Ma Chün Encyclopedia Article

Ma Chün

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fl. c. 260

Chinese alchemist who created an early compass. Using differential gears, Ma Chün developed what he called a "south-pointing carriage." The design of his compass was probably much like that of the ones that have continued to be used in China communities for the divination art of *feng shui:* a spoon made of lodestone or magnetite ore on a cast bronze plate inscribed with symbols indicating the directions of various constellations. The name reflects early Chinese alchemists' mistaken belief that certain kinds of metal cause a compass to point southward.