

Prompt: Evaluate the extent to which Ming China and Ashikaga Japan used various methods to consolidate and maintain political control.

The Ming Dynasty

The Ming Shi-lu, compiled by court historians of the Ming Dynasty, early 15th century

The Ming Shi-li (the Ming Veritable Records) is a collection of the imperial records of the Ming Dynasty. These excerpts were compiled by the historians of the emperors Hongwu and Yongle.

One who is outstanding in ruling the people should treat them as his children. I rule all under Heaven and govern the Chinese and the yi [non-Chinese living within the empire]...so as to follow the will of Heaven and Earth. I wish all distant lands and foreign regions to have their proper places. Paper money, patterned silks with gold thread, and suits of clothing were given to envoys from Siam, Java, Champa, and more...In return we received pepper, sandalwood, exotic animals, and other valuable gifts.

Many respond to Chinese influence and culture. Cochin [India], for example, has long accepted Chinese cultural guidance. When Imperial orders arrived, the people went down on their hands and knees, greatly excited...They bowed and said: "How fortunate we are that the civilizing influences of the Chinese sages have reached us...Confusion has been eliminated and there is no evil to be found. This is the result of the civilizing influences of China."

...It is easy to send troops but difficult to control them. If people act wrongly, they should first be instructed in the correct principles. If they still do not follow them, then there is reason to dispatch troops.

VILLAGE ORDINANCES: "PROHIBITION ORDINANCE" issued by the Ming Dynasty

Each year, we set up ordinances for our village, but they are often ignored by the greedy or overturned by the influential, making them ineffective. Recently, we grouped all households into districts, each with a fixed number of members. On the first and fifteenth of each month, each district will hold a meeting to awaken the conscience of its residents and encourage contact between the high and low.

No cover-ups, bribery, blackmail, or false accusations will be tolerated; such actions will be punished. Anyone who violates the ordinances will be sentenced publicly; if they think the sentence is unfair, they can appeal to the village assembly. From now on, our ordinances will be properly enforced, and the morality of the people will be restored.

Wang Yangming, "The Unity of Knowing and Acting," c. 1470

Wang Yangming was the leading Neo-Confucian scholar of the early Ming Dynasty. He served as a scholar-official and general who became famous for his philosophy on innate knowledge and his belief that it is not the world that shapes the mind but rather the mind that gives reason to the world.

Some people know they should honor their parents and respect their older siblings, yet they fail to act on it. This shows that knowing and acting are different. But in truth, no one who truly knows will fail to act. If people are not taught clearly and sincerely to do good and avoid evil according to their own inner sense of right and wrong, their efforts will not be genuine. The goal of learning is to restore the natural connection between knowing and acting, not just to copy behavior or feel satisfied with knowledge alone. Everyone has the ability to tell right from wrong, and it is through applying that knowledge in daily life that people truly do good and remove evil.

The Ashikaga Shogunate

Zuikei Shūhō, Japanese Zen [Buddhist] priest, *A Record of Good Foreign Relations as a Treasure of Our Country*, 1406

In the first month of the fourth year of the Yongle reign (1406), the Japanese Shogun Ashikaga Yoshimitsu accepted the title 'King of Japan' from the Ming emperor. The Ming court issued a decree conferring upon Yoshimitsu the title of 'King of Japan' (日本国王), acknowledging him as the legitimate ruler of Japan.

Treaty of Kyehae between Japan and Korea, 1443

The Japanese port of Tsushima was an important trade partner with Korea, but it soon became a major base for Japanese pirates (wokou). In 1443, Korea signed the following treaty with the daimyo of Tsushima, Sō Sadamori, who was head of a powerful Japanese clan that had helped fight the Mongol invasions.

The Lord of Tsushima, Sō Sadamori, shall be granted the right to conduct trade with the Joseon [Korean] Kingdom, with a quota of fifty ships per year. In return, Sō Sadamori is obligated to prevent Japanese pirates from raiding Korean ports and to maintain peace along the maritime borders.

Asakura Toshikage's 17-Article Injunction, 1480

Asakurawas a daimyo (lord) of a province during the Ashikaga Shogunate who sought to strengthen his territory administratively as well as militarily at a time when the shogunate lacked much central authority.

The following rules are to be followed:

- Do not give administrative posts or shugo [military governorships] to those lacking ability, even if they come from honored lineages.
- Threetimesayear,selectmenofabilityandhonesty,andsendthemoninspectiontours of theprovince.They must listen to the views of the common people and farmers, and collect information concerning incidences of misgovernment.
- Stop interference from powerful men, nobility, women, or monks without official rank.
- Public officials must perform their duties carefully and avoid bribery. Strive for proper behavior and decorum among retainers and officials.
- If you can discern between reason and unreason and between good and evil and act accordingly, your system of rewards and punishments is deemed compassionately administered. On the other hand, if your heart is prejudiced, no matter how much you know the words of sages and study the texts, they all come to naught.

Italian Jesuit Alessandro Valignano, account of his mission to Japan, 16th century

The people are white (not dark-skinned) and cultured; even the common folk and peasants are well brought up and are so remarkably polite that they give the impression that they were trained at court. In this respect they are superior to other Eastern peoples but also to Europeans as well. They are very capable and intelligent, and the children are quick to grasp lessons and instructions. They learn to read and write far more quickly and easily than children in Europe. [Even] the lower classes in Japan...are generally intelligent, well brought up and quick to learn.