Spencer Laskowski

5/28/17

History of China

The Forbidden City, located in Beijing, was built in the Ming Dynasty and was used until the end of the Qing Dynasty. While the Forbidden City is still standing it is nothing more than a museum to remember the emperors and history that has taken place inside it more than a hundred years ago. It is said that when a baby was born in the Forbidden City to the imperial family the baby could sleep in a different room every night until the baby was approximately 21 years old. The Forbidden City was home to many emperors, however, the emperor that started it all was the Yongle emperor. In 1402, Zhu Di usurped the throne and became the Yongle Emperor and made Beijing a secondary capital to Nanjing. Soon after making Beijing a secondary capital Zhu Di, moved the capital from Nanjing to Beijing and in 1406, the construction of the Forbidden City was underway with a finished product of 980 rooms and covering over 180 acres. The construction of the Forbidden City lasted for 14 years and each pillar used to hold up the roof of the buildings were all made from one tree. As I counted the amount of pillars in one spot of the Forbidden City I counted 8 across and 8 down making that 64 trees holding up the roof of one building. When the Forbidden City was being constructed, the city was built using an interlocking method which is stronger than using any sort of nail. The pillars were covered in pig’s blood for waterproofing and then were painted to keep the pillars from damage. Unfortunately in April 1644, rebel forces captured the Forbidden City and the last emperor of the Ming Dynasty hanged himself on Jingshan Hill, known also as Coal Hill Park. The leader of the rebel forces, Li Zicheng, proclaimed himself the Emperor of the Shun dynasty, but soon fled from the armies of the former Ming general Wu Sangui and Manchu forces setting fire to parts of the Forbidden City as he left. In October 1644, the Manchus had gained supremacy and proclaimed the Qing Dynasty as the successor to the Ming.

During our time in China we got to visit the Forbidden City and learn a little bit about the Empress Dowager Cixi and see where she lived in the Forbidden City, to her Summer Palace, and even her throne behind the curtain of the Emperor’s throne. Empress Dowager Cixi would have major effects throughout the Qing Dynasty during her time. Before she became the Empress Dowager she was selected as an imperial concubine to the Xianfeng Emperor when she was in her adolescent years. She gave birth to a son and after the Emperor passed away in 1861, the son became the Tongzhi Emperor, and she gained her title as Empress Dowager. However in 1875 Cixi’s son had died. This caused Cixi to adopt a son from her sister and calling him as her son so she could keep her position. Her adopted son, became the Guangxu Emperor. Although she had the cover of the Emperor who was “ruling” it was actually Cixi who was the true ruler through her time from behind the curtain. She was “supportive” of the 1898 Reform that her adopted son had wanted to put into place. She was two faced when it came to this reform only making the emperor think she was supportive, but opposing him behind his back making sure this reform never went underway. Guangxu wanted to reform laws, industry, and education through this he would change every aspect of China. In 90 days there were 60 orders given, but the most important thing that he wanted to change was the system used to run China. Instead of an emperor Guangxu wanted China to become a constitutional monarchy. This is where the monarch didn’t have the power anymore, the power was given to the legislature. Cixi didn’t like this plan because she would lose out on her power because it would go to Guangxu. Having a constitutional monarchy gave confidence to the system because more people were brought into the system to rule the country. This reform wasn’t purely about change it was a power struggle for the leading force of China. Cixi wanted change, but this was in no way what she wanted. Cixi acted first to stop the reform by arresting the advisors who supported and helped Guangxu, the Emperor, with the reform while also placing Guangxu under house arrest. To further stop the reform from happening, Cixi arrested all the reformers and cut off their heads. She then put the heads on the top of the wall of the Forbidden City to scare anyone who thought of disobeying her. However, some lucky advisors, Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao, escaped to Japan. With the Boxer Uprising starting in 1899, Empress Dowager Cixi supported this uprising to achieve her own agenda. The Boxer Uprising started due to peasant resentment since peasants were the most heavily exploited people. The point of the Boxer Uprising was to get rid of foreigners and foreign influence. The peasants were called boxers because they had a rich background in martial arts and they called themselves the harmonious fist of righteousness. Missionaries would come to villages and farms on mission trips to spread their beliefs. They had very little knowledge of the Chinese language however, the missionaries would help heal the sick and this gained the people’s trust allowing their beliefs to be spread. The local government wouldn’t attack the missionaries for fear of retaliation. The Chinese people felt that they, the missionaries, weren’t doing any good, there were very few converts, and people felt very strong hatred for the missionaries. In northern China at this time there was widespread drought, but there was no help from the government. Converts received help from the missionaries which caused conflict leading to people attacking the missionaries and converts. The people who began attacking the converts and missionaries were no ordinary people, they protected themselves when the government provided none. These are the same people who believed that the natural disasters were occurring because of the missionaries and converts so they, the non-converts, marched to Beijing to solve the “problem”. The Qing court was divided on this situation with Cixi standing on not liking missionaries since they were changing her people’s beliefs causing her to lose power. Cixi began to receive attacks, so she fled Beijing to the middle most part of China dressed as a farmer leaving the officials left behind to negotiate with huge powers like Russia, U.S., France, and Britain. Li Hongzhang was ordered to negotiate and 450 million, which is more than 2 times the annual revenue, had to be paid to the nations for war. A few Chinese officials went to the U.S. government saying that it wasn’t fair and Teddy Roosevelt, the president at this time, agreed with them. During the Boxer uprising less than 200 foreigners were killed even without the use of modern weapons however, the peasants were still hurt after the uprising because the 450 million indemnity came from them. The Boxer Uprising was the first grass roots movement and when it fell the Chinese people couldn’t keep quiet. In 1900, when the Boxer uprising ended the Boxer Protocol was signed saying that China still had to pay the indemnity of 450 million however, some of the money would be returned to pay for education to send some students overseas.

The summer palace was so beautiful when we visited on our trip. It was beautiful to see all the paintings on the pillars in the long corridor. I liked all of her statues she had in her palace like the deer, the vase, and the stork statue as well as the statue with the head of dragon, deer antlers, the body of a fish, ox hoofs, and a lion's tail. The Empress Dowager rebuilt this palace in 1886 after the war of 1860 (believed by most that she embezzled the money from the Navy) and lived here until she died. Inside the summer palace is the Hall of Joyful Longevity where the deer statue, vase statue, and the stork statue stand. It’s said that the Emperor Qianlong built this hall as a gift for his mother's 60th birthday In front of the Hall of Longevity there is a huge rock that was thought to bring ruins to one’s family due to the legend that a rich official in the Ming Dynasty spent all of his land in order to move the stone to his home, but he failed. In doing this Mi Wanzhong, the rich official, abandoned the stone even though his fascination is what caused him to spend all his land to move it. The Emperor Qianlong and Empress Dowager thought the stone was a spirit stone in the shape of a mushroom which can bring forth spiritual reinforcement to support the Emperor of the Qing Dynasty. This rock is believed to block out all the bad influence since its right in front of a doorway into the courtyard where the Hall of Longevity is. I was so happy to learn about all of the history behind everything in each palace.

My first impression of China was that it’s definitely a world of itself within the global world. Everything is very compact with apartment buildings and huge business buildings, however there is still historic architecture all over the country even in the modern buildings. Although there are so many apartments and businesses buildings, there is still plenty of nature and trees around and the more you walk the more you will notice the nature that is dispersed throughout the city. When I first thought of China I thought it would be like the China that is depicted in The Karate Kid movie that was made in 2010; very rural, modern but not as modern as it is currently. The airport was very quiet when we landed and it was very organized. Everyone is in their own little world; always walking around with headphones in and not really noticing their surroundings. Plus you can tell the country is full of history and everyone is very proud to live in China. China is a place you have to experience for yourself and that was very apparent when we started driving to our hotel in Shanghai. Shanghai was very western in the way it looked like. It felt like a Chinese version of New York City in the United States.

Final Impression of China: China is without a doubt now a country you have to experience for yourself because the movies and stuff we hear on the news is not what China is like/about. Most people have no idea about the history of China and that is very sad because China’s history is rich and 5,000 years long. With every beautiful site that had been preserved for thousands of years to the rich history behind the country it's definitely an experience that you’ll never forget. While there a lot of people and inevitably there will be bumping, pushing, and stopping right in front of you as well as no knowledge of personal space you just keep reminding yourself that you’re experiencing something completely different than what you are use to. China will seem like chaos however, it’s an organized chaos that people there know how to navigate. When you see everything happening you will be shocked because in the united states (exception of New York) we only cross when the crosswalk sign turns green In china people cross as they see fit. Looking back to the beginning of this trip when I only knew one person to becoming our own little family while we were in China. I have learned so much more about China since going on this trip and I have truly enjoyed every moment spent on that trip. I fell in love with China because of this trip and I will miss it until the time I get to come back. The food, nice people along the way, and the memories made will all be the most wonderful part of this trip. We were stared at all of the trip, but the people that were staring didn’t mean any harm they just thought we were beautiful americans. Some brave Chinese people would come up to us and ask us for pictures and others would just take pictures of us without us even knowing that was a different experience for all of us. China was definitely a beautiful and new experience and I can’t wait to go back!!