

Ah! The Forbidden City!

Paintings by Jiang Guofang
Photos by Li Shaobai



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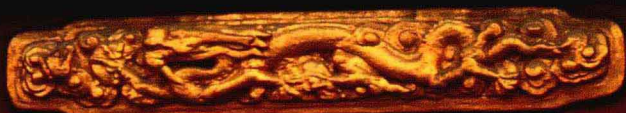
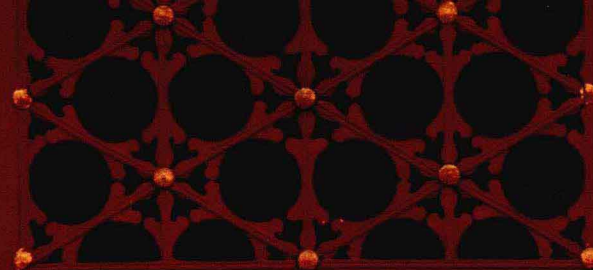
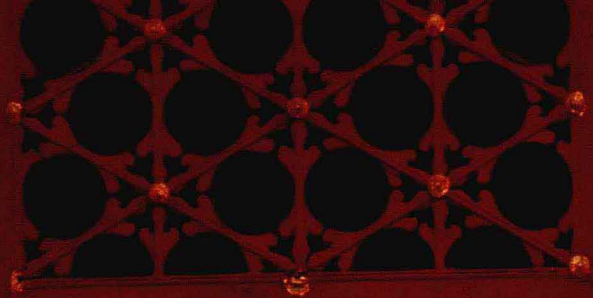
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thousands of empty halls standing in loneliness.

Within the halls, photographer Li Shaobai is waiting for the right moment to catch a perfect shot. The empty rooms and quiet courtyards provide us with a flavor of the past. It was said that solitude could enrich one's life, and the luxurious life of the Forbidden City certainly inspired loneliness in those who once lived here. Beautiful princesses, isolated maids, dignified emperors, all have a place in Jiang Guofang's oil paintings, all emanate a spirit of loneliness. Whatever the expression they wear - curious, amused, lonely, hesitant or proud - they look as solid as the stones of the Forbidden City.

We readers can immerse ourselves in Jiang Guofang's paintings of the Forbidden City and its former inhabitants, and appreciate Li Shaobai's photos of the empty royal palace today. The sorrows of the emperors, the happiness of their concubines, all their love and regret, their hatred and desire, their passions and dreams, sound an echo in our hearts. So many stories within these high walls.

The meaning of life lies in the search for its meaning. For 500 years the Forbidden City sought its own direction. Once the throne extended its reach to secure power around its distant borders, but all its efforts came to naught. Still, the destinies of the people who lived in this palace, the histories and events of their royal lives - all formed a part of the tapestry of China's enduring civilization.

Not even the finest of photos, nor the most exquisite of paintings, could ever capture all there is to tell about the Forbidden City. But this book will serve as a good point of departure to raise the reader's curiosity about the architecture of the Forbidden City and the stories behind it, and that is its purpose.

Preface

Beijing currently boasts a history of over 3,000 years. As early as the 11th century B.C., Ji, a kingdom of the Western Zhou Dynasty, was located in what is now China's capital. As a result of its strategic importance, later dynasties built fortifications here and continued to expand the location. From the time that the Jin Dynasty (1115-1234) made Beijing its capital in 1153, Beijing has functioned as a political center for a period of over 800 years. The Forbidden City was the royal palace of Beijing in Ming and Qing dynasties, and was China's ruling seat for over 500 years. By far the largest and best-preserved ancient palace complex existing in China, it has for many centuries witnessed the most important rites in China's feudal society. Today it is called the Imperial Palace or the Palace Museum, but in historical records and in Chinese people's minds, it is more often referred to, with awe and pride, as the Forbidden City.

As you open this book, you will draw back a veil on the glorious past of the Forbidden City, on its overwhelming, solemn, exquisitely-built palace complex, its huge squares, and the historical figures who peopled it.

As all these glories have vanished into dust, memories remain - memories that can fade or alter. But the fact that night follows day never changes - the sun and moon follow the same trail over the Forbidden City each day. For example, on the Winter Solstice, sunlight will shine into the Forbidden City, adding to the brilliant luster of the Hall of Supreme Harmony; the moonlight will always sparkle on one particular window or piece of furniture.

These silent inanimate insiders were the most reliable witnesses to the tales of the Forbidden City. Emperors, ministers, concubines, maids and eunuchs all have left their stories in this place - a variety of stories, interesting, mysterious or confusing. They have come and gone, leaving behind tens of

Reality · Fantasy

Once the backdrop to prayers for the eternal life of the emperor, fantasies of everlasting power, and passionate loves cut short, the magnificent palace was silent witness to them all. But noble ideals such as crossing a continent to earn renown, great aspirations such as looking down at the world from atop a mountain, and heroic ventures inspired by devotion - have all evaporated under the quiet gaze of heaven and earth. As one dream of one dreamer fell away, it was replaced by that of his successor. Eternal life was never more than a vain hope, a wish to delay one's own departure for as long as possible. Hark! The breeze seems to whisper between heaven and earth. Dreams are often more forceful than the lives of those who dream them...



Chronology of the Ming Dynasty Emperors (1368-1644)

Temple Name	Family and Given Names	Reign Title	Reign Period
Taizu	Zhu Yuanzhang	Hongwu	1368-1399
Huidi	Zhu Yunwen	Jianwen	1399-1403
Chengzu	Zhu Di	Yongle	1403-1425
Renzong	Zhu Gaochi	Hongxi	1425-1426
Xuanzong	Zhu Zhanji	Xuande	1426-1436
Yingzong	Zhu Qizhen	Zhengtong	1436-1450
Daizong/Jingdi	Zhu Qiyu	Jingtai	1450-1457
Yingzong	Zhu Qizhen	Tianshun	1457-1465
Xianzong	Zhu Jianshen	Chenghua	1465-1488
Xiaozong	Zhu Youcheng	Hongzhi	1488-1506
Wuzong	Zhu Houzhao	Zhengde	1506-1522
Shizong	Zhu Houcong	Jiajing	1522-1567
Muzong	Zhu Zaihou	Longqing	1567-1573
Shenzong	Zhu Yijun	Wanli	1573-1620
Guangzong	Zhu Changluo	Taichang	1620-1621
Xizong	Zhu Youxiao	Tianqi	1621-1628
Sizong	Zhu Youjian	Chongzhen	1628-1644

Chronology of the Qing Dynasty Emperors (1616-1911)

Temple Name	Family and Given Names	Reign Title	Reign Period
Taizu	Aisin-gioro Nurhachi	Tianming	1616-1627
Taizong	Aisin-gioro Huangtaiji	Tiancong	1627-1636
		Chongde	1636-1644
Shizu	Aisin-gioro Fulin	Shunzhi	1644-1662
Shengzu	Aisin-gioro Xuanye	Kangxi	1662-1723
Shizong	Aisin-gioro Yinzhen	Yongzheng	1723-1736
Gaozong	Aisin-gioro Hongli	Qianlong	1736-1796
Renzong	Aisin-gioro Yongyan	Jiaqing	1796-1821
Xuanzong	Aisin-gioro Minning	Daoguang	1821-1851
Wenzong	Aisin-gioro Yizhu	Xianfeng	1851-1862
Muzong	Aisin-gioro Zaichun	Tongzhi	1862-1875
Dezong	Aisin-gioro Zaitian	Guangxu	1875-1909
	Aisin-gioro Puyi	Xuantong	1909-1911





Zhu Di, the Ming Emperor
Chengzu (reigned 1403-1425)

**When was the Forbidden City
completed?**

Started in 1406 when Emperor Zhu Di ordered the building of a palace, the construction of the Forbidden City was finished in 1420. Its major buildings, upon completion, comprised three halls, which were renamed later in 1645 (the second year of the reign of Emperor Shunzhi) as Hall of Supreme Harmony, Hall of Central Harmony, and Hall of Preserving Harmony. The well-preserved ancient architectural complex, which used to be called the Forbidden City, is now referred to as the Palace Museum.







