

Temple of heaven



The layout and architecture of the Temple of Heaven is filled with symbolism. According to symbolic tradition, Heaven is round and the earth is square. Therefore, all of the buildings in the temple complex are round in shape, while their retaining walls and the axis are square. The surrounding walls of the complex also reflect these traditions. The southern side of the wall is square and the northern is round. The emperor would enter the temple complex from the south and this would symbolize his transition from earth to heaven. The glazed roof tiles of the major buildings in the temple complex are blue, symbolizing heaven.

Other buildings have green or yellow roof tiles. The green tiles represent Buddhism and the yellow represent the emperor. Only imperial or imperial sanctioned buildings were allowed the colored tile roofs. The building was built without a single nail. The beams, pillars, and rafters were built in such a way that the weight of the building holds the structure together. The hall has 28 pillars which symbolize the 28 constellations. In the center of the hall are four pillars known as the Dragon Well Pillars. The Hall of Prayer for Good Harvests is surrounded by a square surrounding wall.

On the east and west sides of the hall are two halls which was where the gods of the sun, the moon, the stars, thunder, and lighting were prayed to. These halls now exhibit the musical instruments played during the ceremonies at the Temple of Heaven. A round building with a single-gabled roof topped with a gilded ball, the Imperial Vault of Heaven is located directly south of the Hall of Prayer for Good Harvests. It was first built in 1530 and rebuilt in 1752 by Emperor Qianlong. Its design is similar to the Hall of Prayer for Good Harvests, but on a much smaller scale.

It is built on a single tiered marble base. The vault housed the tablet of the Emperor of Heaven and the emperor's ancestral tablets. These tablets were prayed to and offered offerings and were used as a symbolic representation of the emperor's ancestors. The surrounding wall around the Imperial Vault of Heaven is commonly referred to as the Echo Wall. Because of the way it was built, if a person standing on one side, facing the wall and whispers towards it, a person on the opposite side can hear it clearly. Directly in front of the Imperial Vault of Heaven is what is known as the Triple Sound Stone.

If a person stands on the first stone and speaks towards the vault, his words will echo once. If he stands on the second stone, his words will echo twice. If he stands on the third stone, his words will echo three times. It is quite remarkable and absolutely true. Circular Mound Altar: South of the Imperial Vault of Heaven lies the Circular Mound Alter. Originally built in 1530 by Emperor Jiajing, it was rebuilt in 1740 by Emperor Qianlong. The altar is a three tiered plinth made entirely of white marble. It is here that the emperors of the Ming and Qing Dynasties offered sacrifices to heaven annually on the winter solstice.

The ceremony was meant to thank heaven and ensure that the next year would be prosperous. The numbers of stones which make up each tier are in multiples of nine, which is a prevailing theme at the Temple of Heaven and in fact, all imperial sites. In Daoism, even numbers represent women and odd numbers represent men. The highest odd number is nine and it is representative of the emperor. In the center of the top terrace is a round stone known as the Heaven's Heart Stone. Usage Since the emperor of China

was considered the Son of Heaven, he was responsible for administer earthly matters on behalf of heaven.

He did this by offering sacrifices to heaven. Twice a year, the emperor, along with thousands of eunuchs, ministers, and princes would proceed to the Temple of Heaven. The emperor would fast in the Hall of Abstinence located near the Hall of Prayer for Good Harvests for several days. He would live in the complex during the ceremonies. The entire country relied on the emperor for good harvests and weather. The ceremonies were prepared for months in advance and it was believed that it had to be perfectly performed because the smallest mistake would be a bad omen for the coming year.

If there was a year of flooding or famine, the people would believe that the emperor had fallen out of favor with heaven, so it was of extreme importance for the emperor to ensure everything went perfectly. Outside of the Hall of Prayer for Good Harvests, the emperor would personally use oxen to plow a few rows to symbolize the first plowing and planting of the season. At the Imperial Vault of Heaven, the emperor would pray to the Emperor of Heaven and his ancestors, and on the Circular Mount altar, he would pray to heaven for a year of good weather and luck. All of these rituals ensured that the emperor and the empire would be prosperous.

Current Usage For centuries, no commoner was allowed to look inside the Temple of Heaven. Today it is open to the public and has become a beautiful park that is as popular with locals as with tourists. The complex is very large and the areas around the temples are large and filled with ancient cypress trees. Locals will arrive early in the morning to perform taichi, play badminton, chess, or dance, play music, or sing with their friends. The temple

complex has a real community feel to it and it is a wonderful place to mingle with locals and see firsthand what locals do in their free time.

Built as a place of worship, the temple is different from any other imperial structures. There are two parts in the temple zone. The outer wall of the temple zone is 6, 416 meters in length while the inner wall 3, 292 meters long. The architecture of the temple represents two themes: in the heaven and on the earth. The 6 meters high walls of the temple constitute a semi-circle in the north and a semi-rectangle in the south. This special layout illustrates an important belief in ancient China that the heaven is round and the earth rectangular.

The northern section of the wall is high while the south is low, which means that the heaven is higher and superior to earth. All the essential architecture of the temple were built along a north – south central axis and are linked by a bridge called Danbi. The four main structures from the south to the north are the Circular Mound later (Huang Yuan Qiu Tan), the Imperial Heavenly Vault (Huang Qiong Yu), the Hall of Prayer for Good Harvest (Qi Nian Dian), and the Hall of Imperial Zenith (Huang Qi Dian). Other interesting places in the park include the Hall of Abstinence, the Dressing Platform and the Nine Dragon Cypress.