

WORLD HERITAGE LIST

Temple of Heaven (China)

No 881

Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	The Temple of Heaven: an imperial sacrificial altar in Beijing
<i>Location</i>	Beijing
<i>State Party</i>	People's Republic of China
<i>Date</i>	4 July 1997

Justification by State Party

The siting, planning, and architectural design of the Temple Heaven, and also the sacrificial ceremony and the associate music and dance, are based on the *yin-yang* and five-element theory of the ancient *Book of Changes*. This explains the understanding of the ancient Chinese people of heaven and of the relationship between human beings and heaven, as well as their wish to go to heaven. In every dynasty altars were built for the worship of heaven, but the Temple of Heaven in Beijing, which is a masterpiece of ancient Chinese culture, is the only one to be preserved in its entirety.

The number nine is used repeatedly in the dimensions of the Circular Mound Altar and in the number of its components, symbolizing heaven and stressing the relationship of humankind with heaven. The round form and the blue colour of the Hall of Prayers for Abundant Harvests also symbolize heaven, the number of pillars and bays indicating the four seasons of the year, the 24 divisions of the lunar year in the traditional Chinese calendar, the twelve months, and the twelve two-hour periods in each day, and also the fixed stars in the heavens. The Temple of Heaven is designed to "symbolize heaven and represent the earth," and it is the only surviving example of the ancient Chinese *Ming Tang* building, constructed expressly for the use of the Emperors of China. As such, therefore, it is a significant element of ancient Chinese culture.

The Temple of Heaven epitomizes the achievements of the Ming and Qing Dynasties in the fields of architectural design and construction and of art. The Imperial Vault of Heaven and the Hall of Prayers for Abundant Harvests are superb examples of massive structures in wood. The rich woodland surroundings of the Temple creates an ecological environment which highlights the harmony between humankind and nature, and is of considerable significance for the study of ancient architecture and the environment.

The Hall of Prayers for Abundant Harvests is imposing and impeccably constructed. The hall rises in levels of decreasing size, creating a strong sense of upward rhythm and solemnity, with a balanced contrast of colours, all combining to give the observer the feeling of ascending into heaven.

The Temple of Heaven is of great historic, scientific, and artistic value, embodying the culture and philosophy of ancient China. **Criteria i, ii, iii, and iv**

Category of property

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a *group of buildings*.

History and Description

History

The Altar of Heaven and Earth, together with the wall surrounding the garden, was completed in 1420, the eighteenth year of the reign of the Ming Emperor Yongle. The central building was a large rectangular sacrificial hall, where sacrifices were offered to heaven and earth, with the Fasting Palace to the south-west. Pines were planted in the precinct of the Temple to emphasize the relationship between humankind and nature.

In the ninth year of the reign of Emperor Jiajing (1530) the decision was taken to offer separate sacrifices to heaven and to earth, and so the Circular Mound Altar was built to the south of the main hall, for sacrifices to heaven. The Altar of Heaven and Earth was renamed the Temple of Heaven. Concurrently, temples to the earth, the sun, and the moon were built in the north, east, and west of the city respectively.

The large sacrificial hall was dismantled fifteen years later and replaced by the round Hall of Daxiang, used for offering prayers for abundant harvests. In 1553 an outer city, which included the Temple of Heaven, was created around Beijing.

In 1749, the fourteenth year of the reign of the Qing Emperor Qianlong, the Circular Mound was enlarged, the original blue-glazed tiles being replaced with white marble. Two years later renovation work took place at the Hall of Daxiang, and it was given the new name of the Hall of Prayers for Abundant Harvests. This was the heyday of the Temple of Heaven, when it covered 273ha.

Ceremonial sacrifices to heaven were banned by the government of the Republic of China in 1911. By that date, 490 years after its foundation, the Temple of Heaven had witnessed 654 acts of worship to heaven by 22 Emperors of the Ming and Qing Dynasties. It was opened as a public park in 1918 and has been so ever since.

Description

The Temple of Heaven was built on a site located 3.5km to the south-east of the Zhengyang Gate of Beijing. The area that it occupies is almost square, the two southern corners being right-angled and those on the north rounded. This symbolizes the ancient Chinese belief that heaven is round and the earth square. It is a spatial

representation of the Chinese cosmogony on which the political power and legitimacy of the imperial dynasties was based for more than two millennia.

There are two circuits of enclosing walls: the outer wall, which defines the "Outer Altar," measures 1650m north-south and 1725m east-west, the corresponding dimensions for the inner enceinte (the "Inner Altar") being 1243m and 1046m respectively. The three principal cult structures are disposed in a line on the central north-south axis.

The sacrificial buildings are mainly in the Inner Altar, which is sub-divided into two by a wall running east-west. The southern sector, known as the Circular Mound Altar, covers 44.66ha and the northern, the Altar of the God of Grain, is larger (72.34ha). The two altars are connected by an elevated brick path 360m long, known as the Red Stairway Bridge.

The main Temple of Heaven, the Circular Mound, repeats the symbolism of the walls, since the central round feature (heaven) is inside a square enclosure (the earth). It consists of three circular platforms of white marble, decreasing in diameter, surrounded by balustrades in the same material. Entry to the enclosure is effected by means of a series of monumental gates, also in white marble, known as the Lingxing Gates. There are 360 pillars in the balustrades, representing the 360 days of the ancient Chinese lunar year. The imperial throne would have been set up in the centre of the uppermost platform, symbolizing the role of the Emperor as the Son of Heaven and hence the link between heaven and earth.

To the north of the Circular Mound is the Imperial Vault of Heaven. This is a circular structure, roofed with blue glazed tiles and elaborately painted inside and out. It was here that the Emperor made offerings before retiring to the Fasting Palace (or Palace of Abstinence). Other structures within the Circular Mound Altar are the Divine Storehouse, the Divine Kitchen, and the Sacrificial Butchering Pavilion.

In the north enclosure, the Altar of the God of Grain, the main feature is the Hall of Prayers for Abundant Harvests, which is linked with the Temple of Heaven by the Long Corridor, 440m long and 25m wide. The Hall is situated inside a square walled enclosure. In form and materials it repeats the three-tiered circular structure in white marble of the Temple of Heaven. It is surmounted by the Hall itself, once again circular in plan, and with three superimposed roofs in blue glazed tiles, from which the Emperor offered up prayers for good harvests. It is supported on a massive wooden framework and its interior is richly decorated.

There are several ancillary buildings within this group, the most important of which is the Hall of Imperial Heaven, a small rectangular building to the north of the Hall of Prayers for Abundant Harvests on the main north-south axis.

Two important religious ceremonies at which the Emperor officiated took place in the Temple of Heaven each year. At the winter solstice he proceeded in stately procession, escorted by dignitaries, guards, musicians, singers, dancers, and flag-bearers, and carried in a litter, to the Circular Mound, where he offered up prayers and sacrifices to heaven. In March there was a similar ceremony, but this time with less pomp, in the Hall of

Prayers for Abundant Harvests. These ceremonies came to an end in 1911.

In the south-west quadrant of the Altar of the God of Grain is to be found the moated complex known as the Fasting Palace. It was in this 4ha compound that the Emperor would perform his ritual fast before presiding over the ceremonies in the Temple. There is an imposing main hall, an elegant sleeping palace, and a two-storeyed bell tower within the enclosure. Nearby, between the walls of the two enceintes, there are two functional buildings, the Imperial Music Office and the Office of Animal Offerings.

The entire enceinte is surrounded by remains of the ancient pine forest, which is carefully maintained and where there have been new plantings to complete the symbolic link between humankind and nature.

Management and Protection

Legal status

The Temple of Heaven is protected by various legislative measures, notably the 1982 Law on Protection of Cultural Relics (amended 1991); this is elaborated in the 1992 Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the Law of the People's Republic of China on Protection of Cultural Relics. Certain provisions of the Laws on Environmental Protection and on City Planning are also applicable. Violations are punishable under the provisions of the Criminal Law of the People's Republic of China.

On 4 March 1961 the Temple of Heaven was included by the State Council of the People's Republic of China on the first group of important monuments and sites to be protected at national level.

At municipal level, the Regulations of Beijing Municipality of the Protection of Cultural Relics (1987) reinforce the national protection.

Management

The Temple of Heaven is owned by the People's Republic of China. Overall management is the responsibility of the State Bureau of Cultural Relics and the Ministry of Construction of the People's Republic of China. At local level, management is in the hands of the Management Office of the Temple of Heaven Park, an agency of the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Parks and Gardens (established in 1949), which works in collaboration with the Municipal Bureau of Cultural Relics. The Management Office, which employs over 700 people, 70% of them professional and technical staff, has a number of sections covering, *inter alia*, management, engineering, cultural research, scientific research, and archives.

The Management Office implements the Overall Plan for the Protection of the Temple of Heaven, which includes detailed arrangements for the protection and use of the property, the maintenance of the surrounding wooded area and its ancient trees, and general environmental monitoring and control. This plan, which is kept under constant review, is reinforced by a series of regulations on different aspects of maintenance, protection, fire precautions, etc.

The Temple of Heaven Park, which is the area nominated for inscription, forms the centre of three

protection zones. Outside this Grade I protection area there is a second (Grade II) protection area. This is in two parts: the first concerns areas that formed part of the ancient Temple of Heaven complex but which lie outside the present Park, where later intrusive buildings have been progressively removed and replaced with plantations of trees. In the second part of this protection area the heights and overall dimensions of all buildings are subject to strict control. In the outermost (Grade III) area there is control only over the height of any new constructions. The two outer zones constitute an effective buffer zone, as required by the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* (1997).

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

The Temple of Heaven was administered by the Court of Sacrifices of the Ming and Qing Dynasty Ministry of Rites from 1420 until 1911. Considerable restoration work was carried out during the reign of the Qing Emperor Qianlong (1736-96). In 1889 the Hall of Prayers for Abundant Harvests was destroyed by fire, but it was meticulously reconstructed using the original types of material and construction techniques soon afterwards. From 1911 to 1948 the Temple was the responsibility of the office established by the Government of the Republic of China to manage and protect the temples and altars.

With the creation of the People's Republic of China in 1949, this responsibility passed to the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Parks and Gardens. During the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) 800,000m³ of rubbish were piled on the site. The Beijing Municipal Government paid for this to be removed in 1990, but much of the work was carried out voluntarily by thousands of local residents, who also planted many trees in the surrounding area. Since that time, the major work of restoration was the rebuilding in 1995 of the north-eastern sector of the outer wall, when at the same time the market that had grown up there was removed. There has been an ongoing programme of systematic conservation and restoration in progress as part of the Overall Plan (see above).

Authenticity

The authenticity of the Temple of Heaven is very high. The symbolism of the overall layout of the temple complex and of its components is preserved wholly intact. Of the individual structures, only the Hall of Prayers for Abundant Harvests has been completely reconstructed, following the 19th century fire, but its original form has been reproduced faithfully, using the correct materials. Neglect during World War II and the Cultural Revolution resulted in some degradation, but this has been carefully restored and the current management programme provides for continued conservation, which ensures the maintenance of the high level of authenticity.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

An ICOMOS expert mission visited the Temple of Heaven in February 1998.

Qualities

The Temple of Heaven in Beijing is a unique material expression of the Chinese concept of the relationship

between heaven and earth. It is also a potent symbol of the role of "Son of Heaven," the interlocutor between humankind and the celestial realm, played by Chinese emperors over more than two thousand years.

Comparative analysis

The Beijing temple complex is the largest and most complete surviving example of this symbol of the legitimacy of imperial rule, located in the city that has been the capital of China since the early 15th century.

ICOMOS recommendations for future action

The ICOMOS expert mission recommended an extension of the buffer zone, so as better to protect the ambience of the site. This proposal was accepted by the Chinese authorities and a revised map has been received by ICOMOS which takes account of the points made by its expert mission.

Brief description

The Temple of Heaven, founded 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 also that of its individual buildings, it symbolizes the relationship between earth and heaven at the heart of Chinese cosmogony, and also the special role of the emperors within that relationship.

Recommendation

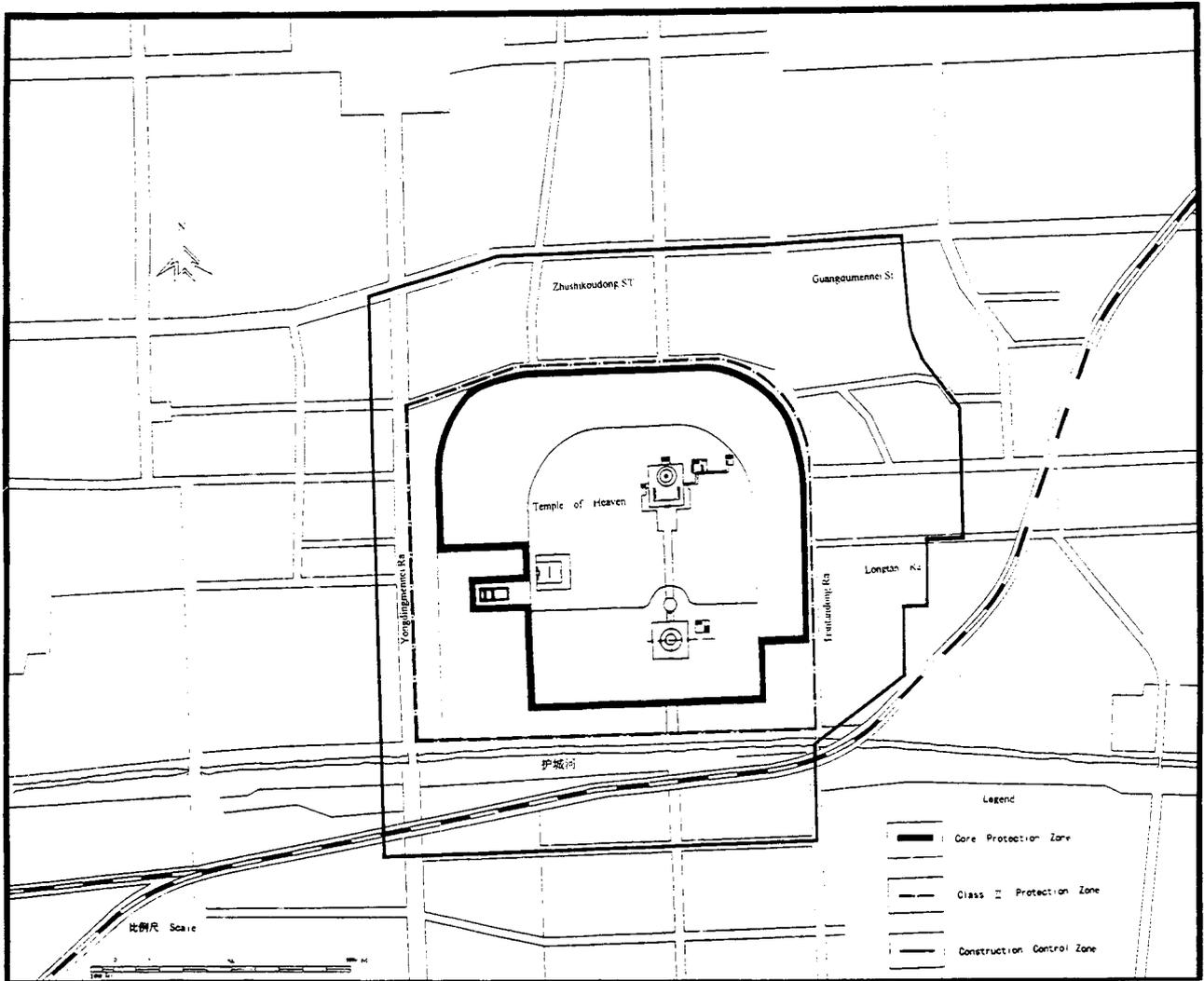
That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria i, ii, and iii*:

Criterion i: The Temple of Heaven is a masterpiece of architecture and landscape design which simply and graphically illustrates a cosmogony of great importance for the evolution of one of the world's great civilizations.

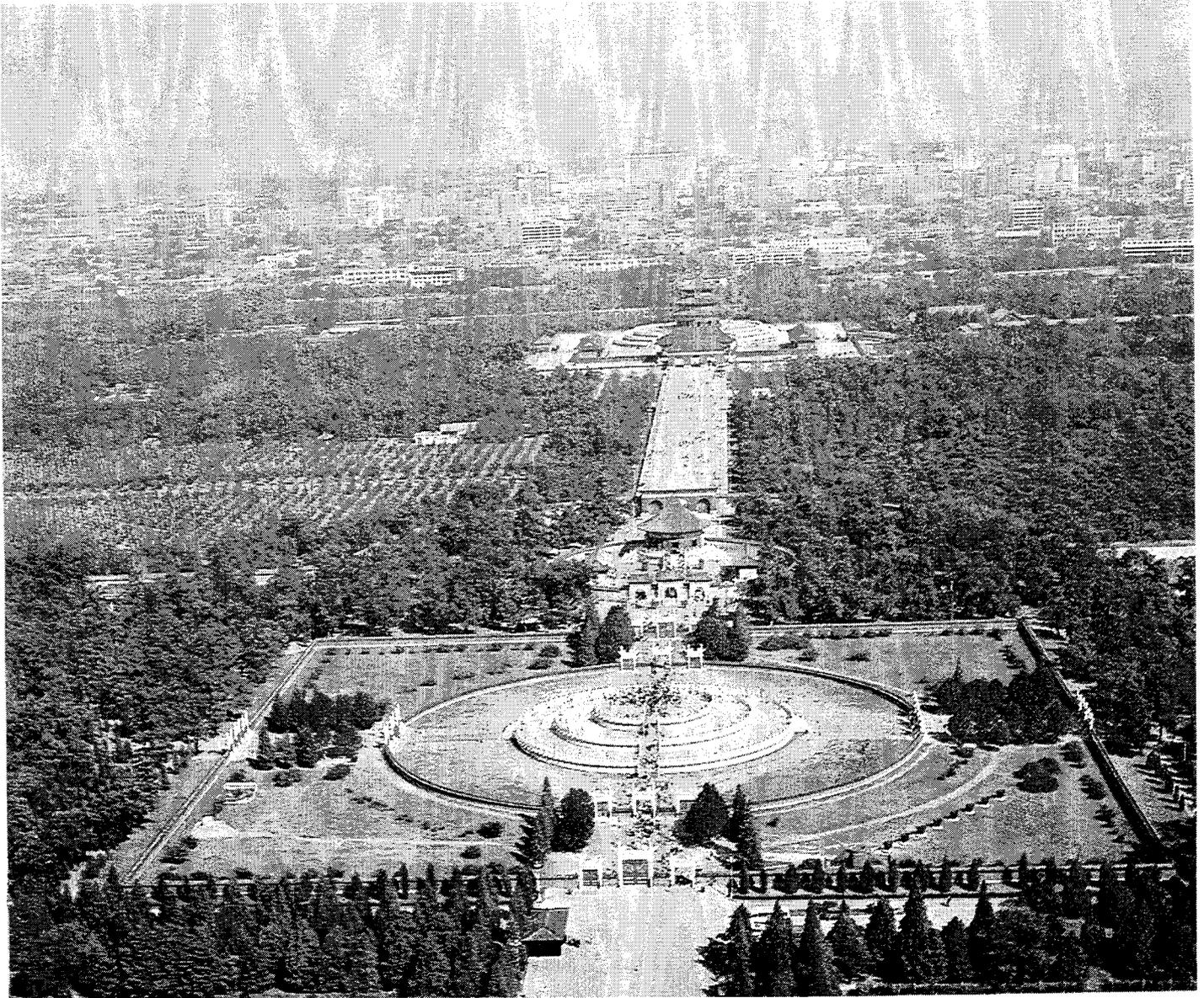
Criterion ii: The symbolic layout and design of the Temple of Heaven had a profound influence on architecture and planning in the Far East over many centuries.

Criterion iii: For more than two thousand years China was ruled by a series of feudal dynasties, the legitimacy of which is symbolized by the design and layout of the Temple of Heaven.

ICOMOS, October 1998



**Le Temple du Ciel, autel sacrificiel impérial à Beijing /
 The Temple of Heaven, an imperial sacrificial altar in Beijing :
 Carte de la zone de protection et de la zone tampon autour du Temple du Ciel /
 Map of the protection area and buffer zone around the Temple of Heaven**



**Le Temple du Ciel, autel sacrificiel impérial à Beijing /
The Temple of Heaven, an imperial sacrificial altar in Beijing :
Vue aérienne / Aerial view**



**Le Temple du Ciel, autel sacrificiel impérial à Beijing /
The Temple of Heaven, an imperial sacrificial altar in Beijing :
Hall des Prières pour des Moissons Abondantes / Hall of Prayers for Bumper Harvests**