

A Kaleidoscope of Chinese Civilization

TALES of the FORBIDDEN CITY

Edited by Cheng Qinhu



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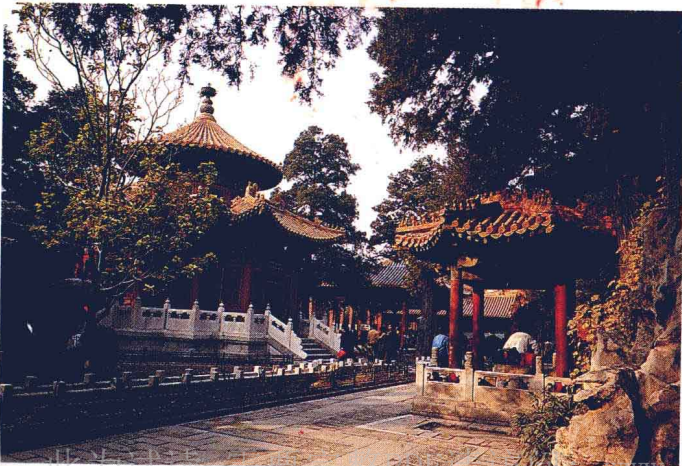
Cover:

Interior of the Palace of Celestial Purity.

1. Portrait of Qing Emperor Kangxi.
2. The bed chamber of an imperial concubine in the Palace of Eternal Spring.
3. One of the two gilded bronze lions in front of the Gate of Celestial Purity.
- 2
4. A view of the Imperial Garden.

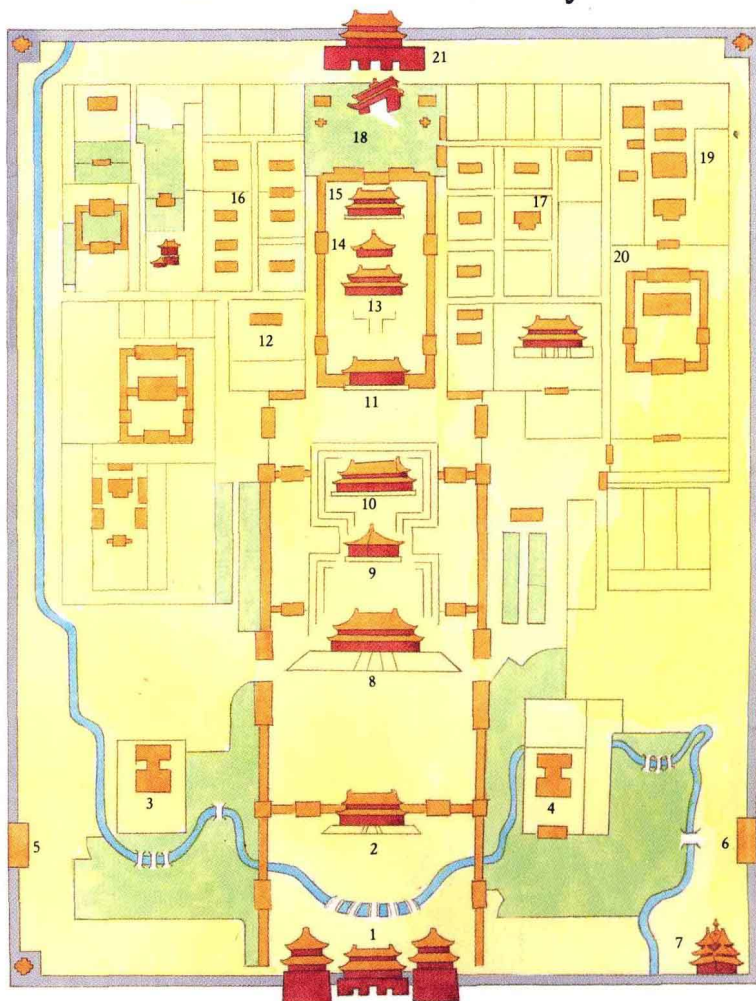


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Plan of the Forbidden City:



- | | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| 1. Meridian Gate | 12. Hall of Mental Cultivation |
| 2. Gate of Supreme Harmony | 13. Hall of Celestial Purity |
| 3. Hall of Military Prowess | 14. Hall of Celestial and Terrestrial Union |
| 4. Hall of Literary Glory | 15. Hall of Terrestrial Tranquility |
| 5. Western Flowering Gate | 16. Six Western Palaces |
| 6. Eastern Flowering Gate | 17. Six Eastern Palaces |
| 7. Watchtower | 18. Imperial Garden |
| 8. Hall of Supreme Harmony | 19. Qianlong Garden |
| 9. Hall of Central Harmony | 20. Hall of Tranquil Longevity |
| 10. Hall of Preserved Harmony | 21. Gate of Divine Might |
| 11. Gate of Celestial Purity | |

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Foreword

The Forbidden City, also known as the Imperial Palace, is located in the center of Beijing. It is the largest ancient palace in the world, with clusters of well-preserved buildings. From early in the morning thousands of tourists from all over China and abroad swarm into the Palace to view its magnificent halls and priceless treasures.

On my way to my office I like cycling along the outside of the wall of the Forbidden City. In the early morning sunshine I ride from the Eastern Flowery Gate (Donghuamen) to the path between the lofty wall of the Forbidden City and the moat outside the Eastern Palace Gate (Donggongmen) and pedal northward. When I reach the watchtower in the northeast corner of the Palace I turn the corner and go west along the riverside, verdant with weeping willows. After work I cycle home along the same route. I have lost count of how many times I have been to the Forbidden City. As an editor, I have got to know many specialists in cultural relics who work in the Palace, and several have become good friends of mine. When we meet we often talk animatedly about the changes in the Forbidden City and the treasures housed in it. I am an avid reader of historical materials concerning the Palace and the history of the Ming and Qing dynasties. This has gradually enabled me to know more about this magnificent yet mysterious edifice, and has prompted me to write this book about it.

Works concerning the Forbidden City are so numerous that it is quite impossible for an ordinary reader to read all of them. Therefore, in this book I concentrate on describing the buildings and the residents' lives in a straightforward language. It is a tale of savage intrigue and power struggles among the splendid buildings, resplendent with the fascinating pageantry of the imperial court. The actors are real-life emperors, ministers, generals and concu-

bines. You will also be introduced to famous spots of historical interest, and the fabulous treasures stored in the Palace, and their stories.... All these accounts are helpful for those who are interested in the history of the Ming and Qing dynasties and the life of the imperial household. Some of the historical materials and research essays quoted in this book are the results of the painstaking work of scholars of several generations. All I have done is sorted out historical materials, edited them and presented them in a new way.

Chapter One

Brief Introduction to the Forbidden City

1. A Sea of Regal Buildings

Gazing for the first time on the countless red walls and bright yellow glazed-tile roofs of the buildings of the Forbidden City, one cannot help wondering exactly how large the Palace is. To be exact, it is 960 m long from south to north, and 750 m wide from east to west, occupying 720,000 sq m. The total floor area is 160,000 sq m and there are 9,999 rooms. (According to Chinese custom, a "room" refers to a space within four pillars.)

How long and how high is the perimeter wall of the Forbidden City? It is 3,400 m long and 10 m high. The moat outside the Palace is 3,800 m long and 52 m wide. The moat was built for security purposes, and so both sides of it have steep embankments, making it impossible to cross without some means of bridging it. In the feudal days the Forbidden City was heavily guarded. In case any one should venture to cross the moat, guards in watchtowers would shoot arrows, and soldiers would come out to arrest him.

Fourteen Ming emperors (Zhu Yuanzhang and Zhu Yunwen reigned from Nanjing) and ten Qing emperors lived in those splendid palaces, spanning a period of 491 years. Some of them were great men who made lasting contributions to the country and the people, but some were fatuous and self-indulgent rulers who lived lives of debauchery. As time passes, people's values change. It is necessary, I think, to re-examine these historical figures' merits and demerits, and give them appropriate appraisals.

After your visit to the Forbidden City, I suggest you go up to the Ten Thousand Spring Pavilion (Wanchunting) on top of Coal Hill (Jingshan) just to the north and get a bird's-eye view of the

billowing roofs of the myriad palace buildings. There you will sense its grandeur, mystery and boundless charm. In the sunshine the red walls (red is a sign of happiness and auspiciousness) and yellow glazed roofs (yellow is a royal color) shimmer brightly. In between these buildings are green gardens with pavilions and grotesque rock formations. The vast squares, the exquisitely built watchtowers, the glimmering moat ... all show the grandeur of an ancient imperial palace. Indeed a splendid sight!

2. The Construction of the Forbidden City

Zhu Yuanzhang, founder of the Ming Dynasty, made Jinling (present-day Nanjing) his capital and bestowed upon his fourth son, Zhu Di, the title of Prince Yan and sent him to live in Beiping Prefecture. After Zhu Yuanzhang's death, his fourth grandson, Zhu Yunwen succeeded to the throne. In June 1402 Zhu Di rebelled, seized his nephew's throne and made himself emperor. The name of his reign period was Yongle. In early 1403, the first year of Yongle, he promoted Beiping Prefecture to Beijing City. Then he moved several hundred thousand people there from Nanjing, and Shanxi and Zhejiang provinces in five waves, so as to make the city stronger and bigger.

In 1406 Emperor Zhu Di came to Beijing himself to supervise the building of the Imperial Palace. The construction was completed in 1413. Unfortunately, before long, it first caught fire and later was hit by an earthquake. The new palace was almost entirely destroyed. It was then rebuilt in 1416, and completed in 1420. In 1421 Zhu Di moved his court to Beijing, which then became the capital.

Later, the Imperial Palace was renovated and enlarged by various emperors and became even more magnificent.

3. The Layout of the Forbidden City

Construction of the Forbidden City followed the principle of "offices in front, living quarters at the back; ancestors on the left

and gods on the right." The emperor held court with his ministers in the halls in the front part of the Palace. The back part was the living quarters of the emperor, empress, consorts and so on. Sacrificial ceremonies to the imperial ancestors were held in the Ancestral Temple (Taimiao) on the left side, which has now been converted into the Workers' Palace of Culture. On its right lies the area containing the Altars of Land and Grain, which is now called Zhongshan Park. Coal Hill to the north of the Forbidden City is like a screen protecting the Imperial Palace from that direction.

Lying in the center of Beijing, the Forbidden City was built on a north-south axis, and the throne is located right on the axis. This symbolized that the emperor was the center of the universe. It also meant that all land under Heaven belonged to the emperor, and all people under Heaven were the emperor's subjects.

4. Why Is It Called the Forbidden City?

Why is this imperial palace called the Forbidden City?

Chinese emperors all styled themselves the "Son of Heaven." That is to say, the emperor was the supreme ruler under Heaven. Therefore, his palace was off-limits to commoners. People were not allowed to approach it. So it was commonly called the Forbidden City.

5. Manpower for the Construction

During the construction craftsmen and laborers were time and again recruited throughout China. Each time, some 100,000 craftsmen and a million laborers were mobilized for the project. The total of the manpower and building materials used for the construction is incalculable.

Take timber for example. Huge trees felled in the forests of Sichuan, Guizhou, Guangxi, Hunan and Yunnan had to be transported by water all the way to Beijing because they were too heavy to carry by any other means.

White marble was obtained from Fangshan County, on the

outskirts of Beijing, colored stones from Jixian County in Hebei Province and granite from Quyang County, also in Hebei. In bitterly cold winters roads leading to Beijing were splashed with water so that sleds could drag the chunks of rock along the ice. To provide water for the purpose, wells were dug along the way, one every 500 m. In summer logs were used to roll the rocks, one large rock often requiring several hundred people to move it.

Wall bricks came from Linqing in Shandong Province, and square floor bricks were transported to Beijing all the way from Suzhou in Jiangsu Province. These high-quality floor bricks would give out a metallic sound when tapped and were known as "golden bricks." Glazed tiles were produced in two major kilns. First, they were made exclusively in the Liulichang (Glazed-Tile Factory) in Beijing. Later, another kiln in Liuliqucun (Glazed-Tile Canal Village) in Mentougou in the suburbs of Beijing, began to fire glazed tiles for the Palace too.

6. Sightseeing Routes in the Forbidden City

The Forbidden City is divided into two parts, namely, the Outer Palace and the Inner Palace.

The Outer Palace was where imperial ceremonies were held, and where the emperor and his ministers carried out their official duties. It includes the Gate of Heavenly Peace (Tiananmen), Meridian Gate (Wumen), Hall of Supreme Harmony (Taihedian), Hall of Central Harmony (Zhonghedian), Hall of Preserving Harmony (Baohedian) and buildings along the central axis. The main structures are the three halls, known as the Three Great Halls. To the east of the three halls lies the Hall of Literary Flowers (Wenhuadian); to the west, the Hall of Military Strength (Wuyingdian).

The Inner Palace consists of the Palace of Heavenly Purity (Qianqinggong), Hall of Celestial and Terrestrial Union (Jiaotaidian), Palace of Earthly Tranquility (Kunninggong) and Imperial Garden, all on the central axis, and six palaces beside them. It served as the living quarters of the imperial household throughout the Ming and Qing dynasties.

There are four sightseeing routes open to the public at present.

The Middle Route takes in the Meridian Gate, the Hall of Supreme Harmony, Hall of Central Harmony, Hall of Preserving Harmony, Palace of Heavenly Purity, Hall of Celestial and Terrestrial Union, Palace of Earthly Tranquility, Imperial Garden and Gate of Divine Might (Shenwumen).

The Western Route takes in the Six Western Palaces [Palace for Gathering Elegance (Chuxiugong), Hall of Manifest Harmony (Tihedian), Palace of Modest Ladies (Yikungong), Palace of Eternal Spring (Changchungong), Hall of Manifest Origin (Tiyuandian) and Hall of the Supreme Ultimate (Taijidian)], and Hall of Mental Cultivation.

The Eastern Route takes in the main structures including the Six Eastern Palaces [Palace of Great Benevolence (Jingrengong), Palace of Celestial Favor (Chengqiangong), Palace of Eternal Harmony (Yonghegong), Palace of Quintessence (Zhongcuigong), Palace of Great Brilliance (Jingyanggong) and Hall to Usher in Happiness (Yanxigong)], and the Palace of Abstinence (Zhaigong).

The Outer Eastern Route (further east than the Eastern Route) mainly includes the Hall for Ancestral Worship (Fengxiandian), Nine Dragon Screen (Jiulongbi), Hall of Imperial Supremacy (Huangjidian), Palace of Tranquil Longevity (Ningshougong), Pavilion of Cheerful Melodies (Changyinge), Hall of Joyful Longevity (Leshoutang) and Qianlong Garden.

The Forbidden City is accessible both from the south (Wumen) and the north (Shenwumen).

Apart from these buildings erected some 570 years ago, one may also view cultural relics and treasures from the collection in the Imperial Palace.

1. Cultural Relics: Cultural relics are mostly exhibited along the Middle Route and the Western Route. Many buildings both in the Outer Palace and Inner Palace are furnished as they used to be.

2. Treasures: Along the Eastern Route there are exhibitions of bronzes, ceramics, and arts and crafts of the Ming and Qing dynasties. The Exhibition of Fine Arts and Exhibition of Treasures