



Alfred Schinz

The Magic Square – Cities in Ancient China

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The Magic Square is the first complex presentation of the development of Chinese urbanism in a Western language. Equipped with extensive source material and accurate modern maps, the author was able to apply metrological methods. This was the first time that this had been done in Chinese urban studies. In the course of the work some unexpected results surfaced, which yielded new insights into the concepts and methods of traditional urban planners and their masters.

For a better understanding of the social, cultural, political and historical context of these concepts, the book includes about 300 drawings, prepared by the author after original Chinese graphics, pictures and paintings, in addition to the more than 150 maps. A large number of black and white and colour photographs show what can be seen today.

The main body of the book is divided into four chapters, which present four millennia of the urban history of China under the following headings:

1. *The beginning of sedentary settlement*, when the different Neolithic culture groups merged into what may be called the beginnings of the typical Chinese civilization.
2. *Antiquity*, the formative period of urbanism, culminating in the first planned city, the Holy City of Chengzhou (Luoyang), at the beginning of the Zhou dynasty (ca. 1000 BC).
3. *The Middle Ages*, the time of the imperial court culture of the Han and Tang dynasties.
4. *The modern time*, the time of the urban culture and its enemies. Economic development after 1000 AD changed Chinese society and created what may be called urban culture connected with international trade. This urban civilization was highly endangered by the increasingly destructive attacks launched by nomadic warrior tribes from northern Central Asia. Eventually it was almost completely destroyed at the hands of the Mongols, who in turn founded a new capital, the present-day Beijing, using the sacred Magic Square concept.

The fifth chapter deals with the structure of Chinese cities and towns in general. It adds an overall view of the urban life and culture that existed in the traditional society of late Imperial China.

Alfred Schinz was a city planner of repute with several decades of practical experience, who worked for many years in the parts of East Asia that were influenced by traditional Chinese culture and migration.

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