



The Detailed Map of Imperial Capital, published in 1908, introduces most of the streets, hutongs, and important buildings of Beijing.

ment of today's cities.”

The Beijing city of Ming-Qing period had almost been preserved in whole, up till now. Although most of the ancient city walls of the modern Beijing city had been demolished, the city gates and their names have been retained.

The demolition of the old gates and walls of the city have brought about gradual changes to the old grid pattern of roads. Following the rapid development of Beijing after the 1980s, the newly-built main road arteries of Beijing had disrupted the layout of the age-old grid pattern of streets. Today, only a certain number of valuable and well-preserved architecture including home dwellings, palaces and temples located in the city center are retained as well.

Provincial Cities

Provincial cities had always served as geographically dispersed centers of political and military control for the central government throughout the dynasties. These cities were often local centers of commercial activities and culture as well—amongst them were traffic hubs, handicraft industries and trading ports, or were even a combination of all these positive traits. Factors such as weather conditions, topography, traffic and defense capabilities had led to differences in the layout and architecture of various cities.

Quadrangle or courtyard dwellings were popular in northern China, where most of the terrain is flat. As such, the northern cities were mostly square or rectangular in shape, and had wide and straight roads. The architecture and infrastructure of these cities were also arranged in a cross or T-shaped layout, with the drum and bell towers located in the city centers. The government offices were also always located within the vicinity of the drum and bell towers. Examples of ancient cities with these characteristics include the Xi'an and Pingyao cities.

In contrast, the layout of cities located in mountainous regions



with many rivers, was more flexible due to the complex topography. The network of roads in such cities usually followed the contours of the undulating land, and was created more out of necessity than actual planning. Cities built along the rivers were often ribbon-shaped, like Lanzhou, which was built along the river valley of the Yellow River. On the other hand, cities built on mountain slopes, would have main roads which extended naturally along the contours of the mountains, like China's famous mountain city, Chongqing.

The Jiangnan region of rivers and lakes had streets and buildings built along both sides of the river banks, where the waterways were the people's main channel of transportation. The small towns built along the river banks often acquired a ribbon shape while the large towns developed a cross-shaped layout, or a nine-grid pattern that intersected the rivers. The Pingjiang prefecture (Suzhou City today) of the Song Dynasty was a classic example of the city of curvy streets, bridged rivers and plaster walls with black-colored tiles.

Some cities were even laid out in circular shapes for strategic defense purposes, to fight floods or to achieve certain symbolic meanings. As an illustration, the Suqian County in Jiangsu, which was built during the Ming Dynasty, was circular shaped for protection against floods, while the circular-shaped outer city walls of Rugao County in Jiangsu were its means of defense against attacks from the Japanese pirates.

Pingyao—The Best-preserved County of Ming-Qing Period

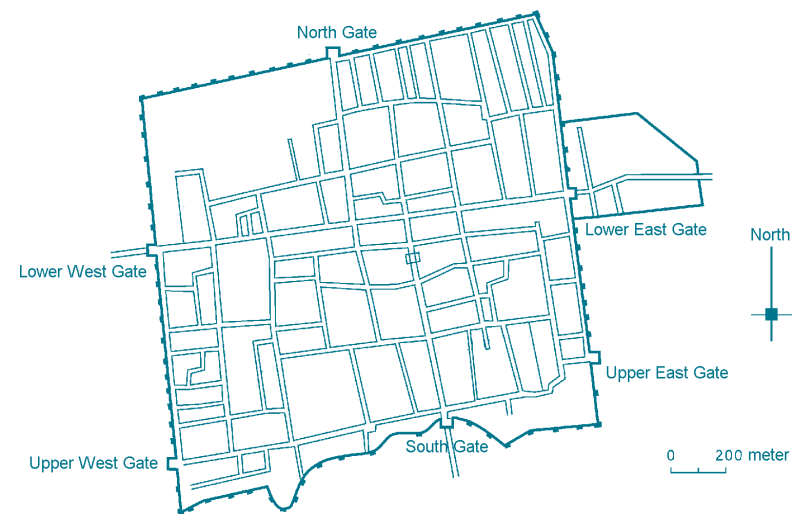
Located in Shanxi Province, the ancient Pingyao city was a famed cultural center with a history of more than 2,700 years. Today's Pingyao city can be traced back to the city expansion carried out in 1370. It had a land area of 2.25 square kilometers and had South Avenue as its central axis. Built according to the traditional layout for ancient Chinese cities, temples and government offices were



located on both sides of the central axis, with markets and dwellings in the city center. The commercial areas in Pingyao city were also far larger than those of most traditional cities, which reflected the economic prosperity of the city. Most of the streets in the city have retained their original names from the era of the Ming and Qing dynasties and were laid out in grid or T-shaped patterns.

Pingyao had been described as a tortoise-shaped city, built with 6 city gates which were representative of its eyes, tail and 4 legs. The tortoise is regarded as an auspicious animal symbolizing longevity in Chinese culture. Therefore, the symbolism of Pingyao as a tortoise was meant to bring about good fortune and eternal existence for the city.

Pingyao city has been commonly regarded as the city of three treasures. One of the treasures is the old city walls. The second treasure of the city is the Zhenguo Temple, with its hall of 10,000 Buddhas, built during the period of the Five Dynasties (907–960). With a history of more than 1,000 years, the colored figurines displayed in the hall are priceless pieces of art. The third treasure of



The plan of Pingyao city in Ming Dynasty.





The inner yard of Rishengchang draft bank in Pingyao, Shanxi.

the city refers to the Shuanglin Temple, which rebuilt in 571. This temple has more than 10 halls, which contain more than 2,000 colored clay figurines from the Yuan and Ming dynasties and as such, is reputed to be “the treasure trove of colored art sculptures”.

Another interesting historical anecdote about Pingyao city would be the fact that it was the home ground of the renowned Shanxi merchants, and also the birthplace of the predecessor of the first modern bank in China, known as Rishengchang. It was the first draft bank which accepted bank drafts. Under the leadership of Rishengchang, the social credit business in Pingyao city grew with leaps and bounds. During its heyday, there were a total of 22 draft banks in the region, making it the financial center of China.

Although Pingyao city has witnessed a sea of change throughout the centuries, its basic infrastructure of city walls, streets, dwellings, shops and temples are still in tiptop condition, with the basic city layout intact. It is thus, the most well-preserved ancient



Chinese provincial city dating from the Ming and Qing dynasties.

Chongqing—The Mountain City or City Mountain

The mountain city of Chongqing is located on the mountain slopes where the Yangtze River and Jialin River intersect. From the Warring States Period right through to the Qin and Han dynasties, the Chongqing city was already established, with its back towards the mountains and three sides fronting waters. Due to its steep terrain, the buildings and streets of the city were built along various ground levels, resulting in a city which has the appearance of staggered layers of architecture and roads spiraling upwards and around the mountains.

During the early period of the Ming Dynasty, the governor Dai Ding expanded the city and built a total of 17 city gates, of which 9 gates were “water gates” for the manual transportation of water into the city to comply with the needs of geomancy. Unfortunately, fires broke out repeatedly and so, the officials shut down 8 water gates to stop the element of fire from wreaking havoc on their city.

The city gates of Chaotianmen were the largest of all the city gates, and faced the capital city of Nanjing during the early period of the Ming Dynasty. As such, it was the location of choice for local officials to welcome official envoys from the capital city or receive imperial edicts. From the beginning of summer right up to mid autumn, one can witness the turquoise waters of the Jialin River and the muddy waters of the Yangtze River melding together in strong torrents, and creating spectacular whirlpools of water, hence giving rise to the magnificent picture of the powerful rush of the waters of the Yangtze River through the Three Gorges.

Suzhou—Picturesque Region of Rivers and Lake in Jiangnan

The city of Suzhou originated during the end of the Spring and Autumn Period in ancient Chinese history and was once the capital city of the state of Wu. During the Qin, Han, Jin (265–316), and

