

CHINA FROM THE MING TO THE QING

The Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) encouraged industry and foreign trade, heralding a renaissance in China's economy and technological development. However, from 1506, a succession of feckless rulers eroded Ming authority. When civil rebellion broke out across the land following a famine in the 1620s, the non-Han Chinese Jurchen (later known as Manchus) took their opportunity and ousted the beleaguered Ming to become China's new rulers.

The Ming governed the realm according to systems set up long ago by the Qin (see pp. 74–75). China's manufacturing blossomed under the Ming, encouraged by foreign trade. Under Emperor Yongle (r. 1403–1424), the Forbidden City was built in the new capital Beijing (which replaced Nanjing as the main seat of imperial residence). He also increased China's trade influence across Asia and Africa.

The later emperors lacked the same vision, which led to a gradual waning of Ming power. Emperor Xuande (r. 1425–1435) established a Grand Secretariat to streamline legislation and, in doing so, reduced the burden on his rule. The Ming suffered a blow in 1449 when the

young Emperor Zhengtong (r. 1435–1449 and 1457–1464) was taken prisoner by Mongol tribes while leading a battle against them. The second half of the Ming era saw court officials displace the traditional bureaucracy, leading to factionalism and poor governance. The empire's fall was presaged in the 1620s by a severe famine, which triggered lawlessness and peasant rebellions across the realm.

In 1644, the Manchus seized Beijing. Initially, the Chinese ruling classes were excluded from government positions, leading to revolts, but reforms thereafter created stability for Qing rule under Emperors Shunzhi (r. 1644–1661) and Kangxi (r. 1661–1722).

ADMIRAL ZHENG HE THE MING TREASURE VOYAGES



Between 1405 and 1433, Admiral Zheng He led seven state-sponsored naval missions, known as the "Ming Treasure Voyages," across the Indian Ocean. With a fleet comprising more than 200 ships and 27,800 crewmen, Zheng He sailed as far as Arabia and the east coast of Africa, establishing new trade links and extending China's commercial influence.



