

ICOMOS

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON MONUMENTS AND SITES
CONSEIL INTERNATIONAL DES MONUMENTS ET DES SITES
CONSEJO INTERNACIONAL DE MONUMENTOS Y SITIOS
МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЙ СОВЕТ ПО ВОПРОСАМ ПАМЯТНИКОВ И ДОСТОПРИМЕЧАТЕЛЬНЫХ МЕСТ
WORLD HERITAGE LIST N° 439

A) IDENTIFICATION

Nomination : The Imperial Palace of the Ming and Qing Dynasties

Location : Peking Municipality

State Party : China

Date : December 29, 1986

B) ICOMOS RECOMMENDATION

That the proposed cultural property be included on the World Heritage List on the basis of criteria III and IV.

C) JUSTIFICATION

For five centuries the imperial palace in Peking was the supreme seat of power of the Middle Empire. The architecture clearly symbolizes the omnipotence of the Son of Heaven, who sat upon a throne during ceremonies in the Hall of Preserved Harmony, which was located at the centre of a palace enclosed by the crimson-colored walls that distinguished the Forbidden City at the heart of the Imperial City. This area was reserved for princes of the blood, for the court and for the personnel of the Palace. It was surrounded by walls separating it from the Inner City, itself adjoined on the south by the populous, commercial Exterior City.

The principle of such spatial organization goes back to the time shortly after 1264 when Kubilai Khan founded a new capital, which took the name of Dadu. The Mongol emperor, whose desire for integration in the Chinese world was evident, took the advice of a geomancer, Liu Binzhong. Inspired by the ancient construction treaties issued under the Zhou dynasty, he had an orderly, square-shaped city laid out, reflecting the image of celestial harmony, which captured the admiration of Marco Polo.

The final layout, however, which subsists in its broad lines, was determined only after the Mongol dynasty of the Yuan was ousted and Yong-Le, the third emperor of the Ming dynasty, decided in 1421 to transfer his court from Nankin (Nanjing), the southern capital, to Peking (Beijing), the northern capital. The Ming retained the location of the Imperial City as well as that of the line of ramparts east and west of Dadu, but the north and south ramparts were moved, creating a rectangular city measuring 6,650 x 5,350 metres. In the 16th century, the Exterior City, Waicheng, was annexed.

The profound modifications that the age-old urban fabric of Peking has undergone since 1953 have somewhat obscured the strict hierarchical plan of the imperial capital. Concrete skyscrapers now tower over the ancient gates of the city and highway belt roads have obliterated the orthogonal network of Jing (north-south) and Wei (east-west) streets. The ramparts have almost completely been demolished, except for those of the Forbidden City, which have been carefully conserved, their massive 10m high walls rising over 52m wide moats.

In 1961, the government of the People's Republic of China issued a decree proclaiming the Forbidden City a major historic monument, thereby ensuring that exceptional measures would be implemented to conserve the ensemble, which covers 72 hectares. It had been made a museum in 1925, when the last Qing emperor abdicated, but later was neglected. Since 1951, the buildings (which cover 15 hectares), the landscape gardens (nearly 50 hectares) and the art collections (12,000 works of art restored) have benefitted from an active restoration policy.

The Imperial Palace, where the living quarters numbered 9,000 rooms, defies any but a summary description. The vast rectangular area, measuring 960m x 760m, is unified by a central axis materially represented by the suite of imperial buildings. It commences in the south between the Temple of Heaven and the Temple of Agriculture, and enters the Imperial City through the Gate of Celestial Peace (Tian an Men), proceeding to the Forbidden City through the Meridian Gate (Wu Men), and thence to the Gate of Supreme Harmony (Tai He Men), beyond which, at the end, stand the three successive palaces of Supreme Harmony (Tai He Dian), of Perfect Harmony (Zhong He Dian) and Preserved Harmony (Bao He Dian).

South of this central ensemble is the official section, with great palaces built on terraces on either side of the imperial axis. To the north are the private quarters where the emperor and his family lived. From the artificial hill in the Imperial Garden (Yu Hua Yuan) to the north which was created by the Ming and considerably embellished by the Manchurian emperor Qianlong, the Son of Heaven could survey below the Palaces of Earthly Tranquility (Kun Ning Gong) and of Heavenly Purity (Qian Qing Gong), separated by the Hall of Union (Jiao Tai Dian), located at the confluence of the yang impulses from the earth and the yin impulses from the heavens.

To the east and west of this enormous domestic space, various palaces rise up on terraces in the midst of a series of enclosed groups, juxtaposed to the miniscule cells of the innumerable family quarters (wives, concubines, the children of the emperor all lived in their individual houses, each with courtyards or gardens).

ICOMOS recommends that the Imperial Palace of Peking be included on the World Heritage List on the basis of criteria III and IV.

- **Criterion III.** The Palace bears exceptional testimony to Chinese civilization at the time of the Ming and the Qing dynasties because it is a true reserve of landscapes, architecture, furnishings and objects of art.

- **Criterion IV.** The Forbidden, or the Crimson, City provides an outstanding example of the greatest palatial architectural ensembles in China. It illustrates the grandeur of the imperial institution from the Qing dynasty to the earlier Ming and Yuan dynasties.

ICOMOS, April 1987