REVIEW


reviewed by Nancy Shatzman Steinhardt

Among the increasing number of monographs on Chinese architecture and related subjects published in the last few years in China and in the West are studies conducted in East Asia by affiliates of the Institut Français d’Architecture in Paris. These investigations are published in the form of research reports—with randomly typed copy, abbreviated and occasionally insufficient documentation, inconsistencies in Romanization, and predominantly photocopied illustrations. Yet an interested reader should not be put off by the format. If one is willing to do a little tandem reading and research, these Institut reports are worthwhile summaries of subjects still relatively unexplored in the Western literature about China, and sometimes offer new insights and translations.

Two of the recent Institut publications are concerned with landscape architecture in East Asia and the designs and sites of Chinese capitals, both largely researched and written by Sophie or Pierre Clément, in collaboration with others listed above.

*Architecture du paysage*, whose first author is Sophie Clément, is the more ambitious and polished manuscript. According to the author, it is a study of fengshui, or “Chinese geomancy,” not in general, but emphasizing topographic or spatial issues. It does not explore anthropological, social, political, or economic aspects of the relationship between site and building in China and Korea. Introducing the study is an outline of its approach and issues of concern, including clear and logical definitions of many key terms: fengshui 风水, dili 地理, kanyu 考据, xiangdi 相地, xue 穴, and qi 气. The author next takes up the Chinese compass and summarizes some of the pertinent literature. A lengthy discussion of siting includes more definitions and redefinitions, important illustrations drawn from a variety of modern and earlier Chinese and

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1 Dr. Steinhardt is Assistant Professor of the History of Art, University of Pennsylvania.
Korean sources, and some textual work. When characters and translations are provided, the latter seem generally accurate, and the two together are very useful. Although the analysis is occasionally difficult to follow, the reader senses light being cast on the elusive world of mountain-water relationships, dragons, yin-yang, and the Five Phases. Clément et al. next turn to the issue of siting and the house, the latter word taken to mean a large-scale residence and by extension the village or even city. This part of the book is introduced by a previously published lecture based predominantly on the Clément’s experiences in Taiwan, particularly with one fengshui xiansheng 风水先生, or “geomancer.” Following are case studies of the siting of Korean building complexes, villages, and even capitals from the tenth century on. Again the illustrations are as important as the text. The most interesting illustrations superimpose the positive aspects of fengshui on site plans. The book ends with an essay on the social function of siting in Taiwan by Hervé Denès and a few comments on the importance of fengshui to the state in Korea. There is no general conclusion.

Several themes run through Architecture du paysage. One is relationships between fengshui and acupuncture, from basic terminology to the similar idea of imposing an external system on a given body for the purpose of creating a state of equilibrium between potentially divergent forces. Another theme is topography itself, to which Clément returns whenever possible, although one cannot fully expound the significance of fengshui without taking into account social or anthropological factors. The author never makes a point of distinguishing between the Chinese and Korean systems. Both rely on some of the same texts, but the reader is nevertheless impressed by their differences. Finally, although one can always take issue with definitions, they are necessary to a basic study such as this one. Clément’s willingness to define, explain, and relate each term for a Western audience is another impressive feature of the book.

Pierre Clément’s study of Chinese capitals deals with a single theme, and is therefore more focused than Architecture du paysage. Les Capitales chinoises includes an introduction which describes the ruler’s city as portrayed in the Kaogong ji section of the Zhou li, a survey of selected Chinese capitals that examines their adherence to the ideal Zhou scheme, and a final section on the city of Nanjing.

The author states in his preface that this study originated in research conducted in preparation for Architecture du paysage, but it is difficult to ignore the impression that Les capitales chinoises was undertaken to use up leftover research notes.

The first chapter explains the Chinese theory of city-building. The city is a symbol of central imperial power. Referring often to Jacques Gernet’s work on Chinese civilization, Clément traces the ideal Chinese city from its beginnings in the Bronze Age. He explains the importance of key sites in the multi-millenial history of imperial building in China, but remarks that successive cities tend to stand not on the ruins of former
ones, but alongside them. He also tells the reader that the Chinese capital is not an architectural entity. Rather it is a symbol.

The second part of Les capitales chinoises primarily deals with Chang'an, Nanjing, and Luoyang, with some attention to Kaifeng (Bianliang) in Song times and to Beijing. Clément's discussion is drawn primarily from the research of W. J. F. Jenner, Louis Gaillard, and the Chinese publication Zhongguo chengshi jianshe shi. He draws to a lesser extent on Paul Wheatley and M. Pirazzoli-T'Serstevens. His plans come most often from the Chinese source or Yue Jiacao's Zhongguo jianzhu shi. Had the author looked further into the primary sources of these works, he might have refined or amended some of his generalizations about Chinese capitals. One claim in particular, namely that Chinese capitals did not grow organically, is invalidated by the history of Bianliang in Northern Song times.

The most noteworthy omission in Clément's study is bibliography. In spite of the large amount of archeological research conducted at city sites in China, not one excavation report or periodical article is cited. Neither, unfortunately, is any of the modern Japanese work on Chinese cities, even the recent summary of half a century of Japanese research by Murata Jirō, published as Chūgoku no teito in 1981. Clément says in his preface that this study was limited by the bibliography available to him. The inaccessibility of sources is particularly noticeable in his last section. The most detailed description, that of Nanjing, is largely based on Louis Gaillard's study of 1903, and the sources employed in it. Zhu Xie's copious study of thirty years later, Jinling guji tukao, is not mentioned.

In other words, the value of Les capitales chinoises lies in its short, readable explanation in French of the Kaogong ji description and its implementation at certain key imperial Chinese cities, and in its large number of early and recent plans collected from scattered sources. The very interested reader is advised to pursue Clément's references and other bibliography used in writing them.