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The Military Collapse of China's Ming Dynasty, 1618-44

Kenneth M. Swope

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This book examines the military collapse of China’s Ming Dynasty to a combination of foreign and domestic foes. The Ming’s defeat was a highly surprising development, not least because as recently as in the 1590s the Ming had managed to defeat a Japanese force considered to be perhaps the most formidable of its day when the latter attempted to subjugate Korea en-route to a planned invasion of China. In contrast to conventional explanations for the Ming’s collapse, which focus upon political and socio-economic factors, this book shows how the military collapse of the Ming state was intimately connected to the deterioration of the personal relationship between the Ming throne and the military establishment that had served as the cornerstone of the Ming military renaissance of the previous decades. Moreover, it examines the broader process of the militarization of late Ming society as a whole to arrive at an understanding of how a state with such tremendous military resources and potential could be defeated by numerically and technologically inferior foes. It concludes with a consideration of the fall of the Ming in light of contemporary conflicts and regime changes around the globe, drawing attention to climatological factors and developments outside state control. Utilizing recently released archival materials, this book adds a much needed piece to the puzzle of the collapse of the Ming Dynasty in China.

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