

## Revolutions and Cyclic Patterns in Chinese Town Planning: The Case-Study of Shenzhen

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**Abstract :** Colin Chant and David Goodman argue that historians of Chinese pre-industrial cities tend to underestimate revolutions and overestimate cyclic patterns: periods of peace and prosperity in the early part of each dynasty, followed by peasants' rebellions and upheavals. Boyd described these cyclic patterns as part of the background of Chinese town planning and architecture. Thus old ideals of city planning-square plan, southward orientation and a palace along the central axis - are revived again and again in the ascendant phases of several dynasties (e.g. Chang'an, Kaifeng, and Beijing). Along this line of thought, this paper questions the relationship between the "magic square rule" and modern Chinese urban planning. As a matter of fact, the classical theme of "cosmic Taoist urbanism" is still a reference for planning cities and new urban developments, whenever there is the intention to express nationalist ideals and "cultural straightforwardness." Besides, some case studies can be related to "modern dynasties": the first Republic under the Kuo Min Tang, the red People's Republic and the post-Maoist open country of Deng Xiaoping. Considering the project for the new capital of Nanjing in the Thirties, Beijing's Tiananmen area in the fifties, and Shenzhen's urban CBD in late 20th century, I argue that cyclic patterns are still in place, though with deformations related to westernization, private interests and lack of spirituality. How far new Chinese cities are - or simply seem to be - westernized? Symbolism, invisible frameworks, repeating features and behavioural patterns make urban China just "superficially" western. This can be well noticed in cities previously occupied by foreigners, like Hong Kong, or in newly founded ones, like Shenzhen, where both Asians and non-Asian people can feel the gender-shift from New-York-like landscapes to something else. Current planning in main metropolitan areas shows a blurred relationship between public policies and private investments: two levels of decisions and actions, one addressing the larger scale and infrastructures, the other concerning the micro scale and development of single plots. While zoning is instrumental in this process, master plans are often laid out over a very poor cartography, so much that any relation between the formal characters of new cities and the centuries-old structure of the related territory gets lost.

**Keywords :** China, contemporary cities, cultural heritage, shenzhen, urban planning

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