

Chinese word for trade guild, *bang*, is written with a character showing two sides of a street.

For the merchant, a single structure commonly housed living quarters, a workshop at the back, and a store at the front. Inside, a well-established family business could make and sell products in a practical way that allowed for just-in-time delivery and convenient repair. Many lanes were named for a family that had been the first, largest, or most skillful in the neighborhood at developing a particular trade or manufacture: grinding grain, dyeing textiles, working copper, making wine, weaving cloth, fashioning metal or bamboo items, or creating medicine. Tang dao'erh hutong was Tang [Family] Knife Lane; along Shen bizi hutong, the Shen family manufactured bamboo items (*bizi*); on Shih nan hutong, the Shih family dyed garments.⁶⁵

Of course, businesses that did not have streets named for them still could be well known, and specialization helped them to succeed. Officials seeking the large Ming-style formal hats with two perpendicular "fins" at the back knew that they should visit the Li family shop near the southern wall of the Northern City and adjacent grain transport canals. If they needed shoes, they would not forget the Song family shop in the Southern City or the Tang family in the East Yangzi Rice Market. Need incense for religious ceremonies? Try the Li shop outside Qianmen. A sore throat would remind the sufferer of the lane where soothing pills were produced according to a secret formula. Some products were seasonal; southwest of the You'an Gate of the Southern City, gardeners raised flowers in accordance with the weather and the holiday calendar.⁶⁶

The street scene was colorful and exciting, though often crowded and demanding. Ming merchants painted and decorated the fronts of their shops; tall signs outside Qianmen in the Southern City rose high above street level. On busy commercial thoroughfares, inscriptions and symbols of trade told passersby, even illiterate ones, what product or service was offered. Wine cups identified a wine shop, just as apothecary jars marked drugstores and striped poles barber shops in the early modern West. Carved commemorative arches (*pailou*), a borrowing from Indian architecture, decorated streets in both the Northern and Southern cities.⁶⁷ Appealing though these avenues may have been to the eye, they were often hard to negotiate. Shoppers and sightseers contended with mud in winter and with dust, flies and heat in summer; a longtime sojourner remarked that it was hard to say which of the two seasons was worse for walking. Some who traveled the streets of Ming Beijing wore black veils to protect themselves from the dust storms that blew in from Mongolia. One advantage of the veil was that

wearers could allow themselves to be recognized only when they so wished, avoiding elaborate rituals of public greeting of acquaintances. Moreover, early Christian missionaries found that they could use veils to move about the city without drawing unwanted attention.⁶⁸

Customers and merchants bought and sold extensively in both the Ming Northern and Southern Cities and in suburbs beyond the walls. Some markets in the Southern City may have acted as wholesalers for retail operations in the Northern City. Still, the largest markets, and the main rice market, were in the Northern City just south of the Forbidden City (in the area of today's Tiananmen Square), where traders from many places crowded and jostled daily from well before dawn. Other major markets operated in the densely populated area of the Southern City outside the Qian and Chongwen gates; in the Northern City on the east side near palaces, state granaries, and connections to the Grand Canal; along the north-central Drum Tower Avenue; in the west near the temple to the City God; and just outside the Desheng Gate on the northwest.⁶⁹ Because of the advantages of its location near transport routes, the east side of the Northern City became more commercialized than the western side. Everything from necessities to luxury items, even foreign goods, could be found for sale in Ming Beijing, though middlemen and transport costs often resulted in high prices.⁷⁰

Ming Beijing had daily, periodic, and temple markets. Periodic markets were held at street or temple locales on fixed days of every month. Temple markets had grown up around religious festivals, such as the birthday of the Buddha, to take advantage of large crowds that would gather for the day's ceremonies. Many markets specialized in customers of a particular kind. A paupers' market in the Southern City near Qianmen opened at dusk and operated into the early morning hours, with darkness concealing seller, buyer, and the possibly shady origins of the goods. It was a place where no questions were asked. At the other end of the social scale, the "inner market" inside the Imperial City sold luxury products to eunuchs, imperial relatives, palace women, collectors, and other wealthy customers. An even higher-level periodic market was held in the northwestern part of the Forbidden City itself on the dates ending in "four" in each month, all days when the gates were opened so that refuse could be removed. Wishing to promote commerce and protect popular welfare, Ming rulers increased regulation of all Beijing markets. The state announced opening and closing hours, determined permissible locations, and set uniform standards of measurement.⁷¹

The Ming was an era of achievement in traditional forms of high culture and of growing literacy and knowledge on the popular level. The capital's book trade

expanded. A well-known painting shows books for sale at a market, displayed on the ground on a *baitan* (spread) of cloth or a mat.⁷² Booksellers would show their wares in front of examination grounds, at temple markets, and at the annual Lantern Festival. By the later Ming period, however, the temporary, movable *baitan* had become a permanent bookstore (*shushi*). Bookstores were found in all parts of the city; some not only sold books but also produced them in a print shop (*shufang*), with the most ambitious proprietors specializing in woodblock publishing and in wholesale rather than retail trade.⁷³ Works of the time included poetry, history, and philosophy in the classical language as well as stories, novels, and plays based on traditional oral material in the vernacular. Literature that sought mainly to entertain, in everyday language, represented a relatively new "semi-learned, semi-popular" culture that first flourished in large cities.⁷⁴ Even readers who knew only a limited number of characters could enjoy vernacular literature, especially since much of its content was already familiar. For their part, the well educated were not only conversant with this material but often its anonymous authors. They usually did not wish to be identified openly with such creations because, in the Confucian view, only literature that contributed to moral understanding could be considered art. Wu Cheng'en, the author of the comic novel *Xiyouji* (Journey to the West, translated by Arthur Waley as *Monkey*) was a sixteenth-century scholar-official whose identity was uncovered only after intensive modern detective work.

Ming scholarship was far-ranging. At the Imperial College (*Guozijian*), built in the Yuan era, literary tradition reigned. Where Mongol rulers once had sent representatives to intellectual discourses, now emperors themselves discussed the Confucian classics for an audience of students and scholars. Later, in the eighteenth century, stone tablets containing the full text of the classics would be placed in the college, where they remain today. Preparation for the regular civil service examinations was extremely demanding; those who passed at the highest level were honored by having their names engraved on stelae that still stand in the Confucian Temple, down the street from the Imperial College. (See Figure 1.) Ming compilers produced massive surveys of the inherited texts of the Chinese world, among which the *Yongle dadian* (Great encyclopedia of the Yongle era, 1407) in 11,095 volumes and *Bencao gangmu* (Materia medica, 1593) are the best known. Educated readers also were interested in the world beyond China. Among writings that attracted their attention were missionary-sponsored works, produced with the help of Chinese scholars, on astronomy, mathematics, geography, medicine, ethics, and linguistics.

In the thirteenth century, Marco Polo's amazement at the wealth and scale of Dadu had reflected the imbalance between China and late medieval Europe, which lagged behind China in many ways. Three hundred years later, Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) exemplified a different balance between China and the West. An Italian Jesuit of rare ability and powerful memory, Ricci lived in China for almost three decades, taking the Chinese name Li Madou; he learned to speak the Chinese language and read its classical literature. He then used this fluency to teach not only Christianity but also science, mathematics, and cartography. In Polo's time, European stimulation at the discovery of advanced societies in Asia had contributed to the Renaissance; in Ricci's, Renaissance achievements came back to China, where some in the imperial court and bureaucratic elite appreciated them. Operating at the pinnacle of Chinese society, Ricci and other Jesuits practiced astronomy (although they still employed the Ptolemaic rather than the new Copernican, sun-centered system, which had been published in 1543). They added European instruments to the older ones used in Beijing by Persian and Chinese astronomers since the Jin-Yuan era. They demonstrated mechanical clocks and introduced up-to-date world maps. Ricci, who never returned to Europe, attained his goal of residence in the capital in 1601 and remained there until his death in 1610, when he was buried in a plot provided by the emperor as a mark of special respect. His pioneering work initiated decades of missionary activity at the Chinese court. Jesuits built the first Roman Catholic church in Beijing, completed in 1652 just north of the Xuanwu Gate of the Northern City, the locale where Ricci had lived and established a chapel in 1605. A successor to this church, later called the Nantang (Southern Cathedral), stands on the same site today.

A calendar of seasonal festivals added customary pleasures and commercial opportunities to the life of the city. Four were especially well known: the Lunar New Year during the first fifteen days of the new year, when residents visited friends and family and paid their respects at temples; Qingming (Clear and Bright) in the early spring, when families visited ancestral graves; the Dragon Boat festival in the fifth month, which people in Beijing marked by picnics, horse riding, and archery competitions rather than boat races; and the mid-autumn festival after the harvest, on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, when families made offerings to the full moon and gathered to enjoy moon cakes.⁷⁵ A fifth, the locally important and picturesque Lantern Festival (*Dengshi*), continued from the eighth through the eighteenth of the first month along both sides of a broad avenue on the east side of the Northern City. Merchants set up temporary booths

and curtains; the rich rented small houses nearby to enjoy the colorful lanterns, the night moon, the music of drums, flutes, and cymbals, and the remarkable wares for sale. The crowd was so large that carriages could not turn around and it was dangerous for their drivers even to look back for a moment.⁷⁶

Fairs and even everyday streets offered extensive popular entertainment. Cricket-fighting, fortune-telling, and card games were common pastimes. Some decks of cards bore the faces of fictional heroes of the Robin Hood type from popular novels such as *Shuihu zhuan* (Water margin, translated by Pearl Buck as *All Men Are Brothers*). A place called Gaoliang Bridge, not far west of the capital outside the Xizhi Gate of the Northern City, was lined with wine shops and places of entertainment. Fairgoers rich and poor entered large tents to watch astounding acrobatic and magic performances.⁷⁷ The Qingming fair at Gaoliang Bridge, which could attract thousands of people on a single spring day, was only one of many interesting annual excursions around Ming Beijing.⁷⁸ But a person also could be well entertained without leaving the city. Story-telling and ballads (often accompanied by the *pipa*, a four-stringed instrument) enlivened Beijing teahouses and streets. A blind man, having learned to play the *pipa* at one of several stores that offered lessons, could make a living by story-telling. Young female singers became skillful at stirring emotions. Performers proficient in many Chinese dialects—all of which could be heard in the capital because of the travel of officials, merchants, and sightseers—developed elaborate oral tales and routines.

Ballads sometimes criticized the rich and powerful, especially corrupt court eunuchs. Already in the Ming era some felt that the direct, straightforward character considered natural to Beijing local residents was being undermined by a love of profit and luxury. Steady, honest, and experienced people sometimes seemed to do less well than the young, the sharp, and even the unscrupulous. Merchants cheated by manipulating measurements. Emperors and high officials modeled conspicuous overindulgence in partying and gambling. Wealthy families kept female slaves as maids or concubines. Critics saw in Beijing a kind of gilded squalor and “artificial splendor—the great wealth of the south displayed at the edge of the steppe.”⁷⁹ More than ever before, rural people from around the Beijing region were drawn to the capital, where they worked as laborers, sedan-chair carriers, maids, and printers’ helpers. But they did not always find the work that they sought. With all its prosperity, the city was also the scene of great suffering; thousands of beggars struggled to survive on its streets, especially in the winter months.⁸⁰

The Ming-Qing Transition, 1640s

The fall of the Ming dynasty was caused by repeated northward military expeditions, inflationary pressures created by an overspent imperial treasury, epidemics, and natural disasters. Amid court and bureaucratic corruption, in the reign of the last of a series of weak emperors, a peasant rebellion led by Li Zicheng exploded into Beijing on April 25, 1644. Meanwhile the Manchus, a new Inner Asian claimant for power, waited outside the Great Wall. After the capital had been occupied by Li, the emperor hanged himself at a spot still marked today just north of the Forbidden City. A leading Ming general, Wu Sangui, then defected to the Manchus, and together they ejected the peasant rebels from the city. Extended fighting between Manchus and Ming loyalists lay ahead both in Beijing and elsewhere. Ming forces held out for years in south China, and more than a generation would pass before the Manchus were completely victorious in 1683. (The Manchus later renamed the hill where the last Ming emperor committed suicide Jingshan [Prospect Hill] because the previous name, which referred to imperial long life [Wansuishan] was inappropriate.)

The Manchus presented themselves as preservers of Chinese legitimacy, as the new holders of the ancient Mandate given by Heaven to rulers of human society, as “more Chinese than the Chinese.”⁸¹ They chose the name “Manchu,” probably from a Buddhist term for “great good fortune,” in 1636.⁸² As descendants of the Jurchen Jin who, five hundred years earlier, had ruled China as far south as the Huai River, the Manchus drew on centuries of familiarity with Chinese political ideas. They did not stake their position only on their military superiority over China, which was not as great as that wielded by their predecessors from north of the Great Wall. Even more than those rulers, therefore, the newly founded Qing dynasty needed assistance, not just acquiescence, from its Chinese subjects. A Chinese official, Hong Chengchou (1593–1665), wrote the regent Dorgon’s major early proclamations on behalf of the Shunzhi emperor, still a young boy at the time of the conquest. Hong, who had been both a provincial governor and a military commander, concluded that Ming frontier policy was ineffective after he was captured by the Manchus in 1642. He surrendered and agreed to help his captors by joining one of the military units that they had created for Chinese adherents. In 1644 he advised the regent to fight Chinese bandits and soldiers but not to harm ordinary people or take their property. “If it is done in this way,” he predicted, “far and near the word will spread, and on hearing it people will submit.”⁸³

As Chinese advisers to Mongol khans had done in the thirteenth century, Hong helped to modify the rule of a conquest dynasty to make it more acceptable in China. Like his contemporary Wu Sangui, he judged that a Manchu dynasty assisted by educated Chinese would be preferable to one founded by the commoner rebel Li Zicheng. Such a conclusion was expedient in a pre-modern context; Inner Asian groups often had played a role in Chinese politics. Moreover, unlike Li and his peasant followers, the Manchus had been preparing for decades to offer themselves as an alternative to the decaying Ming regime.

In Beijing, however, the Manchus soon disregarded Hong's advice to avoid seizing Chinese property. In 1648 they announced that henceforth the Northern City would become the preserve of the Qing military forces ("banners") and their families and that its current Chinese residents would be relocated in the Southern City but compensated financially. The new rulers claimed that conflicts between Manchu and Chinese were responsible for this decision, but they may have intended all along to segregate the two groups and simply waited to consolidate their victory before doing so. Another motive may have been to protect Manchus and Mongols from exposure to smallpox, a disease to which they had not acquired immunity. Only later, in the last decades of the seventeenth century, would the practice of variolation reduce this particular anxiety.⁸⁴ Manchu actions in moving soldiers and their families into the city en masse and displacing many Chinese residents resembled Jin behavior when they had first taken over the city that became Zhongdu in the twelfth century.⁸⁵

The "bannermen" (*qiren*) for whom Chinese Northern City residents now had to make way were products of a distinctive social and military institution. The Eight Banners (*bagi*) were hereditary military units that had supported the Manchu rise to power. In origin the banner system may have been related to the Ming government's own border military colonies (*wei*). Beginning in the later sixteenth century, Manchu military men and their families were organized under eight hereditary banners (flags)—plain yellow, white, red, and blue and bordered banners of the same four colors. Among all the Manchus—men, women, and children—only the emperor was not enrolled in a banner. As the Manchus extended their power in Inner Asia prior to the conquest of China, eight Mongol and eight Chinese (*hanjun*) banners of the same colors and bordered colors were added. For example, the captured commander who gave crucial help to the Manchus, Hong Chengchou, joined the Chinese bordered yellow banner.

Having founded the Qing dynasty, the Manchus now secured themselves in the Forbidden City by stationing the banner forces and their families around it in the Northern City. The territorial arrangement of the banners there probably was *not* derived from the correspondence of their colors with the cardinal compass points, as a common myth has it. It is more likely that the origin of this arrangement lay in the nomadic tradition of protecting the leader's yurt by stationing his closest followers all around it. In Yuan Dadu the Mongols had followed a similar pattern. The Qing rulers carefully placed the Manchu units and their families closest to the Forbidden and Imperial Cities and the Mongol and Chinese units farther away.⁸⁶ (See Map 5 in Chapter 3.) In the mid-seventeenth century transition, 300,000 Han Chinese (60,000 to 80,000 households) were displaced from the Northern City and about the same number of people affiliated with the banners were moved into their vacated houses. The number is smaller than might be expected because the population of the Northern City, estimated to have been as high as 600,000 in 1621, had fallen sharply in connection with Li's peasant rebellion and the subsequent fighting. Still, for those forced to move from the Northern to the Southern City, the experience was wrenching and painful. With an Inner Asian dynasty's characteristic respect for religious institutions, however, the new rulers made an exception for Buddhist and Daoist temples and their resident priests and monks. Allowed to stay where they were, these temples, numbering in the hundreds, became "islands of stability" and sites of potential reconciliation between bannermen and the Chinese whom they had evicted.⁸⁷

New names for the two main parts of the city reflected the major changes that were under way. After the enclosure of the Southern City by a wall in the 1550s, it was referred to as the Outer City, while the Northern City was more often called the Inner City.⁸⁸ Qing usage continued this practice. In the Qing era, Western visitors often referred to the two areas as the "Tartar" (Inner) and "Chinese" (Outer) Cities. "Tartar," originally a term for the Mongols, in this case referred both to the Manchus and to Mongols closely associated with Manchu rule. It is significant that, compared to the original Ming terms ("Northern" and "Southern"), both "Inner" and "Tartar" emphasized dynastic control and "Tartar" and "Chinese" focused on growing ethnic separation.

The new dynastic rulers, again following Jin precedent, appropriated for themselves and the banners the best land surrounding the city. They exploited farm properties as absentee landlords, with the former owners becoming their tenants.⁸⁹ Despite the invaders' many privileges, however, actually living in Beijing and its environs did not come easily to them. They were vulnerable to smallpox;

they had not yet learned the Chinese language; and, like northern peoples before them, they found the summer climate oppressive. They were unaccustomed even to living in a large city; in 1648–1649 the regent Dorgon silenced all the peddlers in the capital because their noise disturbed him.⁹⁰ For all these reasons, the rulers soon established a court residence at Rehe (Chengde), beyond the Great Wall in Manchuria. Later they would build other retreats closer to Beijing, especially on the northwest side. Their impulse to leave the city in the summer followed the consistent practice of earlier Inner Asian dynasties. The Qing dynasty, however, would prove more politically adroit and enduring than any of them.

Like the Liao, Jin, Yuan, and Ming choices of the city as a capital at critical earlier junctures, initial Qing dynasty changes had far-reaching consequences. Much more than before, commerce was concentrated in the Southern (now Outer) City as Chinese merchants relocated their shops and workshops there. Some earlier ethnic enclaves continued to exist, but the trend was toward larger-scale ethnic separation in a “newly compartmentalized” landscape.⁹¹ A Qing rule against inns in the Inner City caused the few hostels for visitors from the same province or area (native-place lodges) to join the majority already in the Outer City.⁹² The new Inner City mainly contained Manchus, Mongols, and Chinese bannermen and their families; the Outer City and the extramural suburbs were for all other Chinese. The Qing rulers were quick to see that this arrangement achieved more than protecting the dynasty. Their placing most commerce, entertainment, inns, and hostels in the Outer City made the Inner City easier to control by reducing daily traffic. The Qing gendarmerie would press this advantage even further by limiting numbers and kinds of shops both in the Inner City itself and along routes used by imperial processions in the Outer City.⁹³

Although, for premodern urban authorities, Qing officials paid an unusual amount of attention to regulating the use of space, they did not forget to regulate appearances as well for dynastic and social purposes. Styles of dress, details of housing, and modes of transportation depended on a person's rank, as had long been the case. But now there was more: in Beijing as elsewhere in China, the new regime required from 1645 on that almost all adult males, except for priests and monks, adopt the Manchu hairstyle (a long queue down the back, with shaved head). Serious resistance followed. Han Chinese resented these orders coming from the Manchus, whom they regarded as their cultural inferiors. That some minority peoples—Mongols, Tibetans, Uighurs—were exempt from the new rules (and others, such as Turks or the Miao, could limit the new-style haircuts to their leaders) only further inflamed feelings on the Chinese side. Tensions over

hairstyle crystallized anger aroused by the forced turnover of housing in the Northern City and the expropriation of desirable land in the capital region. For some time, Beijing became “more like occupied territory than the lively capital it had been.”⁹⁴ The traumatic passage from Ming to Qing was so sensitive a subject that it was almost never discussed openly during the Qing era, and infrequent references employed euphemisms. People often referred to the year corresponding to 1644 as *jiashen*, a name derived from a traditional cyclic system; by using this term, the speaker artfully avoided identifying the year as either the last of the Ming or the first of the Qing.⁹⁵

When the Shunzhi emperor died of smallpox at the age of only twenty-four in 1661 (the regent Dorgon having died a decade earlier), his successor was a seven-year-old son who already had survived the disease. He became the Kangxi emperor, and his long and successful reign lasted until 1722. The transition to yet another dynasty of Inner Asian origin had aroused significant hostility between rulers and subjects. The Manchus had redefined and reallocated familiar spaces; people belonging to diverse groups or engaged in different kinds of activities were now more separated than they had been under the Ming. New fault lines created a need for fresh social integration and opportunities for institutions that could foster it. During the Kangxi reign and after, the resilient society of Beijing gradually revived after a long period of troubles and began to develop and thrive in a new Qing dynasty world.

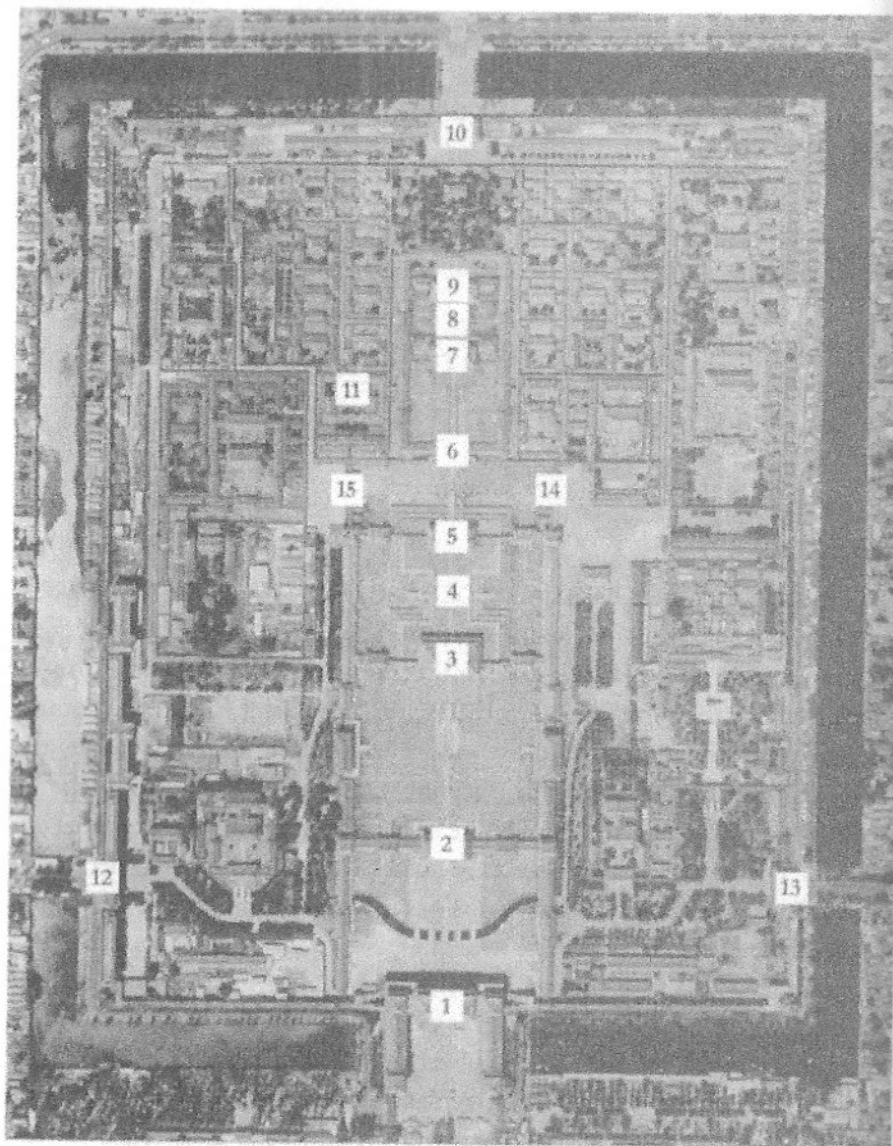
Chapter 2

The Forbidden City and the Qing Emperors

THE REIGNS OF THE KANGXI, YONGZHENG, AND QIANLONG EMPERORS stand out as a high point of imperial and dynastic power in all of Chinese history. In a remarkable era from 1662 to 1796 that has been called China's long eighteenth century, the three rulers saw themselves as heads of a great, multiethnic empire. They also aspired to inherit ancient traditions of universal rule by the Chinese Son of Heaven and by the Buddhist wheel-turning *cakravartin* king.¹

After consolidating their power, the Manchus achieved a vast territorial expansion. The empire would come to include Manchuria and Mongolia to the north, Xinjiang to the west, Tibet to the southwest, and the island of Taiwan. At the same time, emperors worked with the bureaucracy to promote peace and prosperity. The wealth of the empire seemed unbounded, and the treasuries and granaries were amply filled. Much of this wealth benefited the people, not just the rulers, and population may have doubled in size to about 300 million.² The Kangxi and Yongzheng emperors often made a point of frugality, but the Qianlong emperor spared no expense in supporting architectural projects and patronizing the arts, religion, and scholarship. The Qing court both enhanced and turned to maximum effect the distinguished architecture of the capital and of the Forbidden City. (See Color Plate 3 and Map 2.)

In recent years the Chinese authorities have promoted public admiration for the accomplishments of this "high Qing" period and for the vigor and skills of the three emperors. Many books, films, and television programs have made them familiar and popular figures.



THE FORBIDDEN CITY:

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|---|--|
| 1. Meridian Gate - Wumen | 8. Hall of Union - Jiaotaidian |
| 2. Gate of Supreme Harmony - Taihemen | 9. Palace of Earthly Tranquility - Kunminggong |
| 3. Hall of Supreme Harmony - Taihedian | 10. Gate of Spiritual Valor - Shenwumen |
| 4. Hall of Central Harmony - Zhonghedian | 11. Hall of Mental Cultivation - Yangxiudian |
| 5. Hall of Preserving Harmony - Baohedian | 12. West Flowery Gate - Xihuamen |
| 6. Gate of Heavenly Purity - Qianqingmen | 13. East Flowery Gate - Donghuamen |
| 7. Palace of Heavenly Purity - Qianqinggong | 14. Gate of Great Fortune - Jingyunmen |
| | 15. Gate of Eminent Ancestors - Longzongmen |

Map 2. The Forbidden City. Source: Palace Museum, Beijing

The Forbidden City: The Ceremonial and Official View

The Forbidden City was both the private residence of the emperor and his family and the place where he conducted the business of state. The names by which we call the main halls of the Forbidden City today were given them by the Manchus starting in 1645, but the term "Purple Forbidden City" (*Zijin Cheng*) had been used in Beijing from about the 1420s. It alludes to an ancient conception of rulership: *zi* refers to purple, a color associated with martial bravery, and to the "purple bright" constellation of the *ziwei* star, the pole star to which others do homage. Similarly, the emperor occupied a unique status as the representative of all humanity to Heaven in annual ceremonies at the Temple of Heaven. The word *jin* means off-limits, and *cheng* a walled space, a city. The Forbidden City normally was closed to the people. A recent study of Beijing architecture suggests that this closure served the political interests of autocracy by creating a great disparity in the power to observe. The emperor, aided by his officials, could see out to the Imperial City, the Inner City, the Outer City, and beyond, but the populace, with occasional exceptions, could not look back into his stronghold.³

The Forbidden City was and is a rectangle bounded on four sides by an external wall and moat. (See Map 4 in Chapter 3.) Originally each side had one gate. The area measures 961 meters (1051 yards) north to south and 753 meters (823 yards) east to west, covering in all about 723,600 square meters (179 acres). The structures within are laid out along a north-south axis that forms part of a longer Beijing axis beginning at the Yongding Gate of the Outer City and ending at the Bell Tower in the Inner City. The Ming rulers had used the southern part of the Forbidden City for ceremonies and formal audiences and the northern part for the private, residential space of the imperial family and its many servitors. The Manchu emperors took over this pattern and developed it further, performing impressive rituals amid the beautiful structures and extensive spaces of the Outer Court. Ceremonies at dawn in the vast, quiet courtyards imbued ambassadors, officials, and other attendees with deep respect for the rulers.

A tributary envoy arriving for an audience would enter at the southern end of the complex, where the Daqing (Great Qing) and Tianan (Heavenly Peace) gates of the Imperial City led on to the Forbidden City's Wu (Meridian) Gate. (See Map 2.) There he was obliged to dismount. This was the important gate where candidates awaited the results of the court-level examinations for office and where, on rare occasions, vanquished enemies led by silken cords around their

necks were presented to the throne before execution. If he wished, the emperor could look down on these events from the top of a wall twelve meters (forty feet) above the courtyard where his subjects knelt.

Proceeding on foot through the Meridian Gate, the tributary representative would arrive at the vast courtyard of the Taihedian (Hall of Supreme Harmony), the largest and tallest building in the Forbidden City. (See Color Plate 9.) The emperor would come to the same building from the north and take his seat on the throne to receive his guest, who, like Chinese officials, would show deference by performing the kowtow (*ketou*), kneeling three times, prostrating himself, and knocking his head on the courtyard stones three times for each kneeling. (See Figure 3.) The hall and courtyard where the two met in formal audience were the most symbolic spaces in the Forbidden City. The bronze turtle in front symbolized longevity and stability; on special occasions, incense lit inside would cause smoke to billow from its mouth. In the Taihedian, the emperor received large groups of guests at the new year, at the end of winter, and at other times. At the new year, princes, officials, and tributary envoys performed the kowtow amid spoken commands—"Kneel!" "Knock!" "Rise!"—and the music of bells and drums.

Beyond the Taihedian to the north were two other major structures, the Zhonghedian (Hall of Central Harmony) and the Baohedian (Hall of Preserved Harmony). In the Zhonghedian, emperors inspected agricultural tools before symbolic annual plowing rites and prepared themselves before ceremonies in the Taihedian; in the Baohedian, they received ambassadors and presided over palace examinations. Emperors also used the three great halls—Taihedian, Zhonghedian, Baohedian—for marriages, funerals, enthronements, and celebrations.⁴

Court artists carefully recorded the reception of guests in the Forbidden City and at imperial retreats. Their works emphasized the strength of the dynasty and the unification of diverse peoples in the Qing empire. Extravagant visual representation of diplomatic scenes had many historical precedents. On one occasion in the Tang dynasty (618–907), at the then capital of Chang'an, a widowed empress had a nearly life-size stone sculpture made of every ambassador in a large group at her husband's funeral.⁵ In the high Qing era, cosmopolitanism and new pictorial techniques contributed further to the projection of a broad imperial vision in art.⁶

The three great halls, and the Hall of Supreme Harmony (Taihedian) alone, are major points rather than the climax of the Forbidden City or of the entire cap-

ital architectural ensemble. There is no single climax. The power of the arrangement comes from its impact on the visitor as a long series of related structures in a perfect state of balance with each other. Chinese civilization has a genius—in literature, in art, and in architecture—for episodic forms that link many elements not by logic but by association, like beads on a string, in such a way that they make up a whole greater than the sum of its parts.⁷ A historian of architecture suggests that the realization of this concept in the Forbidden City, compared to monumental buildings in the capitals of other countries, is a more subtle, "less obvious, perhaps less pretentious" way of showing power and prestige.⁸ The "Palace Museum" (Gugong bowuyuan) strikingly differs from other such collections—the Louvre, Versailles, or the Hermitage in St. Petersburg, for example—because the palace is an extensive ensemble rather than a single structure of great size.

Beyond the three great audience halls lay a transitional gate, the Qianqing (Heavenly Purity) Gate, a pivotal divider between the outer court (*waichao*) and the inner palace (*neiting*), the two great worlds of the Forbidden City. It is characteristic of Beijing that the inner palace was an inner part of a Forbidden City that was itself an inner area within an Inner City. To the north were three residential palaces, the Qianqinggong (Palace of Heavenly Purity), the Jiaotaidian (Hall of Union), and the Kunninggong (Palace of Earthly Tranquility). The Kangxi emperor had moved his residence from the Baohedian to the Qianqinggong in 1669, reinforcing the distinction between the inner and outer zones of the Forbidden City. Another compound to the west in the inner palace zone, the Yangxindian (Hall of Mental Cultivation), was the actual residence of Qing rulers beginning in the 1720s. Earlier it had been, among other things, the place where the Kangxi emperor studied mathematics with the Jesuit Jean-François Gerbillon.⁹ The rulers kept imperial seals in the Jiaotaidian; they maintained a bridal chamber and altars for shamanistic rites in the Kunninggong, where Ming emperors once had lived. Imperial princes, consorts, and concubines lived in palaces and residences to the east and west of the central axis in the northern part of the Forbidden City, amid gardens and courtyards. The adjacent Western Park (Xiyuan), including three artificial lakes, extended the imperial private area. (Today part of this park is Zhongnanhai, where high Communist Party leaders live and work.) The architecture of the inner palace was on a more human scale than that of the majestic outer court to the south. Residential rooms faced south into courtyards and had a far more intimate feeling than the large, high-ceilinged living spaces of Versailles or other European palaces.¹⁰

In the Qing era the path of a civilian official coming to see the emperor on business, rather than on a ceremonial occasion, lay not through the Meridian Gate and along the north-south axis but rather along a diagonal route from the east, entering at the Donghua (Eastern Flowery) Gate of the Forbidden City and progressing to the transitional area between the outer court and inner palace, marked by the Qianqing Gate, and from there sometimes to the emperor's residence itself. A military official, however, would enter at the Xihua (Western Flowery) Gate. An important place for officials was the gate building at the entrance to the Qianqinggong. A throne set up behind a table covered in yellow silk had carpet in front of it; here officials offering documents for imperial consideration would prostrate themselves to show their veneration of the ruler.¹¹ Even a high official far from the capital would bow to his memorial (a kind of official document) before sending it off by fast horse post to the emperor; how much more intense the sensations of reverence and/or apprehension must have been within the Forbidden City.

An important development of Forbidden City institutions, as well as of their associated buildings and pathways, had followed the Ming founder's abolition of the prime minister's office in 1380. In the 1420s the Yongle emperor had created the Grand Secretariat (Neige) to help handle official correspondence. This office was located in the outer court area of the Forbidden City, along its southern wall near the Donghua Gate. In 1729, however, the Yongzheng emperor set up a new agency that became the Grand Council in the inner palace area of the Forbidden City, adjacent to the private so-called great within (*danei*) and close to the emperor's residence. The location of the Grand Council—much closer to the emperor than the Secretariat was—reflected its dominance over the older institution. Because these two institutions successively became the only channel of regular governmental access to the ruler, they both were connected with limits on officials' power vis-à-vis the emperor.

The influence of the bureaucracy, although limited in the Forbidden City, was pervasive in Beijing as a whole. The Six Boards—ministries of Personnel, Revenue, Rites, War, Punishments, and Works—as well as the Censorate that watched the performance of all of them, were among the major offices in the Inner City. High-level civil service examinations occurred twice in every three years in the southeast Inner City and also in the Forbidden City; they attracted candidates from the whole empire. By one estimate there were about five thousand metropolitan officials in 1800, served by an equal number of secretaries, clerks, and copyists.¹² The state was highly centralized, and, except for routine matters, emperors dealt with provincial officials directly rather than through the

ministries. At the apex of the judicial system, capital cases (those involving offenses punishable by death) had to be reviewed by the emperor himself. Management of populous Beijing was just one of the dynasty's many difficult problems, and the head of the city gendarmerie was among those allowed to memorialize—to send the communications known as memorials to—the throne. The narrowness of the institutional channels—such as the Secretariat and the Grand Council—through which bureaucratic matters entered the Forbidden City gave the emperor some control over his home territory. They did not, however, reduce his workload. With many important matters constantly flowing upward toward imperial decision, the challenge of being Son of Heaven was great indeed.

The Three Emperors

In light of the many demands on the emperor, it was fortunate for Qing rule that from 1662 until the end of the eighteenth century, the dynasty saw only three reigns, two of exceptional length, and all by men of unusual energy and ability. Xuanye, the Kangxi emperor, ruled from 1662 to 1722; Yinzhen, the Yongzheng emperor, from 1723 to 1735; and Hongli, the Qianlong emperor, from 1736 to 1795. (For simplicity the Qing emperors' better-known reign names sometimes appear in place of their personal names in this book; although it is more correct to say "the Kangxi emperor" to show that this is a reign name rather than a personal name, we also use "Kangxi.") All three high Qing emperors had long life spans, reaching the ages of sixty-eight, fifty-six, and eighty-seven, respectively. They had quite different personalities but shared patterns of activity that contrasted with those of the Ming emperors. More mobile than their predecessors, they traveled often in the Beijing area. They hunted in Manchuria and visited summer retreats, dynastic tombs, water control projects, and historic sites. Kangxi and Qianlong also embarked on longer expeditions for political and military purposes; each of them toured south China six times, and Qianlong more than once took his mother along. All were hardworking emperors who on normal days awoke early, limited the time spent at meals, conferred extensively with advisers, and read and commented personally on many documents.

The Qing emperors keenly understood the importance of ceremony in the affirmation and display of power. Interested in religion and aware of the pain that the conquest had inflicted on local people, they patronized city temples and diligently carried out their ritual responsibilities. Ming rulers often had sent substitutes to perform annual winter-solstice observances or prayers for rain at the

Temple of Heaven. Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong almost always went in person, even when they were old and ill.¹³ Religion also enabled them to conciliate various social groups. In addition to establishing many new temples, especially those devoted to Tibetan Lamaist Buddhism and to Confucianism, they also donated funds to religious institutions supporting Daoist priests, Buddhist monks and lamas, and even Muslims and Roman Catholics. Once a temple had been added to the imperial payroll, it tended to stay there, and its long-term advantage in wealth made it more likely to survive.¹⁴

Conscious of the ancient Chinese roots of imperial institutions, the early Qing emperors at the same time realized, to a greater extent than had the Ming rulers, that they could benefit from the ideas and technology of other peoples. Even at times when they were trying to curtail the spread of Christianity, they consulted missionaries in Beijing both out of curiosity and because they wished to use the Europeans' knowledge for Qing purposes. Employment of people of varied backgrounds by a dynasty of Inner Asian origin was a long-established pattern. That tradition took new forms in the Qing era, however, because of changes in the outer world. Reformation and Counter-Reformation Europe had produced a small but dynamic Catholic missionary effort. We saw in the last chapter how the pioneer Matteo Ricci had reached Beijing by 1601, after spending almost two decades in other parts of China, and how the Jesuits led by Ricci used secular learning to attract the interest of the Chinese elite. After the Ming fell, the Jesuits served the Manchus. Noting that the Europeans' predictions were more often correct than those of his Muslim experts, Kangxi placed the missionaries in charge of the Imperial Board of Astronomy. The Jesuits in Beijing also contributed to the expertise available to the Qing court in painting, cartography, and architecture—all fields reflecting the improved understanding of space, geometry, and optics in Renaissance science.

The personal rule of the Kangxi emperor, born in the Forbidden City in 1654, began in his early teens. Having lost both his young parents to illness, the boy emperor apparently was sustained emotionally in part by his Mongolian paternal grandmother. She encouraged his love of reading and stressed the importance of compassion as well as knowledge. He could converse easily in Chinese, and he dedicated himself early to the study of Chinese classics. In later years Kangxi credited his grandmother, who lived until he was thirty-four years old, with helping him to develop the mental and physical discipline necessary to be emperor.¹⁵ In crucial ways, Kangxi stabilized the new dynasty and created a political order favorable to the resurgence of the capital. In the 1670s and 1680s he

completed the Qing conquest by suppressing lingering revolt in the south and establishing control of Taiwan. Turning to the north, he fought Russians who had clashed with the Manchus along the Amur River in the Manchurian border area. Jesuits served as translators when Kangxi and the Russians negotiated a treaty at Nerchinsk in 1689, using Chinese, Manchu, Mongolian, Russian, and Latin as working languages. With all rebellions quelled by 1696, Qing territory was significantly larger than the Ming empire had been and would grow further. Attention to fundamentals such as water control and grain transport also helped the frugal Kangxi to build up the economic reserves needed for architectural projects in Beijing. (See Color Plate 4.)

Kangxi possessed the priceless virtue of intellectual curiosity. His patronage of scholarship followed the precedent of his Jin dynasty ancestors and set a standard for his successors. He sponsored work on the official history of the Ming dynasty that was published decades later under his grandson Qianlong. The *Kangxi zidian*, named for his own reign, was an authoritative dictionary containing almost fifty thousand Chinese characters. The *Qinding gujin tushu jicheng* (Synthesis of illustrations and books past and present) was a huge encyclopedia that appeared under his son Yongzheng in 1728. This monumental work synthesized Chinese knowledge of the time with elements of Western learning. The emperor's interests embraced both humanistic subjects and natural science.

When Kangxi died in 1722, Yongzheng, born in 1678, came to the throne; the circumstances surrounding his ascension at age forty-five remain controversial. Amid intense competition among twenty eligible sons, Kangxi by 1712 had rejected his previously chosen heir, accused him of planning patricide, and refused to name a replacement prior to his own death. Yongzheng may have won out against his remaining brothers because he either changed his father's will secretly after his death or, in the absence of a will, took power by force with the help of the head of the Beijing gendarmerie. Some historians have depicted Yongzheng as suspicious, ruthless, and a far lesser man than Kangxi, his father, or Qianlong, the son who succeeded him; others, however, stress his conscientious rulership and complex personality. He was a serious student of art and of Zen Buddhism.¹⁶

Although his reign lasted only thirteen years, Yongzheng introduced important governmental reforms. He streamlined tax and fiscal practices, thus increasing revenue; he systematized the administration of the Eight Banners at Beijing and beyond, checking the power of individual princes. Battling corruption, he invented an extra stipend given to officials to "cultivate incorruptibility." Following the lead of his father, who had initiated a confidential system of palace memorials, he created

modes of communication that helped emperors to cut through bureaucratic tangles in relations between the capital and the provinces. The Junjichu (literally "office of military affairs") that Yongzheng introduced in the 1720s became in the 1730s the Grand Council, a significant innovation. This group of five or six Manchus and Chinese, served by a secretarial staff of about 250, became the means by which Yongzheng centralized power and made the empire even more autocratic, but also more efficient. Its members talked with the emperor frequently, sometimes daily, at a location near his residence in the Forbidden City or at a branch office near the imperial summer villas. More than twenty thousand surviving documents contain Yongzheng's lengthy comments, in which he used Beijing colloquialisms that he apparently picked up from soldiers and workmen. Some of his comments were longer than the original memorial.

Although his historical legacy was primarily political, Yongzheng wished to create a public image of himself as closely involved with cultural matters. He liked to be painted in different roles. Color Plate 5 shows the emperor in an intimate palace setting in an informal, languid posture, reading a book amid carefully chosen art objects and antiques. A particularly intriguing portrait album shows him trying on more exotic identities: he appears in thirteen roles, including those of Tibetan monk, Daoist immortal, Mongol nobleman, and European hunter. Art historians debate what was in the emperor's mind when he commissioned this album intended for private viewing: "Was the album created as a calculated political strategy to reinforce Manchu subjugation of other ethnic groups; was it creative recreation, with the ruler engaging in fantasy, perhaps inspired by knowledge of European masquerade; or was it a sincere reflection of the ruler's belief that as the supreme monarch he truly embraced the entire spectrum of humanity within his own person?" Such speculative questions about the consciousness of Yongzheng are difficult to answer, but they do suggest the depth of his mind. Secure in his identity as Qing emperor despite questions about his accession, deeply interested in Zen Buddhism with its love of multiple truths and rapidly shifting frames of reference, Yongzheng felt comfortable experimenting with alternative personae in art.¹⁷

Yongzheng's successor Qianlong reigned for most of the eighteenth century and presided over the greatest era of Qing prosperity and imperial expansion. Sometimes described as a child prodigy, he was Kangxi's favorite grandson. He was born in 1711 in Yongzheng's princely palace in the northeastern Inner City. (In 1723, after Kangxi died and Yongzheng took the throne, this residence became the Yonghe Palace [Yonghegong]; later, under Qianlong,

it was converted into a lamasery for monks from Mongolia and Tibet. The "Lama Temple" benefited from imperial patronage and survives today as a religious institution and tourist site.) Qianlong defeated a new challenge from the western Mongols between 1755 and 1757, and he proceeded to integrate Xinjiang, the "new dominion," into the empire. He settled Tibetan troubles by establishing a Qing protectorate in Lhasa. His reign saw the completion of a comprehensive collection of books in four traditional categories (classics, history, philosophy, and belles-lettres) in the *Siku quanshu* (Complete Books of the Four Treasuries) in 36,000 paperbound volumes, containing about 3,450 complete works. (Unfortunately, the twenty-year-long project that produced this collection also destroyed works deemed seditious, punished people who even appeared to criticize the Manchus, and frightened writers away from controversial subjects.) Qianlong was so avid an art collector that he inscribed some of his favorite paintings not just once but twice, or in some cases many times. He even took paintings along on his travels so that he could view them in different circumstances; many of his inscriptions document his lifelong aesthetic experience. He collected ancient bronze ritual vessels, jade objects, and porcelain. Always his purpose was not merely to possess but to know, to discriminate, to comment critically. His judgments have influenced the world's understanding of Chinese art down to the present day.¹⁸

The Three Qing Emperors as Builders of Beijing

Often starting from fifteenth-century Ming foundations, the three high Qing emperors built or restored palaces, princely mansions, gardens, and temples.¹⁹ Happening to pass a temple and admire its scenery, an emperor might later renovate it and then continue to provide funds periodically on special occasions. These efforts dated from the very outset of the dynasty. In 1657, when Kangxi was a small boy and Shunzhi was on the throne, the new Qing rulers rebuilt the Confucian Temple in the northeast Inner City, thus conciliating Chinese literati. After the military and diplomatic successes of the 1680s, Kangxi increasingly turned his attention to construction. In the first decade of the eighteenth century, he ordered the Board of Revenue to build new Outer City houses and stores and to renovate many structures there. In 1703 he created the summer retreat at Rehe (Chengde) beyond the Great Wall; his Rehe replica of the Tibetan Potala Palace in Lhasa showed the importance of Tibetan Buddhism to the rulers. Earlier (in