



As we stride through the Noon Gate, in front of our eyes are three halls with red walls and yellow tiles: the Hall of Supreme Harmony, the Hall of Central Harmony, and the Hall of Preserving Harmony. These three halls are the most important buildings. They are the center of the Forbidden City as well as the center of Beijing.

The Hall of Supreme Harmony in the front is the most magnificent building of the Imperial Palace. It's also the largest wooden structure in China. It was where the emperor ascended to the throne, the empress received her title, and the emperor bid farewell to generals who led troops out to war. The emperor was also congratulated

here by government officials on Chinese New Year's Day, the winter solstice, and his own birthday. Look! What's happening now? What ceremony is about to take place? Everyone is holding their breath and waiting in silence. The emperor is taking a break at the smaller Hall of Central Harmony. In a moment, he will come to the Hall

of Supreme Harmony to host a ceremony. As for the Hall of Preserving Harmony in the back, that's where the emperor hosted a banquet on Chinese New Year's Eve for royal relatives and high officials. It was also where the emperor gave an exam to the finalists of the civil service exams.

Knowledge tips

Coming from the Qianqing Gate, the emperor passed through the Hall of Supreme Harmony, the Hall of Central Harmony, and the Hall of Preserving Harmony. The Imperial City's walls are red, with yellow glazed tiles, consistent with the design of the Imperial Palace. The color combination of red and yellow was exclusive for the use of the emperor.

More than 1,400 years ago, China began to select government officials by giving them exams. Sons of noble families and civilians had equal opportunities to take these exams—first in their hometowns, then in provincial capitals, and finally in the Imperial

Palace. Passing the exams would lead to government positions. Those who passed the palace exam would be greatly honored and given positions in the central government. And those who excelled might even be handpicked by the emperor to marry the princesses.

Have you noticed that each and all of the three halls are named with "harmony"? Why? Because the Chinese think that harmony is the highest realm humanity can achieve: not only one's inner harmony, but also harmony with other people, and harmony between humanity and nature.

Fun/act

Ancient Chinese buildings, including those in the Forbidden City, were all wooden structures that could easily catch fire. The Hall of Supreme Harmony was once burnt down. The emperor took the fire as a warning from heaven for something he did wrong. He issued a self-blaming edict to express his remorse before ordering to rebuild the hall.



The Three Main Halls