

Ancient Cities

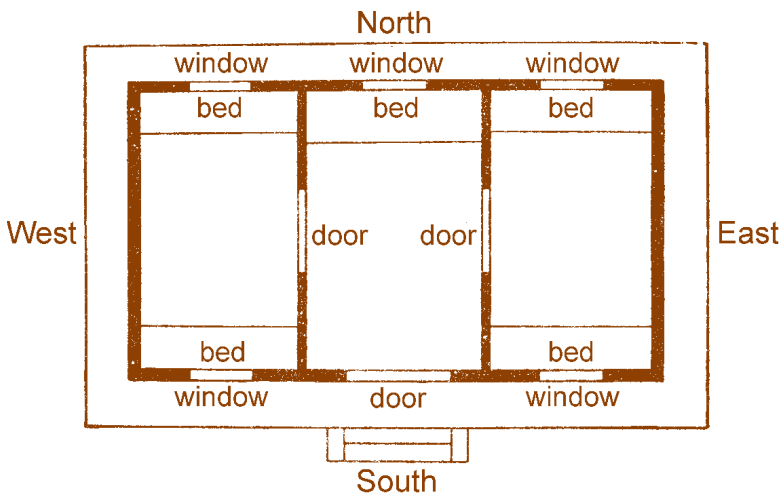


CHINESE ARCHITECTURE

According to historical records and archeological evidence, the emergence of China's earliest cities occurred during the same period as the rise of the earliest ancient cities in the rest of the world, at the end of primitive society (3000 BC–2000 BC).

These ancient cities were built on a very small scale, with little internal infrastructure, and could more appropriately be defined as castles. It was not until the Zhou Dynasty (1046–771 BC) that Chinese cities developed at a faster pace, with urban city developments governed by a specific set of rules and regulations shaped by the feudal system. An example of such a set of rules and regulations is the ancient urban development code, *Zhou Li Kao Gong Ji* (*Rites of the Zhou Dynasty, Artificers' Record*), which contained detailed stipulations ranging from the layout of the cities to the width of roads.

The grid system layout of ancient Chinese cities had its origins in the country's early agricultural society, which was characterized by the "well-field" system. The cool northern and warm southern climates of China led specifically to an emphasis



The north-south layout of houses in ancient China.



The Well-field System

The well-field system, prevalent during the Western Zhou Dynasty, refers to the system of state land ownership that existed when China's society still practiced slavery. At that time, roads and channels that crisscrossed the land divided it into squares that were shaped like the Chinese character for "well" (井), giving rise to the name "well-field."

on buildings being erected in a south-facing position, to avoid cold winds. The practice of constructing buildings on a north-south axis has in turn given rise to the establishment of the north-south direction of the network of roads.

The philosophical foundation of the development of square-shaped cities in ancient China was determined by ancient philosophies such as the philosophy of *yin-yang*, along with the principle of the "Five Elements" of water, fire, earth, wood and metal. The theme of duality, which features in these philosophies, led to an emphasis on forming a central axis in the basic layout of cities and also promoted symmetry. Many cities and the buildings within were named and had locations which reflected their symbolic meaning. *Feng Shui* is a philosophy with origins in the traditions of ancient Chinese culture, which held great respect for man's natural environment and which had a significant impact on the choice of locations for the ancient cities and their layout.

The changes in the economic structure of ancient Chinese society brought forward developments in urban city planning. During the Tang Dynasty (618–907 AD), for the convenience of administration as well as to ensure public security, *li-fang*, an "enclosed-structure" system was adopted for overseeing cities, whereby residential streets and market areas were clearly segregated by a square-grid network of roads. Furthermore, every street and market area had its own wall and gate, along with a gatekeeper, with the gates opening at dawn and shutting at night. This approach both inconvenienced people's lives and limited society's economic progress. It was not until the Song



CHINESE ARCHITECTURE



Detail from the *Riverside Scene at Qingming Festival*, drawn by Song Dynasty artist Zhang Zeduan.

Dynasty (960–1276 AD) that the “enclosed-structure” approach to city planning was abolished, due to extensive developments in agriculture, commerce, external trade and even scientific and technological advancements. Replacing the clearly defined areas for distinctive purposes were many commercial streets, and the prosperous and bustling scenes of these streets in the capital city of Kaifeng during the Song Dynasty can be witnessed in the scroll painting, *Qing Ming Shang He Tu (Riverside Scene at Qingming Festival)*, today classified as one of China’s national treasures.

The Riverside Scene at Qingming Festival

The Riverside Scene at Qingming Festival is one of only a few rare masterpieces still in existence by the Northern Song Dynasty (960–1127) artist Zhang Zeduan. It shows the Northern Song capital of Bianjing (present day Kaifeng, Henan Province) in springtime, depicting the everyday social norms and customs of the capital and portraying a microcosm of the city’s economic life.

Capital Cities

Throughout ancient Chinese history, the rulers of newly established dynasties emphasized the importance of selecting the right locations for their capital cities, often sending their most trusted officials to conduct detailed topographical and

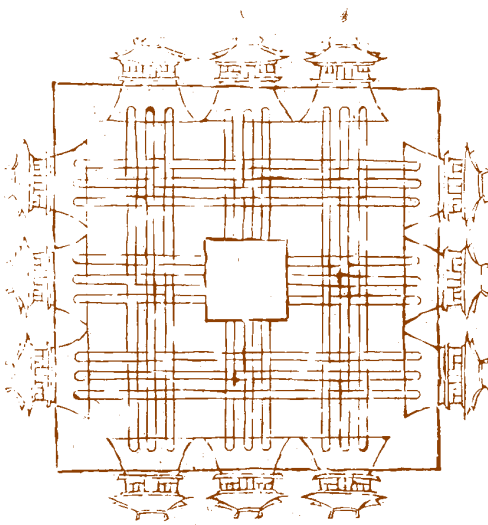


hydrological surveys and supervise the construction of selected sites. The main criteria for the choice of location for any capital city were the strategic political and military needs of the ruler. Another critical factor was the availability of water sources for drinking, farming and gardening, as well as the location of waterways which enabled the transportation of grain and other goods to the capital cities, and formed the lifelines of every dynasty.

During the eleventh century BC, the fall of the Shang Dynasty (1600 BC–1046 BC) and subsequent rise of the Zhou Dynasty saw the establishment of Haojing as the capital city (Xi'an City of Shaanxi Province today). The Zhou ruler conferred titles and land upon his royal clansmen, enabling them to build dukedoms in various areas throughout the kingdom. In accordance with this strategy the Zhou Dynasty began to construct centers of defense and political control on an unprecedented scale. To facilitate the

building of these cities, a strict code of regulations for city planning and construction was devised by the Zhou ruler, which led to a surge in city-building activities. This also laid the foundation for ancient Chinese cities to be created according to a basic format—part of the city was designated as work and business areas while the latter half was reserved for housing and leisure activities.

The practice of seeking a state of equilibrium and harmony was appreciated



The layout of the Imperial City of the Zhou Dynasty, recorded in the Chapter of "Artificers' Record" in *Rites of the Zhou Dynasty*.



CHINESE ARCHITECTURE

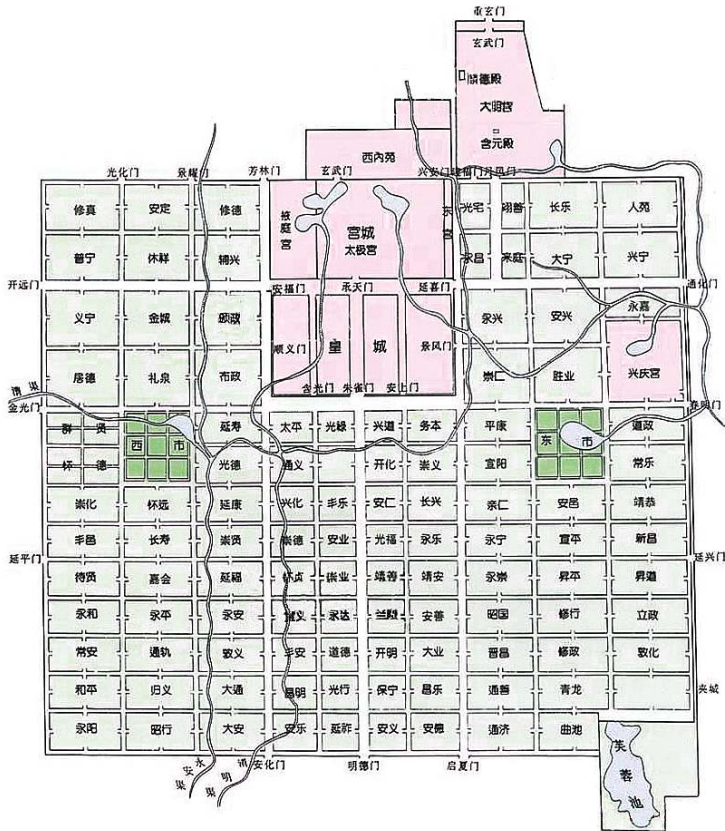
and advocated in ancient China. In the matters of building cities and capitals, symmetry was emphasized, as was the Chinese character “zhong (中),” which means central. Laid out in a quadrangle shape, the Zhou capital city had three sets of city gates on each side, while the imperial palace was located in the centre. It became the model for the planning and construction of later ancient Chinese capital cities.

To safeguard their rulers’ lives, the capital cities of kingdoms from the Warring States Period (770 BC–476 BC) right up to the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) Dynasties, had always been fortified with both inner and outer city walls. Imperial cities or palaces within the inner city walls were built to protect the rulers, while outer city walls were for protecting the civilians. Most ancient capital cities comprised three sets of walls, with the imperial capitals or palaces in the centre, followed by the inner-city or imperial city walls and outer city walls respectively. The ancient Chinese rulers depended on this multi-layered city layout to protect themselves.

Chang’an City of the Sui and Tang Dynasties—The Most Magnificent Capital City in Ancient China

The ancient capital city of Chang’an (present day Xi’an in Shaanxi Province) was the capital city of choice for the greatest number of dynasties in Chinese history. As many as thirteen dynasties built their capital cities here and the city has been reputed to be the world’s longest-serving capital city, with about 1,100 years of history. Built on a large scale in a strictly symmetrical format, with streets laid out like a chessboard and orderly inner streets, Chang’an was the greatest city of its time. It not only served as the benchmark for other ancient Chinese capital cities, but also influenced the design of the capital cities of neighboring countries such as the ancient Japanese cities of Heijo-kyo (Nara) and Heian-kyo (Kyoto).





The *li-fang* layout of Chang'an in the Tang Dynasty.

After putting an end to more than 300 years of war following the Eastern Han Dynasty (25–220 AD), Emperor Sui Wendi (who reigned 581–604 AD) began to construct Daxing city, later Chang'an, on a large scale in 582. Daxing city was built according to drawings after officials had studied the layouts of Ye city (Anyang in Henan Province today), built by the Kingdom of Wei (220–265 AD), and Luoyang city which was built during the Northern Wei Dynasty (386–534 AD). The imperial gardens and government offices were built in the northern part of the city along the central axis of Zhuque Avenue, which strictly



CHINESE ARCHITECTURE

segregated them from the civilians' dwellings. To the left of the inner city was the imperial ancestral temple, while temples for societal offerings and prayers for deities, harvests and the earth were located on the right.

In 618 AD, Daxing city was designated as the capital city of the Sui and Tang dynasties and had its name changed to Chang'an. The city of Chang'an kept to the basic layout of Daxing city, also using Zhuque Avenue as its central axis. To highlight the importance of the imperial palace, the streets to both sides of the central axis, the eastern and western markets of the city as well as the residential dwellings and inner alleys, were all positioned in a strictly symmetrical format. The city's streets were laid out in a grid system, with six main roads providing direct access to the main gates of the city. All of the roads were lined with neat rows of water drainage channels on both sides, and shaded by rows of Chinese scholar trees. The residential areas were divided into alleys by the road system, and the eastern and western markets were centrally located within these areas. For the purposes of security and ease of management, all of the residential alleys and markets were built as enclosed structures. The alley gates opened and shut at regular hours, and curfews were imposed and monitored by troops of patrolling guards. Soldiers patrolled at night when civilians were banned from going out. The ancient city walls of Xi'an, as well as the sites of the Tang imperial palaces, Daming Palace and Xingqing Palace, are still largely preserved.

The provision of scenic spots for the enjoyment of the public helped set Chang'an city apart from its predecessors. The well-known tourist attractions in Chang'an included a pond in the southeast corner of the city and lush gardens, and it was common practice among successful candidates for the imperial examinations to follow the bend of the river and tour the scenic spots.



Beijing City of the Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties—The Symbol of Supreme Imperial Power

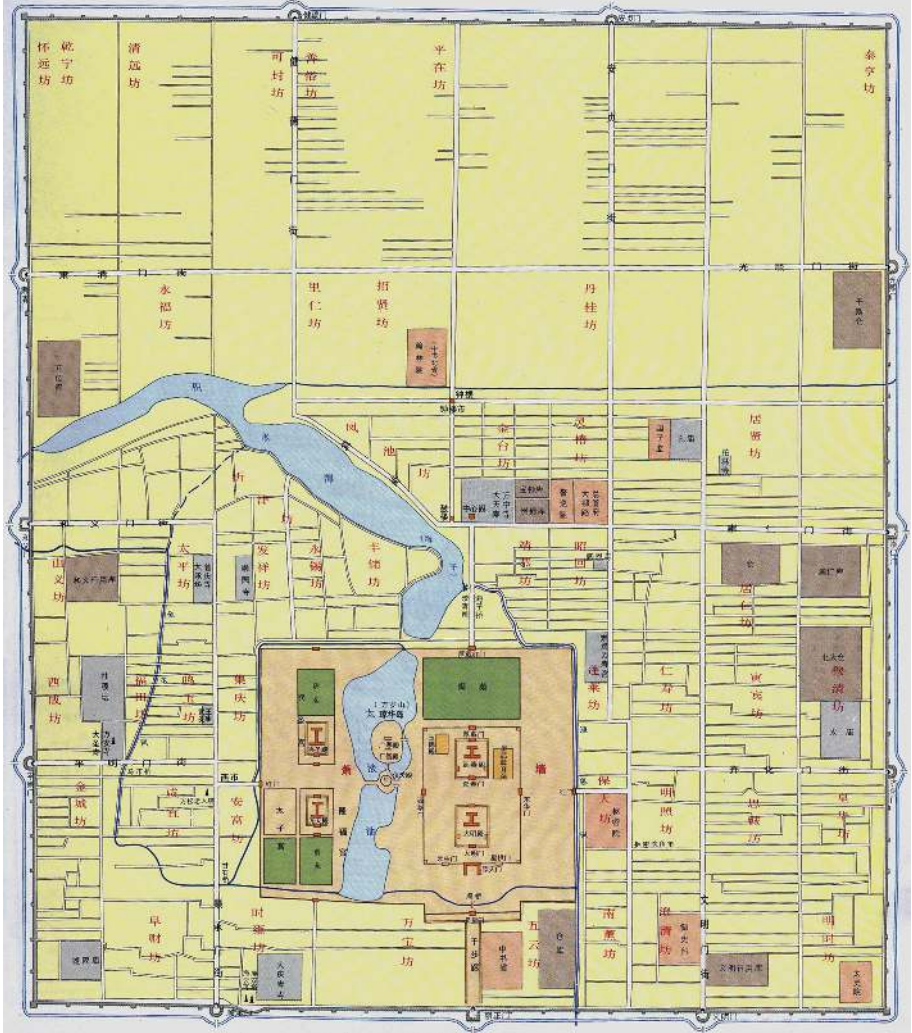
With the exception of Nanjing, which was capital city at the beginning of the Ming Dynasty, the dynasties of Yuan, Ming and Qing all designated Beijing as their capital city. As such, Beijing completely superseded its predecessors, including the capital cities of Chang'an, Luoyang and Kaifeng.

The capital city of the Yuan Dynasty (1206–1368), Dadu (Beijing today), was one of the most magnificent and well-designed capital cities of the world during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Marco Polo wrote that Dadu was such a beautiful city that mere words could not describe it. As part of their assimilation of Chinese culture, the Mongol rulers had modeled the overall layout of Dadu city on the classic city-planning code set out in *Rites of the Zhou Dynasty*. Apart from the chief architect, Liu Bingzhong, other foreign experts such as the Nepalese architect, Aniko (1244–1306) were also invited to participate in the design of Dadu. During this period Dadu city had three sets of walls and eleven city gates, with an orderly architectural layout and a clear network of roads. To accommodate some elements of the nomadic life-style of the Mongols, a piece of land in the northern part of the city was set aside for the emperor and his sons to practice horse riding and archery.

Based on the foundation of Dadu city, the rulers of the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) reconstructed Beijing, but as the capital city of the early Ming Dynasty was Nanjing, Beijing lost some of its importance during the early period of the dynasty. To help defend the kingdom against Mongols from the north, the Ming government abandoned a stretch of barren land about five miles wide to the north of Beijing, thus reducing the scale of the city. When Emperor Chengzu (who reigned 1402–24) decided to shift the capital to Beijing, the southern wall of the imperial city within



CHINESE ARCHITECTURE



Dadu, capital city of the Yuan Dynasty in the Zhizheng period (1341–1368).

Beijing city was relocated further southwards by approximately half a mile, to facilitate the extension of the road (for the imperial carriage) leading to the main gates of the innermost imperial palace. By the middle period of the Ming Dynasty another wall was constructed just outside the southern wall of the city, to ward

