

# MING

THE GOLDEN EMPIRE







## CONTENTS

Nomad Exhibitions	4
Partners	7
History of the Tour	7
Overview	8
Interpretive Structure	11
Exhibition Themes	12
Audio Visual and Multimedia Features	28
Response from our Partners	30



# NOMAD EXHIBITIONS

Working in close partnership with Nanjing Museum on this exhibition, Nomad Exhibitions will manage the exhibition design and production, touring logistics and exhibition hire contracts with host venues.

Nomad Exhibitions specialises in the design and production of innovative and expertly designed temporary, touring and permanent exhibitions for museums, galleries and cultural venues worldwide.

Through a diverse programme, world-class featured collections, and creative exhibition presentation and interpretation, the award-winning Nomad team aspires to encourage meaningful and lasting cultural interactions between international communities and between museums and their visitors.

Nomad is motivated by the aim to contribute positively towards the improvement of the exhibition production and hosting experience for cultural venues. The team is committed to facilitating worldwide access to outstanding collections and heritage through a focus on creative design, curatorial excellence, exceptional partnerships and environmental responsibility.

## Commitment to sustainable touring exhibitions

Nomad's exhibition services are provided climate neutrally. Their sustainable model is achieved through considered design principles including use of recycled/recyclable materials and reusable modular systems, efficient and low volume packing, zero waste and zero landfill policy. This significantly reduces the carbon footprint of activities both to Nomad and their touring exhibition hosts.

All services that Nomad provides are carried out whilst maintaining a detailed audit of emitted carbon; that carbon footprint is then accounted for through financial and service support within sustainability partnerships such as for SolarAid (a UK charity providing low-cost solar lights to rural Sub-Saharan African communities).



**Genghis Khan: How the Mongols Changed the World**  
*Château des ducs de Bretagne, Nantes, France*



**Highland Warrior**  
*Canadian War Museum, Ottawa, Canada*





Nanjing Museum

## PARTNERS

At Nomad Exhibitions we aspire to the very best standards of curatorship and see the successful collaboration with museums and content development teams as central to the successful outcome of the exhibition.

Nanjing Museum are our partners for the exhibition **Ming The Golden Empire**. The museum was one of the first state museums in China, and it holds an extensive collection of original Chinese artefacts. Today Nanjing Museum is one of the most well established museums in China with some 400,000 artefacts in its collection and 200,000 volumes of professional publications. The institution provides museum services, heritage conservation, archaeological excavations as well as academic research. After four years of extensive refurbishment, the Museum has reopened in November 2013, offering an exceptional exhibition space of 26,000 square metres and an ambitious programme of temporary exhibitions.

### History of the Tour

**De Nieuwe Kerk**, Amsterdam, the Netherlands (2013)

**National Museum of Scotland**, Edinburgh, UK (2014)

**La Caixa Forum**, Barcelona, Spain (2016)

**La Caixa Forum**, Mallorca, Spain (2016)

**La Caixa Forum**, Zaragoza, Spain (2017)



## OVERVIEW

**Ming The Golden Empire** is a major touring exhibition with an extensive collection of original Ming dynasty artefacts from Nanjing Museum. This exhibition displays the rich and diverse collection of objects from the daily life of an ordinary Ming subject, to the luxurious and rare artefacts of the Imperial Court.

Large scale imagery will provide visual support for the exquisite collection on display while creating a dramatic backdrop for the artefacts. Interactive digital media will give the visitor the opportunity to delve deeper into the unique culture of the Ming dynasty.

This unique exhibition aims to expand the experience of Ming art and artefacts, beyond the famous blue and white porcelain. As well as focusing on the impact of the dynasty's great achievements, and how this has influenced China's national identity today.







# INTERPRETIVE STRUCTURE

## INTRODUCTION

The entrance to **Ming The Golden Empire** will introduce the topic of the exhibition through a large dramatically lit title and image. Once inside the exhibition a feature object from the collection will be on display in the introduction area.

## THEME ONE PALACES AND WALLS

**Palaces and Walls: Imperial Power and Court Life**, focuses on the strict hierarchy and structure within the Ming Imperial Court, and its efficient bureaucracy which ruled over a vast empire. This theme will examine the influence of the Royal Court on aesthetics and style, and the courts major consumption of luxury objects.

## THEME THREE THE GOOD LIFE

**The Good Life: Goods, Money and Merchants** concentrates on the creation of commerce during the Ming dynasty. The importance of taste, elegance and knowledge is further explored, as well as the influence of the Imperial Court to national consumption.

## THEME TWO THE IDEAL SOCIETY

**The Ideal Society: Class, Art and Culture** focuses on the structure of society during the Ming dynasty, and the importance of education to obtaining employment, and status. This theme will explore the hardships faced by Ming citizens in daily life, and the role that women played in society. Religion and the importance of the Three Teachings will also be highlighted.

## THEME FOUR BEYOND THE EMPIRE

**Beyond the Empire: Tribute, Trade and Threat** will explore the use of the tribute system by Ming emperors, and how this affected the private trade economy, which led to the establishment of the South China Sea trading routes. The exhibition will conclude by focusing on the legacy that the Ming dynasty has left on China and Chinese national identity today.



## THEME ONE

# PALACES AND WALLS

The exhibition opens with the fascinating topic of **Palaces and Walls: Imperial Power and Court Life**. The narrative will describe how Emperors were surrounded by a large court of officials, guards, and servants, and lead a life dominated by protocol and rigid hierarchy. The theme will highlight the strict rituals and traditions of the Imperial Court which controlled even the Emperor's power at times.

The visitor can learn how the Imperial Court displayed its wealth, prestige and power through decoration. This was achieved on every scale, from grand and elaborate architecture to delicate pieces of jewellery. The Imperial Court was decorated with rare and beautiful possessions. They were a major consumer of luxury objects, to accommodate this large scale consumption vast numbers of state workshops were built, some even inside the palace grounds. Showcases will display a fascinating range of exquisite items from the Ming Imperial Court, while stunning large scale images will set the context for the story.



### KEY TOPICS:

- Hierarchy and structure
- Ritual and tradition
- Organisation of the empire
- Architecture and decoration





## THEME ONE

# PALACES AND WALLS

### HIGHLIGHTS:

**Bricks made for building the city wall of Nanjing, the Ming capital during the Hongwu Reign (1368–98).**

Each clay brick is marked with the details of where and when it was made, as well as the names of those responsible for all stages of its production. This was an official requirement and was a means of ensuring quality control. It is an excellent example of the high level of government organisation which existed during the early Ming period. The city wall ran for 48 km and took 21 years to complete. The millions of bricks required were made throughout the Yangtse river valley and shipped by river to Nanjing.



**Painting on silk of The Forbidden City, the Imperial palace complex built at Beijing during the Yongle Reign (1403–24) of the early Ming period.**

This hanging scroll shows the formal layout of the complex arranged on a north-south axis. The design was shaped by ancient religious beliefs about the correct arrangement of space. It is thought the figure in the red robe portrays Kuai Xiang (1398–1481). As Chief of the Bureau of Construction, he was responsible for overseeing much of the building of the Palace.







Gu Family Embroideries

Spinning, embroidery, spinning and weaving were regarded as traditional domestic activities for Ming women. Embroidery reached new heights of technical sophistication by the late Ming and was increasingly considered an art form. In some art collections, embroideries and other crafts were categorized on the same basis as paintings. Although little has been known to embroidery, the leading late Ming embroiderers were all women.

Embroidery styles were typically regional but the Shanghai Gu family were the most famous embroiderers of the 17th century. Gu embroiderers recorded their style patterns, and sometimes copied the works of renowned silk painters. Sophisticated needlework was combined with pale ink washes to 'paint' with needles and silk threads.



Golden cicada on a jade leaf, from the Ming dynasty

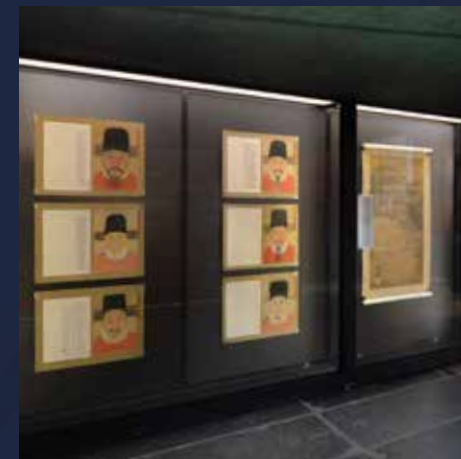
THEME TWO  
**THE IDEAL SOCIETY**

**The Ideal Society: Class, Art and Culture**, will focus on the structure of society during the Ming dynasty. The visitor can learn about a society made up of four distinct classes of citizens, and embedded in tradition and hierarchy.

This theme will focus on employment and education, as well as the importance of gaining status, wealth and success. The Ming dynasty reinstated an examination system which tested young men on a common curriculum, and helped form a national culture among the gentry. Education was a luxury of the gentry, however with merchants' families becoming increasingly wealthy, there was a shift in the social structure, and an increase in the status of the scholar official.

The role of women in this strictly structured and traditional society will be brought to light within the theme of **The Ideal Society: Class, Art and Culture**.

The importance of the Three Teachings, Confucianist principles mixed with Buddhism and Daoism, guided religious and philosophical thought. These beliefs formed the definition of taste, style and culture.



**KEY TOPICS:**

- Society structure
- Employment and education
- The role of women
- Religion – The three teachings



## THEME TWO

# THE IDEAL SOCIETY

### HIGHLIGHTS:

#### Imperial edict, or patent granting rank to an official of the Ming government.

Government officials were graded according to a rigid hierarchy. This rank defined their status and that of their families. Strict rules also governed their appearance, from the colour of their robes to the design of the silk brocade scroll awarding their rank. The scroll begins with four seal characters flanked by dragons woven into the blue background. These read 'in accordance with the mandate of Heaven'.

These portraits are of senior government officials. Each had passed the *jinshi*, the highest grade of imperial examination, during the Wanli Reign (1573–1620). Similarities in their dress, age and appearance hint at the strict hierarchy of Ming society. Realistic portraits of this kind were normally used to create effigies, used after death in religious ceremonies. The pictures are unsigned, indicating that they are the work of a professional artist.

Li Rihua was born in Jianxi, Zhejiang. He passed the *jinshi* examination in 1592. As well as pursuing a successful career in the government service, Li was a noted artist, poet and collector in the tradition of the 'scholar artist'. He wrote extensively about the collecting and appreciation of art and antiques.





## THEME THREE

# THE GOOD LIFE

**The Good Life: Goods, Money and Merchants**, describes a changing Chinese society. Previously artisans were bound in government service, however during the Ming dynasty they became independent producers, and for the first time items could be bought with cash payments, which opened up the market to anyone who could afford it, not just the elite. Silks, jewellery and musical instruments were made available for purchase on the open market for the first time.

The gentry created their own sense of style, where strict rules on elegance were fundamental to good aesthetics. The creation of a style based on knowledge aimed to set the elite apart from the Emperor, and the nouveaux riches. Therefore an economy was established based on taste as much as wealth, where connoisseurs used artefacts to express their ideals of culture, taste and aesthetic discernment. These aesthetic ideals encouraged a consumer market for high quality art and artefacts.

Displayed in this theme visitors can see some of the most desired commodities of the Ming dynasty: painted hanging scrolls, hand scrolls, calligraphy, embroidery, enamel work, and porcelain. Painting was the domain of the educated scholar, and the workmanship was prized on the values of the scholar and not his skills alone. This was regarded as the highest aesthetic expression of cultural and moral status. This style of craftsmanship was also very important to the art form of calligraphy. Works produced by artisans in workshops were considered to be soulless. Calligraphy was believed to be the art form which most truthfully expressed the spirit of the producer.



### KEY TOPICS:

- The artisan – Creating commodities
- A consumer market
- Taste, elegance and knowledge
- The scholar-artist style





## THEME THREE THE GOOD LIFE

### HIGHLIGHTS:



**Hanging scroll entitled *Old woods and Solitary Bamboos*, by Tang Yin (1470–1523), from the mid Ming period.**

Although figure painting was Tang Yin's speciality, as shown by *woman with flute*, this landscape shows his versatility as a painter. Here the image is created from ink and wash, and a variety of descriptive and expressive strokes. The focus is a group of gnarled trees, traditionally associated with longevity. Clumps of bamboo, distant hills, and a fast flowing stream complete the scene.

The painting derives from the 11th century landscapes of Guo Xi. This artist from the Northern Song Dynasty (960–1127) played an important role in developing landscape as a subject in its own right. Along with other Song artists, he stressed the importance of artistic expression, using monochrome ink to convey the artist's feelings and emotions. These ideas became central to the scholar artists of the Ming.

**Blue and white decorated ceramic plate, from the Jiajing Reign (1522–66) of the mid Ming period.**

This impressive plate is typical of the high quality porcelain objects produced from the mid Ming. Using skills and techniques developed for the imperial court, the kilns of Jingdezhen began producing more luxury objects to meet the demands of an increasingly wealthy society.

Prior to the Ming dynasty, blue and white decorated porcelain was mainly associated with export to the Middle East. However, during the mid Ming period, it became a highly desirable product for the domestic Chinese market. The plate is finely painted with the familiar design of intertwined stems of four different flowers. The outside surface has a pattern of pine trees, bamboo and plum blossom – the traditional Chinese design known as the 'three friends of the cold season'.







#### KEY TOPICS:

- The tribute system
- Trade routes – The South China Sea
- Silver
- The legacy of the Ming dynasty

## THEME FOUR BEYOND THE EMPIRE

The Ming dynasty devised a highly structured state controlled system when it came to international trade. The tribute system was based on foreign embassies presenting gifts to the Ming Emperor, who then returned gifts of equal or higher value. However not all countries were recognised as tribute bearers, and so were denied entry to China. This system made private trade virtually impossible.

Private trade routes were established through the South China Sea economy to overcome the control of trade by the Ming dynasty. This way commodities could move between Europe and China on the private market. The South China Sea trade routes relied upon China continuing to deny foreigners access to domestic markets, and that the Ming dynasty continued to produce goods of high quality that were desired worldwide.

This theme will also highlight the importance of silver as a commodity to Ming China, and how this opened up trading between China and Europe. Trading also changed the social structure of the Ming dynasty, with merchants becoming wealthier than the gentry.

This final theme will conclude with the legacy that the Ming dynasty left China, highlighting their strict aesthetic principles and demand for high quality, as well as the many architectural achievements, such as the Forbidden City, that remain symbols of Chinese identity today. Through the development of strict aesthetic principles, and the increased importance placed on the arts, the Ming dynasty established themselves as producers of fine goods. With increased wealth within the empire, these goods satisfied consumer demand, while also creating large scale international demand for luxury goods. A development which has left a lasting impact on China and Chinese identity today.



## THEME FOUR BEYOND THE EMPIRE

### HIGHLIGHTS:

#### Kraak Porcelain

This term was given by the Dutch to a type of Chinese porcelain made for export. The name is thought to be a corruption of the Portuguese word carrack, the type of merchant ship used to trade with China. The kilns at Jingdezhen began making porcelain specifically for export towards the end of the sixteenth century, during the Wanli Reign. This was partly in response to a decline in orders from the imperial court as the power and resources of the emperor dwindled. Most of this was destined for markets in South East Asia and Japan but a growing quantity was making its way to Europe, mainly through Portugal.

These objects were recovered in 2005 by the Swedish marine archaeologist Sten Sjostrand. They came from the cargo of a wreck discovered off the east coast of Malaysia. Archaeological investigation has revealed that the ship was probably Portuguese. It was sunk around 1625 on its way to the trading port of Malacca, probably after attack by a Dutch vessel. The rivalry between the European nations now trading with China was intense and often violent.



**Blue and white decorated bowl with a pattern of *lingzhi*, a type of fungus. This was much used in Chinese medicine and therefore symbolized health, longevity and good luck.**



**Blue and white decorated plate with a central pattern of flowers and birds. The crowded design with radiating panels is typical of Kraak export porcelain of this period. So too is the rather crude style of painting.**



**Blue and white decorated plate with a central pattern of two deer, a traditional symbol of wealth. The glaze has numerous flaws which were often found in export porcelain of this quality.**



## AUDIO VISUAL AND MULTIMEDIA FEATURES

The exhibition presentation is supported by a series of beautifully produced audio-visual films and multimedia interactives that allow visitors to delve deeper into Ming culture and arts. These features include:

- A short film, 'The Art of the Brush', which provides a narrated insight into the techniques and symbolism employed in creating the types of paintings presented in the exhibition.
- An animated film interpretation of the extraordinary Forbidden City plan painting, within which the Ming architect highlights various features of the famous City complex.
- An animated film presentation featuring portraits of all the sixteen Ming emperors, with their hand painted names overlaid in Chinese characters.
- A multi-user touch table interactive presenting the famous world map drawn by the Italian Jesuit Matteo Ricci for the Ming Emperor. The interactive allows visitors to explore the many features within the map and learn what was known about the world during the Ming dynasty.





## RESPONSE FROM OUR PARTNERS

***"we have been very impressed by the professionalism of the Nomad team and really enjoyed working with them to create this wonderful exhibition"***

Marlies Kleiterp, Head of Exhibitions,  
De Nieuwe Kerk, Amsterdam

***"we look forward to welcoming the outstanding Ming collections from Nanjing Museum and unveiling such a rich and vivid part of the history of China to our public"***

From Isabel Salgado Gispert, Deputy Director of  
the Department of Culture, "La Caixa" Foundation

***"Ming: The Golden Empire is a superb exhibition that we are very pleased to be able to show in Edinburgh. Working with Nomad Exhibitions has been a pleasure"***

Alison Cromarty, Exhibitions Manager,  
National Museums Scotland

***"this wonderful exhibition will...give our national and international visitors an excellent chance to discover a very unique period of Chinese history"***

Dr Gordon Rintoul, Director,  
National Museums Scotland

***"the objects in this project are extremely rare, before this exhibition many have never been out of China"***

Mr Lumin Huang, Deputy Director,  
Nanjing Museum

***"Nanjing Museum has been delighted to work with Nomad Exhibitions to offer this unprecedented discovery of the Ming dynasty to international visitors"***

Mr Lumin Huang, Deputy Director,  
Nanjing Museum





# MING

THE GOLDEN EMPIRE



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