

TIMELINE OF QING EMPRESSES IN WORLD CONTEXT



Significant moments in Chinese history, including those most relevant to the empresses featured in this book, are featured here along with major events in world history, especially those involving women of note.

1616
The chieftain Nurhaci (r. 1616–26) unites various Jurchen tribes and proclaims his rulership of the Later Jin dynasty.

1625
Bumbutai (1613–1688), a descendant of a Mongol royal line, marries Hong Taiji (r. 1626–43), Nurhaci's son and successor. She subsequently is named **Empress Xiaozhuang**.

1636
Hong Taiji adopts "Manchu" as a new name for his people and changes the name of the Jin to the Qing dynasty.

1644
The Manchus conquer Beijing and formally establish their seat of government in the Forbidden City.

Empress Xiaozhuang is promoted to empress dowager after her five-year-old son is enthroned as the Shunzhi emperor (r. 1644–61).

1600s

1600
Elizabeth I (r. 1558–1603) grants a charter to the British East India Company expanding trade with the East Indies, the Indian subcontinent, and China.

1618–48
Religious conflict between Catholics and Protestants convulses Europe in the Thirty Years War.

1644
Christina (1626–1689) becomes queen of Sweden and reigns until her abdication in 1654.

1653
Empress Xiaozhuang takes up residence at the Palace of Compassion and Tranquility (Cining gong), later using it as a site for Buddhist worship.

1661
The Shunzhi emperor dies and is succeeded by his son, known as the Kangxi emperor (r. 1662–1722).

1661
Empress Xiaozhuang receives the title of grand empress dowager and serves as her grandson's adviser and mentor until her death in 1688.

1704
Lady Niohuru (1693–1777), a member of a prominent Manchu family, enters the household of the future Yongzheng emperor (r. 1723–35) as a low-ranking consort. She is later known as **Empress Dowager Chongqing** and Empress Xiaosheng.

1716
Italian Jesuit missionary Giuseppe Castiglione (Lang Shining; 1688–1766) becomes the first European court painter in China.

1722
The Yongzheng emperor ascends the throne after the death of his father.

1727
The future Qianlong emperor (r. 1736–95) marries Lady Fuca (1712–1748), who becomes his primary consort and is later named **Empress Xiaoxian**.

1735
The Qianlong emperor begins his reign following the death of his father.

1700s

1646
Queen Nzinga (r. 1624–63) of the Kingdoms of Ndongo and Matamba (present-day Angola) battles the Portuguese in an effort to stave off colonization and the slave trade in southwest Africa.

1689
Queen Mary II (r. 1689–94) assumes the throne as joint sovereign of England, Scotland, and Ireland with her husband, King William III (r. 1689–1702).

1702
Anne (r. 1702–14) becomes queen of England, Scotland, and Ireland following the death of her brother-in-law, William III. In 1707, she becomes ruler of the United Kingdom of Great Britain following the joining of England (including Wales) and Scotland.

1740
Maria Theresa (r. 1740–80) begins her rule of the Hapsburg empire.

1762
Empress Catherine II (r. 1762–96) ascends the throne of Russia.

1736
Qianlong grants his mother, Chongqing, the title of empress dowager. She enters her newly built residence, the Palace of Longevity and Health (Shoukang gong).

1744
Empress Xiaoxian presides over the Qing dynasty's first state sericulture ceremony at the Altar of the Goddess of Silkworms in Beijing.

1748
Empress Xiaoxian dies, plunging the Qianlong emperor into grief.

1750
The Qianlong emperor commissions the Garden of Clear Ripples (Qingyi yuan) for Empress Dowager Chongqing's sixtieth birthday.

1765
The Garden of the Palace of Compassion and Tranquility is expanded for Empress Dowager Chongqing as a space for her Buddhist devotional activities.

1776
Abigail Adams (1744–1818) urges her husband, John Adams (1735–1826), to include rights for women in laws being drafted for what will soon be proclaimed the United States of America. No such rights are enumerated in the Declaration of Independence, issued on July 4.

1780s
Rani Velu Nachiyar (r. about 1780–90), queen of Sivaganga estate (present-day Tamil Nadu, India), is the first queen to fight against British colonial rule in India.

1793

The Qianlong emperor receives diplomats from the court of King George III (r. 1760–1820), the first such mission from Great Britain.

1795

The Qianlong emperor retires, and his son ascends the throne, taking the reign name of the Jiaqing emperor (r. 1796–1820).

1796

Lady Niohuru marries the future Daoguang emperor (r. 1821–50). She dies in 1808, receives the posthumous title of empress when Daoguang ascends the throne, and is later known as **Empress Xiaomu**.

1820

The Jiaqing emperor dies and is succeeded by his son, the Daoguang emperor.

1839–42

Conflicts initiated by Great Britain over trade rights in China erupt into military actions known as the First Opium War. Hostilities end with the Treaty of Nanjing, in which the Qing agree to open five ports for trade, thus weakening control over its social, economic, and foreign policies.

1850

The Xianfeng emperor (r. 1851–61) succeeds his father, the Daoguang emperor, after the latter dies.

1851–64

Rebels occupy much of the Yangzi River heartland with the goal of overthrowing Manchu rule. Known as the Taiping Rebellion, the civil war costs more than 20 million lives.

1852

Lady Niohuru (1837–1881) becomes the empress of the Xianfeng emperor. She later is named **Empress Dowager Ci'an**.

1852

Lady Yehe Nara (1835–1908) enters the household of the Xianfeng emperor as a sixth-rank consort. After giving birth to a son in 1856 she is promoted to the fourth rank. She is later named **Empress Dowager Cixi**.

1856–60

The Second Opium War breaks out as Western powers seek to expand trade in China, including the right to deal in opium. The war weakens Qing imperial rule.

1860

French and British troops invade Beijing, looting the Garden of Perfect Brightness (Yuanming yuan) and the Garden of Clear Ripples. Empresses Dowager Ci'an and Cixi flee to Rehe (present-day Chengde) with the Xianfeng emperor.

1861

The Xianfeng emperor dies. Having each been granted the title of empress dowager, Ci'an and Cixi launch a coup d'état with the help of Xianfeng's brother, Prince Gong (1833–1898). The resulting co-regency of Ci'an and Cixi lasts until 1875, a period of relative stability.

1862

Empress Dowager Cixi's five-year-old son adopts his reign name as the Tongzhi emperor (r. 1862–74).

1875

The Tongzhi emperor dies; Empress Dowager Cixi chooses her four-year-old nephew to become the Guangxu emperor (r. 1875–1908).

1881

Empress Dowager Ci'an dies. Empress Dowager Cixi continues as sole regent to the Guangxu emperor.

1884

Empress Dowager Cixi retires from the regency and resides in the lavishly refurbished Palace of Gathered Elegance (Chuxiu gong).

1886

Empress Dowager Cixi orders the restoration of the Garden of Clear Ripples, damaged by the French and English troops in 1860, using funds originally designated for the Qing navy.

1889

The grand imperial wedding of the Guangxu emperor and **Empress Xiaoding**, Empress Dowager Cixi's niece, takes place.

1894

Sino-Japanese War breaks out.

1898

Empress Dowager Cixi halts the Guangxu emperor's modernizing "Hundred Days Reform," puts him under house arrest, and resumes her regency and direct control of the court.

1900–01

Fearing foreign influence, Empress Dowager Cixi backs the forces known as the Boxers who lay siege to Western diplomatic quarters in Beijing. In the ensuing conflict, known as the Boxer Uprising, Cixi and the Qing court flee Beijing to Xi'an as an eight-nation military force invades and loots Beijing. The Xinchou Treaty ending the fighting requires China to pay reparations.

1902

Empress Dowager Cixi and the court return to Beijing. She implements a series of "New Policies" that institute modernizing law, government, education, and social reforms.

1904

Empress Dowager Cixi's portrait, by the American painter Katharine A. Carl (1865–1938), is shown at the St. Louis Exposition.

1905–06

After failing to reach an agreement on an immigration treaty in 1904, China boycotts US products and businesses.

1908

The Guangxu emperor and Empress Dowager Cixi die. Cixi's infant grandnephew—known as Puyi—is chosen to reign as the Xuantong emperor (r. 1909–12). Guangxu's wife, Empress Xiaoding, becomes **Empress Dowager Longyu**.

1911

The Xinhai Revolution overthrows the Qing dynasty and ends imperial rule in China. The Republic of China is established a year later.

1912

Empress Dowager Longyu signs abdication papers on behalf of the five-year-old Xuantong emperor, who continues to live in the Forbidden City until 1924.

1922

The Xuantong emperor marries **Empress Xiaoke**.

1925

The Forbidden City opens to the public as the Palace Museum.

1700S

1784

The *Empress of China* departs New York and becomes the first American ship to sail to China, opening trade between China and the United States.

1793

The French Revolution overthrows the monarchy, resulting in the execution of King Louis XVI (r. 1774–92) and Queen Marie Antoinette (1755–1793), daughter of Maria Theresa of the Hapsburg empire.

1800S

1804

Napoléon Bonaparte (1769–1821) crowns himself emperor of France and his wife, Josephine (1763–1814), empress.

1837

Coronation of Queen Victoria of the United Kingdom (r. 1837–1901).

1861–65

Approximately 750,000 people die in the US Civil War.

1867

Queen Min (Empress Myeongseong, 1851–1895) becomes consort of King Gojong (r. 1863–97) of the Joseon dynasty of Korea. The couple pursue progressive policies modernizing and opening Korea to the West.

1868

Japan's Meiji emperor (r. 1867–1912) initiates steps to modernize and Westernize his nation. They provide models for reforms later implemented in China.

1900S

1905

Alice Roosevelt (1884–1980), daughter of President Theodore Roosevelt, visits the Forbidden City, where she meets Empress Dowager Cixi.

1914–18

World War I starts in Europe and evolves into a global conflict.