

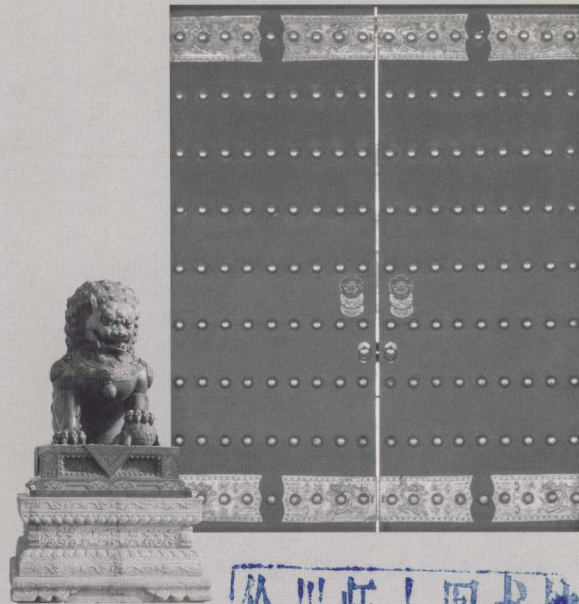
# A PANORAMA OF THE FORBIDDEN CITY

Cultural Relics Publishing House

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## A Panorama of the Forbidden City

**B**uilt between 1406 and 1420, the Forbidden City of the Ming and Qing dynasties has nearly a 600-year history. Ancient people thought that the Zi Wei Xing Yuan, or the pole star, of the heavenly palace constellation is the residence of the Lord of Heaven, and that the emperor of human society is the "Son of Heaven". In the Tang Dynasty, the heavenly palace was likened to the "Zi Jin", or forbidden palace, and, in the books and records of the Ming and Qing dynasties, the imperial palace is called "Zi Jin Cheng", or forbidden city

The Forbidden City is the largest and most complete extant group of ancient Chinese architecture. It covers an area of about 720,000 square meters, 960 metres long from north to south and 760 metres wide from east to west, consisting of 8700 rooms of over 980 buildings. Its overall arrangement was laid out, on the basis of Dadu palace city of the Yuan Dynasty, after the model of imperial palace in Nanjing and Zhongdu in Fengyang of the Ming Dynasty. The buildings of the forbidden City are divided into two distinct areas: the Outer Court in the south and the Inner Court in the north. Buildings of the Outer Court, or the Front Court, had a ceremonial or administrative function, whereas most of the buildings in the Inner Court, or the Rear Palace, were the residence of emperor, empress, concubines, and imperial princes and princesses under age. The where emperor dealt with routine affairs at palace was in the Front Court or in the Rear Palace.

The design of the whole of the imposing Forbidden City is dominated by the central north-south axis, along which a complex of halls, palaces, pavilions, courtyards and gardens interlocking verticals and horizontals in rising and falling elements brings into architectural harmony and unity. Either the arrangement of structure or the painted decorations and the stone carvings demonstrate the emperor's idea of the most august imperial power of the feudal society. And, at the same time, all the buildings of the Forbidden City are the precious heritage of excellent

tradition and techniques of ancient Chinese architecture.

From 1420 to 1911, a total of 25 emperors (15 of Ming and 10 of Qing) lived in the Forbidden City and exercised supreme feudal autocratic power over the country for 492 years. After Revolution of 1911, the Qing Dynasty was overthrown, but its last abdicated emperor Pu Yi still lived in the Inner Court for 13 years. The Front Court, a forbidden area in former days, was taken charge by the republican government and to the publics. It was in October, 1924, that patriotic general Feng Yuxiang staged a coup d'etat in Beijing and sent Lu Zhonglin, the garrison commandant, to drive Pu Yi out of the Inner Court. On October 10, 1925, the whole northern portion of the Forbidden City was turned into a museum, the Palace Museum. It was placed under a board of directors consisting of well-known figures of various circles, and was in charge of such places as the Inner Court, Imperial Ancestral Temple, Coal Hill and Imperial Archives, within or without the Forbidden City. From then on, the Forbidden City began to be called the Imperial Palace.

After the founding of new China, the confines of the museum jurisdiction are limited to the whole of the Forbidden City. In 1961 the Imperial Palace was rated as an important historical and cultural monument under state protection.

The Palace Museum houses nearly 1,000,000 pieces of cultural relics, large quantities of which are rare and precious art treasures. It is world-famous for its complete group of palace buildings of the Ming and Qing dynasties, court historical relics of the Qing Dynasty furnished in original state, rich collections of cultural relics, and large numbers of scientific research personnel.

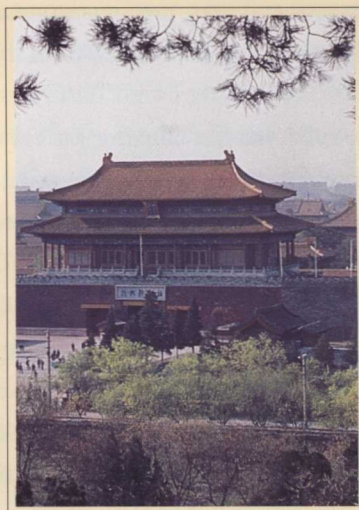
Most of collections in the Palace Museum came from that of the Qing count, oth-

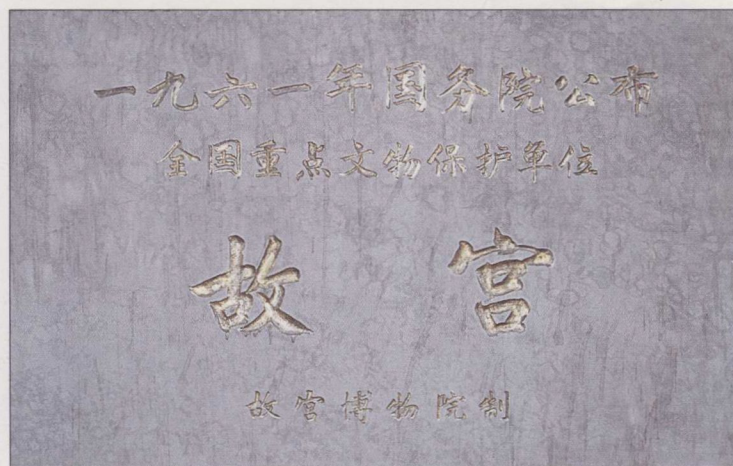
ers were acquired and purchased over years since the founding of the Museum, including traditional Chinese paintings, model calligraphy, stone rubbings, ceramics, bronzes, jades, lacquerware, gold and silver vessels, silks and embroidery, seals, various carvings, precious stones, handicrafts, writing materials, and books, furniture and daily necessities from the inner court of the Ming and Qing dynasties.

In 1924, the last emperor Pu Yi left the Imperial Palace. Simultaneously the Government instituted a Commission for the Custody of the Property of the Manchuhouse. The different buildings were at once officially inspected, and a general inventory with a record of 1,170,000 pieces of art treasures and cultural relics through the ages left over by the Qing Court was then taken in hand. On the eve of the War of Resistance Against Japan (1937~1945), more than 13427 cases of cultural relics were moved to the south of the country so as to avoid accidents. In 1948, of the said objects 2927 cases were moved to Taiwan, 2176 cases were kept in Nanjing, and the rest were returned to Beijing in succession.

Since the founding of new China in 1949, the Palace Museum has collected and purchased all kinds of cultural relics numbering more than 260,000 pieces, in which there are no lack of rare treasures such as "Bo Yuan Tie" (a copybook for calligraphy) and the painting "Wu Niu Tu" (five oxen). Among the historical relics which we took over, a total of 180,000 pieces, which were kept in Zhangyuan in Tianjin by the abdicated emperor Pu Yi have also very high historic and artistic value.

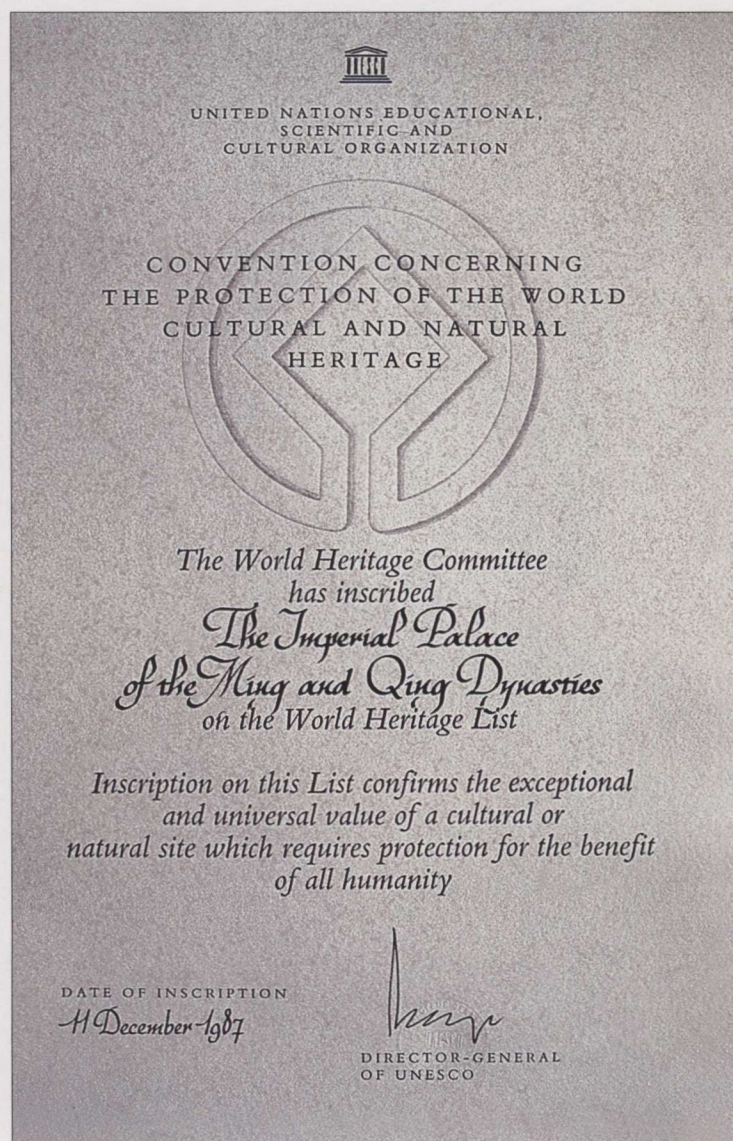
The Imperial Palace occupies an important place in the world cultural history. In 1987, it, as one of the first Chinese major historical and cultural sites under state protection, was placed in the List of the World Human Cultural Heritage published by the UNESCO.





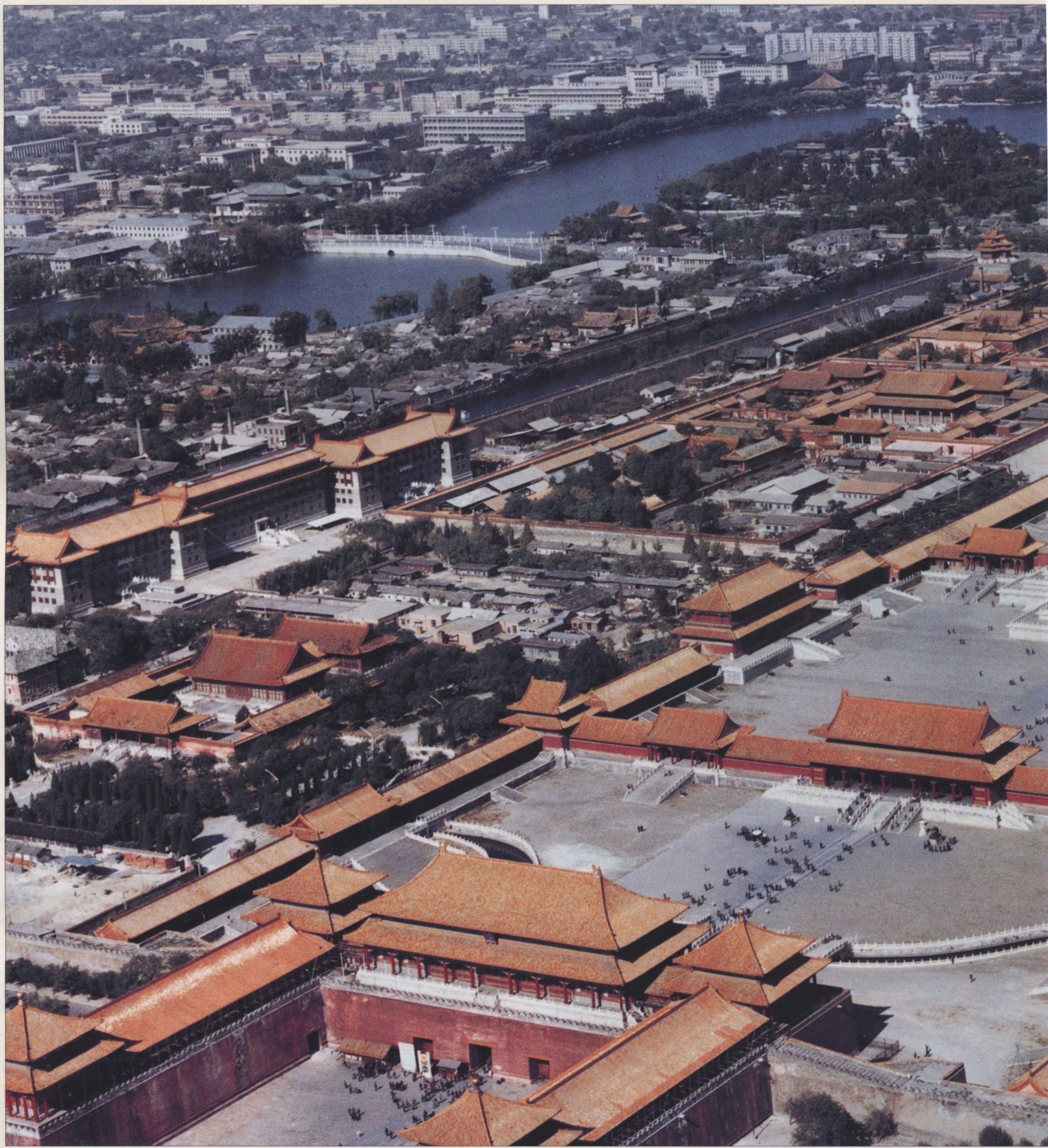
1. The Mark of the Palace Museum listed as one of the important historical monuments under state protection

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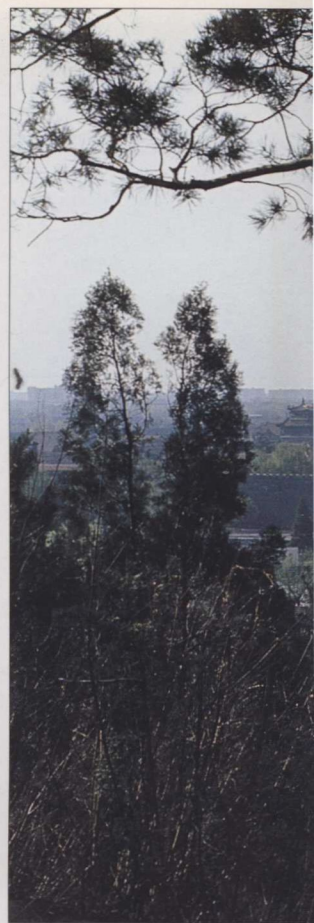
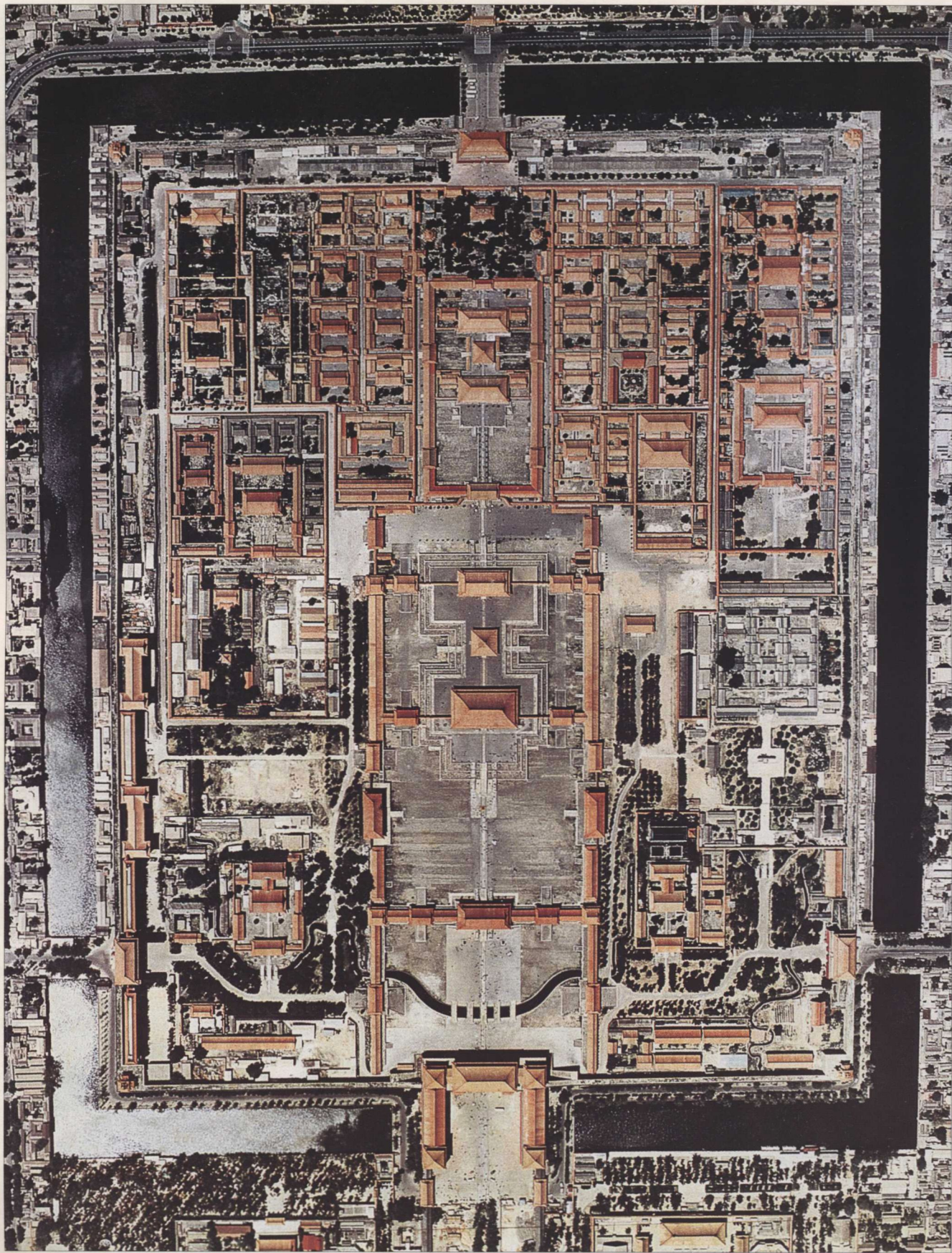
2. The certificate of the Palace Museum placed in the list of the World Human Cultural Heritage published by the UNESCO



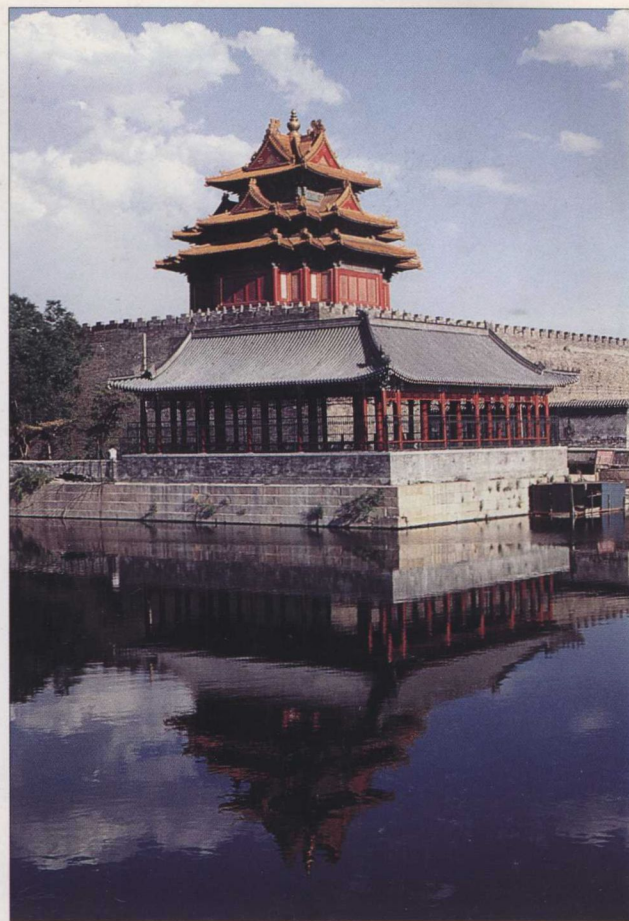


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3. An aerial map of the Palace Museum



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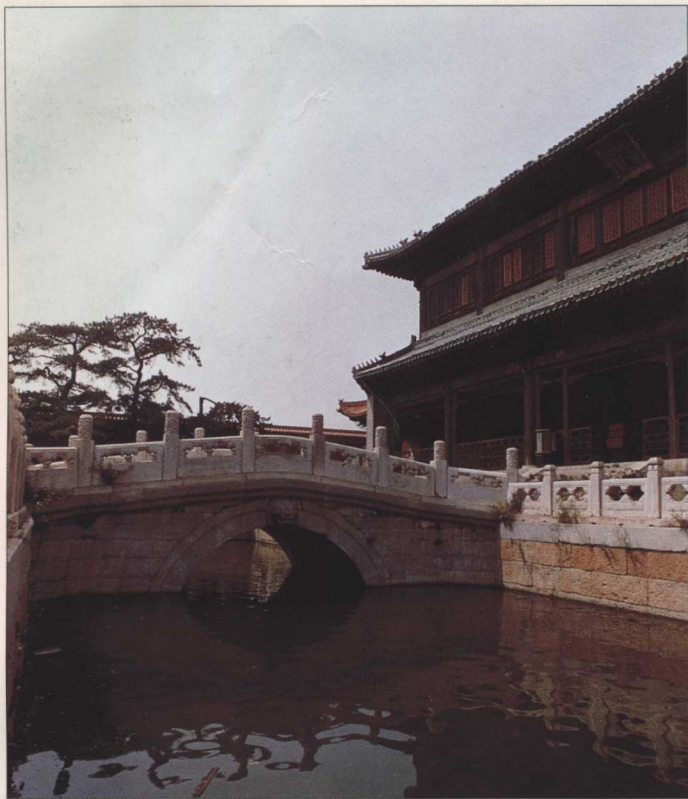


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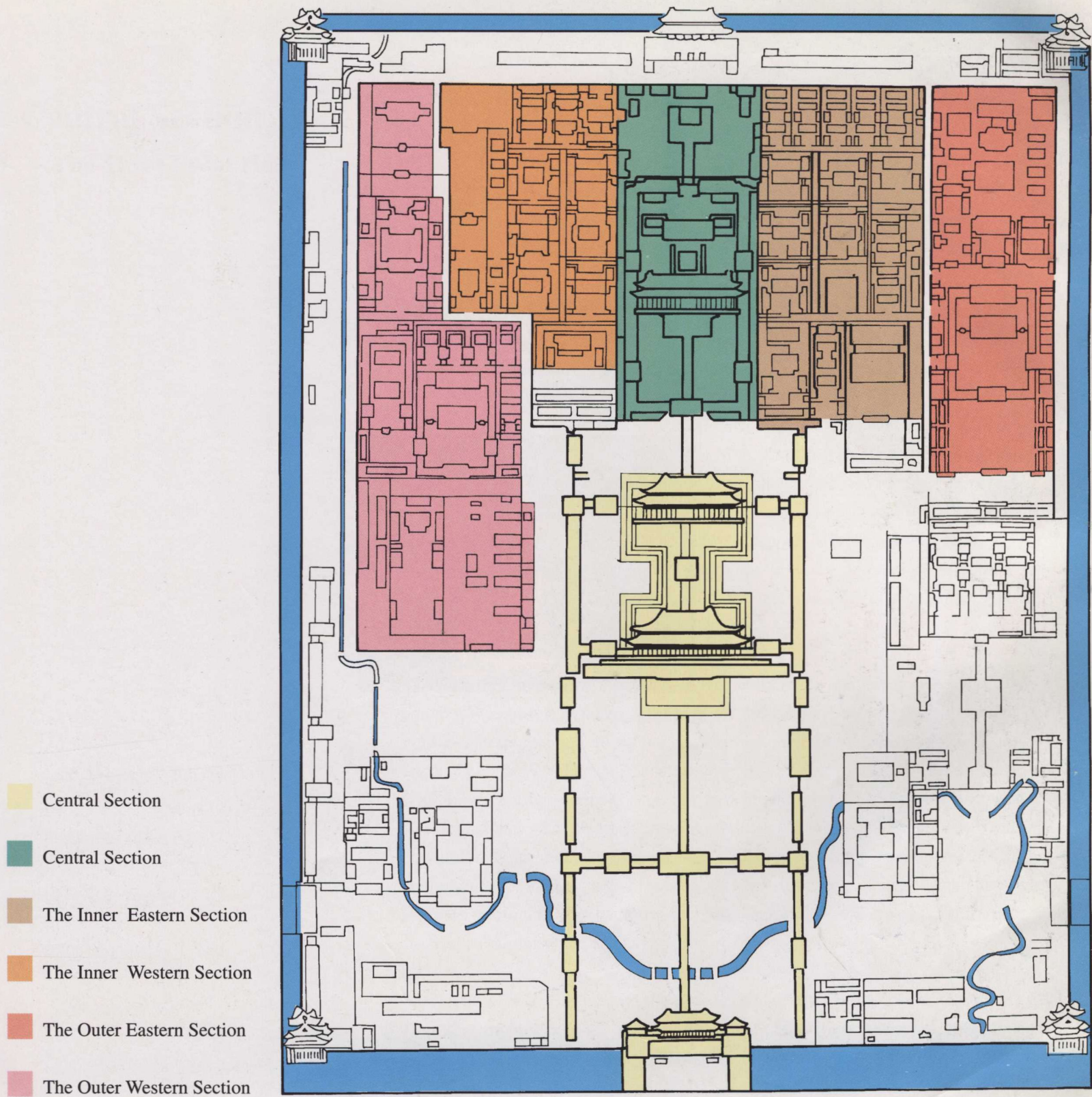
4. A bird's-eye view of the Palace Museum
5. The Forbidden City seen from Jingshan (known as the Coal Hill)
6. The northeastern turret of the Forbidden City
7. An open view in the south seen from Tai He Men (Gate of Great Harmony)



8. Wen Yuan Ge (the Imperial Library)

9. The exterior of Tai He Men (Gate of Great Harmony)





II



## Central Section

### — The Three Front Halls

The Forbidden City is mainly divided into two parts—the front court and the inner court. The front court, or the outer court, is situated in the southern half part of the city, including Tai He Dian (Hall of Great Harmony), Zhong He Dian (Hall of Middle Harmony), Bao He Dian (Hall of Preserving Harmony), and Wen Hua Dian (Hall of Literary Glory) in the east and Wu Ying Dian (Hall of Military Eminences) in the west. It was where the Ming and Qing emperors held important ceremonies and dealt with daily routines. On such grand occasions as emperor's accession, birthday, wedding, coronation of empress, promulgation of imperial order on an expedition, and the New Year's Day, the Winter Solstice, etc., a celebration would be performed here. In addition, it was also here that the emperor received thanks for imperial favors and congratulations from officials and foreign envoys.

Wu Men (Meridian Gate) is the southern entrance to the Forbidden City. It is commonly known as Wu Feng Lou (Five-Phoenix Tower) because of its five buildings—a central hall and four square corner pavilions set above the walls in square-edged “ $\square$ ” shape. The center passage-way was reserved solely for the emperor, with the exception of rare occasions when an empress was officially welcomed and when the new first three successful candidates in the palace examination were announced. Officials had to pass through auxiliary gates to the east and west of the center. In the Ming Dynasty, the courtyard in front of the gate was the site for the flogging of officials who had offended the emperor. This was called “Ting Zhang” (to beat a courtier with cane at court).

The Hall of Great Harmony is the most important and largest of the three halls. Here the emperor held grand ceremonies and grand court audiences. It is 35.05 metres in height with a massive floor space of 2,380 square metres. In the Center of the hall is a large throne mounted on a high platform and decorated with open