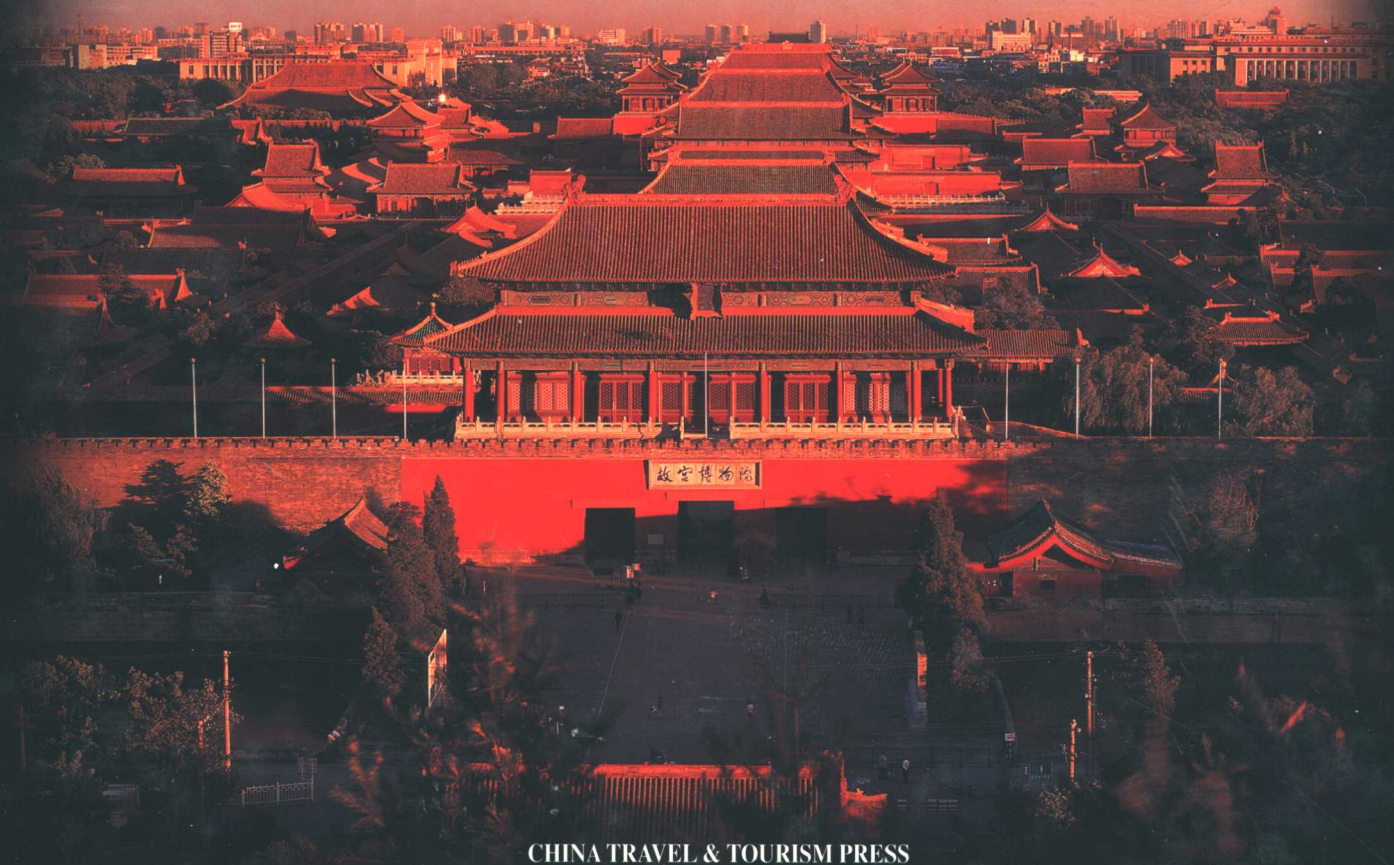


中国皇宫 CHINA'S

IMPERIAL PALACES



CHINA TRAVEL & TOURISM PRESS

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COMPILED BY CHINA TRAVEL & TOURISM PRESS

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Overleaf

Pp. 4~5: The Forbidden City at sunset.

Pp. 6~7: Overlooking the Forbidden City from the Jing Hill.

China's Imperial Palaces

At the height of his power in the eighteenth century, the Chinese emperor ruled over a population of four hundred million people spread over a land mass that covered a third of the Asian continent. He lived in splendour in his palaces, the most important of which was located in the city of Beijing.

In the eighteenth century, China was ruled by the Qing dynasty (1644-1911). The dynasty originated in the North Eastern provinces of China (formerly known as Manchuria), but by then had become quite sinicized. The emperor was a hard-working man who rose early to attend court. He was assisted by a sizeable bureaucracy selected by examination. Indeed, he kept a harem, closely supervised by his principal consorts and eunuchs. His palace served as his home and his office. Nevertheless, to see the palace design as being governed by such practical concerns as where he might sit to rule on matters of state and what he might do in his leisure hours misses the very important element of his religious life for which the architecture must also cater. The Chinese emperor was the Son of Heaven, and it was his duty and privilege to intercede between Heaven and his subjects. The quarters he lived, therefore, were surrounded by shrines of deities and ancestors, to whom tight regulation required that he give offerings on a regular basis. The palace, therefore, combines practical administration with the emperor's domestic life and his religious personage. Chinese ideas concerning these various aspects of imperial authority are writ large in palace architecture.









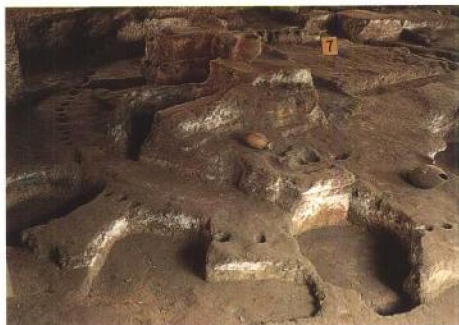
Imperial Palaces through the Ages

The Chinese Empire dates from 221 B.C. when the First Emperor of the Qin dynasty defeated other states to set up a unified regime over the land mass that became China. He founded his capital in today's Xianyang (near present-day Xi'an) and there built the Efang Palace. Although the Qin became a decided break with tradition, Chinese historians recognise its many continuities from earlier ages. The Qin succeeded the suzerainty established by the Zhou dynasty over nearby states in north China, and before the Zhou, the Shang dynasty that had made claims to overlordship from the bronze age. Five centuries prior to the Qin unification, the King of Zhou had lost authority in all but name over his vassals and long before his royal house was deposed, his vassal states were warring with one another.

The Qin dynasty introduced many changes with the aim of imposing its rule on the states that it had conquered. It improved roads, standardised weights and measures, issued a new coinage, imposed a unifying law, and, to the detriment of its subsequent reputation with all Chinese historians, burnt all books that did not meet its approval and buried alive scholars who disagreed with the realm. The dynasty did not last. In 206 B.C., it was overthrown by the Han dynasty.

The Han dynasty saw itself as a successor of the earlier tradition that had been overthrown

by the Qin. Embracing the political theories of the Zhou, the Han recognised that the emperor held his authority as the last of a long line of predecessors, whose moral well-being strongly affected the fortunes of their governments. The



governing force behind those fortunes was Heaven, which gave the ruler mandate to rule only in so far as he was benevolent to his people. The theory of the mandate of Heaven, employed first in the Zhou kingdom, lasted to the end of the Chinese empire in 1911 (AD) as a guiding

principle for the exercise of imperial authority. From the Zhou to the Qing, the last dynasty in Chinese history, the ruler, as king or emperor, was, for this reason, referred to as the "son of Heaven".

By the Han, nevertheless, knowledge of the ways of nature was becoming more sophisticated than in the Zhou. Prominent among the theories of nature by this time was the theory of the harmony of opposing forces expressed as the yin and the yang, or the more intricate checks and balances of the five elements of metal, wood, water, fire and earth. Such forces might be discerned in many ways, in the heavens, in land form and in the human body. Theories about them gave rise to cosmology, geomancy (fengshui), and the various branches of Chinese medicine. They were employed also in the building of houses, and, not least, palaces.

No one knows when the theory of the mandate of Heaven began. Obviously, rulership was in place before any king declared his authority over his vanquished opponents and so Chinese historians have looked towards the late stone age for early signs of kingship. They believe that they have located them in the "big house" discovered in the now famous site of Banpo Village in Shaanxi Province, near Xi'an. This "big house" was supported by four corner pillars and enclosed by low walls. It was simpler than the compound discovered at Erlitou Village in Henan Province, built on a raised platform

Opposite

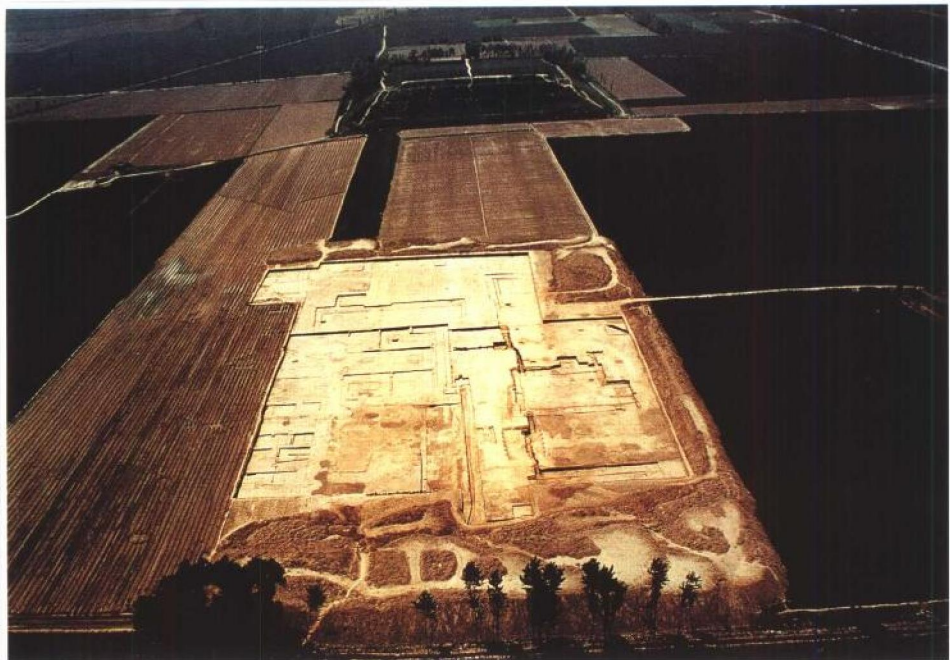
Top: Site of a house at Banbo near Xi'an.

Opposite

Bottom: Remains of "big house" at Erlitou, Henan Province, possibly the earliest palace in China.

Below: The terracotta army at Qin dynasty imperial tomb at Xi'an, an indication of imperial grandeur.





which showed signs that a set of eight chambers was enclosed within a corridor. By the Bronze Age, sizeable and well-defended structures began to appear, in which houses had obviously been laid out along an axis. Archaeological excavations at cities that belonged to Zhou vassal states have yielded similar structures, as in the Yongcheng Palace of the Qin state before it became overlord of all China, discovered at Majiazhuang Village in Fengxiang county, Shaanxi Province. The Efang Palace built by the Qin dynasty after its conquest of all of China has also been partially excavated. It was built on a 10 m. high platform and estimated to be 1,300 m. by 500 m.

Geomantic considerations are apparent in

Han palaces. Imperial palaces had main gates facing south, but the Weiyang Palace in Xi'an had gates in the east and the north, reflecting the belief in the Han that the abodes of the deities were located in those directions. In the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern dynasties that followed the Han, the palace was located in the northern parts of the capital city, and the principal hall of the palace was given the name the Hall of Primordial Extreme, the primordial extreme being the state from which all elements evolved. Subsequent palace architecture reflects the principles of geomancy that became well used from the Han dynasty onwards.

However, the layout of the palace also reflects practical arrangements for government. Unlike earlier palaces where the halls were arranged

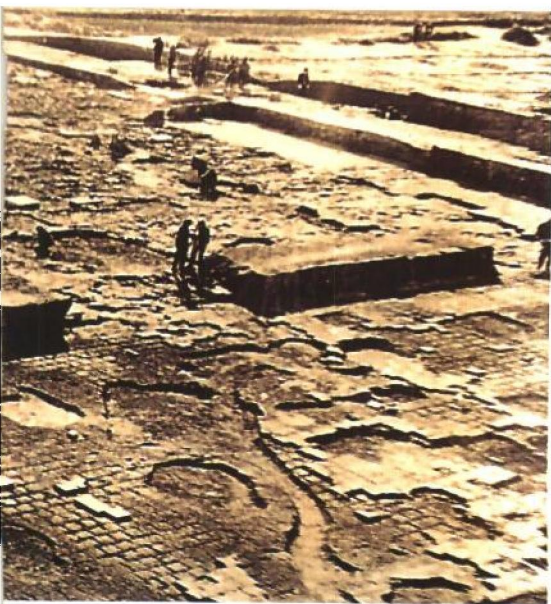
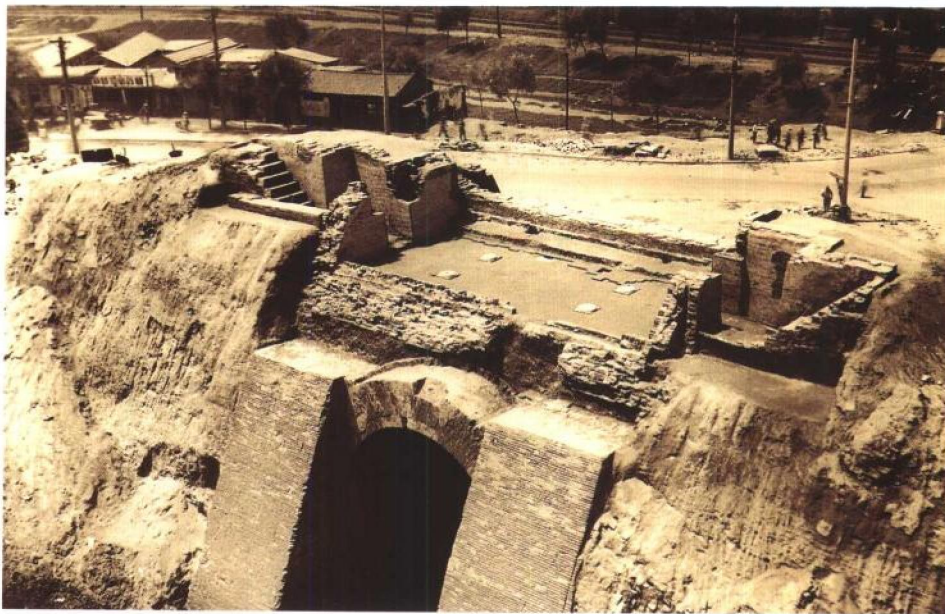
along a single axis, in the several dynasties that followed the Han, the "Great Hall" where the emperor attended major festivities of state was located by the side of the "Common Hall" in which he held regular audiences. The arrangement reflects the growing importance of the Principal Secretariat in the imperial government, the equivalent of a Prime Minister's office. As the Principal Secretariat declined in power in future dynasties, imperial palaces were designed in such a way that the halls of audience were arranged one behind the other.

Throughout China's long history, imperial capitals were located at various parts of the country. Until its decline from 25 A.D., the Han dynasty also set up its capital Xi'an. The choice of the location had much to do with the principal trade routes into Central Asia. The great city of



Xi'an, located where it was, became not only the China end of the silk road, but also imperial China's first defence against nomadic invaders coming in from the Central Asian steppes.

Xi'an, however, was cut off from grain-rich Yangzi delta, which was gradually opened up for cultivation from just about the end of the Han. The supply of grain from the lower Yangzi valley to the north was solved only when the Sui dynasty built the canals that led up to Kaifeng, from where it might be brought overland to Xi'an. From the seventh century, Xi'an and Kaifeng were possibly China's most important cities and served alternatively as imperial capital from the tenth century until the twelfth century. The Tang dynasty's capital was, therefore, founded at Xi'an, while the Song, until it lost north China to invaders from beyond the Great Wall, established its capital



at Kaifeng. Defeated in the north by nomadic kingdoms, the Song withdrew to the south of the Yangzi River in 1227 and set up its capital in Hangzhou. The Mongols, who finally defeated the Southern Song dynasty and founded the Yuan dynasty, set up its capital in Beijing. When the Mongols were overthrown, in 1368, the Ming dynasty founded its capital at Nanjing. That arrangement, however, lasted only several decades, for the capital was then moved back to Beijing in 1403. The shift to Beijing reflects the growing strategic importance of the northeast. Together with the Great Walls of China, located only 60 kilometres to the north of Beijing, the imperial presence in a northern capital signalled the emperor's determination to stand up against any intrusion from the north.

Opposite

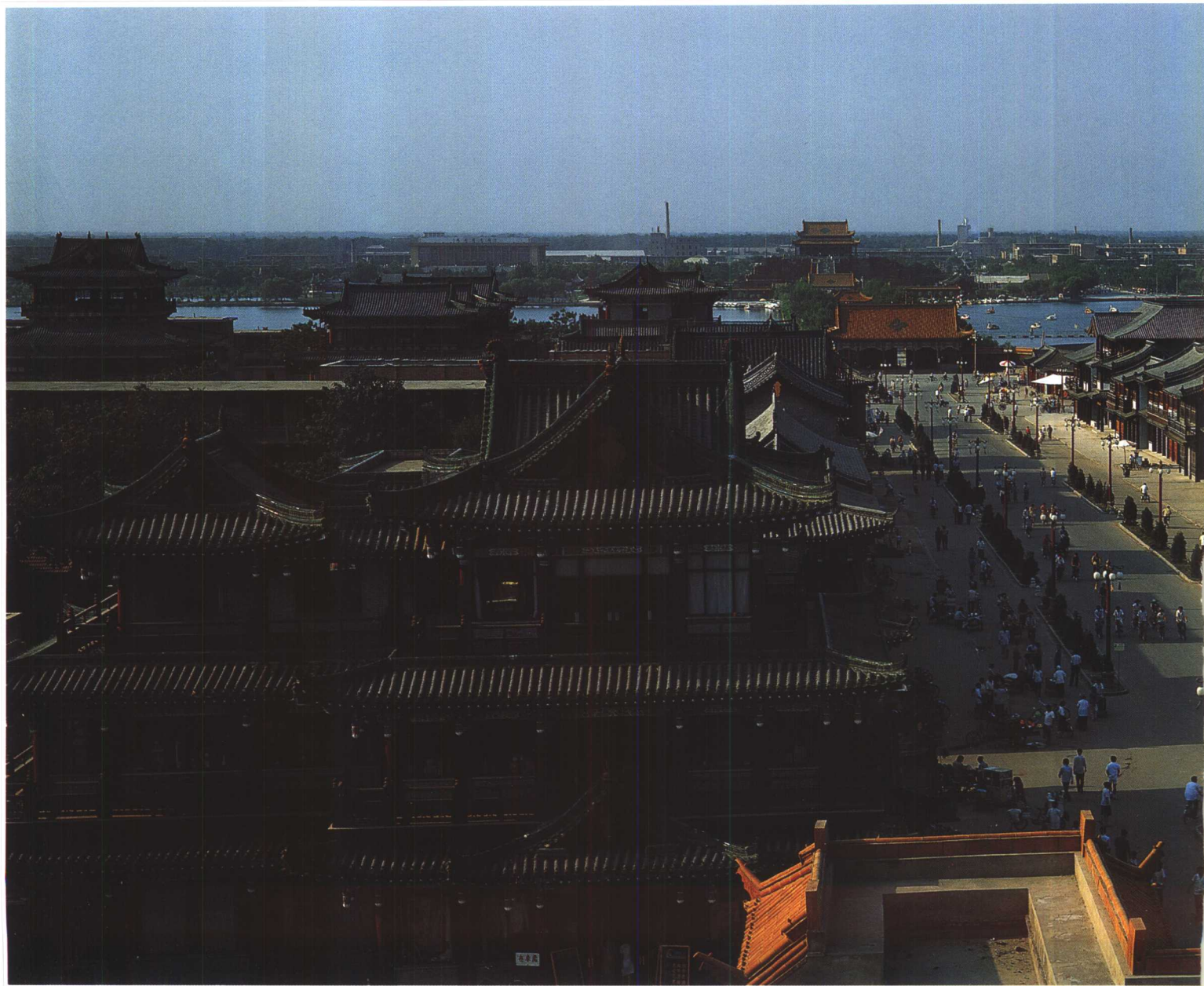
Top: The Wei Yang Palace of the Han dynasty, situated in the southwest of Chang'an City (present-day Xi'an).

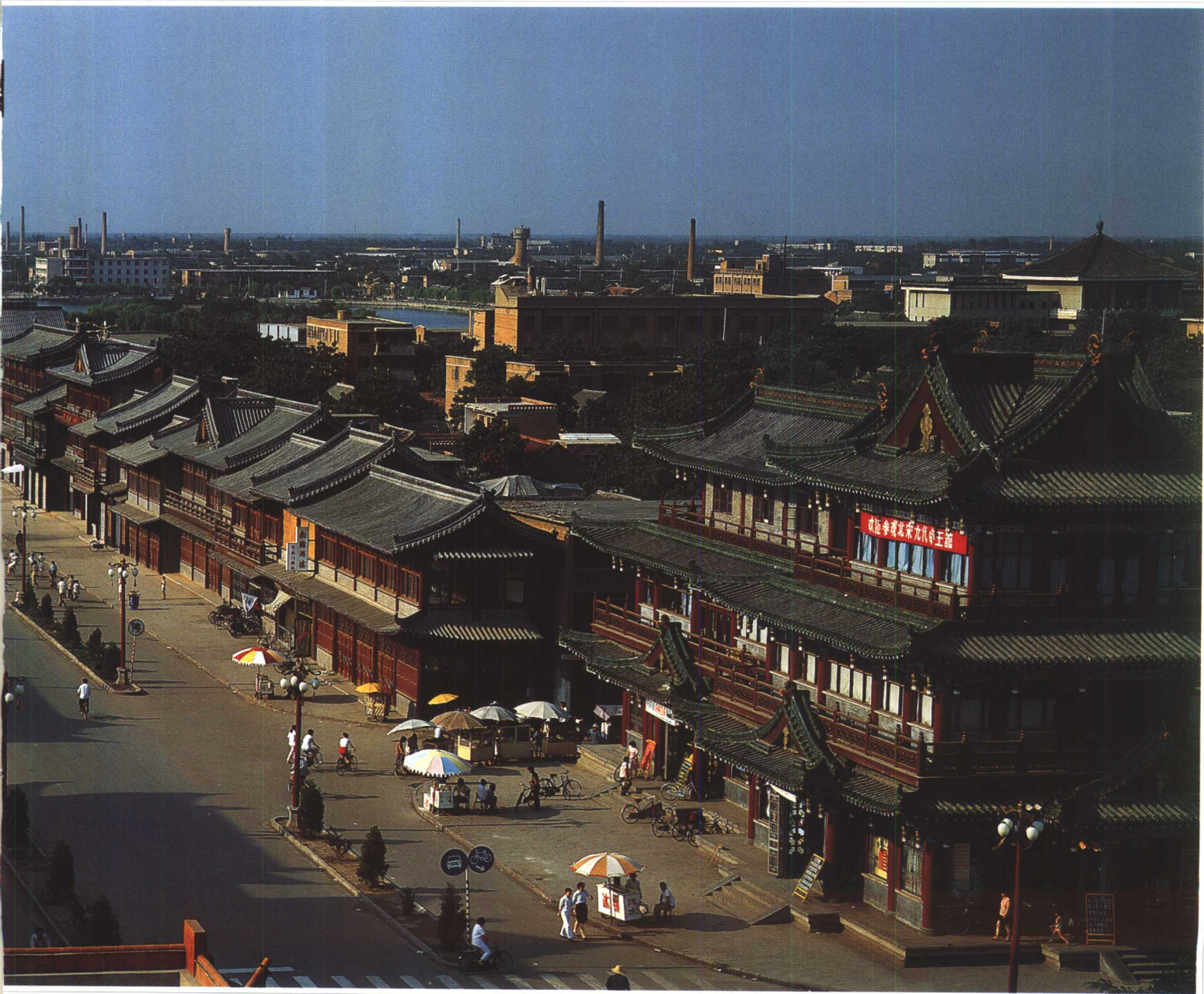
Left: Remains of the Linde Hall of the Daming Palace of the Tang dynasty, one of the earliest palaces made up of a complex of three main halls in a straight line.

Above: Gate of Dadu, present-day Beijing, capital city of the Yuan dynasty.

Overleaf

Pp. 12 ~ 13: Reconstruction of Imperial Street in Northern Song Kaifeng City, shops being located on both sides of the street in front of the imperial palace.







The Imperial Palace in Beijing

The imperial palace in Beijing was built in 1420 by the Ming Emperor Yongle (r. 1403-1424), who came to the throne by rebelling against his nephew, the reigning emperor. It was retained by the Qing emperors as their palace upon the overthrow of the Ming in 1644. Palace fires were quite frequent and so palace buildings had been burnt down and replaced, but for close to five hundred years, until the Qing government was displaced by the Republic in 1911, the imperial palace was located in exactly the same place.

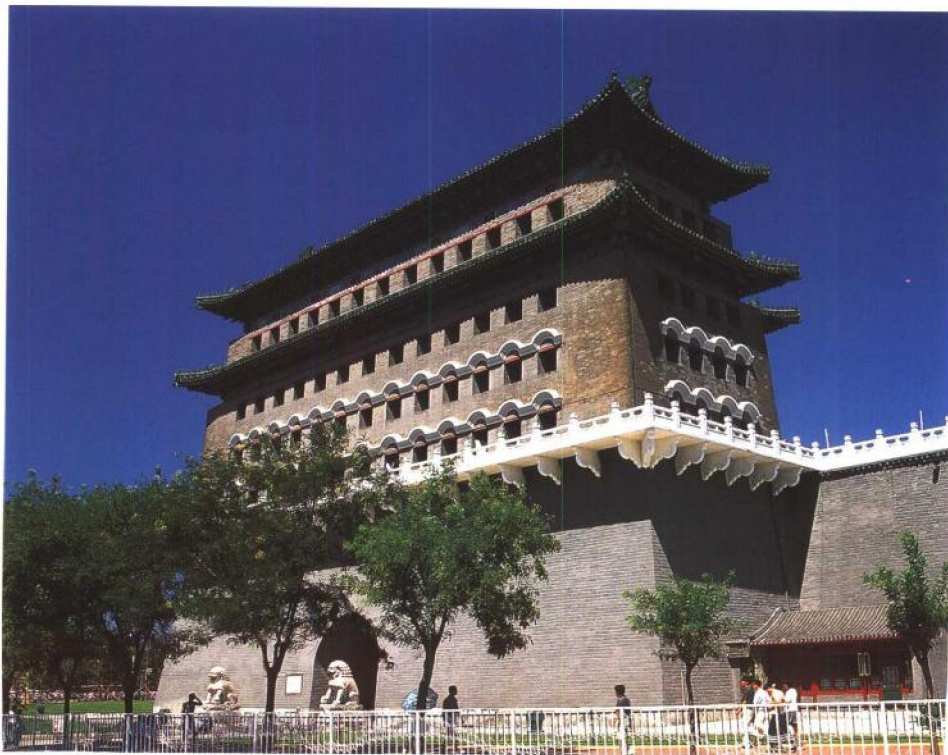
To understand the ground plan of the imperial palace, it might be convenient to think about its location as an enclosure within an enclosure. The larger, outer, enclosure is the capital city, Beijing. A road runs from north to south along the

city, forming the longitudinal axis on which the city was planned. The imperial palace is located towards the northern end of this road, and the axis continues through the palace compound. One might begin with the Gate of Perpetual Peace at the outermost walls, and travelling north, one reaches the Central

Gate of the Yang (as in yin and yang) in the inner city walls. In between are located the Altar of Heaven and the Altar of Agriculture, where the emperor himself conducted sacrifice. Further north on the same road, one reaches another gate, the Gate of the Great Qing (or Great Ming in

Opposite: Tian'anmen (Gate of Heavenly Peace), Beijing, entrance to the imperial palace.

Right: Central Gate of the Yang, Beijing, entrance to the inner palace.



Overview of the Forbidden City, Beijing.

