have to ever guess, hey, where's the official from, just pick a Jiangnan province. And then you say, OK, I think he was from Zhejiang because his death-- his tomb is on West Lake. Yu Qian.

So Yu Qian is this official. And he basically-- this is an unprecedented situation-- he basically kind of takes control of the government. He says-- because the Mongols want a ransom. They want territory. They want all this stuff. And they said, we'll give you your emperor back.

So then Yu Qian is basically facing down a Mongol invasion of Beijing, which is really tough, really brutal. And he basically says, look, no, we're not going to negotiate. Let them keep the emperor. Just put a new emperor in, and we're going to keep going.

So Yu Qian saves the Ming. And he basically also fortifies Beijing. And the Mongols, who thought they were going to negotiate, realized they're not going to negotiate with us. And so Beijing is saved. Yu Qian, maybe he's kind of a hero, except eventually the Mongols get sick of holding this emperor under house arrest and then just let him go.

[LAUGHTER]

So he comes back to Beijing. And he's like, what were you guys doing? You just let me stay there. So then he goes under house arrest because there's a new emperor on the throne that was put on there basically under the reign of-- under the watch of Yu Qian.

So the Zhengtong emperor is under house arrest. Then-- oh, classic Ming-- there's a eunuch coup, and they take out that emperor. And then this guy comes back to the throne as Tianshun and then, I think, probably has him immediately executed.

So then Yu Qian has a very, very fascinating legacy in Chinese history of being a-- he sold out the emperor, but he saved the country. So in later centuries, he kind of became celebrated. And today, you can visit his mausoleum on West Lake. It's kind of a site to visit. Yeah?

AUDIENCE: Why wouldn't they just kill him instead of putting him on house arrest and be like, 'oh, no, he had an accident'? 'What are the chances?'

TRISTAN BROWN: So I mean, this is-- that's a great question. Why not just kill him? I mean, it might have just been bad press. I mean, it was kind of obvious that the Mongols brought the emperor back. And, I mean, it was so awkward because this is not something that ever should happen, because technically he's still the emperor. He was crowned the emperor. He didn't die. So what is he?

So nobody knew what he was. So it was like, OK, just put him under house arrest. But then he was back with a vengeance. And so it was just brutal. I mean, it's just brutal. So this is what I'm saying about all the Ming stuff.

And realize, the Ming-- of all the eras of Chinese history-- this is the heyday of the eunuchs. The eunuchs are super powerful during the Ming. And they're-- again, it's not fair to say this, but as the historical annals go, they're seemingly always up to some mischief. I'll show you some more examples of that not too long from now.

The Great Wall. Why does the Great Wall come to exist? It comes to exist right around this time in the way that you know it today, basically right during these reigns, the Zhengtong to Tianshun reigns, this era in the middle of the 15th century, the 1400s. And why? Because basically this is the reaction to, the emperor was taken. We need to fortify the northern defense. So it's right around this time that basically you could say there's all this money thrown to this defensive version of the Great Wall. You got it? You good? All right.

AUDIENCE: And it was useless.

TRISTAN BROWN: Useless, yeah. Yeah, so it was pretty useless. I mean, think about this. Just remember this. The wall does not work like a wall to keep people out. You can't ride a horse up this mountain. Look at that mountain. It's not like the horse isn't going to come up and say, oh, wow, the wall's there. I can't go in.

No, the wall exists to basically unify the watchtowers. Do you understand what I'm saying here? The wall is actually-- quote, unquote, the "wall" is a misnomer of the Ming. It's the watchtowers that give you the signaling and the communication system. The wall itself is really there for the walkway between them so that you can walk between the mountains.

It's not actually like, I'm riding my horse up this Mount Everest. That's not going to work. No horse is going to get over that anyway. So you can think about it like that. So it's not really fair to say it was useless, in the sense of it did work as guard towers, and it did work as communication relay. It did work as those things. But in terms of, did it work to keep invaders out, no. It didn't.

All right, now let's get on to the Jiajing emperor. This guy, I got to say, probably one of-- probably the craziest. Probably the craziest. I'll tell you some good stories about him. And then I'll get through Jiajing today. And I'll tell you some fun stuff about him. And then we'll call it a break. And I'll give you a recording for Wednesday.

So first things first. Jiajing-- you will be confused, I guarantee you, because there is a Qing emperor called Jiaqing. So just realize there's Jiajing in the Ming, Jiaqing in the Qing. So just think, "Jiaqing," "-qing", that's the Qing. "Jiajing," that's the Ming.

So he comes to the throne, and already there's a problem. And it's actually kind of an interesting problem to have. This is called the Great Rites Controversy. So in the Ming, basically you come to-- the emperor comes to the throne. And the emperor does the ancestral sacrifices to his father, who is the previous emperor. That's how it's supposed to be.

The problem was Jiajing was not the son of the previous emperor. The previous emperor did not have a male heir. So he was like the cousin-- oh, no, sorry, nephew. Nephew. So you have, then, a problem, which is to say, OK, no problem. We can handle this. The Ming can handle this.

So according to the rules, what you have to do, Jiajing, is you have to adopt-- the previous emperor posthumously adopts you as his son. So you do the ancestral sacrifices to that emperor, who's like your uncle. But then Jiajing is like, no, I want to sacrifice to my dad. That's my biological dad. So you can see you have here a Confucian problem. Is it the family or the states?

So Jiajing makes the argument that, no, I want to give the sacrifices to my dad. And then there's all of these officials who are up in arms over this. There's a public protest among officials who are scandalized at the idea that he won't be adopted and do the proper sacrifices. You can think about-- I know you say this, but today, when presidents, they visit the cemetery at Normandy or they do some other ritual, people get up in arms about how they act, what they say, was Biden asleep, whatever.

[LAUGHTER]

People talk about these things. They matter, the public performance of being a leader like this. So it mattered right from the very beginning of Jiajing's reign. So what he basically does is that he makes this ancestral rites adjustment. He holds his ground on this. And then something really remarkable happens in Chinese society during this time, which is that basically Jiajing sort of encourages people across China to build ancestral halls and worship their ancestors.

So this is a really fascinating story because let me basically pose it to you this way. This is an accidental-- this is an accident of Chinese history that it happened this way. So the rites controversy-- let me put it this way. In the Song dynasty, people worshipped their ancestors, of course. But everybody can worship their mother, their father, their grandparents. But in terms of deep ancestors, long-standing ancestral lines, in the Song dynasty, building an ancestral hall, that was reserved for people who had passed the exams and became officials.

You had the right to build a temple to your own family. That's really nice. Here's Tristan's family temple. There you go. In the Song, if I was a jinshi degree holder and official, I could do that. I had the right to do that.

And by the time you get to the Ming, as a result of this rites controversy, Jiajing basically says everybody can do it. So that's where you're going to start to see the Liu family ancestral hall, the Wong family ancestral hall. Every family can build an ancestral hall now because he basically takes off the guardrails.

So in other words, this extends the rite of ancestor worship, really true ancestor worship. I'm not just saying father, mother, grandfather, grandparent. That always existed. But I'm talking about building a freestanding temple that the lineage under the name of a common ancestor held the land and paid taxes.

This is, again, when we talk about the gender relations-- we were talking about that last year; sorry, last week-- I was telling you about how property inheritance rules, everything like that. In the Ming, the big family lineage becomes more and more important. That patriline becomes more and more important. And with this change and this incentive to worship ancestors and build ancestral halls, basically all the land is held in the name of the ancestor, who then becomes the taxpayer when he's dead.

So who owns the land? Well, our great, great grandfather. So then the structure of the lineage becomes really important. The Chinese family became a lineage corporation. And the pattern of late imperial society from the Ming and Qing dynasties became strong central government, a small government bureaucracy, a large body of exam-taking gentry, and strong family units that essentially govern themselves.

So this is what I want you to think about this paradox. You go, was the state strong? Or was the state weak? Well, the central government was strong. The emperor could be strong. But in terms of the penetration into local society, it was pretty much the families govern themselves. They establish their own temples and everything like that. So that's what you can think about it.

So I'll just say-- and I was just going to give you the Chinese-- the family names. You can think of all the famous Hong Kong family corporations and things like that. This is really-- this looks old. This looks ancient. Oh, these Chinese family lineages. Oh, god, wow, this is traditional China. This is not traditional China. This is mid-Ming-dynasty China and after. It's only in the mid-Ming dynasty that these family units emerged in the way that we came to know them in the 20th century. So just so that you know that.

Now, I'll just get back. OK, so really, really quickly, I promised you some stories about Jiajing. I will deliver on them. I'll talk really, really briefly about the palace plot of the Renyin year. This is something that comes up every now and then. And it's an example of just how out there Jiajing was.

Just really, really quickly-- how do I even say this? So basically, Jiajing was interested in all types of self-cultivation. Of course he was, right? And he was trying to get elixirs to live forever. And this involved basically-- [SIGHS]

He did some really strange stuff, OK? Just take my word for it. I don't know how much detail about this I should go into. But I'll just say that he collected young women from around the empire to basically help him make these elixirs. And we know he did this because, in 1542, there was literally a rebellion. And these women, who were in the palace, tried to strangle him. And you say, well, how do you know this happened?

This is actually recorded. It is recorded. Like, this woman was strangled. This woman was strangled. This woman was strangled-- or beheaded-- because they tried to strangle him this night. That's how out there he was. Now, again, you can look it up for the details, I'll just say.

But this is a moment that reflects, let's just say, the unique governing realities of the Jiajing reign. He's not particularly-- I won't say he's asleep at the wheel. He's not at the wheel. He's doing his own thing. He's involved in his own stuff. And I think it's really fascinating to look at this moment in history of, he nearly was assassinated.

So he ultimately was not killed. The empress, Empress Fang, I think, saved him in the middle of the assassination attempt. And then all of the women who were basically trying to kill him were then executed. But basically, this is the moment.

Now, this gives me an opportunity in the last two minutes here to say something about the subject of actually women coming into the palace. And remember, as I've said to you time and time and time and time again, that the Forbidden City was basically a palace of eunuchs and women, particularly the rear of the Forbidden City, where the imperial family lived. And so this is that-- when you look at the map of the Forbidden City, this is the ho gong, the inner court of it.

So there's a great interactive article from a few years ago of the*South China Morning Post,* where they talk about, during the Ming dynasty, the selection process of becoming an imperial concubine in the imperial city. And when it comes to the plot of the Renyin year, I thought it was good background information to give it to you.

So basically, what you'd have-- this is an example, "The Outstanding 50." In 1621, Ming emperor Tianqi sends eunuchs across the country to handpick 5,000 young women aged 13 to 16, for whom he would select a wife. This was true of the wife-selection process. This was also true of the concubine-selection process.

So basically, you'd have-- I think this is 5,000. So 5,000 women would come into the palace. And then they would be selected. And there would be examinations. And it gets narrowed down as the days go on. And they ultimately narrow it down to 50. And then they, in turn, narrow it down further than that. And then he selects from there.

So this is kind of in the background to this whole palace plot. The thing is, this palace plot against Jiajing is possible because there's so many women who are in the palace, you have to understand. They constituted a majority of the palace population. So I'm out of time. Great to see you. I'll record for Wednesday. And have a great break.

[AUDIO OUT]