Overview

The weakening of the Ming dynasty in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century paves the way for the Manchu takeover of China in the mid-seventeenth. As the Qing dynasty, the Manchus rule China, large parts of Central Asia, and other neighboring regions until the late nineteenth century. China is one of the wealthier and more populous nations in the world during this period, largely due to efficient production and trade in tea and luxury goods such as silk and porcelain.

The arts flourish despite a tendency toward conservative thought. Porcelains are produced in record numbers for export and use at home. New palettes such as the well-known *famille verte* and *famille rose* are added to an already impressive repertory of shapes and glazes. Orthodox painters preserve and reinterpret earlier traditions, while “Individualist” masters develop new sensibilities with regard to themes and techniques. The widespread export of Chinese goods has a profound effect on the visual arts of much of Europe, influencing architecture, textiles, and ceramics, and creating a taste for new materials such as lacquer.

Key Events

- **1601–82** The Dutch dominate international trade in porcelains and other goods from their headquarters in Batavia (Jakarta). Over 12 million ceramics are shipped to Europe during their tenure.

- **1610–95** During his lifetime, the influential political philosopher and historian Huang Zongxi writes biographies of important Ming leaders and several analyses of government structure.

- **1616** Nurhachi (1559–1626) establishes the Manchu Jin dynasty in the northeast.

- **1626–1705** Zhu Da, called Bada Shanren (1626–1705), and other painters such as Shitao (1642–1707) revitalize traditional Chinese painting with highly expressionistic renderings of a wide range of subjects. Their work is often contrasted with the more traditional work of artists such as Wang Hui (1632–1717), one of the so-called four Wangs of Chinese painting.

- **ca. 1620–83** Lack of imperial patronage or control has a profound impact on the Chinese ceramic industry, which adapts to produce a new range of wares for domestic consumption and export to Japan, Southeast Asia, and, to some extent, Europe.

- **1628** Severe famine and widespread banditry lead to rebellion in several regions, further weakening the crumbling Ming dynasty.
• ca. 1630 Sino-Spanish trade, conducted via the Philippines, expands considerably, as does trade with Japan.

• 1636 Nurhachi’s son and successor changes the name of the Jin dynasty to Qing, the dynasty under which the Manchus control all of China. Nurhachi’s grandson is the first Manchu emperor and rules under the name Shunzhi (r. 1644–1661).

• 1645 The Manchus decree that all Chinese men shave their foreheads and wear their hair in a long queue or plait, as a means of controlling the people they have just conquered.

• 1662–1722 The Kangxi emperor, the first of three powerful and efficient Manchu rulers, ameliorates the relationship between Manchus and Chinese, changing the status of the latter from that of a subject race to one of parity. He commissions much historical writing, as well as dictionaries and other reference tools, and reestablishes imperial workshops for the production of porcelain, lacquer, metalwork, and other goods.

• 1673–81 The Kangxi emperor takes several inspection tours throughout China at the end of a long period of civil war.

• ca. 1683 The imperial kilns are rebuilt at Jingdezhen, leading to a renaissance in the production of high-quality porcelains.

• 1683 The island of Taiwan is added to the Qing empire. Long a refuge for Ming loyalists, Taiwan had been under the control of the pirate Zheng Chengqong (known in Western sources as Koxinga, ca. 1624–1662) and his sons since their defeat of Portuguese and Dutch traders in the middle of the century.

• 1712–22 Letters written by the Jesuit Pere d’Entrecolle provide descriptions of the organization of the porcelain factories and the techniques used in the making of ceramics, which are still traded to the West in gargantuan quantities.

• 1715 The Jesuit missionary Giuseppe Castiglione (1688–1766) arrives in Beijing. He works as a painter at the Chinese court under the name Lang Shining, and produces works noted for the blending of European and Chinese technique and themes.

• 1717 The Qing halt the Zunghar Mongol invasion of Tibet. By 1720, the Chinese have gained control, installing a new Dalai Lama loyal to the court.