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CHINESE CULTURAL INSTITUTE
科泉市中華文化協會

茶葉香談

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TEA LEAVES

Summer 2014

Colorado Springs Chinese Cultural Institute

www.cscii.org



In This Issue

- 2-3 A Day in the Shoes of the Emperor
- 4 Land of Floating Mountains

Chinese Proverb

"Failure is the mother of success."
失敗是成功之母

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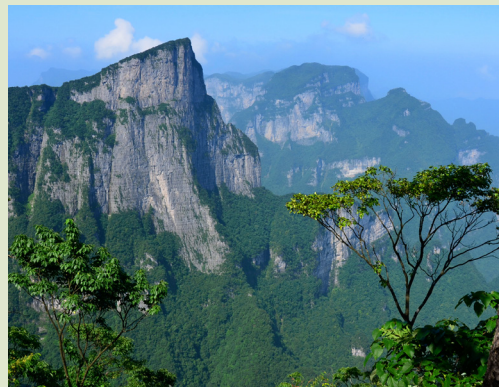
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Letter from the Editor: Special Edition

Throughout my life, many of my most memorable moments and influential experiences have been from traveling to China. Marveling at ancient palaces, partaking in traditional tea ceremonies, nervously trying cuisine from chicken feet to jellyfish to stomach, seeing the generosity and feeling the warm hearts of my relatives half the world away have all contributed to who I am and how I see the world. I believe true understanding and appreciation of a culture cannot be achieved without being in the middle of its people, customs, beliefs, and the sounds in its streets. I certainly haven't reached a complete understanding of Chinese culture, but my trips have helped me on that path of unfolding my history and realizing which aspects of China I would like to incorporate into my own life. My experiences have insured that my cultural heritage is so much more than a checked box on a registration form; it is a living, breathing, ever-present part of me. This past June I was fortunate enough to visit China for the fifth time with my parents and my aunt and uncle. We all undoubtedly enjoyed the trip, and as it was my aunt and uncle's first time in China, certainly an unforgettable adventure. On our two-week trip we visited two impressive cities: Beijing and Chongqing (my mother's hometown) and explored two beautiful national parks: Zhangjiajie and Jiuzhaigou-Huanglong. Over the next two editions of Tea Leaves I will write about my favorite experiences on my travels and include as many pictures as possible to share my trip with you. I won't possibly be able to express the feeling of being in China, but I hope I can pass on my fascination to you and further you on the path of appreciating the many wonders that China holds. I hope you enjoy!



A Day in the Shoes of the Emperor

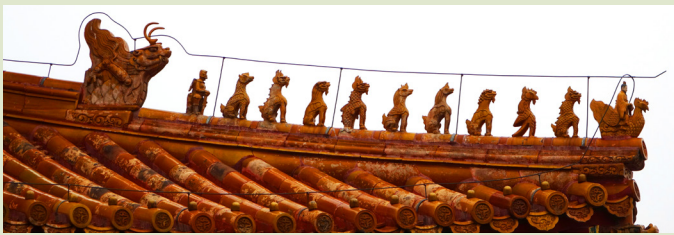
By Eric Woods

From 1420 to 1911, twenty-four Chinese Emperors resided in and ruled from the Forbidden City. For perspective, this city, also known as the Imperial Palace, served as the center of the Chinese government since Galileo's invention of the telescope until the eve of the First World War, twice as long as the United States has been a Republic. The palace itself showcases the harmony of a mighty display of power and an architectural masterpiece based on balance, symbolism, and detailed craftsmanship.

Construction of the Forbidden City began in the Ming Dynasty, when Emperor Yongle moved the capital from Nanjing to the defensible location of modern day Beijing. To prove his Manifest Destiny to a doubtful nation, Yongle decided to build the most opulent palace China had ever seen. His creation spanned over 172 acres filled with ornate buildings, lush gardens, over 9,000 rooms, a 10 meter encompassing wall, and a two mile long surrounding moat: an incredible complex in its beauty and fortitude. The city itself was divided into two sections, the northern Inner and southern Outer Courts. The Inner Court housed the Emperor, his family, and his concubines, while official business was conducted in the Outer Court. There, the Hall of Supreme Harmony, at 35.5 meters tall, towers over the compound, decorated by thousands of detailed paintings and sculptures. Considered the most important building in the palace, this Hall held the Emperor's special events from his ascendency to the throne, to his wedding, to dispatching his top general for crucial battles.

Many of the features of the Forbidden City employ symbols of the heavens to signify the divine favor for the emperors. Nearly all of the roof tiles in the city are yellow, as it is the respected color of the emperor. The palace is also symmetrical on the north-south axis, aligning with the pole star to emphasize the Emperor's divinity. Many of the buildings have sets of mythical creatures lining the ridges of the roofs. Each fabled animal signifies a different ideal such as happiness, justice, peace, or protection from fire. Additionally, the number of mythical animals on the roof represents the importance of the building, with the Hall of Supreme Harmony displaying all 10 creatures on each of its corners, reaffirming its distinction. Even the doors throughout the palace have symbolic significance. Many of the doors have bronze knobs arranged in 5x5, 7x7, or 9x9 rectangular patterns, with the greater amount of knobs signifying a greater importance of the building.

Today, the Forbidden Palace is the best-preserved ancient palace in the world and awes nearly 14 million visitors a year. Although the interiors of the important buildings are roped off from the public, tourists can still admire their ornate architecture and many thousands of artifacts, which the vast museum displays. (Continued next page)



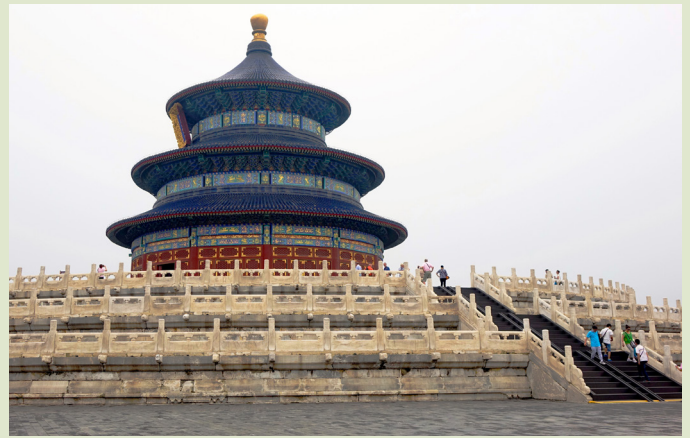
A Day in the Shoes of the Emperor (Continued)

Visitors can also view several of the elaborate throne rooms in buildings such as the Hall of Supreme Harmony. Although it's no longer home to an emperor, the Forbidden Palace is still a breathtaking site.

During my trip, I was lucky enough to walk through this marvelous palace that a century and a half ago only a select few could witness. The Forbidden City retains its mysterious feel as the complex still has its ancient stone paved courtyard style and brilliant white marble carvings. Fine details dotted every surface of the palace, from engravings on the bronze lion sculpture to beautifully restored red, green, gold, and blue painting of dragons that coated the wooden structures. When I rested in the less traveled corners of the palace, I felt myself being transported across time, appreciating the power and reverence that once flowed through the very halls that I walked.

Just two miles away lies the lesser internationally known but just as impressive Temple of Heaven. The entire complex covers a sprawling 670 acres, but the vast majority is composed of gardens and recreational areas, making it a very popular destination for retirees to play cards, preform songs in community bands, or practice tai chi. The centerpiece of the temple is the Hall of Prayer for Good Harvests, a beautiful triple-gabled circular building with a diameter of 36 meters and a height of 38 meters. It is covered by intricate, vibrant paintings and topped by a deep blue ceramic roof. Here the Emperors prayed to the deities for life-bringing rainfall and protection from natural disasters. This was seen as perhaps the most important role of the Emperor during ancient times as it was believed he had the Mandate from Heaven and was able to gain the favor of the Gods. Symbolism was again predominant throughout the temple. For example, the outer walls enclosing the temple were covered by green ceramic tiles whereas the buildings within the temple were all donned by blue. Here, the green represents the Earth while the blue symbolizes the sky and thus Heaven. Literally, the temple was seen as Earth's physical connection with Heaven and the Gods. One aspect that particularly caught my attention was the richness of the glaze that colored the roofs. Considering that this structure was constructed in the 1890's (the original was burned down when it was struck by lightning), it was amazing that after a century the tiles retained looks of emeralds and sapphires, highlighting the quality and craftsmanship that created this ancient wonder.

As two of the best preserved and certainly most majestic ancient imperial compounds in China, both the Forbidden City and Temple of Heaven are perfect to witness, and more so, to experience ancient Chinese architecture, culture, and spirituality. The stillness and grandeur of both locations provide soothing compliment to the busy heartbeat of Beijing. They are must-sees on any trip to China.



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The CSCCI is committed to fostering understanding of Chinese culture by promoting opportunities for events, networking, travel, education and services available to the people of Colorado Springs.

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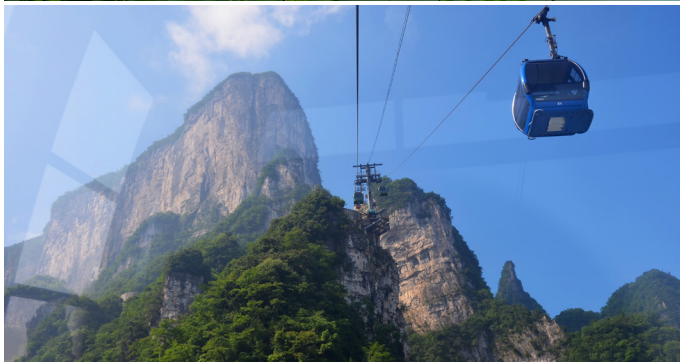
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Land of Floating Mountains

By Eric Woods

Many people know China for its rich cultural history, beautifully preserved ancient architecture, and growing metropolises, but China also boasts many natural wonders that rival the most spectacular landscapes across the globe. On my trip, I had the pleasure of visiting one of these places of paradise: Zhangjiajie.

If you have seen the movie Avatar, you might remember its scenes of reptilian birds soaring through a panorama of floating pillars of rock and mysterious fog. Though Zhangjiajie lacks the dragon-like creatures of the world of Avatar, it actually inspired the animated scenery of the movie. Zhangjiajie's endless forest of rock skyscrapers jutted hundreds of meters into the sky, giving the area an otherworldly feeling with their magnitude. The second distinct trait of the region is heavy fog that often engulfs the mountain elevations. As fog banks roll in and out of the area, entire mountains disappear and reappear before your eyes in the matter of minutes, adding to the mystic fascination. In my opinion the most breathtaking experience in Zhangjiajie is Tienmen shan, known for its fantastic view of the entire valley region and several other stunning features. To reach the top of Tienmen shan, I took the worlds longest cable car-spanning 7.35 kilometers and taking nearly 30 minutes. Be warned that the trek at the top is not for the fainthearted. Like all of the surrounding mountains, Tienmen shan is a large rock tower with sheer cliffs on every side, so in order to provide the best views, an artful concrete walkway know as the Road in the Sky has been built into the side of the mountain encircling the mountain over 1,400 meters above the forest canopy below (that's almost a mile!). As if this was not crazy enough, a 200 meter long section of the walkway has recently been replaced with 7 cm thick glass, giving tourists a perfect view of the sheer drop beneath them-surly a once in a lifetime, adrenaline filled experience. On my way down the mountain I visited another unique part of Tienmen shan, the Tienmen cave, also known as the Gate to Heaven. Preceded by a massive staircase of 999 steps, this cave is more of a hole that has been naturally carved straight through the entire mountain. The colossal cave measures 130 meters high and 30 meters across, so large that stunt planes flew through the opening during the 2008 Haute Voltige airshow.

Overall, Zhangjiajie was possibly the most captivating and immersing location on my trip to China. Whether I was being awed by the spectacular surrounding landscape of seemingly floating mountains, hearing the traditional songs of the local Tujia ethnic group, or walking down streets that retained a more traditional feel than urban Beijing, I felt that Zhangjiajie was truly a precious and one-of-a-kind gem which I hope to cherish again on my future travels through China.

Upcoming Asian Cultural Events

CSCCI Hot Pot Dinner Event*

Jade Dragon Chinese Restaurant, Colorado Springs
November 7, 2014

CSCCI Chinese New Year Festival

City Auditorium, Colorado Springs
February 7, 2015

*Register online at www.cscCI.org

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