

Closing the Sea

Trace why Ming leaders limited overseas trade and what changed.

SS.6.W.4.12 "Identify the causes and effects of Chinese isolation and the decision to limit foreign trade in the 15th century."

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each reason Ming leaders wanted to limit overseas activity, and circle each result of that decision.

Ming China Limits Trade

- ① In the early 1400s, Ming China sent huge fleets across the Indian Ocean. Admiral Zheng He carried silk, porcelain, and gifts to ports in Southeast Asia, India, Arabia, and East Africa. The voyages showed China's wealth and built tribute relationships with foreign rulers. After 1433, however, the court stopped sponsoring these expensive expeditions. Officials had to decide how to use the empire's money, workers, ships, and attention. This change began a major shift in official policy toward overseas contact.
- ② Several causes pushed the Ming government toward limits. Maintaining long voyages cost supplies, labor, and tax money. At the same time, Ming leaders worried about Mongol groups along China's northern border and spent more resources on defense. Many Confucian officials believed farming and order at home were more important than merchants seeking profit overseas. They also feared that foreign contacts and powerful coastal traders could weaken the government's control. These concerns made distant voyages seem less useful.
- ③ The court did not shut China completely. It ended state-sponsored treasure voyages and restricted much private sea trade, while allowing tightly controlled tribute missions and trade at approved ports. These policies reduced official contact with distant lands and limited chances for Chinese sailors to travel widely under government support. Shipbuilding and naval exploration declined. Yet foreign goods and Chinese exports still moved through legal trade and smuggling. China remained important in Asian trade, but the government chose closer control rather than open expansion.

2

ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1

What were two reasons that Ming leaders decided to limit overseas activity?

2

How did concern about the northern border affect the government’s choices about overseas voyages?

3

What did the Ming court stop or restrict, and what kinds of contact did it still allow?

4

Give one effect of limiting overseas activity, and explain how it changed China’s contact with distant lands.

3

YOUR TURN

Your own words

Complete both rows to show two different cause-and-effect chains. In each row, connect a cause to a Ming policy choice and then to an effect of that choice.

CAUSE	MING POLICY CHOICE	EFFECT

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Underline each reason Ming leaders wanted to limit overseas activity, and circle each result of that decision. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What were two reasons that Ming leaders decided to limit overseas activity?	Long voyages used costly supplies, labor, and tax money, and leaders wanted resources for defense against Mongol groups on the northern border.
2	How did concern about the northern border affect the government's choices about overseas voyages?	Leaders spent more resources on northern defense, so distant voyages seemed less useful.
3	What did the Ming court stop or restrict, and what kinds of contact did it still allow?	It ended state-sponsored treasure voyages and restricted much private sea trade. It still allowed tightly controlled tribute missions and trade at approved ports.
4	Give one effect of limiting overseas activity, and explain how it changed China's contact with distant lands.	Official contact with distant lands decreased because fewer government-supported voyages gave sailors fewer chances to travel widely. Shipbuilding and naval exploration also declined.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

CAUSE	MING POLICY CHOICE	EFFECT
Long voyages cost supplies, labor, and tax money.	The court ended state-sponsored treasure voyages.	Government-supported travel to distant lands declined.
Leaders feared foreign contacts could weaken government control.	The government restricted much private sea trade and allowed only controlled trade.	China had less official contact with distant lands, although some trade continued.

Accept any two accurate chains supported by the passage. Students should show that China limited and controlled overseas contact, rather than claiming that all trade ended.