

World Heritage Sites in China

World Cultural Heritage in Beijing

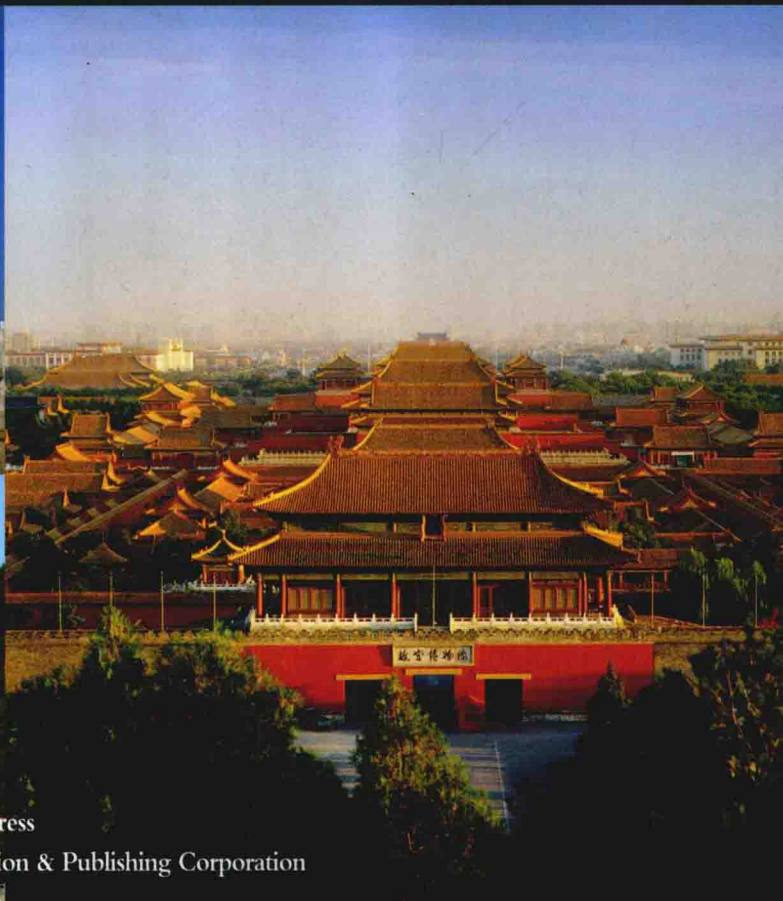
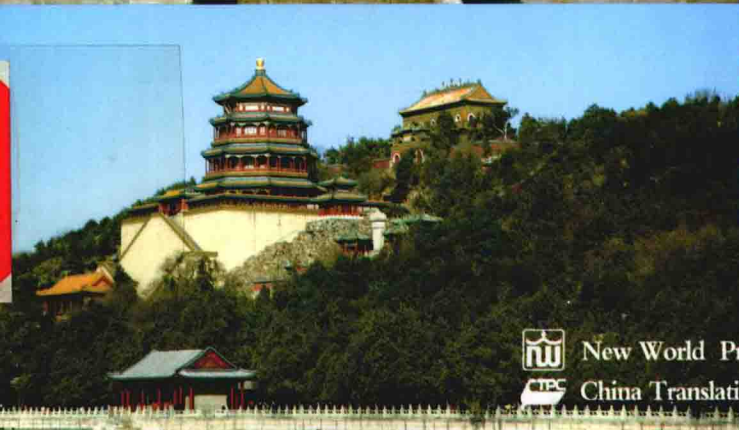
Text by Wei Xin

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English Translation by Ma Hongjun and Hu Xiaokai



北京的世界文化遗产



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World Heritage · China

This is a series of books about the contents and grace of the World Heritage Sites in China. It is also a splendid chapter that records the remarkable achievements made by China in cooperation with the rest of the world in advocating world peace, seeking long-term benefit for mankind and protecting the common homeland of human beings around the world.

In China today, World Heritage Site protection has become an enlarged and deepened concept of environmental protection. Taking World Heritage Site protection as an integral component of the sustainable development of human society has become a public consensus. As the top-rated group of the targets placed under heritage protection, World Heritage Sites in particular have won the universal care and affection of all people, with their high universal values, their scientific and strict protection concepts and mechanisms, and their state-of-the-art conservation and management. Meanwhile, World Heritage Site protection has played a unique and noticeable role in improving the people's livelihood, building a harmonious society, protecting the heritage sites and the environment, and providing the best example for society.

China is a country with a vast territory, numerous ethnic groups, a long history and colorful cultures. The natural environment of all shapes and forms and the cultural traditions of profound meanings constitute a rich World Heritage resource. The 10-year Cultural Revolution prevented China from becoming the earliest member of the Convention concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritages that came into force in 1972. But since the country signed the convention in 1985, World Heritage Site has made great progress in China. Of all the 830 sites that have been included on the World Heritage List, China claims 33, comprising 24 cultural sites, five natural sites and four mixed sites. While these sites have greatly enriched the World Heritage treasure-house and made outstanding contributions to worldwide heritage protection, environmental protection and sustainable social development, they have also promoted the understanding, friendship, cooperation and common prosperity between the Chinese and other peoples of the world. In addition, they have truly stimulated the love of homeland, the sense of pride, the self-confidence and the creativeness of the people at the heritage sites. They have also promoted social

harmony and progress, enhanced homeland beautification, reinforced conservation concepts, and improved protection techniques and management expertise.

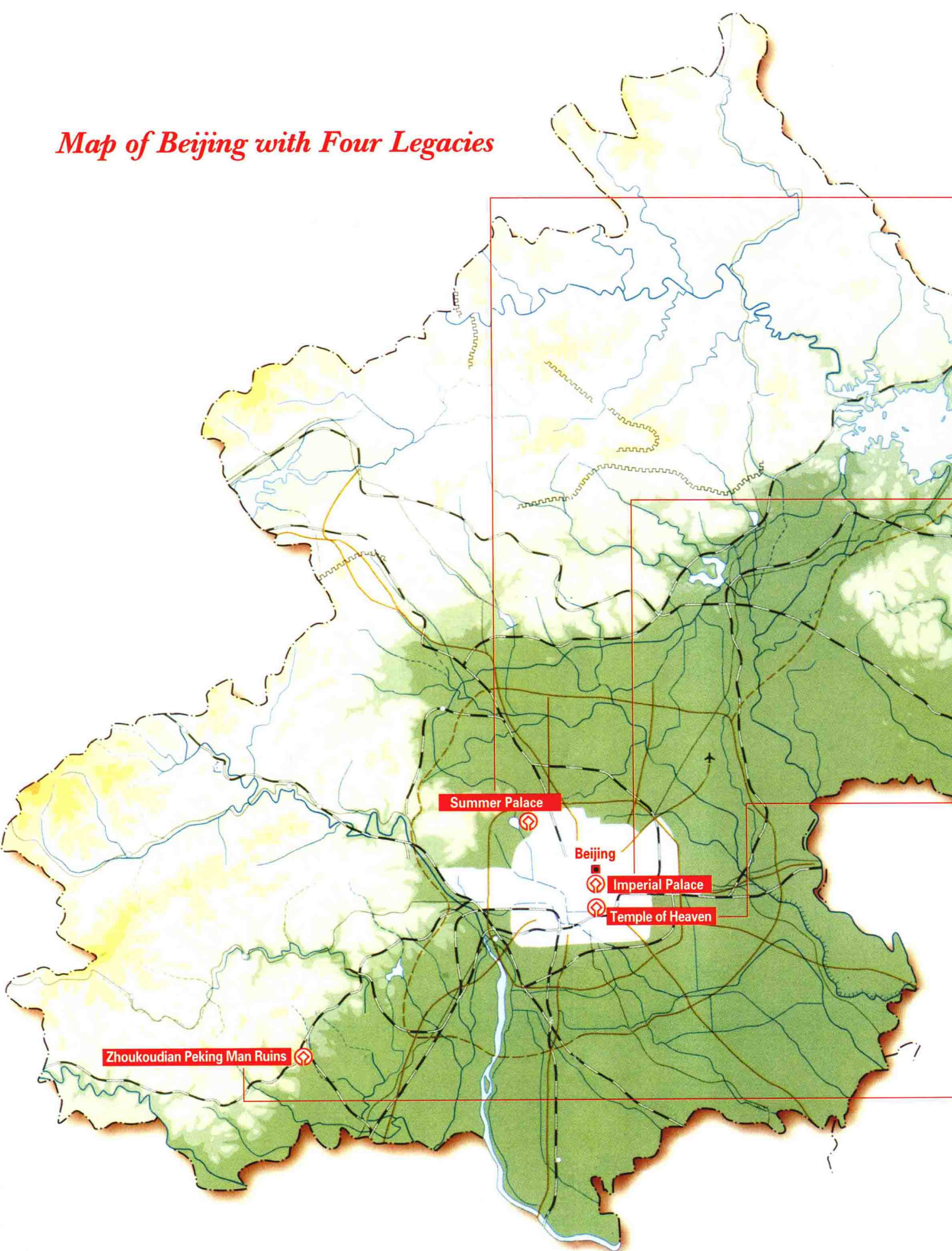
World Heritage's work in China has demonstrated all the latest progress in this field. For example, the deepening understanding of World Heritage's emphasis on sites' universal values, authenticity, completeness and state of protection and management, the exploration and improvement of sites equilibrium and representativeness, the advocacy and respect for cultural diversity, and the continuous exploration and expansion of site varieties are all manifested in World Heritage's efforts in China.

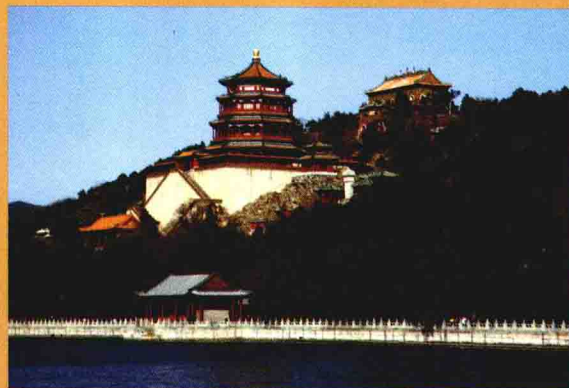
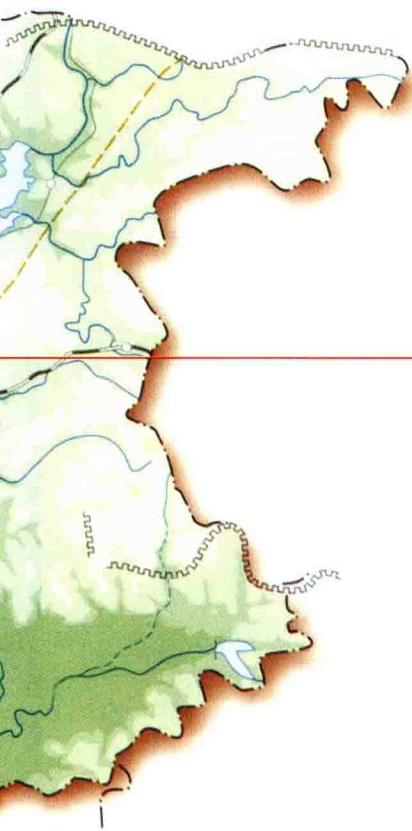
While the cause of world heritages develops, the publicity and promulgation of these heritages should also continue to develop. The World Heritage • China series, which now sets sail, not only covers the 33 old heritage sites on the 2006 List, but also supplements it with new sites. Along with the existing sites, the new ones with unique images and contents, representing different ethnic groups and regions will further enrich the heritage treasure-house of the Global Village. Cultural, industrial, scientific, and agricultural sites will appear one after another. The world heritages in China will make greater contributions to the cooperation and development among various peoples and to the harmonious coexistence between humankind and nature. Presenting them to the whole world in a continuous, timely, vivid and truthful manner and making them available for the common admiration, love and enjoyment of human society has apparently become a glorious mission for the series of books.

Guo Zhan
ICOMOS Vice President
ICOMOS/China Vice President & Secretary-General

Beijing, September 9, 2007

Map of Beijing with Four Legacies

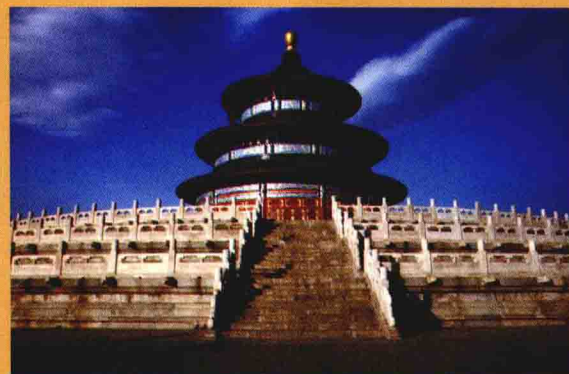




Summer Palace



Imperial Palace

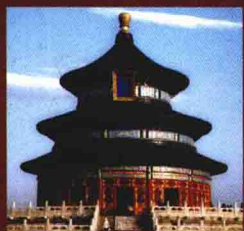


Temple of Heaven



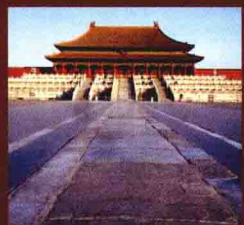
Zhoukoudian

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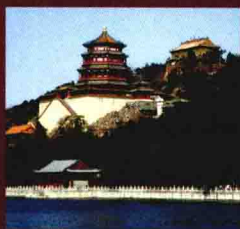
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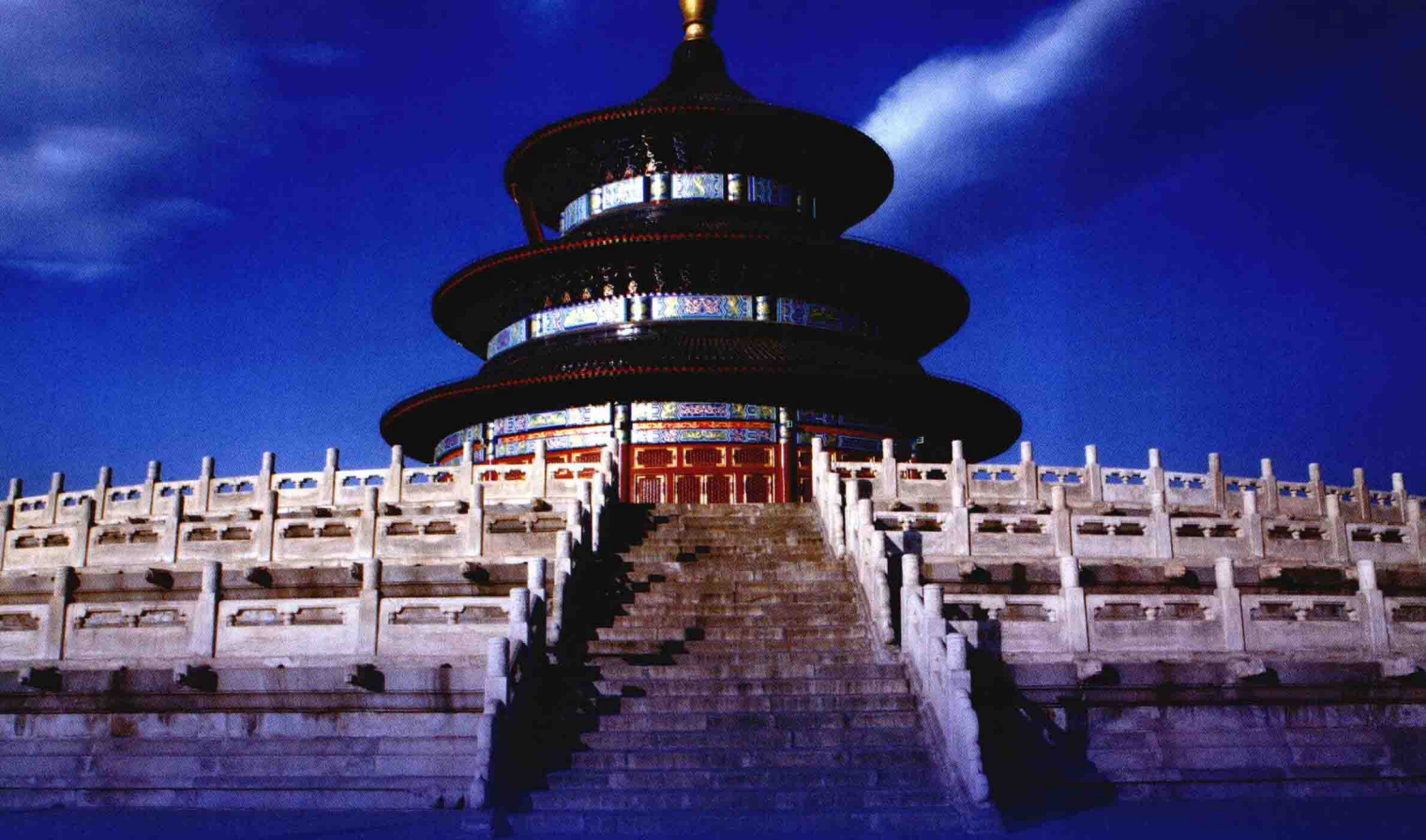


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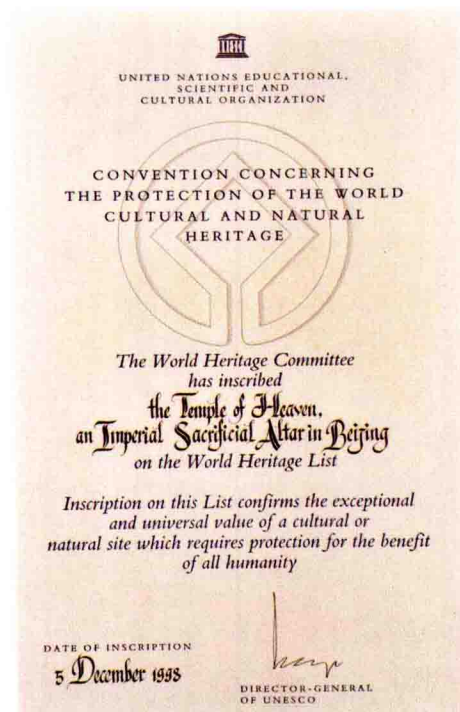
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World Heritage Sites in Beijing

Temple of Heaven



Temple of Heaven

- Name of World Heritage Property in Chinese: 北京皇家祭坛——天坛
- Name of World Heritage Property in English: Temple of Heaven
- Geographical Coordinates: 39°53' N, 116°24' E
- Date of Inscription on World Heritage List: December 2, 1998
- Criteria for Inclusion of Cultural Properties on World Heritage List: I-II-III

Justification of the World Heritage Committee:

The Temple of Heaven, built in the first half of the 15th century, is a dignified complex of fine cult buildings set in gardens and surrounded by historic pine woods. In its overall layout and that of its individual buildings, it symbolizes the relationship between earth and heaven—the human world and God's world—which stands at the heart of Chinese cosmogony, as well as the special role played by the emperors within that relationship.



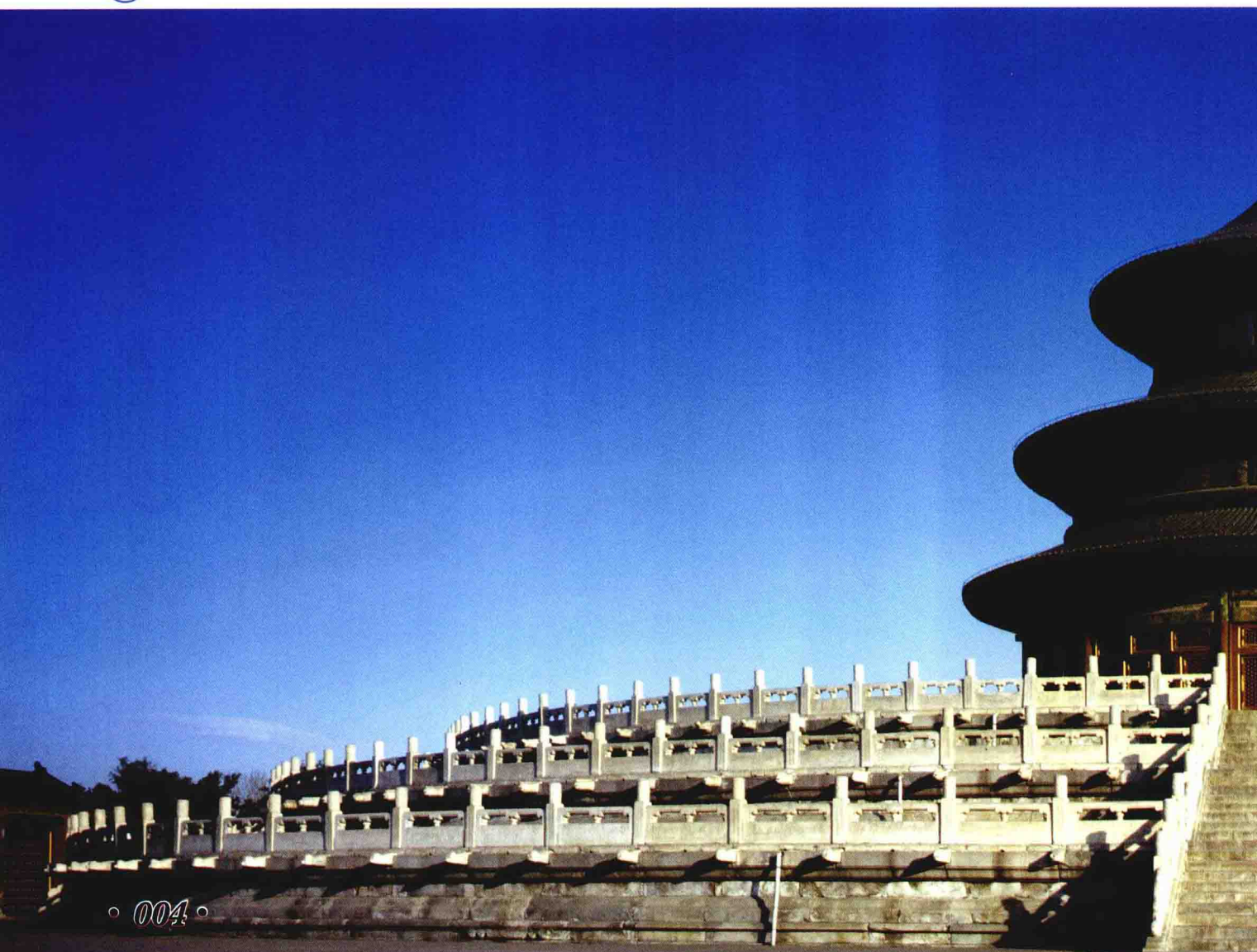
Overview

Located southeast of Beijing Tian'anmen (Gate of Heavenly Peace) and set in a walled park, the Temple of Heaven is the largest sacrificial complex in the world. Construction work began in 1406 and ended in 1420, or the 18th year of Emperor Yongle's reign in the Ming Dynasty.

As China's finest heaven-worshipping architecture, the Temple of Heaven is the only surviving example of its kind and a summation of the architectural achievements of the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1616–1911) dynasties. This world famous monument features elaborate layout, unique

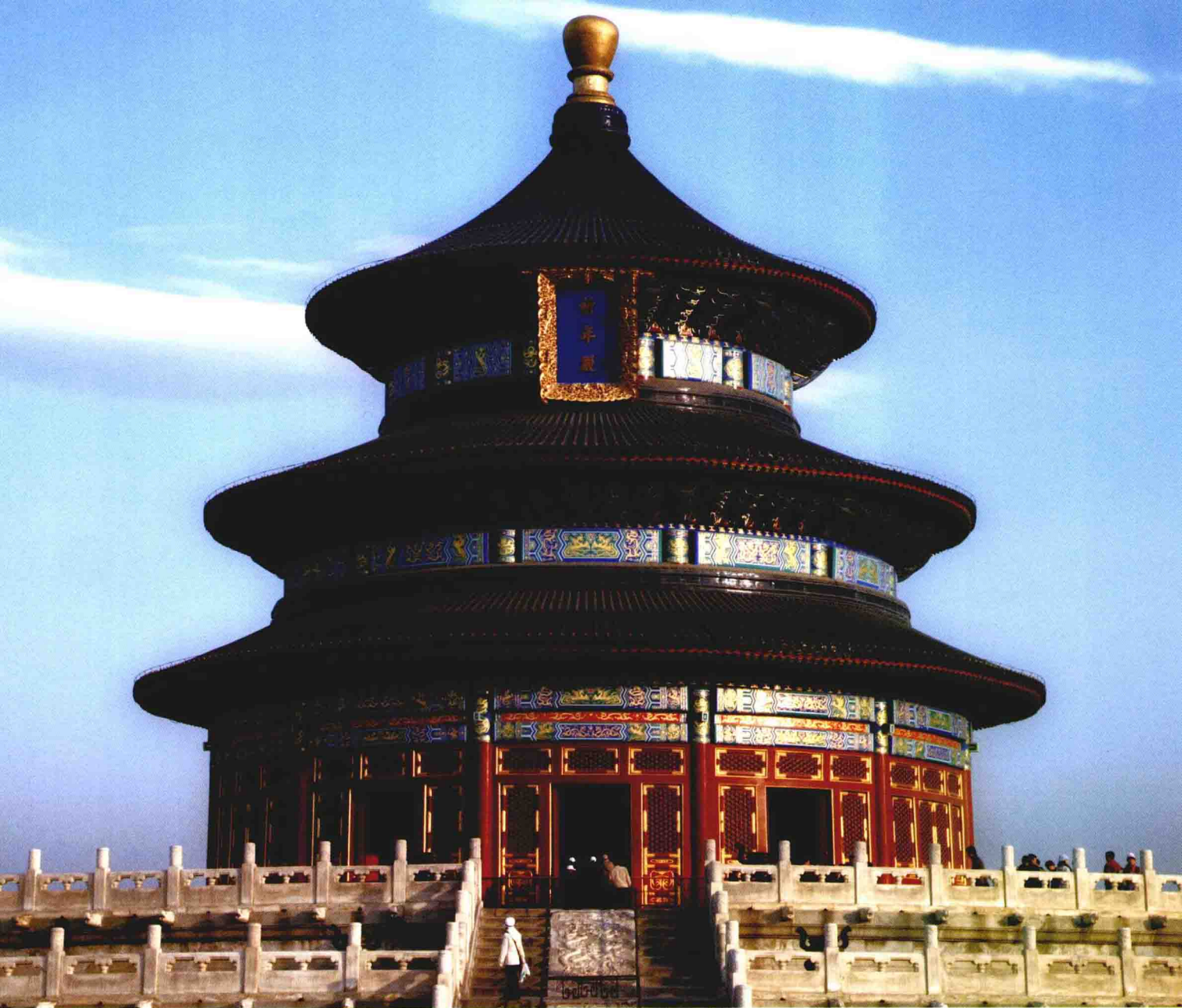



Full view of the Hall of Prayer for Good Harvests, Temple of Heaven



design, and ornate decorations. The siting, planning, and architectural design of the temple, as well as sacrificial ceremonies, music, and dance, were deep-rooted in *yin-yang* and *wuxing* (the five elements) of *the Book of Changes* (one of the oldest Chinese classics, a book of divination practice based on profound and peculiar philosophical theory). Taken together, they speak volumes for ancient Chinese understanding of heaven, the relationship between man and heaven, and their desires for heaven. One of the world's architectural wonders, it occupies a pivotal position in China's architectural history.





 The Hall of Prayer for Good Harvests

The temple grounds cover a total area of 2,730,000 square meters, even larger than the Forbidden City. Its beautiful architectural style expresses the philosophical and cosmological elements of Chinese culture. Forming the heart of the imperial complex, the inner temple is partitioned by a wall into two groups of buildings—the Circular Mound Altar (also known as the Round Altar) in the south, and the Altar of Prayer for Good Harvests in the north. The rectangular wall at the southern end of the central axis represents earth, and its semi-circular counterpart at the northern end signifies heaven, since ancient Chinese believed “Heaven is round and earth square”. This explains why the wall is popularly referred to as “Heaven-and-Earth Wall.”



The principal cult structures, including the Circular Mound Altar and the Altar of Prayer for Good Harvests, are disposed in a line on the central north-south axis. Major parts of the temple complex are separated by walls, and connected by the Red Stairway Bridge, an elevated pathway. All the temples, halls and altars here are dome-shaped, again symbolizing heaven. As the dominant structure of the whole complex, the Hall of Prayer for Good Harvests or the Altar of Prayer for Good Harvests, is mounted on a three-tiered marble terrace. This circular building measures 38 meters high and 32.72 meters in diameter, crowned with a triple-eaved cylindrical roof of blue tiles.

A single-eaved circular structure topped with a blue-tiled pyramidal roof and a golden finial, the Imperial Vault of Heaven was used to store the spirit tablets of the gods. Wrapped around the vault is the well-known Echo Wall, whose hermetically laid bricks enable human voice to travel from one side of the wall to the other. The Circular Mound Altar, the altar proper, consists of white marble arrayed in three tiers, where emperors prayed to heaven at the winter solstice. Other notable buildings within the temple grounds include Hall of Abstinence, Pavilion for Abattoir (also called Animal Killing Pavilion, where animals were sacrificed for the rituals), and Divine Music Office.

The year 1918 saw the Temple of Heaven turned into a park. In 1961, the park was listed by the State Council of China among "Key Cultural Relics Under State Protection." And finally, in 2001, it was rated by the Ministry of Construction as a Four-Star Tourist Attraction.



The Imperial Vault of Heaven and the Echo Wall wrapped around the vault