

**Source:** [KBHistoryMasterIndex](#)

#ret

## Prompt

Essay 1: Kennedy and Mann on Ming Decline

Directions: In Chapter 1 of Rise and Fall of the Great Powers, Paul Kennedy sketches out an explanation

A strong essay will clearly describe Kennedy's argument and link it to specific pieces of supporting or

Additional sources: In addition to Kennedy and Mann, you may OPTIONALLY use and cite from any of the pr

Citations: Direct quotations as well as paraphrasing from any of the sources should be cited with a simp

Length: 350-750 words

Format: 12 pt font, double spaced, double-sided if possible, with name on at least the first page.

Wang Xijue, Ming dynasty court official, report to the emperor, 1593.

The venerable elders of my home district explain that the reason grain is cheap despite poor harvests is

Huang Zongxi, late Ming dynasty scholar who fought against eunuch rule of the court and the Manchu inva

The origin of misrule under the Ming lay in the abolition of the prime ministership by [Ming founder] G

I believe that those with the actual power of prime ministers today are the palace menials . Final auth

Zhang Han (1510-1593), was a Ming official who writes Songchuang Meng Yu ( ) during his retirement. T

As to the foreign trade on the northwestern frontier and the foreign sea trade in the southeast, if we c

Foreigners are recalcitrant and their greed knows no bounds. I do not think our present trade with the

As to the foreigners in the southeast, their goods are useful to us just as ours are to them. To use wha

The Salt and Iron Debates from 81 AD documented Confucian scholars' critique of the government's trade m

The Confucian learned men: The purpose of merchants is circulation and the purpose of artisans is making

At present the government ignores what people have and exacts what they lack. The common people then must

The government officers busy themselves with gaining control of the market and cornering commodities. W

Also in the Google Drive:

Cook\_ZhengHe.pdf goes into a bit more detail about Zheng He's journeys

Brook\_Zhang Han article.pdf is a few pages from an article about Zhang Han's document that discusses va

Ropp\_Ming.pdf has more historical detail about the Ming dynasty

Ropp\_Qing.pdf has Qing dynasty events if you want to use it to contrast with Ming

Zhang Han-Ming Trade.pdf is a fuller primary source with his critique of Ming trade policies

Getting started:

Lay out Kennedy's argument, and decide which aspects you agree with, disagree with, or want to complica

Kennedy's argument is \_\_\_\_\_, and he is wrong in \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_

Kennedy's argument is \_\_\_\_\_, and can be supported by \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_

Kennedy's argument is \_\_\_\_\_, and while he is right in \_\_\_\_\_, he is wrong in \_\_\_\_\_ and can be more n

## Outline

### Kennedy's Argument

There was, to be sure, a plausible strategical reason for this decision. The northern frontiers of the empire were again under some pressure from the Mongols, and it may have seemed prudent to concentrate military resources in this more vulnerable area. Under such circumstances a large navy was an expensive luxury, and in any case, the attempted Chinese expansion southward into Annam (Vietnam) was proving fruitless and costly. Yet this quite valid reasoning does not appear to have been reconsidered when the disadvantages of naval retrenchment later became clear: within a century or so, the Chinese coastline and even cities on the Yangtze were being attacked by Japanese pirates, but there was no serious rebuilding of an imperial navy. Even the repeated appearance of Portuguese vessels off the China coast did not force a reassessment. Defense on land was all that was required, the mandarins reasoned, for had not all maritime trade by Chinese subjects been forbidden in any case? Apart from the costs and other disincentives involved, therefore, a key element in China's retreat was the sheer conservatism of the Confucian bureaucracy—a conservatism heightened in the Ming period by resentment at the changes earlier forced upon them by the Mongols. In this "Restoration" atmosphere, the all-important officialdom concerned to preserve and recapture the past, not to create a brighter future based upon overseas expansion and commerce. According to the Confucian code, warfare itself was a deplorable activity and armed forces were made necessary only by the fear of barbarian attacks or internal revolts. The mandarins' dislike of the army (and the navy) was accompanied by a suspicion of the trader. The accumulation of private capital, the practice of buying cheap and selling dear, the ostentation of the nouveau riche merchant, all offended the elite, scholarly bureaucrats—almost as much as they aroused the resentments of the toiling masses. While not wishing to bring the entire market economy to a halt, the mandarins often intervened against individual merchants by confiscating their property or banning their business. Foreign trade by

Chinese subjects must have seemed even more dubious to mandarin eyes, simply because it was less under their control.

- Wrong
  - “a key element in China’s retreat was the sheer conservatism of the Confucian bureaucracy”
- Nuance
  - “The accumulation of private capital, the practice of buying cheap and selling dear, the ostentation of the nouveau riche merchant, all offended the elite”
  - “Foreign trade by Chinese subjects must have seemed even more dubious to mandarin eyes, simply because it was less under their control.”
- Right?
  - “warfare itself was a deplorable activity and armed forces were made necessary only by the fear of barbarian attacks or internal revolts.”

## Meet Sushu

- needs more nuance: accumulation of private capital -> Mann doesn’t see foreign trade as dubious - dis  
 From Sushu Xia to Everyone: (3:35 PM)

- not correct: government did want to trade with foreigners

- what about Mann’s thing about trade ban, smugglers, etc? government wanted tributary trade relations  
 From Sushu Xia to Everyone: (3:37 PM)

-> government wanting to control/centralize trade -> isn’t that confucian conservatism? - confucian con  
 From Sushu Xia to Everyone: (3:41 PM)

- disagree: "ming china is less vigorous/enterprising" and general notion of decline - disagree with c  
 From Sushu Xia to Everyone: (3:43 PM)

- Kennedy is mostly right re: conservative confucian forces in the govt, but it’s about centralization  
 From Sushu Xia to Everyone: (3:44 PM)

- the merchant pirates were quite vigorous in their pursuit of trade. they were being stopped by the  
 From Sushu Xia to Everyone: (3:46 PM)

Kennedy is mostly right re: conservative confucian forces in the govt, but they banned trade not becau  
 From Sushu Xia to Everyone: (3:48 PM)

1) Kennedy is mostly right re: conservative confucian (govt didn’t want commoners to trade) 2) it’s not

Although John Kennedy correctly traces the Ming government’s distaste for ( #todo-exr0n word choice: commoner trade) to conservative Confucianism, he incorrectly attributes the Ming slashing of foreign trade to a lack cultural vigor—this was instead an attempt to control and profit.

As Kennedy notes, the Ming government banned foreign trade due to the Confucian conservative values of government control and opposition to foreign influence. Kennedy claims “a key element in China’s retreat was the sheer conservatism of the Confucian bureaucracy” and Mann tactfully elaborates “all contact with the world outside was supposed to be supervised by Beijing” (Kennedy 7, Mann 127). Although Kennedy doesn’t provide much detail on what he means by “sheer conservatism”, Mann supplement’s Kennedy’s argument by explaining Beijing’s plan to limit and supervise trade relations with the outside world. All sources agree that on a high level, Confucianism’s conservative values played a major role in China’s restrictive trade policies.

However, Kennedy inaccurately suggests that Confucian China stopped trade due to a dislike of commerce and cultural complacency. Kennedy writes “Foreign trade must have seemed even more dubious to mandarin eyes”, whose imprecise wording and questionable support heavily contrasts the rest of the text; He further milks this dubious claim by generalizing it to a “dislike of commerce” (Kennedy 8). A more nuanced take notes counters that Beijing’s slashing on private trade with foreign parties is a means of consolidating power and centralizing profit, instead of due to a generic distaste of trade (Mann 126). In fact, the benefits

of foreign trade were known and considered—a retired Ming official writes “our expense is still less than one ten-thousandth of the benefit we gain from trading with them” (Zhang Han). That the author was retired and still actively writing about the importance of trade with foreign powers shows that trade had not been a niche concept but rather a generally considered and debated topic within the mandarin court. The Chinese did not decimate public trade because they found it distasteful—the advantages of trade were known and leveraged and the private ban was a part of their plan. Kennedy also writes that “Ming China was a much less vigorous and enterprising land” and gives the impression that some cultural complacency is at fault (Kennedy 8). However, Kennedy again assumes the claim and uses it as a transition—a deeper analysis reveals that trade-oriented merchants joined forces with pirates to ensure their business. At one point, they fought off the imperial forces sent to pacify them and later invited illegal foreign smugglers onto Chinese land (Mann 133).

Contrary to Kennedy’s simplification, the Ming government banned foreign trade to control and profit international relations through tributary interactions. Mann elaborates on an important detail: the Chinese allowed foreign nations to pay tribute to the emperor, who would give them small gifts in return. The submissive nation would often be allowed to sell extra goods to the masses, which essentially turned the scheme into an outlet for foreign trade under strict government control (Mann 127). Internally, these visits were thought of as assertions of dominance because the only way foreigners could trade with China was under the name of tributary contributions (Zhang Han). Ultimately Ming China banned private trade with foreign parties not due to a Confucian dislike of commerce or cultural lack of vigor, but rather as a tool to consolidate government power and make a profit. Although historians concur that aspects of Ming China’s Confucian philosophy played a major role in the decline of foreign interaction, Kennedy’s assumption (WC) that this was due to a dislike of trade and cultural triumphancy is debunked by realizing the political and economic motivations—the Ming did not ban trade but rather reframed and restricted it for governmental advantage.

- “But as long as they were content to remain at the margin of production and gather what wealth they could from the peasants, their political subordination and their economic security were simultaneously assured.” (Brook 185)

## Export

Link ### Thesis Although John Kennedy correctly traces the Ming government’s distaste for ( #todo-exr0n word choice: commoner trade) to conservative Confucianism, he incorrectly attributes the Ming slashing of foreign trade to a lack cultural vigor—this was instead an attempt to control and profit.

### Body 1

As Kennedy notes, the Ming government banned foreign trade for due to the Confucian conservative values of government control and opposition to foreign influence. - “a key element in China’s retreat was the sheer conservatism of the Confucian bureaucracy” (Kennedy 7) - “With a few exceptions, all contact with the world outside was supposed to be supervised by Beijing.” (Mann 127)

### Body 2

However, Kennedy inaccurately suggests that Confucian China stopped trade due to political and economic complacency and a dislike of commerce. - Kennedy: “This dislike of commerce” (Kennedy 8) - “Beijing’s prohibition on private trade has less to do with an abhorrence of trade than a desire to control it for the dynasty’s benefit” (Mann 126) - “our expense is still less than one ten-thousandth of the benefit we gain from trading with them” (Zhang Han) - Not complacent: Trade oriented pirate merchants beat back three hundred imperial soldiers in 1557 and some even invited three thousand Japanese and Portuguese smugglers to camp on Chinese territory. (Mann 133)

**Body 3**

Contrary to Kennedy's simplification, the Ming government banned foreign trade to control and profit international relations through tributary interactions. - "the ban-and-tribute scheme for what it was: a way for the government to control international commerce". (Mann 127) - "Moreover, these foreigners trade with China under the name of tributary contributions. That means China's authority is established and the foreigners are submissive." (Zhang Han) - "But as long as they were content to remain at the margin of production and gather what wealth they could from the peasants, their political subordination and their economic security were simultaneously assured." (Brook 185)

---