THE SHIKONGREN ARCHIVE

VOL. II

Practising Feng Shui

Reading a house, a site, and a grave

Lü Wenyi

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44 essays · www.shikongren.com

How to read this volume

The largest volume in the archive. Forty-four essays moving from the classical procedure — finding the dragon, fixing the seat, judging sand and water, taking the orientation — to the rooms and streets people actually live in.

This is the largest section, and the one most readers come for. It is not a manual of rules to apply to your flat. It is a record of how a practitioner looks at a site: what gets measured, in what order, and what gets thrown out as noise.

The sequence follows the classical procedure. First, what a master is even looking for — which is not "good energy" but a place where a vein of energy stops. Then seeking the dragon: tracing that vein through the landscape until it comes to rest. Then setting the point on the place where it rests. Then sand and water, which are not "mountains" and "rivers" but two functional categories — what holds energy and what moves it. Then orientation, which is a reading of the whole site rather than a compass stuck on a door.

After that the section moves onto ground the classical method has to be stretched over: apartment blocks, public cemeteries, shops on a street, a site by the sea, a village built on water, a temple. Then families — graves, descendants, and what happens when relatives want the same feng shui. The final block is argument rather than instruction: a mountain cannot be pinned, a cut vein is not always a disaster, a missing corner does not damage your career, and feng shui cannot fix laziness.

If you only read three: "What Is Feng Shui? Revisited", "Setting the Orientation in Natural-Science Feng Shui", "Is Feng Shui a Science?"

About this book

This volume collects 44 essays first published at **shikongren.com**, a free public archive of Chinese metaphysics (yixue) maintained by Lü Wenyi. The archive runs to several hundred pieces in Chinese; the English shelf is a translation project, and each essay here was translated from a Chinese original that is still online.

The translation is faithful to the argument rather than to the sentence. Idiom was rebuilt, not carried over. Where an essay names living people in dispute, the translation generalises the name; where a passage was pure invective, it is compressed to the argument and a note says so. Course prices, phone numbers and enrolment notices — common in the Chinese originals — are omitted.

Everything in these pages is a position taken by the author and argued from cases. It is not presented as laboratory finding, and no reader is asked to accept it on authority. The useful test of any claim in this book is whether it describes something you can go and look at.

Free to download and pass on. Please keep the source and credit it; do not sell it. Each essay is also readable, with its Chinese original, at www.shikongren.com.

Compiled 2026 · 44 essays

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CHAPTER ONE

What Is Feng Shui? Revisited

2020-01-27 · 2,223 words

> **Translator's note.** This opens the practice layer. The foundations volume established what qi is and how it moves; this essay asks the question that everything else depends on — *whose* fortune is being read. Lü's answer is blunt: not the family's, not the house's, but one named person's, in one place, at one time. The three variables he names here (environment, time, person) recur in every article that follows, and the Mao Zedong example is the clearest illustration in the whole collection of why "good feng shui" is a meaningless phrase on its own.

In the narrow sense, feng shui means the natural environment — every blade of grass, every tree, every grain of sand, every stream.

In the broad sense, it means the relation between people and the natural environment. Its object of study is that relation, and equally the question of how to use and reshape the environment so that it benefits people, letting them move toward the auspicious and away from the inauspicious. The root of an individual's feng shui is the study of one specific person, during one specific period, existing in one specific environment, and the auspicious or inauspicious state of each aspect of that person's life — not the rough fortune of a clan or a household in some environment. Town feng shui studies a settlement and its surroundings in the same rough way.

Ordinarily, when we say "feng shui" we do not mean the natural environment alone. We mean the environment, plus the relation between people and the environment, plus the relation between people, the environment and time.

Real feng shui has two contents. First, the natural environment. Second, time.

Why study the relation between environment and time? Because people live inside both. A person without time is a corpse; a person without space is a god or a ghost. And in fact even gods cannot do without space — in the legend, Chang'e's living environment is the moon palace.

The purpose of studying feng shui is to use environment and time, through an understanding of how the three — person, environment, time — relate, so that we move toward the auspicious and away from the inauspicious. Anyone studying feng shui therefore has to think about those three elements together.

Traditional feng shui studies the environment alone. Seeking the dragon: which dragon is alive, which is dead. Setting the point, reading the sand, finding the water — all of it is natural environment.

Traditional feng shui does also speak of the relation between environment and person, but what it describes is the good or harm a given environment does to *everyone*. Reading and choosing feng shui ought to be about the good or harm done to one specific person. To speak only of an environment's good or harm to a whole family is wrong; it is not real feng shui. Only the relation between one environment and one person's fate is real feng shui — because a good environment is not good for every member of a clan. Was the feng shui of Mao Zedong's ancestral grave good? For Mao it was excellent. For his brothers and sisters it was very bad. And was it good in every respect for Mao? For his rank, his fame, his social standing, his talent — excellent. For his wealth and his descendants — bad. For his emotional and married life — not good either.

So only when you understand which aspects of a given environment are good and which bad *for one specific person* have you actually understood feng shui. Otherwise all you can say is that some environment is good for everyone or bad for everyone, and that conclusion is itself false. Everyone says Afghanistan is a bad place — but being president of Afghanistan is not bad. Everyone says America is a good place — but begging and sleeping rough on an American street is worse than a comfortable life in China. A feng shui

theory that only says whether a whole environment is good or bad for everybody has, strictly speaking, no value, or very little.



What feng shui should study is whether one environment is good for one particular person. The flaw in traditional feng shui is precisely that it never solved the relation between a specific person and a specific environment. In one house the husband becomes an official and the wife dies. In another, husband and wife both rise and grow rich, and the child dies. Three people live in the same house — why is the difference in their fortune so large? Is that supposed to be good feng shui? If feng shui cannot answer “good for whom, bad for whom,” and only says vaguely that a place is good or bad, it is a fraudulent theory. You would do better choosing a spot yourself than listening to a master of that kind, because such a master is talking nonsense — never mind how fluently. That is also why so many masters ruin themselves.

A friend of mine had studied feng shui for years. When his mother died he did not let his younger brother decide; he found the “treasure site” himself. Then the demolition order came. His brother's house was pulled down and the

brother received two flats and 300,000 yuan in cash. His own house was not touched and he received nothing. He wanted some money from his brother, was refused, and sulked. His son is disobedient and cannot even find a wife. His brother's daughter is top of her school. So: if the feng shui you learned is not scientific, then doing feng shui is also blind. When it works out it is coincidence; when it fails it is inevitable. That is the root of why many masters destroy their clients and destroy themselves along with them. Studying feng shui comes down to one sentence: it is the study of the relation between an environment and one specific person. That is real feng shui.

We have to grasp the relation between one person, the environment and time. Why time? We know that an old house may be a hundred years old and have housed several generations — so why did one generation produce a child who became an official and grew rich, while earlier generations produced only ordinary people? And why, among five or six siblings in the same generation, did only one succeed? The house has not changed. So we also have to see which child's own energy resonates with the auspicious energy of that house.

Suppose you want to attend my lecture. If you do not come while I am teaching, and instead come and sit here after I have gone home to rest, you can sit for a month and never hear a single session. It is not the case that I am always here teaching and you can drop in whenever you like. House feng shui works the same way. The feng shui of a house may be very good, but it is not equally good in every minute — and that brings in time. Which is why one can say: every feng shui is good, and every feng shui is bad. More precisely: there is no good feng shui and bad feng shui as such. What matters is whether this person and this feng shui meet, and act on each other, at an appropriate good time or a bad time. The worst feng shui still holds a little good energy; the best feng shui still holds a little bad energy. The good energy can be identified with feng shui theory — but if you do not know when it will act, it is useless to you.

Take Bill Gates. When he started out he had a few partners and shareholders. After the company turned a profit, two of them took a small dividend and sold out. Gates was, in effect, a huge and auspicious feng shui environment. Four people ran into that environment at the same time. Some of them left before Gates had made his tens of billions, and got very little. The shareholders who held to the end were there for his most prosperous moment. That is to say, time is a crucial part of the feng shui environment too; if you study only whether an environment is good or bad and not when, you may as well not study it. It is the same with shares: if your timing is wrong you are always the loser. That is a question of time.

Feng shui and everyday common sense run on the same logic. We need to know where an environment is good and where bad, and also when it is good and when bad, and further, which person at which time can fully match its good energy. Only when all three questions are clear can we actually solve a person's problem.

For someone already born we cannot solve the problem at the root, but to a large extent we can change that person's fate. A man with no ability of his own need not despair — if he sticks close to a capable man, his fate will not turn out badly. The same with environment: a person whose own fate is poor, living in a very good feng shui environment, is like following an excellent man, and will obtain a small measure of wealth and rank.

The greatest effect of feng shui is on those not yet born — those who are born *after* the feng shui is in place. For those already born it only changes fate to a degree; it will not turn a beggar's fate into an emperor's. We should be rational about this.

Traditional feng shui never solved these three problems in theory. On the surface it discusses liqi, orientation, date selection; it also says this is good for the eldest son, that for the second, that for the third. But in fact its “eldest, second, third” are extremely loose categories, because a clan has more than

one eldest son, and more than one second son. It does not follow that because one eldest son became emperor, every eldest son becomes emperor; or that because one eldest son became an official, every eldest son does; or that because one eldest son grew rich, every eldest son does.

The liqi school of Fujian is famous. One master specialised in orientation and the forty-eight configurations, and everyone said he was formidable; many people studied dragon-seeking and point-setting with him. Once, at a yixue conference, I chatted with him and asked whether his theory could determine who would prosper and who would not. He said yes — he could tell whether the first branch of the family (the main gate), the second, or the third would prosper. They believe their method is already accurate. In fact it is not accurate at all; it is a very long way from accurate. To a client it may seem precise, but looked at through logical reasoning and against objective fact, it is not accurate in the least.

Look at it vertically. Grandfather is the eldest son, father is the eldest son, oneself is the eldest son, one's son is the eldest son, one's grandson is the eldest son — five eldest sons in a row. If the grandfather died young, at twenty-eight, are all the later eldest sons short-lived too? Or if the grandfather became a county magistrate, will all five generations become county magistrates? Absolutely not. But to the client, a reading that says “the eldest branch here will produce a magistrate” is accepted as correct — because clients, and most fortune-tellers too, lack dialectical thinking. Nobody stops to ask *which* eldest son — the grandfather, the father, oneself, one's son, or one's grandson.

Look at it horizontally. Suppose the father has five brothers, and each of the five has five sons. In that generation of cousins, counting the fathers' generation as well, there are six “eldest sons.” Now the eldest son of the eldest brother becomes a magistrate. We declared that this grave makes the eldest branch prosper — correct, the eldest son of the eldest brother did become a

magistrate. But what if it had been the eldest son of the *second* brother? Is the reading still correct? Yes — an eldest son became a magistrate. The trouble is that it was the second brother's eldest son and not the first's. Is your reading accurate? Was it the main gate that prospered or the second? And if it had been the fifth brother's eldest son, then which branch does this grave favour? Such readings are a hundred thousand li from accurate. They mean nothing.

At the very most, traditional feng shui can say “good for the main gate rather than the second or third” — and that is the same as saying nothing. Traditional grave selection is blind selection. If you do well, it is because your own fate is good and your ancestors accumulated hidden virtue. If your fate is miserable, it is because your ancestors did not, and neither did you.

So the study of feng shui must hold tightly to the relation among three things — environment, time, and one specific person. We must always work around those three. That is the correct direction.

CHAPTER TWO

What Is a Feng Shui Master Actually Looking For?

2020-01-28 · 2,500 words

> **Translator's note.** The companion piece to the previous essay, written the next day. If "what is feng shui" is the definition, this is the hunt: what exactly is a practitioner walking a hillside looking for? The answer — an energy the classics call *shengqi* (生气, living qi), which Lü renames "life's primordial motive energy" — is argued through an unusually wide set of examples, from stem cells to the growth rate of rice. It also contains one of the few genuinely funny passages in the collection: a reporter from *Zibo Daily* asks a master what feng shui is, is told "genes," and the master is arrested the same afternoon.

Whether it is traditional feng shui or natural-science feng shui, when we seek the dragon, set the point and read a site — what are we actually looking for? Reading feng shui is not simply checking whether a place has mountains around it and water at its breast. It is not looking at the dragon sand and the tiger sand. It is not, in the end, about setting an orientation and choosing a fenjin.

Guo Pu's *Zangshu* says: "To bury is to store; it is to ride the living qi." In other words, we are looking for something called *shengqi* — living qi — also called earth qi (*diqi*).

So what is living qi? In truth the ancients never worked it out. They simply believed that such a thing as "living qi" existed. It is not a magnetic field. It is not wind. It is not water. Nor is it microwaves, electromagnetic waves, ultrasound, infrasound, or any of the other things people say it is.

Many people, wanting to prove that feng shui is scientific, dress it up in the vocabulary of modern science. The dressing is transparently forced. If feng shui were ultrasound, we could put an ultrasound machine in the living room and be promoted and enriched. If it were a magnetic field, we could manufacture electromagnets and have it on tap. If it were the movement of air, we could buy a few electric fans, arrange them in a bagua formation around the room, sit in the middle and prosper. All of this is the same strained talk, produced by people who want to seem learned and want feng shui to look like science.

There was a master in Guangxi called Gong Daocheng who used to say that the human body carries eight kinds of magnetic field, and that he could change the type of a client's field by adjusting the feng shui, and that the reason a person has bad luck is that somewhere in his body the field is wrong. Modern science has never said there are eight kinds of magnetic field. His “eight fields” are simply the eight directions. It is pure invention.

A master in Zibo, Shandong — Han, let us call him — wrote books on predicting the stock market, books on predicting the lottery, and books on feng shui. A reporter from the *Zibo Daily* went to him undercover and asked what feng shui is. He said: feng shui is genes. The reporter asked what feng shui has to do with genes. He said the reporter was uncultured and would not understand the explanation anyway. It was not that the reporter could not follow the explanation; it was that the master's own education did not run deep enough for him to explain what a gene is. Many masters today believe that a handful of scientific terms will overawe anyone. In a modern scientific society there are plenty of well-informed people; it is only that few of them bother to use what they know to interpret feng shui theory. The reporter went away and published a piece headlined “Feng Shui Master Makes Wild Claim That Feng Shui Is Genes” in the *Zibo Daily*. That same day the master was dealt with by the public security bureau.

There is nothing wrong with interpreting feng shui through scientific knowledge — it is a sound approach and a good way to spread the subject. But do not talk nonsense. “The body has eight magnetic fields,” “feng shui is genes,” “feng shui is all kinds of waves” — this is nonsense, because it does not survive strict logical examination.

So what is living qi? We can characterise it as a form of energy. All energy flows; there is no energy at rest. Air in motion forms wind, which generates electricity; water in motion forms hydropower. The motion of matter is absolute and rest is relative. All motion of matter follows laws, and has its own modes and tracks. Modern science has established that, because of gravity, the flow of energy on earth follows one rule: from above to below, from high to low. Only when we know how energy moves on earth can we know where to look for this living qi.

We can also, rationally, use modern scientific knowledge to think about what this energy actually is, and give it a precise reading: **life's primordial motive energy.**

Our ancestors had in fact noticed the same thing. It was only that science and technology were undeveloped in their time, natural science was still a seedling, and their reading of living qi belonged to a plain materialism. They called this “energy of the primordial motive force of life” the *chonghe zhi qi* — the qi of harmony and balance — meaning energy in which yin and yang are fused one hundred per cent. Solitary yin does not generate; solitary yang does not grow. Only the harmonised yin–yang qi is energy that can be used.

In modern terms, we can understand “life's primordial motive energy” as effective energy which can turn into whatever it needs to turn into. Think of the stem cells in human bone marrow. To a medical scientist they are rather like what we are describing: stem cells have the property that, according to the body's needs, they can be cultured into the cells of any organ. A lung cell cannot become a liver cell, and a lung cell cannot become a brain cell; but a

bone-marrow stem cell can become a lung cell, a liver cell, a brain cell, and so on, as the body requires. A stem cell is not in the absolute sense “life's primordial motive energy,” but it is close to it in a degree. So the harmonised yin–yang qi *is* life's primordial motive energy.

Then what, concretely, is this “life's primordial motive energy”?

The Big Bang theory holds that the universe formed when a dense, incandescent singularity exploded and expanded 13.7 billion years ago. It is the most influential account in modern cosmology. Hawking held that after the Big Bang countless particles were produced, filling the whole universe. He called them subatomic particles. In theory these subatomic particles are evenly arranged. But because there exists in the universe a force that might be called “the primordial motive force of life,” certain particles break formation, recombine and rearrange, and in doing so form the sun, moon and stars, and everything on earth — mountains, rivers, plants, animals, and us.

Every one of us is also made of these subatomic particles. In essence, the material composition of a human being and of all things is the same. From the standpoint of modern particle physics there is no essential difference between a man and a cow. This is also what Buddhism means by Buddha-nature: to realise Buddha-nature is to be able to return to that subatomic state. The reason Sun Wukong could transform was that the subatomic particles in his body could recombine freely — but not entirely freely; only some of them could, which is why his transformations were numbered, seventy-two of them, and not whatever he pleased. Erlang Shen's particles recombined a little more freely, so he had seventy-three. At the level of the Buddha, Shakyamuni could turn a single hand into a universe that Sun Wukong could not jump out of. For Daoists who cultivated themselves into immortals, transformation was likewise possible, and the basis of it was control over the subatomic particles in the body, recombining them according to intention.



As the universe evolved, the earth came to be; as life on earth evolved, we humans came to be. So why are we alive? What actually sustains a human life? Medical scientists say we are alive because we take in nourishment, because our bodies contain protein, calcium, iron, zinc and vitamins. But then a problem arises. Do people who die in accidents or of illness necessarily have an imbalance of calcium, iron and zinc? Go and test a very old man who dies at ninety — his vitamins may be more normal than those of a twenty-year-old, and yet he dies. Which is to say that our living system is not sustained by trace elements, not by protein, not by calories. It is sustained by this “life's primordial motive energy.” The more of that energy your body obtains, in a mode of action matching the primordial motive energy already in you, the more your undertakings will move toward success, and the more your wishes will come true.

As for why we eat, drink and breathe: our life is not sustained by the food as such. It is that this primordial motive energy exists in air, water, plants and animals. We stay alive on these things not because of calcium, iron, zinc or protein, but because the food contains the primordial motive energy that the

living system requires. Ginseng grown for a thousand years works better than ginseng grown for one year, and from antiquity to the present nobody has been able to explain why. If you take a modern scientific instrument and analyse the two by physical and chemical methods, their composition is identical. So why the difference? Because a ginseng root that can live a thousand years is telling you that its own energy is great; if it had no energy it would have died. In the past, northerners lived longer on average than southerners, and were much stronger physically. With no weapons, one northerner could take on three Vietnamese, because the Vietnamese live in the south. Why is southern vitality less tenacious? It has to do with what people eat. Southerners eat aquatic products and rice, which have short growing seasons; northerners eat pigs, cattle and sheep, and grain crops, which have long ones. The longer a plant or animal takes to grow, the more primordial motive energy it accumulates in the process. In modern society the difference has blurred: food moves in both directions, and through intermarriage many southerners now carry northern genes.

Since this primordial motive energy is what sustains us, where is it? It is in the food we eat, the water we drink, the air we breathe, and throughout the universe. As the earth revolves and rotates, gravity draws large quantities of this energy from space onto the earth's surface. Once it lands, it must move according to the earth's rules — which means it must have a mode of gathering. Where does it gather? In theory, in low places. The trouble is that low places hold water, and energy that lands in water flows away with the water. Water does not gather energy; water moves, and energy in water is chaotic and cannot accumulate.

If this energy is really to gather, it can only be in the earth's solid matter, not in water. Only the material of the ground is relatively at rest. High mountains and broad land are where the most of this energy collects. This is why traditional feng shui insists that the water in the bright hall must gather — “if the water does not gather, wealth does not gather.” Only when water is held

does the energy stop and slowly accumulate; if the water runs, the energy runs with it and we cannot obtain it. So the requirement that water gather has a scientific basis. What we are looking for is this primordial motive energy.

Someone may object: we are made of subatomic particles, we already carry the primordial motive force inside us, so why look for it outside? Because we arrive with only what we accumulated in the womb — a very small amount. A person who brings a great deal of this energy from the womb will have a large fate, high office, much wealth, a good marriage and good children. But the amount anyone brings from the mother is limited, and it must be continually replenished afterwards.

Water and air affect people most, because this energy is distributed evenly through them, and so their effect on each person is the same. Precisely for that reason a person cannot concentrate it. Dissolve a lump of sugar in a barrel of water and no one can swallow the whole lump at once.

This energy will collect in soil — but some soils collect more and some less. Choosing a site means finding the place, on the surface or beneath it, where this energy gathers most, and putting it to use. That is the root of site selection. If we build a house where this energy gathers, we will draw more of it, and our wishes will come true.

The law of the universe is that whatever has more energy controls whatever has less. There is no absolute equality in this world; if there were, there would be no point pursuing it. Because there is inequality, we go on pursuing equality. The world is unfair: the earth is more massive than the moon, so the moon goes around the earth; the sun is more massive than the earth, so the earth goes around the sun; the centre of the galaxy is more massive than the solar system, so the solar system goes around it. The animal world is the same: the weaker lion submits to the stronger. Human society is the same: in an army, the man with the best military skills will end up leading, and a man who cannot shoot straight or fight hand to hand will not. A person with great

energy can control others; a person with little energy cannot. The more people your energy can control, the greater your achievement. It is not about being big and tall — what matters is how much primordial motive energy is actually in your body. If there is very little, there is no question of wealth or rank at all.

Reading feng shui, then, means looking for the place on the surface or in the strata where this primordial motive energy gathers most. We may call that energy living qi, or earth qi. And where exactly does it gather? Everything in feng shui — dragon, point, sand, water, orientation, date selection — is an attempt at that question. So first understand what we are looking for when we read a site: what it is we are hunting as we run over hill and valley.

CHAPTER THREE

What Is a True “Dragon Point”?

2017-12-19 · 2,466 words

> **Translator's note.** The most important distinction in the practice layer, stated for the first time in 2017: there are two kinds of point, and only one of them deserves the name. The *maiqi xue* (脉气穴, the vein-qi point) sits on the stratum that carries the vein's energy upstream; the *jiaodian xue* (焦点穴, the focal point) is merely a place where surrounding sand and water reflect or trap a little stray energy. Everything the traditional trade calls feng shui — the embrace of hills, the orientation, the fenjin, the date — is, on this account, a description of focal points. The essay ends with the test cases that the traditional theory cannot answer: the Ming tombs, and the Eastern Qing tombs.

What is a dragon? A dragon is a mountain range, or a water course.

What is a dragon point? A dragon point is that position — that point — within a mountain range or water course (the water course seen on the surface, the strata seen in substance) where the vein energy is greatest and most concentrated.

What is a *true* dragon point? A true dragon point is one of those points where the vein energy accumulating in a mountain range (or water course) is at its greatest and most abundant, and can be used by us most effectively. Because mountain ranges differ in length, height, width and internal structure — or, for water courses, in length, width, depth and flow pattern (this is the surface phenomenon, and it belongs to the focal point; only the strata can locate the vein-qi point) — the vein energy of different true dragon points varies. The greater the energy, the greater the wealth and rank that follow. But however

great or small, any true dragon point guarantees at least an upper-middle level of prosperity.

Traditional feng shui holds that a true dragon point on a dragon come a thousand li is more prosperous than one on a dragon come a hundred li, and a hundred li more than ten. In fact, even if the dragon has come a thousand li, if the stratum carrying the vein's energy upstream of the point is broken or destroyed, the point's energy may well be less than that of a point on a dragon come a single li.

Scientifically and objectively, the prosperity of a true dragon point is not determined by the length of the dragon. It is determined by three things: **the distance, upstream from the point, over which the qi-bearing stratum continues unbroken; the number of undulations within that unbroken stretch; and the thickness of the qi stratum itself together with its density relation to the strata above and below it.** It is emphatically not determined by the surface length of the range, nor by whether the sand and water embrace the site affectionately. Between a true dragon point and a fond embrace of sand and water there is, one might say, no substantive relation at all. Whether the sand and water embrace the point affects it only at the surface level.

A true dragon point is like the mouth of a spring. As long as there is an inexhaustible flow of water underground feeding it — and the vein-qi stratum of a true dragon point is exactly the spring's source — then no matter whether the mouth of the spring is embraced by sand and water, you can put your lips to it and drink sweet water forever. Put your lips instead at the mouth of a spring with no inexhaustible source, and however wide your mouth, however well you wrap it around the opening, you will never drink sweet water forever. As long as water keeps gushing out, eight winds blowing do not stop you drinking; they only cost you some of the energy. But if no water comes out, no wind at all makes any difference.

So a true dragon point always has an inexhaustible supply of vein energy for us to use, and whether it is ringed by hills and embraced by water matters very little. Of course, a true dragon point with hills around it and water embracing it is a beautiful woman in beautiful clothes. But a beautiful woman in rags, or with no clothes at all, is still absolutely a beautiful woman. The relation between a true dragon point and its sand and water is the relation between a beautiful woman and beautiful clothes.

Understand this and you understand why every single imperial tomb in the Ming tombs outside Beijing perfectly satisfies the feng shui rule of “hills around, water embracing, sand and water affectionate,” and yet produced idiot emperors, short-lived rulers, and the emperors who lost the dynasty. You understand why every tomb in the Eastern Qing tombs perfectly satisfies the traditional theory of the “true dragon point,” and yet produced only one wise ruler, the Qianlong emperor, while the other wise rulers were all born at the Western Qing tombs. The “qi-bearing stratum” theory completely explains why the descendants of each individual imperial tomb differ. The “hills around, water embracing” theory cannot explain these facts at all. With our theory of the true dragon point, the actual record of each tomb's descendants can be explained cleanly and completely.



At this point some master will say: Lü Wenyi, if you claim that most of the imperial tombs at the Ming tombs and the Eastern Qing tombs are not true dragon points, why did the Ming and Qing dynasties each last two or three hundred years? A good question, and a sharp one. But in fact it is not really a question at all, because everything in the world follows laws of development and change — the law of inertia and the law of energy. A dynasty is founded because it obtained enormous energy; that energy is spent, and a dynasty dies only when two conditions are met at once: its own energy is nearly exhausted, *and* another enormous energy has already come into being. Take a train already running at speed. To stop it you need a counter-force greater than its momentum — a hillside, a ravine, the brakes slammed on. How long it takes to stop is decided by the contest between the momentum of the train and the counter-energy opposing it. A dynasty rises because its founding ancestors obtained enormous energy; it falls because another, greater energy appeared and in the end consumed the energy of the previous dynasty. But producing

that outcome takes time. That is to say, the fall of a dynasty cannot defy the law of inertia either.

Physics tells us that a body in motion, with zero resistance, will move forever; the smaller the resistance, the longer it moves. And if a moving body meets great resistance but at the same time is continuously supplied with great added force, it will also move indefinitely — and accelerate, if the added force exceeds the resistance; or move for a very long time, if the added force is slightly less; or stop very quickly, if the added force is much less. People and dynasties are alike. All motion is the product of energy: receive energy and you keep moving; receive none, and you stop when you meet resistance.

Understand this, and you should understand the significance of the true dragon point — and why most of the imperial tombs at the Ming tombs and the Eastern Qing tombs are not true dragon points. If a dynasty can continuously obtain enormous energy, then even when a great counter-energy has appeared, it will last a very long time. If it cannot — or obtains it only intermittently — then once the great counter-energy appears, it will die quickly. Understand this, and the two or three hundred years of the Ming and the Qing, and the brevity of the Qin, all become intelligible.

When I say that the true dragon point is decided not by hills around and water embracing but by the structure of the stratum in which the vein's qi lies — and for the flat plains too, the true dragon point is decided by the stratum — many masters who read dead books and read them to death will try every kind of smear against me online, to defend the theory that a true dragon point is decided by the embrace of sand and water: a theory that cannot survive either practice or theoretical derivation.

Why do I say so? Because these masters do not know that the configuration of hills around and water embracing is at most the **focal point** — the smallest-energy kind of point there is — and not the **vein-qi point** formed by the stratum where the vein's qi lies. Because they do not know that only a vein-qi

point has an inexhaustible supply of vein energy for our use, while a focal point holds only a pitiful little focus of energy reflected off the surrounding sand and water and leaking from the strata. Because they do not know that what determines the quality of a person's fate is **form** (*luantou*), not **liqi** — even though they are forever quoting the line “form is the body, liqi is the clothing.” When there is money and reputation to be had, they treat liqi as the body and form as the clothing.

And because these masters do not know the fundamental difference between the vein-qi point and the focal point, they study and propagate liqi — orientation, fenjin, the date and hour — as the root of feng shui. Since the focal point is itself formed by energy reflected from the surrounding sand and water, the size of its energy does bear some relation to orientation, fenjin and date; those factors do influence, to a degree, the auspicious or inauspicious energy of a focal point. That is why orientation, fenjin and date selection have a little accuracy when applied to focal points. But analysed to the bottom, even a focal point's auspicious or inauspicious energy is decided not by orientation, fenjin and date, but by the shapes and sizes of the surrounding sand and water that form the focal point. Orientation and date at most cause a small fluctuation in the energy at that spot.

If friends everywhere can understand this, they will never again fall into the feng shui traps that the clever swindlers of this trade have designed so carefully.

From this article I think readers should be able to see: dragon points come in two kinds, the **vein-qi point** and the **focal point**. Only the vein-qi point can be called a true dragon point; the focal point cannot. The vein-qi point is the dragon point of greatest energy; the focal point is the dragon point of least. A vein-qi point guarantees at least upper-middle prosperity; a focal point guarantees at most the prosperity of a geomancer — which is to say, generally a little above average. A vein-qi point is that spot in the stratum where the

vein's qi lies, where the supply is inexhaustible, most concentrated, greatest, and most effectively usable by us. A focal point is only a spot formed where sand and water reflect, gather or block energy; its energy is far less than a vein-qi point's. Sometimes the two coincide; when a vein-qi point and a focal point fall on the same spot, the good fortune is doubled. Focal points are easy to find, and vein-qi points are even easier — the key is that you must understand where in the dragon the vein's qi lies. **Once you have located the stratum in the dragon that carries the qi, the vein-qi point is easy to find.**



Once the vein-qi point is understood, a whole set of ancient puzzles solves itself. A coffin placed on a cliff face can still produce generals and ministers, great wealth and high rank — because the coffin happened to sit on the qi-bearing stratum. A man living in a cave in a cliff can still produce the same — because he happens to live on the stratum. A man living, or a coffin buried, in flat country with no sand, no water, no river and no hill, can still produce

emperors and ministers — because the spot is exactly where the vein's qi breaks out of the ground. A place where the sand flies, the water runs away, where sand and water turn their backs and shoot at the site, can still produce great wealth and rank — because although the sand flies and the water runs, the point sits precisely on the qi stratum. And a place with hills around and water embracing, affectionate in every particular, can produce not prosperity but poverty, meanness and early death.

Understand the fundamental difference between the vein-qi point and the focal point, and in actual fieldwork you will not be blinded by the partial theory of “hills around, water embracing” and misjudge a site. (Mao Zedong's birthplace, in fact, has a bright hall of reversed-bow water, with sand flying and water running to the northeast, north and northwest.) You will be able to choose a genuine vein-qi point, a site that produces generals and ministers, great wealth and rank. You will be able to use the inexhaustible energy of the vein-qi point to change fate, for yourself and for others, to a very large degree: poverty and meanness into the ordinary, the ordinary into small prosperity, small prosperity into middling, middling into great. Using a vein-qi point raises a person's level of fate by one or two grades. Only those born *after* the point came into use can be emperors or ministers; for those already born before the true dragon point was used, the most that can be done is to raise them one or two grades. A focal point can also change a person's fate — its energy is smaller and the change is smaller, but it is still a thousand times better than a spot that is not even a focal point. For a spot that is not even a focal point produces, at best, a very ordinary person.

A true dragon point holds auspicious energy and dangerous energy both. Only when your **birth order and birth time** align with the direction from which the vein-qi point's auspicious energy comes do you have good fortune to speak of. If your birth order and birth time align with the direction of its dangerous energy, you will have great calamity. And if neither — if your birth order and birth time match neither the auspicious nor the dangerous direction — then

that vein-qi point has only the effect of sand-and-water fortune on you, and no vein-energy effect at all.

The vein-qi point is the true dragon point.

The focal point is not.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Core Secret of Seeking the Dragon and Setting the Point (Part 1)

2017-12-23 · 2,428 words

> **Translator's note.** Part one of the argument that carries the whole practice layer. Lü's method here is analogy, and the analogies are unusually good: a dragon point is where you sink a well, not where the well looks pretty; the surrounding hills and streams are the scenery around the well, not the aquifer. From that he derives the claim that the trade's entire surface vocabulary — embrace, orientation, date — describes decoration rather than supply. The passage on Yang Yun song and Liao Yu is worth reading closely: he is criticising them while insisting their standing is not in question.

When people hear “dragon point” they think at once of the traditional sequence: **seek the dragon, set the point, examine the sand, find the water, fix the orientation, choose the day and hour.** Yes — by “dragon point” I mean *the place where the vein's energy can actually be used*.

A “dragon vein” is a mountain range, or a water course. “Vein qi” is the energy stored in that range or course. A “true dragon point” is that one place — that one point — where the energy stored in the range can be fully controlled and used by us.

Take a homely comparison. There is water in the strata; but the question of *where to sink a well* so that the groundwater can be controlled and used most effectively — that place is like the dragon point. Energy flows everywhere in the human body; only at an acupuncture point can the energy moving through the body be controlled and used most effectively — and that point on the meridian is the equivalent of a dragon point on a dragon vein.

“Sand and water” are merely the things around the dragon point, like the objects around a well. Whether a dragon point exists is not decided by sand and water; it is decided by the structure of the dragon's strata — its landform. Whether water exists is not decided by what stands around the well; it is decided by whether there is an aquifer down there. Whether an acupuncture point exists is decided by whether a meridian passes there, not by the arrangement of muscle and tissue.

Where can you drill water? Where can you drill oil? Gas? Where can you dig coal? Where can you dig iron ore? Where can you build a large reservoir? The decisive factor is not the sand and water on the surface. It is the structure of the strata. Dispense with strata and judge only by surface sand and water, and every place in the country could produce water, oil, gas, coal, iron ore and reservoirs — because if you look only at surface combinations of sand and water, every place looks much the same, in the way that every place has some configuration of “hills around, water embracing.”

But the facts? Facts defeat rhetoric. All real energy is decided by the structure of the strata. Without a stratum that stores energy, no matter how fine the surface arrangement of sand and water, you will absolutely never strike water, oil or gas there. Which is to say: **the core theory of feng shui is seeking the dragon and setting the point.** Only by finding the true dragon point can we change our fate at the root; only by finding the true dragon point can we draw water, oil, gas, coal, iron ore without end. And to find it, one must — only must — understand the theory of **strata structure and the accumulation of energy in strata: the theory of the focal point.**

Relying on surface observation of the dragon's “form, stripping, escort” and on “hills around, water embracing, sand and water affectionate” to find a true dragon point is, in truth, harder than climbing to heaven.

Even the old masters — Yang Yun song, Liao Yu and the rest — could not guarantee that the points they chose by their experience of form and embrace

were true dragon points. A thousand years of fact have settled it: if they could have guaranteed it, their own descendants would not still be geomancers, or poor, or in some cases without heirs. I am not denying the greatness of their contribution to Chinese culture. I am saying only that the age they lived in had no theory of strata structure and energy accumulation, and so they could do no more than explain the theory of vein qi and the dragon point through the visible surface — the dragon's form, its stripping and escort, the embrace of sand and water. Their spirit of inquiry, their practical experience, their philosophical thinking about feng shui laid a solid foundation for those of us who came later. Their standing in the field is not in question.

But the stars turn and time changes. Every science moves forward and approaches the final truth, and feng shui, being a science, is no exception. After several thousand years, as human understanding of landform has moved from the surface to the interior of the strata, feng shui ought likewise to move from studying the surface of landform to studying what lies inside the ground — toward something more objective, more scientific, closer to the actual truth of the subject.

Chinese medicine developed over several thousand years. If it had stopped at the surface diagnostics of looking, listening, questioning and pulse-taking, and never used the CT scan, the X-ray, the MRI, the ultrasound, the laboratory test, it could never have determined accurately where a tumour is or how large it is; it would not even know where in the body the heart, liver, spleen, lungs and kidneys actually sit. Chinese medicine advanced because it took up new science and new discovery, and its power to cure rose enormously. Feng shui is the same. If it stays at observing and applying the surface phenomena of landform, and cannot use new science to dissect what lies beneath, then “seeking the dragon and setting the point” will remain forever an empty theory with no reliability and no practical value.



Once we can see the internal structure of the landform, we have found the location of the dragon's vein qi, and using that vein to set a point and change a person's fate becomes a hundred per cent precise. Decoding the secret of the true dragon point through the theory of strata structure and energy accumulation is then no more difficult than turning over a hand.

But for several thousand years we have not done this. We have only “copied the ancients' books and recited the ancients' examinations.” We have not kept pace with the times, nor pushed our inquiry into the essential truth of the subject any further. Instead we ring endless changes on the old texts — new bottles, old wine — summoning spirits and ghosts, cheating the world, stealing reputations, swindling money. Which is how feng shui came to be regarded as superstition and as a con, and that is a miserable position to be in.

To decode the essential truth of feng shui with the findings of modern science is the inescapable duty of our generation. If we go on selling new bottles of old wine, we will be the criminals of the age. The essence of the old texts we must

absorb without false modesty; the errors of the old texts we must discard without hesitation. Only so can we travel light. Only so can we carry forward and develop the theory of the dragon point that Yang, Liao and the others discovered at such cost — and be worthy of the masters who lie underground. Otherwise we shall be ashamed before them, and have no face to make money from their theory.

By now friends should see: among the six items — dragon, point, sand, water, orientation, date — **seeking the dragon and setting the point are the soul.** And the root of seeking the dragon and setting the point is not the dragon's form and the embrace of sand and water. It is **strata structure and the accumulation of energy in strata: where the focal point is.**

With that theory alone, and no appeal at all to form and embrace, we can accurately explain every one of the world's hard cases. A site with hills around and water embracing, affectionate in every particular, that produces no wealth, no rank, and no descendants. A site where the sand flies and the water runs away, where sand and water turn their backs, that produces great wealth, high rank and a hundred years of life. A dragon of the five defective kinds — bare, broken, isolated, merely passing through, or all rock — that produces ministers and generals and a hall full of grandchildren. A site where one man rises to minister and every other relative dies young. A site where one man rises while the rest of the family are poor, mean and die badly. A site where one man reaches the throne while his relatives are utterly unknown.

With that theory alone we can, in a village or an apartment block that produced a minister, identify precisely the house in which that man's mother spent most of her ten months of pregnancy. In a cemetery crowded like a forest, with no external marker of any kind, we can find the exact ancestral grave of the man who rose to minister. In a graveyard of unmarked mounds we can find the grave of the direct ancestor after whose burial a particular person's fate changed fundamentally. In a village or a block we can find the

house of the one person whose fate changed after settling there. None of this, and none of these explanations, is possible on the theory of form and embrace.

Survey the imperial tombs of the Tang, Song, Ming and Qing, and you will understand why a “true dragon point” with hills around, water embracing and every liqi rule correctly applied produced emperors who died young and ruined the state. Which proves: the root of the dragon point is strata structure and energy accumulation — where the focal point is. The form and the embrace are only a surface phenomenon of the dragon point. Only in the strata, only at the focal point, is there inexhaustible, endless energy; only with that energy can our fate be changed at the root.

Why can the dragon point change our fate at the root, while sand, water, orientation and date cannot?

Because the dragon point's energy is powerful and inexhaustible, while sand, water, orientation and date cause only a slight fluctuation in it. Without a true dragon point, no configuration of sand, water, orientation and date will give you a powerful, inexhaustible supply. With a true dragon point, you get that supply even with no configuration at all.

Some masters say that without the protection of sand and water the energy of a true dragon point will be blown apart by the wind. To which I say only: as long as the water keeps coming, the wind blows away a portion and does not affect your use of the water in the least. If no water comes at all, what does it matter that the wind does not blow it away? You would rather have the water and the wind. Of course it is better still if the water is sheltered and not blown away. But the essential thing is to understand **which factor matters and which does not, which is principal and which secondary.** A man who cannot tell principal from secondary, and talks at random, is no feng shui master.

Energy is the root of fate. To change a person's fate you must obtain great energy, and only great energy changes a fate at the root.

A homely illustration. A person already born is a car that has left the factory: its quality and performance are already fixed. If you want to improve that quality and performance fundamentally, there is one effective way — rebuild it. If you only service it, maintain it and swap parts, its quality and performance will not change fundamentally. Rebuilding the car is like using the inexhaustible energy of a dragon point to change a person; servicing and swapping parts is like adjusting the sand and water around a point, or changing the orientation and the date. Only sufficient energy changes a fate at the root, and only a true dragon point supplies it.

Once a person has the power of a true dragon point, his fate changes at the root: poor to rich, small wealth to middling, middling to great; mean to honoured, small honour to middling, middling to great. But understand this: however much energy a person already born obtains from a true dragon point, he cannot cross more than two grades above the innate level that the feng shui of his birth environment had already fixed. A car built as a car cannot be rebuilt into an aeroplane; but it can be rebuilt into a car of one or two grades better quality. For a person not yet born, the energy at the true dragon point sets at least the floor of the wealth and rank he will have after birth. A true dragon point can be used for a grave, and equally for a dwelling. Either way it changes, at the root and most effectively, the fate of the descendants of the buried and of those who live on the spot.

A scientific theory of the true dragon point should be spread widely, for the benefit of all. Students of feng shui should be able to answer the contempt and misunderstanding of every layer of society by changing their own fate first. Only when a master has improved his own fate will others believe in his real level, and believe he is capable of improving theirs. If the geomancer himself

is begging in the street, how can anyone believe he has the ability to change another man's fate?

Using a true dragon point, we can change our fate at the root and most effectively. Without one, every method of changing fate is still effective, but only on the surface and to a small degree: an up-and-down fluctuation within the same level of fate. Only the true dragon point lifts us onto a higher level, and so achieves a thorough change.

In one sentence: the value of the true dragon point is that it changes our fate at the root and lifts us into a higher level of fate.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Core Secret of Seeking the Dragon and Setting the Point (Part 2)

2017-12-24 · 1,631 words

> **Translator's note.** Part two moves from "what a point is" to "what can be done about it." The distinction here between *manifest* and *latent* energy (显性能量 / 隐性能量) is doing a lot of work: two people can be identical in weight, looks, schooling and character, and still carry very different latent energy — the way a kilogram of uranium and a kilogram of coal differ. It also introduces the birth-order matching rule (*rending dingwei*, 人丁定位) that decides whether a given point helps or destroys a given person, and ends with an unexpected claim: a vein's energy need not lie underground at all, which is how a flat on the twentieth floor can sit on a dragon point.

There are very many ways to change the fate of a life. At the large end: transmuting the energy of fate, adjusting feng shui, adjusting by medicine. At the small end: names, the six relations, colour, number, the five elements, talismans and incantations, praying to gods and Buddhas, qigong, cultivation practices, releasing living creatures. All of them can change a life to some degree. But the degree is confined within the level of innate fate that the ancestral grave and the family home had already fixed before birth — an up-and-down movement inside that level, and nothing more. None of these methods can change a fate at the root.

Once a person is born, it is as though a car has left the factory. You may change what the car is used for, change the environment it is used in, replace its parts, change its name, change the driver, change its colour, change its number plate, change the fuel, consecrate it, chant over it, paste talismans on

it, take refuge for it, tune and service it — by none of these means will that car become a different car at the root. The only way to turn it into another car is to rebuild it, and the more thorough the rebuild, the less it is the original car.

A person's fate is the same. The best way to change it thoroughly would be for the mother to select a true dragon point to live in, carry the child there for ten months, and give birth to him all over again — which is a joke. So can a human fate really not be changed at the root? We can say with absolute certainty: it can.

How, then?

We know that to change a car fundamentally without altering its outward appearance, we can rebuild its power train, its suspension and its running gear. Once those three are rebuilt, the car's performance differs essentially from what it was. A person's fate is the same. Without changing a person's **manifest energy**, we can fundamentally change his **latent energy**. A person's wealth or poverty, honour or meanness, fortune or disaster, longevity or early death are determined by the latent energy within his fate. Two people whose manifest energy is identical — same weight, same looks, same schooling, same cultivation, same morals, same temperament — do not necessarily have the same latent energy of fate. (A kilogram of uranium and a kilogram of coal contain utterly different internal energy.) Without touching the manifest energy, changing the latent energy of a fate changes the fate at the root.

And the only way to change a person's latent energy at the root is to let that already-born person receive the inexhaustible, enormous energy of a true dragon point. Only a true dragon point has such a supply — just as only a well drilled into the oil layer produces oil, into the gas layer produces gas, into the coal seam produces coal, into the water-bearing layer produces water. Without the true dragon point there is no inexhaustible supply. With it, the fate of an already-born person will certainly change at the root.

So how is an already-born person to get that supply?

First, by moving the grave of his closest blood ancestor to a true dragon point. This transmits the energy indirectly.

Second, by building or buying a house and living on the point itself. This receives the energy directly.



Once a person has that supply, how much will his fate change?

1. It depends first on the level of innate fate fixed by the ancestral grave and family home before his birth. The higher that level, the higher his capacity and efficiency for receiving the energy of the true dragon point. If the birth environment fixed him at the level of a geomancer, and the true dragon point he later obtains is of the level of a prince or a marquis, he will rise to the provincial or ministerial level. If the birth environment fixed him at the level of the poor and mean, then even with a princely point he will not become a provincial governor; the most he can reach is middling wealth and middling rank.

This is exactly like rebuilding a car. If it left the factory as a little four-wheeled farm cart, no rebuilding will turn it into an Audi. If it left the factory as a

Santana, it can be rebuilt to Audi performance.

2. It depends second on how much energy the true dragon point itself has. Is this a dragon come a thousand li, a hundred, or ten? And can the way the vein's qi circulates actually deliver that qi into the point we have chosen? The more distant the source and the better the circulation pattern suits the point's intake, the greater the change in the fate of the person who receives it.

3. Vein qi has auspicious and dangerous aspects, and true dragon points do too. And because the recipients differ, the same point is auspicious for one person and dangerous for another. At one and the same true dragon point, different people who receive the inexhaustible supply will show utterly different fates: one dies young, one rises to minister, one ends in ruin, one has no descendants. This is why siblings born into the same pregnancy environment have different fates, and why the descendants of one ancestral grave have different fates.

So even after finding a true dragon point, you must understand the theory of how a point relates to **birth order and position within the family** (*rending dingwei*). Only then is the outcome guaranteed. Without it, the result may be ruin.

From all this it should be clear: to change a life at the root, the person must receive the auspicious energy of a true dragon point, and only then does the change become fundamental. Apart from the true dragon point configuration, every other method of changing a life is a fluctuating adjustment inside a fixed level of fate. None of them can cross the innate level that was fixed at birth.

With the theory of strata dissection and energy accumulation in strata we have decoded the vein-qi point, and can apply it in practice to benefit people and change fates. With it, the true dragon points of every kind of incoming dragon can be found simply and conveniently, and the inexhaustible energy of a true dragon point can change a human fate at the root.

The true dragon point is the only method of changing a human fate thoroughly at the root.

Where, then, is the true dragon point?

At the stratum where the energy accumulates, and at the focal point of the landform's energy.

1. In yin-dwelling feng shui — graves — true dragon points exist, but they are suitable only for burying (or reburying) the remains or ashes of one's closest blood ancestors.

1. In yang-dwelling feng shui — houses — true dragon points also exist, in dense cities and in open countryside alike. Choose the point and live on it, and the fate of the person whose energy corresponds to that point's auspicious energy will change fundamentally: poverty to wealth, meanness to honour, small wealth and small honour to middling, middling to great.

If a child is born after the family has moved onto that point, and that child corresponds to the point's auspicious energy, then the outcome follows the length of the dragon. A dragon under one li: wealth in the millions, rank at the county bureau level or fame within a county. Under ten li: millions, and rank at the county or regimental level, or fame within a county or city. Under a hundred li: tens of millions, and rank at the prefectural level, or fame within a province or city. Over a hundred li: hundreds of millions, and provincial or ministerial rank, or fame at home and abroad.

So in country and city alike, true dragon points are everywhere; find one and you can become rich and honoured. At this point some swindling master will ask: “In the city everything is tower blocks, some of them dozens of storeys high — are all hundred floors from the first to the hundredth wealthy and honoured?” I can answer plainly. **Vein qi is not only underground or at ground level; it can also be high in the air.** How deep below the surface or how high above it the vein's qi runs is decided by the way the qi circulates

— by the direction in which the strata's energy moves inside the rock. If a stratum tilts upward, the qi is in the air, not underground. Whichever floor of the building receives the energy jetting out of that inclined stratum, the household on that floor containing the corresponding auspicious person is the one that prospers.

Which is to say: the true dragon point may be as high as the sky or as low as beneath the ground. Its position is decided entirely by the structure of the strata and the landform.

CHAPTER SIX

The Dragon Vein: Passing the Canopy, Crossing the Gorge, Binding the Breath

2020-03-15 · 538 words

> **Translator's note.** A short technical note, and the clearest statement in the collection of what *chuanzhang*, *guoxia* and *shuqi* actually refer to — three names, the author insists, for one place: the narrow saddle where two summits are joined by a ridge. The essay is worth reading for the last two paragraphs alone, which argue that importing the feudal hierarchy of ruler and minister, father and son into a natural science is a category error. "Whether there is oil underground has nothing to do with the social system."

A dragon vein runs from the ancestral mountain to the parent mountain to the point-star. Where the vein stops is the dragon's head; where it begins is the tail. Low ground is the head, high ground the tail. "Head" and "tail" here do not describe the animal's shape. They describe where the vein's qi comes to rest. Traditional feng shui holds that the vein's qi travels *inside the ridge*, from high ground toward low, and so the place where the qi runs out is called the head.

Looked at as a whole, the vein rises and falls, and the long narrow join between two summits is where it **passes the canopy, crosses the gorge, and binds its breath**. In substance these three terms mean one and the same place. (See the figure.)

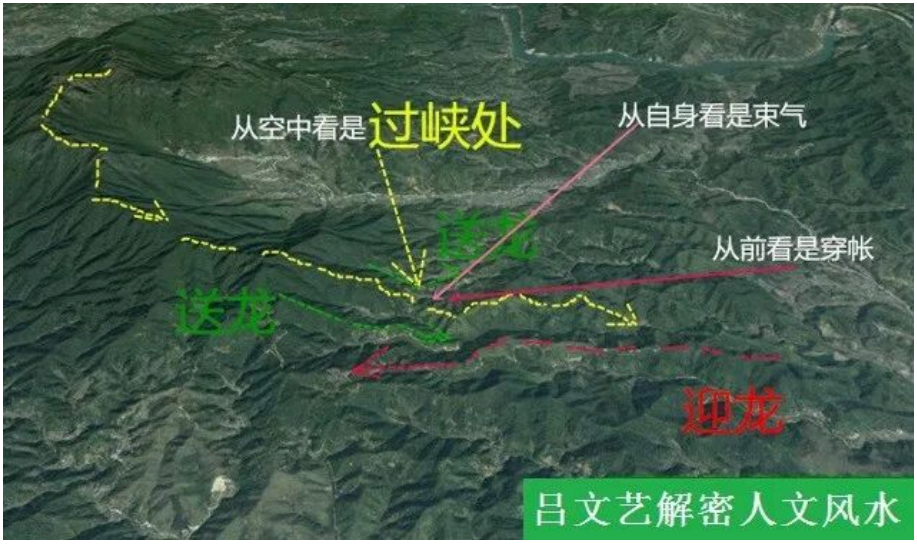


Shu means something drawn together into a single strand. Seen from the vein itself, the vein goes from thick to thin and back to thick; at the thin place the qi is drawn into one line, and that is why it is called “binding the breath.”

If you stand at the point-star where the vein ends and look back at the constriction, the qi appears to come out through the mountains on either side, like a man emerging from behind a hanging curtain. Hence, figuratively, “passing the canopy.”

If you look at the constriction from the air, the escorting mountains on either side form a gorge, and the vein's qi passes through the gorge. Hence “crossing the gorge.”

Traditional feng shui holds that if the constriction is broken, the passage through the canopy has failed and the dragon ahead of it is a dead dragon. For the crossing to succeed there must be escorting dragons on both sides. If there are no escorts to left and right, or if the constriction is cut through, the crossing has failed. (See the second figure.)



Strictly speaking, every dip between two summits is a gorge crossing. The vein's qi moves the way an emperor moves: it needs attendants before and behind, guards to left and right, or the emperor is both undignified and unsafe.

Traditional feng shui carried the human world's hierarchy — the three bonds and five constants, ruler and minister, father and son — straight into the subject. In fact the notions of human ethics and the theory of feng shui have nothing whatever to do with each other. Moral and humanistic ideas belong to the social sciences. To interpret a natural science through the humanities and social sciences is absurd in itself. Whether there is oil under the ground has no relation to the social system; natural disaster has no relation to human morality.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Is a Cut Dragon Vein Always Bad Luck?

2017-12-29 · 1,472 words

> **Translator's note.** This is the article that makes the theory testable. If the vein's qi lies in a particular stratum, then breaking that stratum should change a site's fortunes — and it does, in both directions. The four diagrams describe a site that produces nothing for five hundred years, then produces great wealth the moment a road is cut through the hill above it. Lü adds a rebuttal to the "period luck" school that is worth following closely, and quotes the Ming author Xie Heqing against it.

Every feng shui master, ancient or modern, Chinese or foreign, will answer without hesitation: a cut dragon vein is inauspicious. My answer is: **a cut dragon vein is not necessarily inauspicious at all.**

Why so absolute? Masters, do not lose your tempers. Let me explain.

What is a dragon vein? A mountain range or a water course. What is vein qi? The energy stored in that range or course. Where in the range does the vein qi lie? Yang, Liao, Zeng and Lai — the founding masters — never said clearly. Why not? Because in their time there was no theory of strata structure and the accumulation of energy in strata. They did not understand that oil has its stratum, gas its stratum, coal its stratum, iron its stratum, gold its stratum. They did not understand that energy is stored in particular layers. Naturally they did not know which layer of a dragon holds the qi that affects human fate. So they took the wholly conservative route to protecting the qi: do not dig the dragon. Cut the dragon and you cut the qi.

The objective fact is otherwise. There are very many ancestral graves and dwellings that for generations produced no great wealth, no high office, no

ministers and generals — and then a road was run along the dragon, a hillside was quarried, a tunnel was bored, a bridge was built, a reservoir was dammed. Overnight those poor sites became sites of great wealth and high rank.

Why? The masters of liqi, who cannot distinguish principal from secondary, will explain it by "period luck" (*qiyun*). So let me put a question to them. A site has been in use for five hundred years. Why was there no period luck before, and only after 1990 was there any? Is the luck of the first seven-period different from the second, third and fourth? One *yuan* is a hundred and eighty years — is the luck of the first hundred and eighty years different from the second and the third? At this the swindlers will say: the luck is the same, but the people born are different. So I ask again: in five hundred years of use, with more than three thousand births, is there not one person with the same zodiac sign and the same life palace? There are dozens of pairs of twins — why do their fates diverge so widely?

Xie Heqing, author of the *Shenbao Jing* and a great Ming-dynasty figure in the field, wrote: "Form is the orthodox. To discuss fortune and misfortune by compass and hexagram is to glue down the pegs and carve the boat — a side road, fragmented and mistaken." Which shows: any master who explains a feng shui question by period luck is simply a swindler who keeps finding fresh reasons to prove himself right.

I am not denying period luck. It has its own science and its own truth. But the study of period luck is emphatically not the core theory of feng shui. **Period luck causes a slight fluctuation in vein qi. If there is no vein qi to use, the best period luck in the world will not produce a minister; if there is vein qi to use, the worst period luck will still produce one. Whether a site can produce great wealth and high rank is decided by vein qi, not by period luck.**

With that understood, let us return to the question: why does cutting the dragon sometimes produce great fortune? The figures will make it easier.

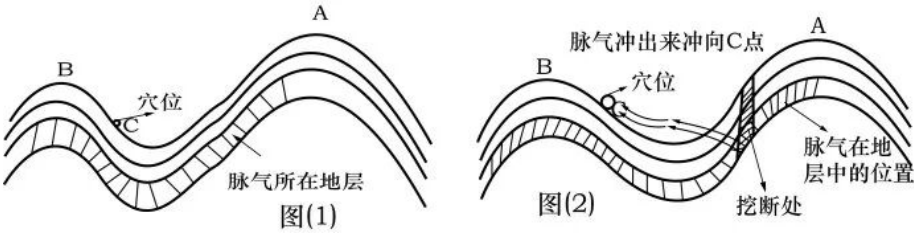


Figure 1. Before hill A is cut, the vein qi passes underground and has no connection with point C. Point C receives no energy.

Figure 2. After the stratum holding the qi is cut through, the vein qi pours out and runs down the slope of hill A straight at point C. Point C therefore receives the vein's qi — which is why the people at C became rich very quickly after the hill was cut. But when the excavation continues to the point where the terrain no longer lets the qi flow to C, C stops producing wealth.

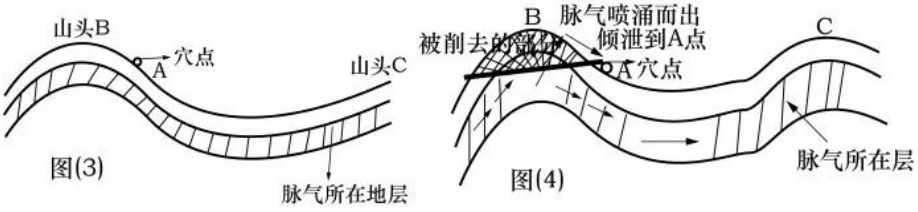


Figure 3. Here point A is far from the qi stratum and does not touch it. A receives nothing, and produces neither wealth nor rank.

Figure 4. When the summit B — the backing mountain behind point A — is levelled, the qi stratum in the vein is cut. Once cut, the inexhaustible qi gushes out of the strata and pours onto point A. A receives the vein's qi, and the people at A become wealthy, even to the level of ministers.

These two examples show how cutting a dragon can be auspicious. It does not follow that a dragon must be cut to be good. The point is this: **whether a point can produce great wealth and high rank depends on whether the point receives the vein's inexhaustible qi. Whether the stratum**

has been cut or left intact is beside the point. What matters is whether the point lies in the stratum that holds the qi, or can come into contact with the qi inside that stratum. If it does not, it will never produce a minister. Only when the point sits exactly on the qi-bearing layer, or touches the qi within it, can it produce great wealth and high rank.

Yang, Liao, Zeng and Lai did not know the structure of strata and did not know which layer the vein qi occupies, or how it gathers and flows. Judging only by the visible form of the surface, they could not guarantee that the point they chose lay on the qi-bearing stratum or touched the qi. That is why those founding masters did not manage to change their own descendants' fates into great wealth and high office; their descendants ended up poor, and remained geomancers. (And even had they found a true dragon point, they had no precise notion of the *magnitude* of energy, so they still could not have guaranteed that their descendants would reach ministerial rank. The degree of prosperity is set by the amount of energy in the vein. If the vein holds little, even an accurate point will not produce ministers; it will guarantee some prosperity, no more.)

Understand this, and you understand why cutting the dragon sometimes enriches and why an intact dragon sometimes produces nothing. But readers should grasp a more important point as well. If the dragon is intact *and* the point happens to lie on the qi-bearing stratum, that is many times better than obtaining the qi by destroying the stratum. Getting at the qi by breaking the layer that holds it is, after all, killing the goose for the egg.



After reading this, friends should be clear on the following.

1. Because the strata of different dragons differ, the vein qi is stored in different layers.

2. Only if the vein's qi is in close contact with the chosen point can that point produce wealth, or rank, or a minister.

3. True dragon points are very numerous, but their energy varies enormously — and that variation is set by whether, and how badly, the qi-bearing stratum is damaged between the ancestral mountain and the point. The less damaged that stratum is, and the further its unbroken run reaches, the greater the prosperity. The more badly damaged, and the shorter the run, the smaller.

4. The more unusual the position of the qi-bearing stratum within the dragon, the greater its energy. Which layer the qi occupies is the core secret of seeking the dragon and setting the point.

5. Feng shui is a science, not a mysticism. It is objective and dialectical, not mechanical and dead. It is something we must keep developing and

perfecting; the ancients did not reach the final truth. A master who does not study and research but only follows the old rules will decline with each generation. Only by using new science and new discovery to develop the subject can feng shui become a science, and benefit the practitioner, the client and society. Otherwise masters are only reheating the ancients' cold rice — cold rice with grit in it — and their descendants will end up carrying on the trade as poor geomancers, exactly as before.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Where in the Strata Does Vein Energy Accumulate?

2020-05-12 · 2,145 words

> **Translator's note.** A field manual in disguise. Two rules about where energy collects — downstream of a dipping layer, and in the layer of lower density — are followed by the practical question every grave-digger faces: how deep? Lü's answer is that the old books' inch-measurements are useless because they were groping after something they could not name, and that the real criterion (stop when you reach the five-coloured earth) is a density test in plain clothes. The essay then turns to the east–west asymmetry that decides whether a slope collects energy or scatters it, which is the most mechanically specific argument in the collection. One paragraph of curses against plagiarists has been reduced to a note, and a telephone number appended to the text has been removed.

1. Vein energy accumulates downstream of a dipping stratum.

Because of gravity, everything on earth must move from above to below. So the greatest quantity of vein energy gathers on the downstream side of a sloping layer.

2. Vein energy accumulates most in the stratum of lower density.

Density is the amount of substance per unit quantity. In physics, the mass of a unit volume of a substance is called its density. Steel is denser than cotton; stone is denser than soil. Why does more vein energy gather in a low-density layer and less in a high-density one? Because the lower the density, the greater the gaps between molecules — which in effect increases the surface area. A material with more surface area can absorb and hold more of other materials and of energy. Suppose every molecule of rain falling from the sky were a unit

of vein energy: a ball of cotton and a block of steel of the same volume — the cotton will hold far more water molecules than the steel. So a low-density stratum holds more vein energy than a high-density one.



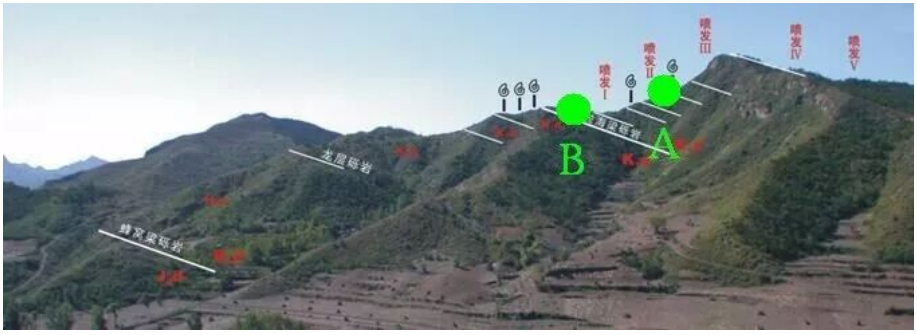
This figure also bears on how deep to dig a foundation, or a grave. How deep is auspicious? The old books give many measurements: one foot eight, three feet six, three feet eight, four feet five, four feet eight, five feet five. But none of them fixes an invariable figure. Why did the ancients give so many depths and never tell us which one is auspicious? Most practitioners have never thought about it.

The truth is that the ancestors could not tell you how deep to dig a particular pit, because different landforms require different depths. So how did they judge? **They had one criterion: stop when you reach the five-coloured earth, or earth that is clearly auspicious.**

In practice, one site may reach the auspicious earth at two metres; another at twenty centimetres. Dig deeper and you may cut through the layer — and if the layer is cut, the vein energy drains away and you get none of it.

The ancients had no concept of strata, but they did talk about five-coloured earth. Understand: a change in soil colour is in substance a change in soil density. Where density does not change, colour generally does not either. On the loess plateau, dense soil looks darker; less dense soil looks paler. In the south the colour changes are more various — red, white, yellow, purple, layer upon layer, each distinct. The ancients had already noticed the strata; limited by the science of their time, they did not pursue it. So they told their descendants: dig until you reach the auspicious earth, and stop. Their explanation was not scientific, but seen through the lens of strata it is clear why they refused to lay down a hard rule of four feet eight or five feet five.

In actual practice, local grave-diggers mostly fix the depth by local custom. In Hequ county, Shanxi, the usual depth is five feet five. In the Lüliang region, pits go as deep as six to nine metres. The younger the deceased, and especially where the death was violent, the deeper the pit — nine metres. The reasoning is simple: only if the dead are buried deep will the ghost be pressed down and unable to come out, unable to go home and harm the living. For an old person of eighty or ninety who died a natural death, the pit is about three metres. All of this is local folk custom and the habit of the local grave-diggers. So what is the right depth for a foundation, or for a grave? The criterion should be: **dig to the layer where the vein's qi is most concentrated and holds the most energy.**



A mountain like this looks continuous, and its form is well made. Setting aside the surface energy gathered by the shape of the land, and looking only at the energy in the strata: here the direction of the strata's energy does not agree with the trend of the mountain. Set a point at A and you get no vein energy, and nothing auspicious will happen.

(The original interrupts the article here to say that because plagiarism is rampant in the trade, the author reserves some core material for his face-to-face classes, and appends a curse on anyone who steals his writing. The curse has been omitted.)

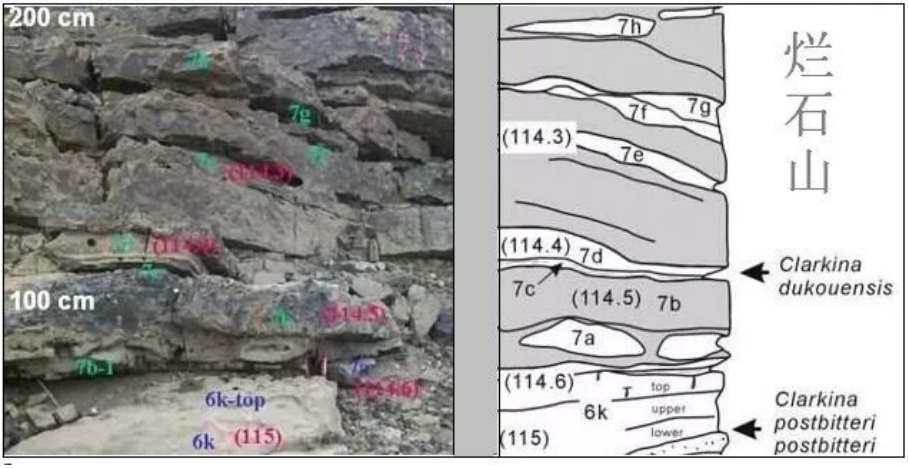
In practice, when looking for a point we must consider both the energy underground and the energy on the surface. If the two coincide, the fortune is great. If they do not, we must at the very least obtain one of them — either the underground vein energy or the surface energy.

In the figure above there is a point at B which cannot obtain the underground vein energy. Suppose the terrain runs high in the east and low in the west. We know that the earth's revolution and rotation both run from west to east. The vein energy that is useful to us falls to the ground from space, and then gravity draws it toward B — so the point at B will produce wealth and rank. This is the scientific reason why **sand in the east is auspicious.**

Conversely, if the terrain runs high in the west and low in the east, then B gets no underground energy, and although the energy falling from space would in theory be drawn toward B by gravity, the earth's rotation and revolution generate a force running from east to west. The two opposing forces make the energy on the western slope chaotic and unusable. Energy that cannot be used we describe as inauspicious — not because the energy is in itself bad. This is the root reason why two identical landforms can differ in fortune according to the direction of the slope.

Traditional feng shui, unable to explain this, goes wrong again and again in practice. The same landform: a point on this hill produces wealth, a point on

that hill produces nothing or runs of bad luck. Unable to find the cause, practitioners transferred the question to the water mouth and to orientation, hoping to solve by orientation why identical configurations differ in fortune. The ancestors could not solve it; the *Guolu Yinyang* — the *Golden Lock and Jade Gate* — tried to. But the *Guolu Yinyang* is a summary of experience with no theoretical basis at all. Some clever practitioner noticed in the field that sand in the east is auspicious and water in the east inauspicious, that sand in the west is inauspicious and water in the west auspicious, and composed a great many mnemonic verses and made them into a book. He never raised the experience to the level of theory. Experience is no substitute for theory, which is why the verses of the *Guolu Yinyang* prove inaccurate in many cases in the field. Water in the east is supposed to be inauspicious — yet some families with water in the east prosper very well. And the original text of the *Guolu Yinyang* contains no theory of sitting, facing and fenjin at all; the fenjin material now printed in editions of the book was shoved in by modern hands.



By traditional reckoning a rubble mountain like this holds no energy at all. It is called a “broken army mountain,” a place where nothing may be buried.

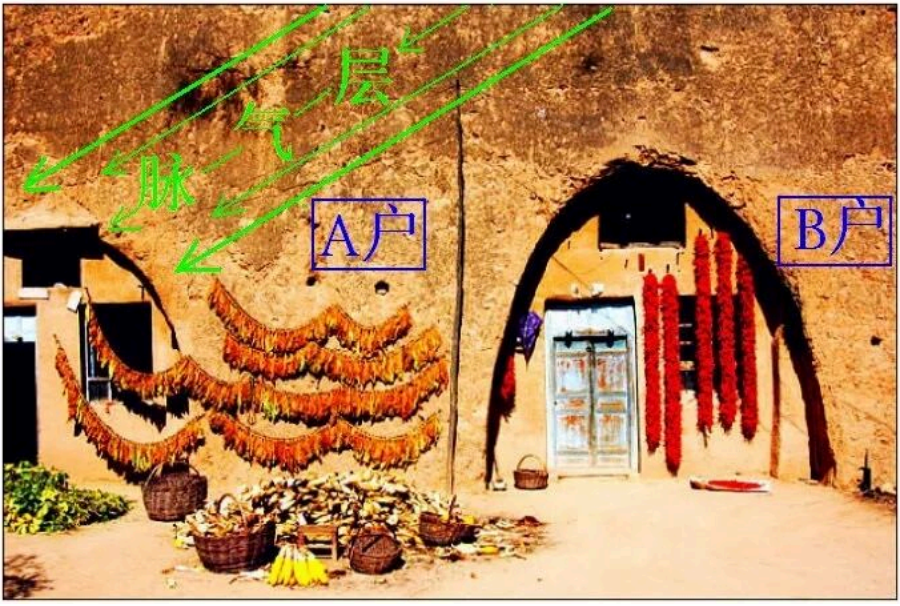
In reality, in Shandong, Gansu, Ningxia and much of the south, mountains look exactly like this — and they too produce wealth and rank. Someone may ask: does the vein energy not simply run away? Yes, some of it certainly runs away. But how much each household receives is a comparative matter. Every household's water pipe leaks; the household whose pipe leaks least gets the most water. On a rubble mountain some loss is normal; no stratum is ideally complete. If the energy is auspicious, then the household whose point loses least of it will be the one that prospers most.

Understand that the energy in the strata is extremely stable. It is very hard to destroy — unless you cut a mountain or bore a tunnel, there is in general no way to damage it. By contrast, the energy formed on the surface by the shape of the land is unstable. Plant a row of big trees beside the house, set up a gravestone, put up a cowshed next door — any of these will have a large effect on the feng shui. Any change whatever in the surface landform changes where the surface energy gathers and how much gathers there.

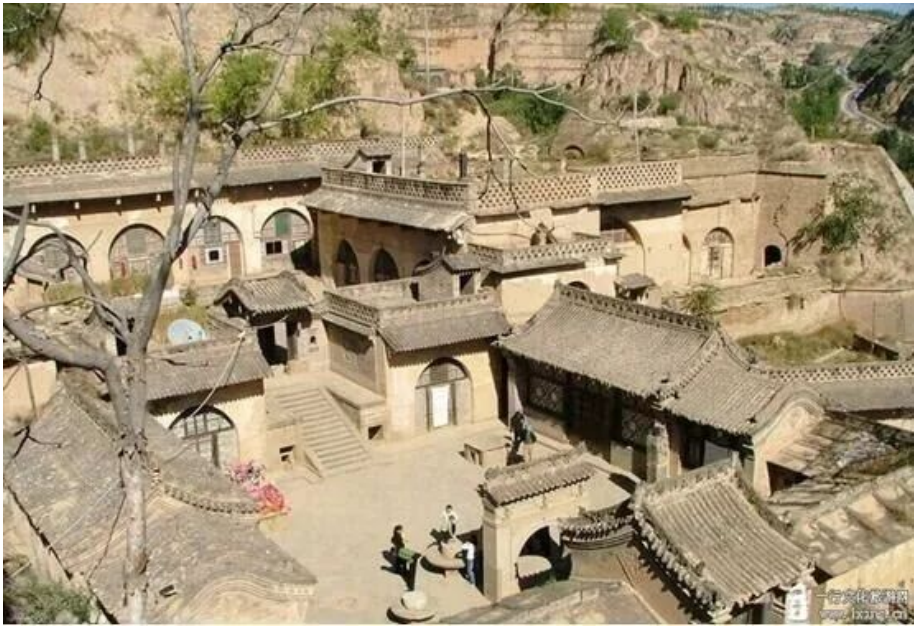
Traditional feng shui says that building a temple on a mountain will suppress the dragon. Dynasty after dynasty, emperors afraid of rebellion built temples all over the country to pin the dragons down. Did it work? Not in the least. The idea belongs to feudal superstition. The dragon is a protector of the Bodhisattva — how could the Bodhisattva press the dragon to death? If you keep a fine horse to ride, do you go home and strangle it for something to do? The Bodhisattva is all compassion: if the dragon suffers, she suffers; if you suffer, she suffers. Why would she suppress it? Many people in this trade understand nothing and simply assume that a temple will pin a dragon down. It will not. There is no point discussing this superstitiously, and still less point discussing it scientifically.



The cave dwellings of northern Shaanxi and the Shanxi loess plateau have no hills around, no water embracing, no hollow, pincer, breast or mound. Obtain the auspicious vein energy from the strata and they produce wealthy and honoured people all the same.



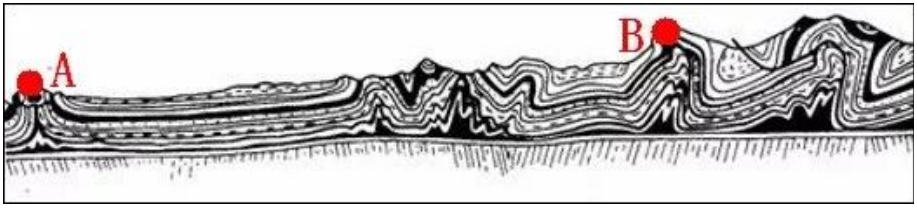
Suppose these are two neighbouring cave dwellings. The vein energy in the strata enters household A and cannot enter household B. B gets nothing — and the difference in fortune between the two households will be enormous. On the loess plateau you see it among brothers: three of them marry and live in three adjoining caves, and every child born in one cave turns out able, while every child born in another is dull, or dies young. On the loess plateau most wealth and rank comes from vein energy in the strata, not from energy gathered by the surface landform.



This is the ancestral home of a large landowner on the loess plateau before 1949. The compound happens to sit exactly on the qi-bearing layer; all the auspicious vein energy went into his household. Even the neighbours who sat on the same layer were robbed of it by the landowner's house. That is what “grabbing the feng shui” means. And in fact the families around the landowner's house were all ordinary peasants.



If the auspicious layer flows only into household A, A will have wealth and rank and the others will have none. But if the land here runs high in the north and low in the south, and the vein energy comes from the north, then several households will benefit — even the pets and livestock kept there will live happily. Auspicious vein energy is useful not only to people but to animals, and even to objects. In real life, a parking space affected by inauspicious vein energy is forever being scratched or involved in accidents. The stretches of road where serious crashes keep happening are, in substance, caused by the feng shui environment.



Suppose the shaded band is the qi-bearing layer. Setting a point on either hill A or hill B is what traditional feng shui calls a “heaven point,” and the method is what it calls “contracted burial.” Put the point on A and you get vein energy, and wealth. Put it on B and you get nothing at all — B not only fails to receive the stratum's energy, it loses its own. In real life a heaven point rarely makes

anyone prosper, because it is very unusual for the energy in the strata to return all the way up to a summit.

CHAPTER NINE

Precautions When Setting the Focal Point

2020-05-16 · 1,831 words

> **Translator's note.** A short, sharp essay on remediation, and the best demolition of the trade's two favourite explanations that I have seen in this collection. “Four ounces deflect a thousand catties” and “you strike the mountain's death point the way a needle stops the heart” are both, Lü points out, true statements attached to objects nobody has ever located — the mountain's heart, the building's death point. What follows is the positive doctrine: do not block bad energy, deflect it, or move the origin. The Yu the Great passage makes the argument better than any feng shui text could. As usual, a paragraph of curses against plagiarists has been reduced to a note.

With a focal point, if more energy arrives from inauspicious directions and less from auspicious ones, the point is mostly inauspicious. If more arrives from auspicious directions and less from inauspicious ones, it is mostly auspicious. Remember: no feng shui can be a hundred per cent auspicious. There is always some inauspicious energy in it, because among the twenty-four directions of the full circle, with all their sand and water, it is impossible that every grain of sand and every stream is auspicious. That is precisely why we need to choose a site, and why we need to adjust one.

And what is the purpose of choosing and adjusting?

The purpose is to let the bad energy pass us by, and to make the good energy flow onto us — into our ancestral grave, into our house.

When choosing a site you must avoid the effect of inauspicious energy. How? We have discussed the question of “flow.” How does flow work? In fact, once

you have learned to find a focal point you should already understand it. Suppose all the energy coming from the northeast is inauspicious. Then when you set the point you must arrange matters so that the northeast energy passes you by. However inauspicious the northeast energy may be, it will then have no inauspicious effect on the point, or very little.

When adjusting a site, the methods — shifting the origin, planting a row of trees around it, building a wall, building a house — serve the same end: move toward the auspicious and away from the inauspicious, let the bad energy pass us by, and let the good energy meet us unplanned.

How, then, do we achieve this in choosing and adjusting sites? First we must understand what feng shui actually is, what we are looking for when we look for it, and what causes auspicious and inauspicious feng shui. If we follow the traditional routine — move the door, change the facing, hang a qilin, hang a bagua mirror — it does have an effect, but the effect is produced by psychology. That is psychological feng shui, and it does not belong to natural-science feng shui. In other words: psychological feng shui alone cannot solve the fundamental problem. It can only make a very small adjustment.

In practice the simplest and most effective method is to shift the origin, or to let the inauspicious energy pass us by — not to block the bad energy and turn it back. Understand: no human-made object can turn bad energy back. However advanced a bulletproof vest is, it stops only ordinary rifle and pistol rounds. If a missile is coming at you, you can wear the vest and hide in a tank and it will do you no good. **Understand that this world is a material world, and energy is its master.** Can you hang a bagua mirror and reflect the energy of the building opposite back at it? Every traditional master says yes — and has a theory to support the absurdity.

The first theory: four ounces deflect a thousand catties.

On the surface it sounds entirely reasonable. But it does not survive logical analysis. You say a bagua mirror can deflect a thousand catties with four

ounces, and can turn aside the energy of the inauspicious sand charging at you. I too believe in four ounces deflecting a thousand catties; I grant it is true. But how many thousand catties does the mountain opposite have? How many four-ounce portions does your mirror need? The mountain opposite does not have ten thousand catties — suppose it has ten thousand *times* a thousand catties. To deflect that, do you not need ten thousand times four ounces? Without them, how will you deflect it? Every martial artist knows that four ounces can deflect a thousand catties. The question is whether a three-year-old who knows the technique and can perform it can deflect a grown man standing in front of him. The “greatness” of traditional feng shui lies in its skill at deception: it plays logic games with you. The theory is correct; the mountain opposite cannot be deflected with four ounces. You would need an uncountable number of them. So the doctrine collapses under its own reasoning. Which is to say that any master who tells you he will neutralise inauspicious sand and water by the four-ounces method is a fool — or, to put it precisely, a master who understands nothing.

The second theory: the principle of the acupuncture point.

The argument is that sticking a needle into a man's heart will kill him. I believe that too. Not only a man: stick a needle into an elephant's heart and it will go down and lie still, and may die. The question is: where is the heart of the mountain opposite? Where is its death point? How many points does a mountain have? Which of them would stop that mountain's energy from acting in our direction? Do you know? Does any master know where the points of the mountain opposite are? When the sharp corner of a building opposite is aimed at you, where is that building's death point? I believe that if the death point of a building were found, a very light force might neutralise its adverse effect on you. Natural scientists have said that the earth too has a death point, and that if it could be found, a single grenade might detonate the planet and reduce it to dust. That is a scientist speaking, not a fable. It can be calculated physically. Find the earth's death point and a grenade would indeed

do it. But where is it? The same scientists say the universe contains wormholes, and that if we could find one we could travel between the stars and make the old young again. But where is a wormhole? Nobody has found one.

So every theory in traditional feng shui looks correct on the surface, and every one of them plays cat and mouse with our descendants and our clients. For profit it commits one recurring logical error: it swaps one term for another in order to deceive us. “Four ounces deflect a thousand catties” and “striking the death point” as methods of averting harm do not survive logic, nor analysis of the objective facts, nor the test of practice.



Vein-qi points and focal points alike have their auspicious and inauspicious aspects. The best method of choosing a point and adjusting a site is not to block the inauspicious energy but to **lead it away.**

Why not block it? Because the inauspicious energy is not a small quantity. If it were tiny — a leaf falling on your head — you would not need to neutralise it at all. If it is great, like a mountain falling, the best response is not to catch it but

to let it pass you by, to step aside, or to guide it off at an angle in another direction. That is the root of choosing and adjusting feng shui.

Go south and you will see bagua mirrors hanging on houses along both sides of the street: large and small, round and square, convex and concave, every variety, each reflecting the others. These are the masterpieces of feng shui practitioners. The Taiwanese master Yang Dengke recommends hanging a gold compass as his method for averting harm in every case. I ask: can a mirror, can a compass, return energy? How much energy does your mirror or your compass have, that it can return the energy of nature? These are tricks, or at best they work by psychological adjustment — and most ordinary people believe in them completely. We must be clear: this method of averting harm is surface work. Its function is psychological. It makes the client feel secure.

The principles that should govern genuinely choosing and adjusting a site for someone are these:

First, lead the inauspicious energy past the site.

Second, avoid the inauspicious energy — that is, shift the origin.

Without these two methods, every technique of adjusting feng shui and averting harm is either ineffective or barely effective. The only effect is psychological.

(At this point the original repeats its warning about plagiarism and appends a curse on plagiarists. The curse has been omitted.)

Our ancestors already told us the method for leading inauspicious energy past us. Everyone has heard the story of Yu the Great taming the waters. In the time of Emperor Yao, the Yellow River flooded constantly. To stop the flooding and protect the fields, Yao called the tribal chiefs together and asked for someone skilled at water management. Gun was recommended. Gun took the task and built dykes to hold the water back — a wall of triple height, a simple earth rampart thrown around the settlements to keep the flood out.

After nine years he had not succeeded, and he was exiled to Mount Yu, where he died. Emperor Shun then appointed Gun's son, Yu. Yu reviewed his father's experience and replaced “enclosing and blocking” with “dredging, guiding and clearing the obstructions” — following water's natural tendency to run from high to low, and opening the choked channels along the lie of the land. He led the flood into cleared riverbeds, into hollows and lakes, and from there to the four seas. The waters were subdued, and the people came down from the high ground to live on the plains and farm again. Yu became the first king of the Xia dynasty, and was remembered as “Divine Yu.”

Our ancestors understood that water must be guided, that it cannot be stopped or turned back — so how could the energy of feng shui, energy falling from the sky, possibly be blocked?

Besides: to us on earth, vein energy is zero-state energy. It passes through any object. Can a bagua mirror stop it? This zero-state energy gathers somewhere because of gravity. It is not an energy our eyes can see — just as we cannot see air, though air objectively exists, and the reason an aircraft can fly is that air exists. This energy, which fills the universe and fills the dragon veins, is invisible, but it is objectively there. And just as air lifts an aircraft, this energy can change our fate.

CHAPTER TEN

The Twenty-Four Sand Burial Methods, in Photographs

2020-05-05 · 1,568 words

> **Translator's note.** Twenty-four named ways of placing a coffin, each keyed to the shape of the point-star. The names are mostly pictures — drawing a bow, leading two oxen, shouldering an open umbrella, carrying a saddle — and the translation keeps the image because the image *is* the instruction. This is the traditional vocabulary at its most concrete, and it is worth comparing with the two essays on the taiji halo already in this collection: the same field, described from the ground rather than from the theory. Many of these methods require tunnelling in from the side rather than digging straight down, a point that matters in practice and is easy to miss. The author's opening note that he gives only a thumbnail reading of each photograph, reserving detail for his classes, has been kept, since it explains the compression.

The twenty-four sand burial methods are a way of setting the point that takes the *shape of the point-star* as its standard.

(The original notes here that plagiarism is rampant in the trade, that the author's articles have been copied widely, and that in consequence the readings of the photographs below are deliberately compressed — enough to make the point, not enough to teach the method. The full detail is reserved for his face-to-face classes.)

1. Drawing the bow (牵弓). The summit of the incoming dragon tilts over toward the saddle on one side, in the posture of a man drawing a bow with both hands. The point goes at the “rat flesh” — a descriptive term: when you

draw a bow hard, the pectoral muscle swells up like a rat lying there. That is also where the strength is concentrated, and it is what decides whether the arrow flies.

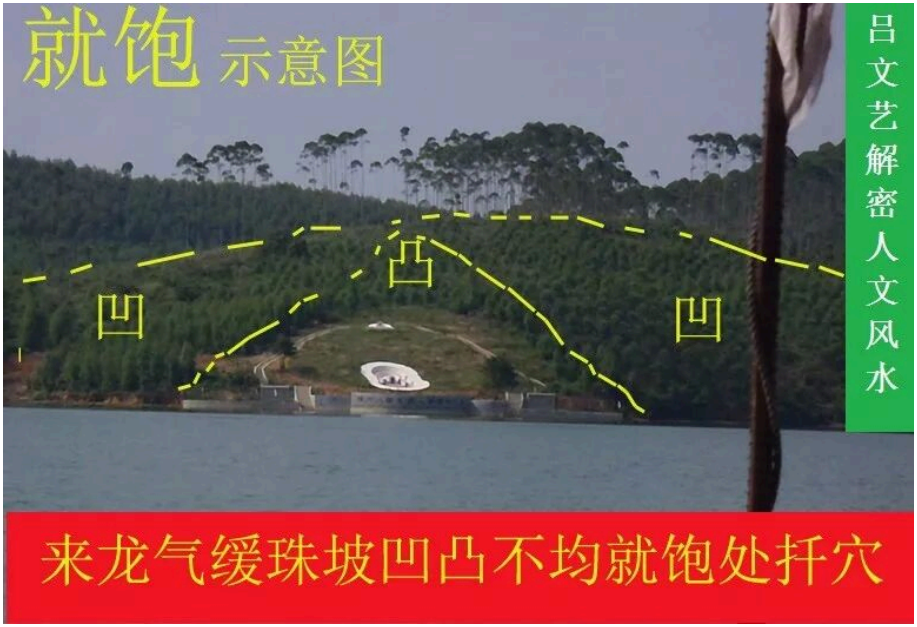




2. Leading the ox (牵牛). An earth-form mountain runs as the dragon, and at the point of entry two metal-form hills rise suddenly. The parent mountain is earth-shaped; at the entry two metal hills appear; the point is set on the metal hills. It looks like a man leading two oxen at once.



3. Going to the full (就飽). *Jiu* means to draw near; *bao* means the place where the vein energy is most concentrated. The incoming vein is slow, and although you have a point like a piece of jewellery, the slope is uneven — so set the coffin at the fullest part.


就饱 示意图
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就饱 示意图
珠坡面高低不均就饱处扦穴
吕文艺解密人文风水

4. The post station (停驿). *Ting* means to stop; *yi* is the ancient relay station, and here means the place where the vein energy collects. The qi comes fast along a high ridge; a small knot forms below on flat ground, and at the entry there is a place where the carts and horses halt.



5. Horse-mane burial (馬鬣封). *Lie* is the long hair on the neck of certain animals. On the high ridge there is a hollow, and within the hollow a mound. Do not dig a pit on top of the mound; tunnel in from the side of the mound, slide the coffin in, and seal the mouth with earth — the way a horse's mane falls over to one side and closes a wound on its neck.



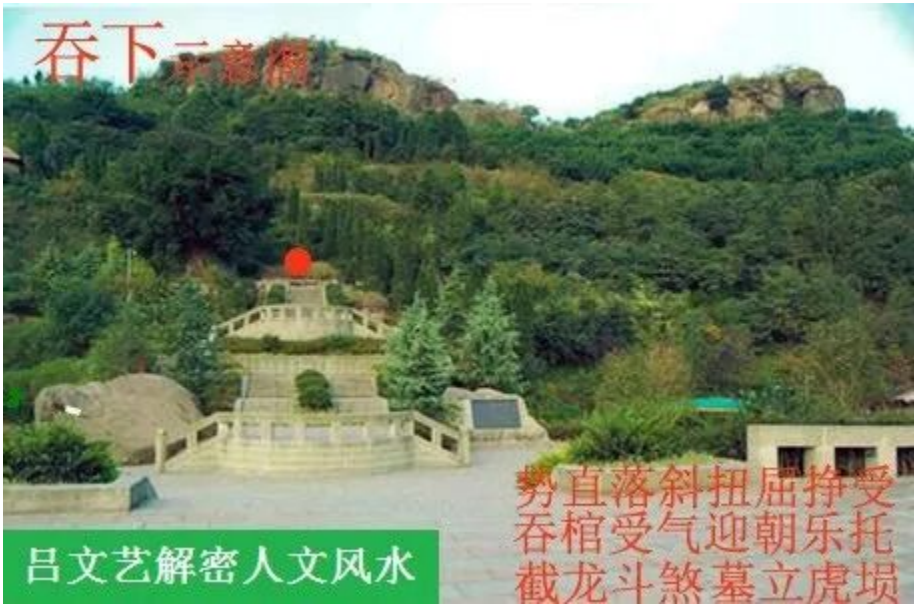
6. Sunken burial (沉葬). The point-star is high and the dragon and tiger sands are low. Bury the coffin low, keeping it level with the dragon and tiger sands.



7. Grasping and pulling (拿扯). The incoming dragon is steep and urgent, the bright hall narrow and long, the table mountain close. By observation and thought, find the place of greatest energy within the arena and place the coffin there, with its height gauged against the table mountain.



8. Swallowing down (吞下). The dragon falls straight and steep, twisting and wrenching as it takes the blow. The method is to swallow the point in and open the shaft below; the point's disposition is high, with the intent of fighting the sha.



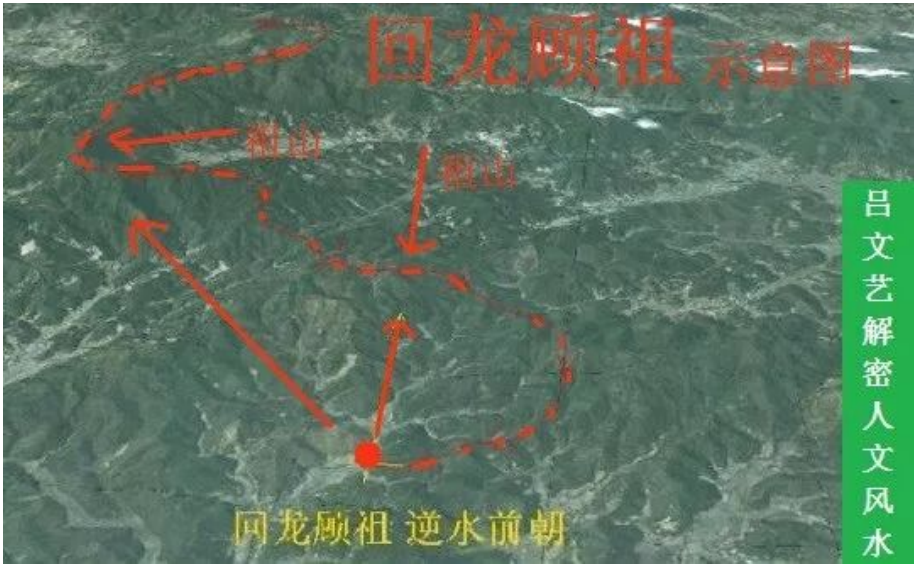
9. Shouldering an umbrella (擔傘). The vein's qi rushes straight down. Bury the coffin *beside* the qi line, not on top of it. The metal-form hill is shaped like an open umbrella and the qi line is the handle; the coffin steps aside from the handle, the way a man carries an open umbrella on his shoulder.



10. Two baskets on the arm (大小腕藍). *Wan* is written *wan* (剜) in the old books. When the dragon arrives, two metal-form hills of different size extend from a side arm. If they are not metal-form, it is not a true dragon point. Set the point where the energy gathers at the entry. The smaller metal hill has the look of a dragon turning back to regard its ancestor. The landform resembles a man with two bamboo baskets hanging from his arm.



11. The returning dragon regards its ancestor (回龍顧祖). The dragon comes on steep and hard; after crossing the gorge it turns around, opens its face and knots, looking back toward its source.



12. Bumping the point (撞穴). The dragon is steep; standing below, the bright hall is shallow and small, and the departing water crosses at an angle. Tunnel in and insert the coffin so that its *side* faces the qi — never with the head of the coffin toward the qi.



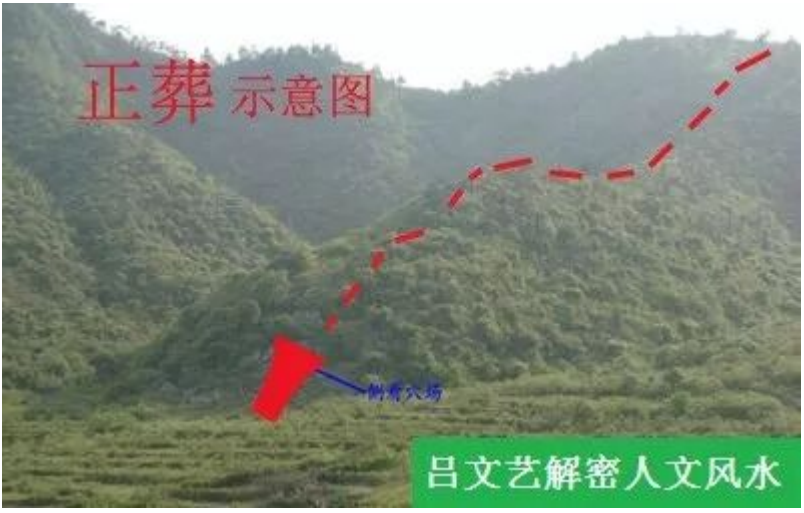
13. Holding the child (抱兒). Steep above, gentle below, with the dragon and tiger sands pressing in. First find the waists of the dragon and tiger; then look at how the waters join, and whether the dragon sand wraps the tiger or the tiger wraps the dragon. Only a bent arm can hold a child, so set the point in the bend of the dragon or tiger sand.



14. Spitting burial (吐葬). The dragon descends, and a mound inside a hollow knots like a dewdrop about to fall from a blade of grass. This is called “spitting breath.” If the dewdrop is broken, the qi does not gather — so you can only set the point sticking to the pearl.



15. Straight burial (正葬). The dragon is neither urgent nor slow, its escort is neat, and the coffin receives the vein's qi head-on.





16. Piled grave (壘墳). The dragon has both a cover and a seat: steep above, gentle below, a single mound rising on flat ground, and stone within the mound. Skim off the loose soil, cut the shaft shallow, bury straight, and then pile the earth up into a grave.



17. Floating burial (浮葬). *Fu* means toward the top, brought up high. The green dragon and white tiger are high and the point-star is low; bury the coffin high, because the low ground carries too much yin qi.

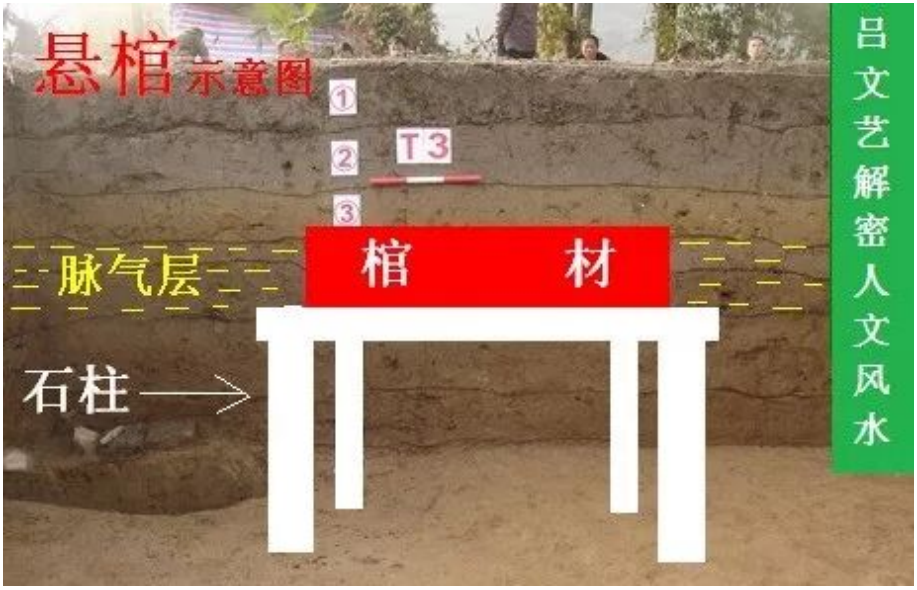


18. Opening up (打開). The mound is tall, broad and full. Dig a deep pit on top of it, build four pillars inside the pit, and suspend the coffin.



19. Hanging coffin (懸棺). The vein's qi is urgent rather than slow. Although the sand and water at the knot are perfect, the knot lies deep below.

Dig a deep pit, line it with brick or stone into a large chamber, set four stone pillars upright inside it, and rest the coffin on the pillars. The height of the coffin matches the height of the qi.



20. Cutting the wood to make it sprout (扦木生芽). The dragon drops its vein like a long straight tree trunk — what is also called a long black-tortoise beak. In such a place, even if every corroborating sign says the site is auspicious, you must never set the point at the very end of the vein, head-on; that would ruin the line. But along this long straight trunk there will be a node, like the joint of a bamboo, and at the thick part of that node you can open a shaft and place the coffin — enough to pick up three-tenths of the prosperity. It works like grafting a tree, which is why it is called cutting the wood to make it sprout. Bring in earth from elsewhere, pack it firm, and make the grave neat.



21. Fighting the axe (鬥斧). A straight dragon knots, but with no dragon or tiger sands to wrap it. Instead the ghost and halo sands turn over and lie across as facing mountain and table mountain, and a bright hall forms, so that the point can receive the living qi. The look of it is the point-star of the straight dragon jammed into the socket where an axe head takes its handle. Because the dragon comes straight and the reception is sideways, it is called fighting the axe.



22. Wounded ridge (傷飢). *Ji* here means the ridge. After the dragon arrives there is a taiji halo in the open face, and the vein's qi runs down along the spine. The coffin must be placed hugging the spine line.



23. Carrying the saddle (擔凹). A horizontal dragon knots. Metal-form hills stand on either side, and the point is set in the middle, carried between the two metal hills.



24. Riding the dragon (騎龍). The dragon reaches flat ground and does not stop; it goes on and raises a mound ahead. The table mountain crowds close on the point, so the point is exposed and cannot gather qi, while the rear dragon presses in behind. Withdraw to higher ground and set the point there.



CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Four Point Methods — Hollow, Pincer, Breast and Mound — in Photographs

2020-04-30 · 378 words

> **Translator's note.** The four elementary point methods, named for what they look like: a hollow, a pincer, a breast, a mound. The critical point — and it is easy to skim past — is that these four are not methods of *setting* a point but methods of *finding the arena*. They tell you where the dragon has knotted; they do not tell you where inside that arena to dig. The accompanying photographs, seven of them, show the four shapes on real hillsides.

There are many ways to set a point. The four most commonly used are the **hollow** (窩), the **pincer** (鉗), the **breast** (乳) and the **mound** (突).

Given a dragon that is a true dragon, whether there is a true dragon point on it is decided not by the surrounding sand and water but by whether the body of the dragon carries landforms of these four kinds — hollow, pincer, breast, mound. Traditional feng shui says that a dragon stops when it meets water: that is, where the dragon reaches flat ground, or walks into the water. At the place where it stops, we look to see whether the slope carries one of these four distinctive shapes. If it does, the true dragon has knotted there.

The four methods are not precise ways of setting a point. They are ways of finding the arena in which a point may be set.

So what do the four landforms actually look like?

1. The hollow (窩穴). The mark of the hollow is that it is round and empty. When the feet of the dragon sand and the tiger sand curl inward to embrace, the arena so formed is a hollow.





2. The pincer (鉗穴). The mark of the pincer is that it is long and empty. When the feet of the dragon sand and the tiger sand extend outward without embracing, the arena so formed is a pincer.


钳穴示意图
吕文艺解密人文风水



3. The breast (乳穴). The mark of the breast is that it is long and round — like a long loaf laid on the slope.


乳穴 示意图
吕文艺解密人文风水


乳穴 示意图
吕文艺解密人文风水



4. The mound (突穴). The mark of the mound is a hemispherical shape — like half a ball set down on the hillside.




突穴示意图
突
吕文艺解密人文风水


突穴示意图
吕文艺解密人文风水

CHAPTER TWELVE

The Focal Point in Flat Country

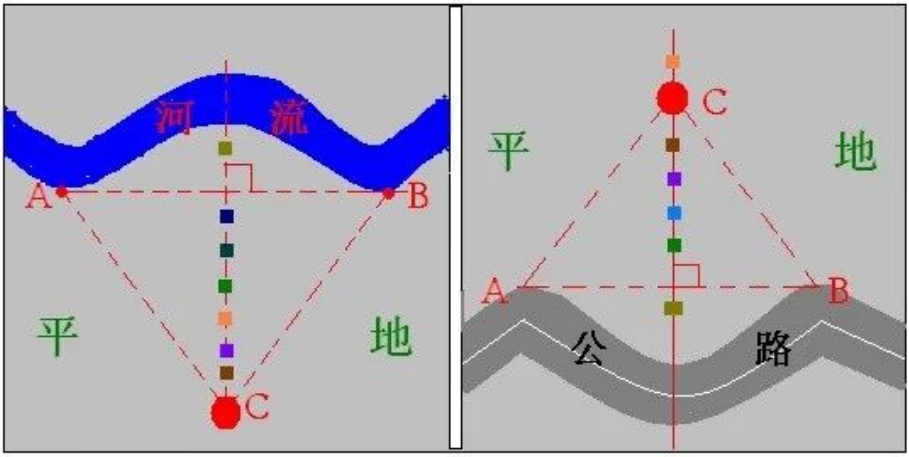
2020-06-24 · 821 words

> **Translator's note.** A short, technical piece with an unusually clean rule in it. In flat country the old books looked for “water dragons,” because rivers were the only large energy-carrying features on a plain. Modern roads do the same job, and there are far more of them. The essay gives the geometric construction for locating the strongest focal point at a bend or crossing — the third vertex of an equilateral triangle — and then a table for deciding whether a given bend helps or harms. The caveat at the end is the honest part: these rules apply to focal points, not to vein-qi points, and a vein-qi point outranks an angle of water entirely.

On a plain, a focal point can be formed where a road or a river bends or crosses.

1. How to find a focal point.

Where is the focal point? There is a criterion. (See the figure.)



The focal point lies on the perpendicular bisector of the line joining points A and B. There are many focal points along that bisector, but what we want is the one of greatest energy, and that one can be calculated: it is at point C, the third vertex of the equilateral triangle ABC, where AB = AC = BC.

On a plain, a focal point formed by a bend or crossing of a river or a road carries a great deal of energy — much more than the surrounding sand and water: the houses beside it, the crossing water, and the rest. The focal point's energy is of a different order.

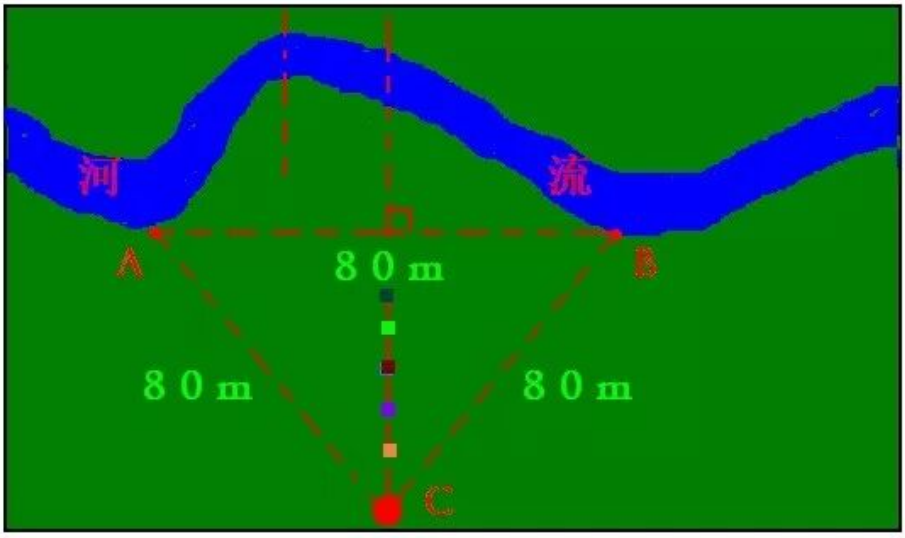
Flat-country focal points are auspicious or inauspicious. Practice shows that an auspicious focal point certainly produces wealth and rank; an inauspicious one certainly brings serious misfortune.

The old books on the plains always speak of finding the **water dragon**. In the past there were no roads to speak of, let alone railways, so on a plain the only large dragon was the river. In modern flat country, roads, motorways and railways also form focal points of enormous energy — and there are far more roads today than there are rivers.

Reading feng shui on a plain today, the first thing to look at is the focal point formed where a road or a river bends or crosses, because that focal point

outranks the energy of angle water and of all the other sand and water.

Note carefully: focal points do not always lie on the centreline of the bend.



This is because landforms differ, and the place where the vein energy gathers therefore differs. It is a physical cause. In reality, most river bends are irregular.

The focal point at C carries the greatest energy. The points around C carry progressively less.

2. How to judge an auspicious or inauspicious focal point formed by a water dragon or a road dragon.

The auspicious and inauspicious character of sand and water by direction.

Taking the eight palaces:

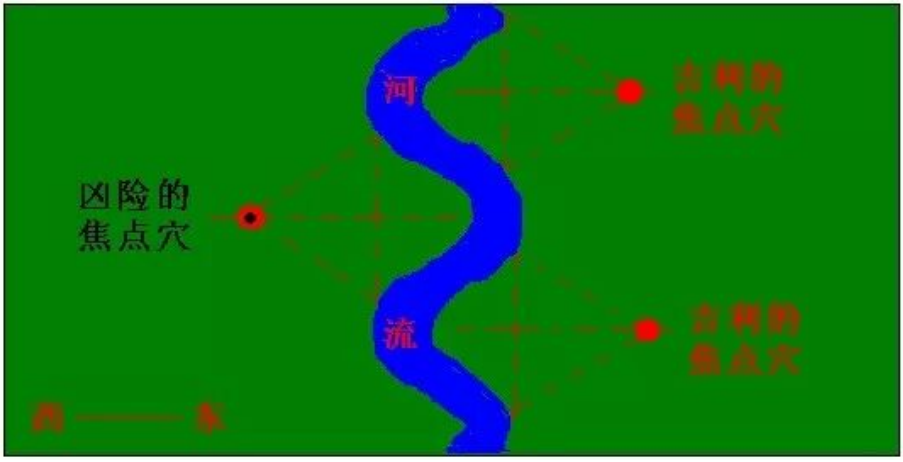
1. In the four directions **east, north, southeast and southwest**, sand is auspicious and water is inauspicious.

1. In the four directions **south, west, northeast and northwest**, water is auspicious and sand is inauspicious.

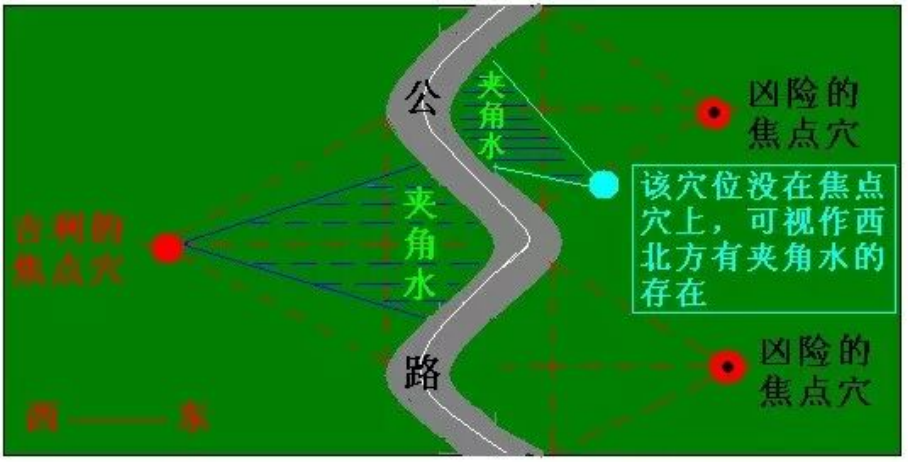
By the same logic, focal points formed by water dragons and road dragons are judged as follows:

1. In the four directions **east, north, southeast and southwest**, a focal point formed by a road dragon is auspicious, and one formed by a water dragon is inauspicious.

1. In the four directions **south, west, northeast and northwest**, a focal point formed by a water dragon is auspicious, and one formed by a road dragon is inauspicious.



Water in the east is inauspicious, so a focal point formed by a river bend in the east is inauspicious. Water in the west is auspicious, so a focal point formed by a river bend in the west is auspicious.



Sand in the east is auspicious, so a focal point formed by a road bend in the east is auspicious. Sand in the west is inauspicious, so a focal point formed by a road bend in the west is inauspicious.

A road bend in the east gives an auspicious focal point. But someone will ask: a road bend in the east also forms inauspicious angle water — so which is it? As long as it is a true dragon point, as long as it is a vein-qi point, its energy is the greatest, and beside a vein-qi point, angle water counts for nothing.

All of the above applies to focal points. If the point in question is not a focal point but a sand-and-water point, the points on either bank of the river or road are judged differently.

On a plain, a focal point formed by a water dragon or a road dragon is in practice equivalent to a vein-qi point — but we cannot call it one, because it does not sit in the qi-bearing layer.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Telling Sand From Water (Part 1)

2020-05-23 · 3,391 words

> **Translator's note.** The first half of a long practical piece on classification: is this thing in front of me sand, or water? Lü's answers are more interesting than the question. A fridge is sand even though it contains cold air, because nobody sits with the door open. A row of trees is sand that also behaves like water, which makes it the single most useful adjustment tool in the collection — it works whichever side it is on, reducing the effect of whatever lies behind it. The long detour through colour, smell and the physiology of perception is there to make one point: sand and water are placeholders for energy, and energy reaches us through the body, not through symbols. One paragraph of curses against plagiarists has been reduced to a note.

1. Factories.

Every factory is sand.

A mineral water bottling plant is sand too, because its water is not sitting out in an open tank; it is enclosed. Modern high-tech livestock sheds are classified as sand.

2. Electrical appliances.

Every electrical appliance is sand.

Televisions, computers, stereos, mobile phones, telephones, microwave ovens — all sand. Even an electric razor is sand. A refrigerator is sand.

Many books say: open the fridge door and cold air comes out, so cold air is water, not sand. But who in real life buys a fridge and leaves the door open all day letting the cold out? Even letting it out, the door is open briefly, to put

food in or take it out. Reckoned by the physics of work, producing a thousand kilocalories of cold costs at least a thousand kilocalories of heat; energy is conserved. So whether the fridge door is open or shut, a fridge is classified as sand. A water dispenser is sand, because its water is fully enclosed. A washing machine is sand, because a fully automatic machine washes with its water enclosed, and an ordinary machine is not running twenty-four hours a day.

In an appliance showroom, where appliances are everywhere, the stalls selling appliances in the middle cannot treat the surrounding appliances as sand. This is a balanced system, and inside a balanced system there is no such thing as sand and water — just as a man in air, or a fish in water, has no need to decide whether the air or the water is sand.

3. Plants.

Plants, flowers, grasses and trees are classified as sand, but they also perform the function of water.

First: plants have an adjusting function in feng shui.

Flowers, grasses and trees are sand in themselves, but they release water molecules into the air every second, so where there are plants the humidity is higher. We can therefore regard plants as neither sand nor water — which is exactly why they are so useful in adjusting a site. (See the figure.)



Suppose there is a stand of trees between a pond and a house. Consider: is there a difference in energy between the pond's effect on the occupants with

the trees and without them? Certainly there is. Here the trees are acting as sand — as a barrier — and in that case the pond's effect on the house drops sharply.



Suppose there is a stand of trees between a house and a factory. With the trees and without them, the factory's effect on the occupants is certainly different.

First, the factory's noise and dust will have much less effect on the occupants; even its noxious gases will have less. Because the trees block, and because the trees themselves constantly transpire moisture, which means they also act as water. The more trees and the larger they are, the greater the barrier, and the more their water function shows. Of course, when trees stand beside a pond or a river they also give off moisture, but compared with the water of the pond or river their contribution is small enough to ignore — and in that situation the trees are acting as sand.

Understand this, and you understand that plants play an important part in adjusting a site, with very obvious results.

Suppose the factory lies in an inauspicious direction. With a stand of trees in between, the factory's bad effect on you is greatly reduced. Conversely, if the factory lies in an auspicious direction, a stand of trees in between will reduce its good effect. If a pond lies in an auspicious direction, trees between will reduce the pond's good effect on you. And if the pond lies in an inauspicious direction, trees between will equally reduce its bad effect.

Houseplants in pots work the same way; the only difference is that a potted plant has less effect than a tree planted outside. The larger the volume of the plant, the greater its power to adjust a site.

Second: the mistaken view of plants in feng shui.

Many feng shui books now on the market say that trees divide into yin and yang: tall trees are yang trees, short trees are yin trees; pines are yang, willows are yin, and so on. On what criterion they divide a tree into yin and yang, I cannot imagine. Frankly, this is nonsense. Of course, if you insist on dividing trees into yin and yang, that is your affair. But let me ask: planting pines between a factory and a house, and planting willows between them, does make a difference — yet once you set aside the *degree* of effect, all trees do the same job in feng shui. How can one call them yin and yang? If the distinction meant anything, it would mean this: if a factory is harming you, planting yang trees in between would make the harm *greater*, and planting yin trees would make it disappear, because the yin trees would dissolve all the factory's yang. The absurdity collapses under its own reasoning. Students have no need to memorise any of it. In choosing and adjusting a site we should solve the problem at the root.

On the question of which trees to plant in a courtyard, some say you must not plant mulberry, sophora, pear or peach — because *sang* (mulberry) sounds like *sang* (mourning), *huai* (sophora) like *huai* (bad), *li* (pear) like *li* (separation), *tao* (peach) like *tao* (flee). All inauspicious puns. This is folkloric feng shui. In the silk districts of the south, mulberries grow inside and outside every courtyard, and the peasants make a good annual income from them — where is the harm? Shenzhou, on the central Hebei plain, is a famous producer of honey peaches, pears and apples; most of the county's farmers grow exactly these crops, live in peace and prosper, and hardly any of them "flee" their home district or suffer "separation in life and death." In real life, are there no separations and bereavements in households with no pear tree in

the yard? Bereavement has no relation whatever to whether a pear tree is planted.

Others say you must not plant pine or cypress in a courtyard, because pine and cypress are trees for temples and graveyards. This too is folkloric feng shui with no scientific basis.

(The original repeats its warning about plagiarism here and appends a curse. The curse has been omitted.)

Third: points to watch when planting.

1. If you are reading a site for someone, do not plant what the local people consider taboo. Respect local custom; do not add a stone to your client's shoe. Custom is a habit formed over thousands of years and handed down; once formed it is sacred in people's minds, and science itself is sometimes helpless before it.

1. Planting should follow the principles of natural-science feng shui and of natural science itself.

Does planting carry any meaning for fortune? Certainly it does. But it is not the case that planting a peach tree makes you flee; plant an apple tree and you may flee just the same. It is not the case that a pear tree causes divorce; plant an apple and divorce still comes. It is not the case that a mulberry brings bereavement; old houses lived in for generations with no mulberry in the yard still see deaths.

From the standpoint of feng shui, what matters is **which direction you planted in, where in the courtyard, where around the house** — that is the root, that is the main factor.

Which species you plant is a secondary factor. From the standpoint of scientific knowledge, which flowers are best to keep at home? Green or red? White or black? That is another question.

First: every client, and every one of us, has personal tastes.

Second: which flowers may be kept in a room and which may not is itself a scientific question, because different plants differ enormously in their chemical volatiles, and different volatiles have completely different effects on the same person. So what you plant around your home, in the yard and indoors does bear a fairly close relation to a person's fate. A single tree cannot decide our fate, but it can influence it to some degree. Which flowers belong in the bedroom, which in the living room, which trees in the yard and around the house — these should be decided on scientific grounds.

Third: every plant has physical properties, expressed in its shape and colour. Plants of different form affect the mind and the body differently; plants of different colour do too.

A thing affects the mind *through* its effect on the body. The energy implicit in a plant's shape and colour stimulates the body. A red flower, for instance, projects the red band of the light spectrum into our eyes; the energy of that band stimulates the eye, and only then do we form a thought. Cover our eyes and a red flower, a blue flower, produce no mental activity at all. Every mental event arises after some external material thing has stimulated us. Without the influence of the material world a person would be as good as dead, and would have no mental changes whatever. Put a pot of red flowers in front of a corpse and it will not blink, because it is not receiving the flower's influence — so where would a mental change come from?

Every mental change comes from the energy of external things acting on us. It is because external energy affects our body that we have mental changes — not the reverse, as though a thing changed our mind and we then discovered that our body had been disturbed. If I stick a needle in your arm while you are not looking, do you first have a mental change or first feel pain? Do you first hate me and then feel pain, or first feel pain and then hate me? You feel pain first,

and only then form the mental response — resentment, or amusement, or curiosity.

This world is a material world. All spirit is built on a material base; without matter there is no spirit. This is the philosophical position that matter determines consciousness.

Then can there be spirit without matter?

Yes — because spirit is itself a form of matter. “Matter” in philosophy means everything that objectively exists: what we can see, touch and feel, and also what we cannot see, touch or feel. Spirit is simply matter that our eyes cannot see and our flesh cannot feel. The latest research has demonstrated the existence of gravitational waves, further confirming Einstein's general theory of relativity — and yet we cannot feel gravitational waves. Think of radio waves: who can feel a radio wave? We do not know which waves pass through our brains, whether long or short, ultrasonic or infrasonic — and those waves are objectively existing matter. So we may regard such waves as the existence of spirit. Spirit is a form of matter, and this world is a material world.

When is spirit not matter?

Only when, in religious language, you “leap out of the three realms” — then spirit and matter unify completely. As long as you are on this earth, spirit is matter. If the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas were not material, how could they manifest? Their manifestation in the sky is not matter? If they were not material we could not see them. So Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are material too. The only difference is that if we cut off a finger we cannot stick it back on, whereas their matter is of a special kind that can compose itself into anything at will: they can take themselves apart and still live, while we take ourselves apart and that is the end of us. That is the whole difference. So Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are material; otherwise we could not see them, and they could not manifest in order to demonstrate their greatness and wonder.

In short, our mental changes are caused by material changes. Which means that what we grow at home affects us very differently from one plant to another.

You may ask: will keeping a pot of flowers really bring me disaster? Possibly, and possibly not. Why? Possibly, because the chemicals or the physical state implicit in that plant really are closely connected with you. Suppose you have allergic rhinitis and the flowers you keep shed pollen every day, in large quantities — will that not affect your health? Suppose your eyes water in bright light, and every plant you keep is white, or as vivid as a scarlet lily: the more vivid the colour, the stronger its action on the eye, and a green plant would be better for you. So if you are highly sensitive to certain plants, then yes, keeping them may really affect your fate, even change it. If you are not sensitive, the relation is simple: the greater the plant's energy, the greater its effect on you; the less, the less.

How do you judge a plant's energy?

Physically: a plant of greater volume has more energy than one of smaller volume. Chemically: a plant with more harmful volatile compounds has more energy, and does us more harm; a plant with fewer has less energy and does less harm. Conversely, a plant with more energy and more of the beneficial compounds does us more good. So the question of plants should be approached scientifically. Dividing them into yin and yang solves nothing. In a field, a courtyard or a graveyard, the chemical volatiles of plants have little effect on us, so plant whatever you like. But for flowers in a bedroom, or wherever you spend your time, you would do well to look into the plant's volatiles and its physical properties.

Why does colour affect us so strongly?

Colour in itself has no meaning. Colour is the result of an object reflecting different bands of the light spectrum, and different bands have completely different effects on people. Powerful ultrasound can kill any animal quickly; in

that band, a wave can kill a person instantly without their feeling anything. By the same token other bands — the red band, the yellow, the blue — have their own effects. So it is not colour that affects us; it is the energy of a particular band of light. Colour is not in itself the meaning of water, wood, metal, fire and earth. Colour affects us as wavelength affects us — as wave energy affects us.

In practice we should read everything scientifically. Suppose you advise a client to wear green and not black, and you tell him green is wood and black is water, that he likes wood and not water. Is that wrong? Not exactly — but it is not persuasive, and a scientifically literate person will not believe it. The client does not know what water, wood, metal, fire and earth are, and thinks it is superstition. But tell any scientist that different colour bands affect us differently, and not one will call it false.

Taste works the same way. Smell something foul and everyone turns away at once; smell something fragrant and most people take another breath. And people also take another breath of a foul smell — do you believe it? We look twice at a beautiful woman; we also look twice at an ugly woman. Why? The beautiful woman's energy is great, so her impact on us is great; the ugly woman's energy is also great, so her impact is great too — it is simply negative energy. Smell is the same. When the air carries no smell at all, nobody consciously takes an extra breath to check what it tastes like; but a sudden fragrance or stench stimulates the nerves very strongly.

Modern science has established that in this world colour and touch both need a process before the brain responds. **Only smell acts on thought directly.** The olfactory cells differ from every other cell: smell acts directly on the brain, whereas sight cannot. A thing first stimulates the eye, and the optic nerve carries the signal slowly to the brain's visual centre. That is why we identify a smell faster than anything else. Put a vivid flower and a bad smell in a room, and the person entering registers the smell first. If the smell is strong, he will

not notice the flower at all. Scientists have found that smell outranks every other sense in speed. Walking down the street you do not notice the many women passing, but let one walk by and a scent drift over, and you turn your head at once to see where she is.

Which means that smell too can change a person's fate. How? Different flowers have different scents; keep the kind of flower whose scent suits you. That is a thorough and effective way of changing fate.

In using plants to change our fate, the most important thing is the size of the plant's energy and the direction in which it stands; second is the effect of its physical and chemical properties on us.

4. Calligraphy and painting.

Are calligraphy and painting sand or water? In terms of the nature of the material, all of them are sand.

Judged by colour: one painting may be dominated by vivid red, another by black. Both are sand in essence, but colour carries the properties of the five elements — and water, wood, metal, fire and earth, applied to colour, are only other names for bands of the spectrum. So when assessing a painting by colour, we may judge its five-element character by its dominant colour. That is: where black stands out, we may regard the painting as carrying some of the meaning of water. Where no colour stands out, we generally treat it as sand, and its sand meaning is the stronger.

Judged by content: a painting that depicts water may be treated as carrying the meaning of water. A painting of high mountains, plants, villages and the like may be treated as sand. A painting of animals is judged by the kind of animal: aquatic animals give it the meaning of water, land animals the meaning of sand. If the animals are the twelve zodiac creatures, a rat or a pig gives it the meaning of water, and the other signs give it the meaning of sand.



On this question, everyone in the trade divides paintings into sand or water according to his own preference. But if we examine the matter rationally from every angle, we can know this: whatever the content of the painting and whatever its dominant colour, **a painting is classified first of all as sand.** That is beyond doubt, and the sand meaning carries more than sixty per cent of the weight. The remaining forty per cent may be judged by colour and content.

A painting is sand in essence. Hanging a picture of the ocean on the east wall does not make the east an ocean. The east is not an ocean; the east is still sand. The picture of ocean water merely exerts a suggestive effect on the mind, which changes us a little, and so affects our fate a little. In practice, using paintings to adjust a site for a client or at home requires weighing content and colour together to get the best result. The same reasoning applies to using written characters alone to adjust a site.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Setting the Orientation in Natural-Science Feng Shui

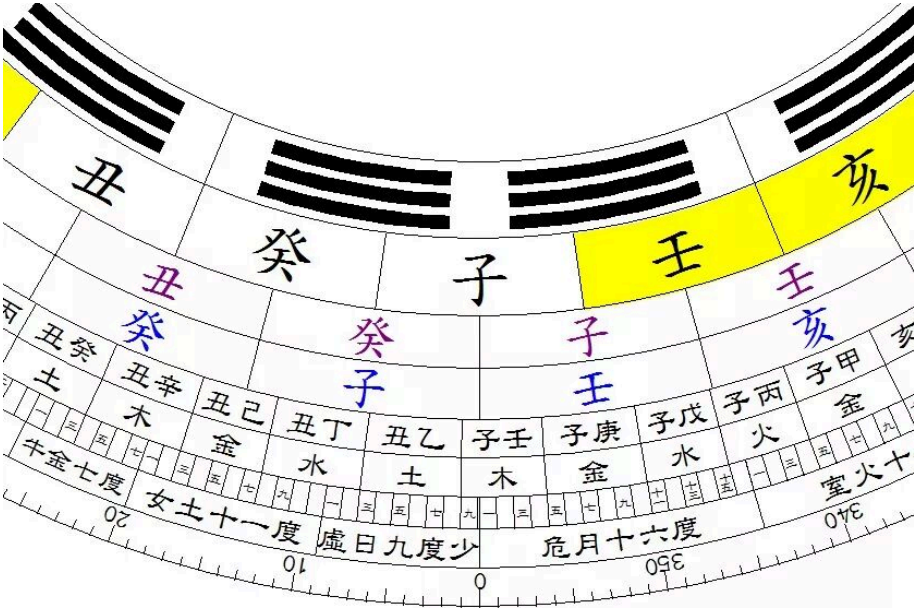
2020-06-16 · 2,543 words

> **Translator's note.** The most systematic attack on orientation in the collection, and the one that states the underlying logic most plainly: the things around a point decide that point's fortune; the direction a box is turned does not change the things around it. Lü's apple-tree image — hanging a toy cat on a tree and turning its face, expecting the tree to change — is the whole argument in one picture. He also does something unusual here: he concedes that orientation may matter by three or five per cent, and then says that if you have the point right you may orient as you please. The passage on the three plates, and on the louse on an elephant, are worth reading twice.

On the question of orientation, traditional feng shui reached a conclusion — stated very explicitly in Liao Yu's *Sixteen Burial Methods* — that the sitting and facing of a house or a coffin should be fixed by the direction in which the vein's energy comes and goes.

And indeed: if orientation really were useful, and if obtaining the vein's energy depended on it, then one would have to orient along the direction of the qi's movement.

Two questions have to be considered. First, the direction in which the vein's qi comes and goes. Second, the place where the energy concentrates. Grasp those two and the whole question of what orientation to set is answered.



1. On “the direction in which the vein's qi comes and goes.”

If it is a vein-qi point, then one should orient along the qi's direction, since only so can the greatest energy be obtained. If the qi comes from the east and runs west, then sitting east and facing west is best.

But is that true in scientific terms? In practice, sitting north and facing south makes no difference either. **The theory of orientation exists only because you believe orientation works.** If you do not believe in it, it does not matter in the least what orientation you set. So: the qi runs from east to west — you may equally sit northeast and face southwest, sit north and face south, sit northwest and face southeast, or even sit west and face east, sit southwest and face northeast, sit south and face north, sit southeast and face northwest.

A house has a front, so it has an orientation. But for bones — and especially for ashes, or for a reburial of collected bones — there is no head and no feet.

Where is the orientation then? Orientation is fixed by the direction of the head and the feet. Ashes have neither head nor feet: how do you orient them?

If you believe orientation has an effect, then orient along the direction of the qi's movement; and on that basis you may orient however you like by the Sanhe school's theory, the Xuankong school's theory, or any of the flying-star and liqi theories. What matters is that you get the dragon, the point, the sand and the water right — that the point you set is a true dragon point, a vein-qi point or a focal point. Once the point is well and accurately set, you may orient entirely according to whatever you were taught, or whatever the general public accepts, and it will have no effect on the feng shui at all — especially for collected bones and ashes.

If one insists that orientation affects feng shui, then only houses and intact corpses can have one. A corpse at least has head and feet: does the qi enter at the head and leave at the feet, or enter at the feet and leave at the head, or enter at the waist? If we are to believe in orientation at all, then only with a corpse is there a real relation between qi and body — that is, the question of how the qi enters the corpse: through the head, the shoulder, the chest, the waist, the feet?

As for building a house: if you believe orientation works, fine. The back wall's direction is the sitting, the front façade's direction is the facing. Choose your site, and build and orient according to any theory you have learned. Because in fact what orientation you set has, one might say, no great relation to the fortune of the house or the grave. Even if it has some, it is one or two per cent, or three or five per cent — that little. Of course the more auspicious the better, so you may orient by whatever theory you learned, or by the direction of the vein's qi. There is no difference between the two, because orientation simply has no great effect. What matters is where the point is; what matters is what every plant, every grain of sand and every stream around the point does to it.

Several arguments are made about orientation.

The first: the *Dili Wujue* holds that seeking the dragon, setting the point, examining the sand and finding the water are like sowing in spring and watering and fertilising in summer — and orientation is the autumn harvest. If you do not harvest, all the earlier work is wasted.

Is that so? Even taking the metaphor as given, the work is not wasted. Can I not go out to the field and eat the grain standing there? Why must I bring it home and store it? To store it I would have to build a barn. And without spring sowing and summer tending, what would there be to harvest in autumn? **The dragon, the point, the sand and the water are the root of feng shui.** Even if orientation works, it is like bringing the grain home so that it is convenient to eat in winter, or like improving the quality of the product a little. That is a fluctuating influence. Your act of harvesting does not decide whether there is grain in the field, nor whether there will be food in winter. What decides whether a man starves in winter is whether there was spring sowing and summer tending — whether anything grew in the field. If there is nothing in the field, what are you harvesting? If what you sowed in spring and summer was grass, is it any use bringing grass home in autumn? Will you eat grass at home when winter comes? So the traditional reading of orientation is itself mistaken; to treat orientation as the thing that decides a site's fortune is itself the error.

The second: the dragon, point, sand and water are like a building's materials and foundations, and orientation is the blueprint. Without a blueprint you cannot build; the blueprint is the decisive factor.

Can you not build without a blueprint? In the past, apart from imperial projects, who had blueprints? How many ordinary builders could even draw one? Even granting that a blueprint matters, it matters less than the foundation and the materials. Give me now the master plan of the Forbidden City: have you a foundation that size? Have you that quantity of materials? “Even a clever housewife cannot cook without rice.” The blueprint becomes

useful only once there is a foundation and materials. Without them, what use is a drawing? I could sell you the plan of the largest and most beautiful skyscraper in the world, held in my head — would you buy it? But if I have a pile of sand, cement and brick in store, I can turn that into money. Even a man buying a blueprint buys it after he has the foundation and the materials. From this alone you can see that every traditional analogy offered to prove the importance of orientation collapses on examination.

The third: the fortune or misfortune of the whole sequence — dragon, point, sand, water — must be decided by orientation. Without orientation, the dragon, point, sand and water have no fortune at all.

That sounds quite right. But think again: they are talking about **sitting and facing**; we are talking about **direction** — about where, relative to a person at the origin, the surrounding sand and water lie: east or west, south or north. We are not talking about the box's orientation. Sitting and facing cannot decide the fortune of the surrounding sand and water. Suppose a computer stands to your north. Facing east, the computer is auspicious for you; would facing west or north make it inauspicious? Would facing northwest turn it into inauspicious sand? The theory sounds plausible until you go down to the essence of the thing, and then you see that it cannot survive the facts. No object changes from auspicious to inauspicious, or the reverse, because of the direction your face is turned.

Traditional feng shui is very obscure here. The ancestors never worked it out. They said: look, there is a tree in the east; on the earth plate it sits on the *jia* character, on the heaven plate it may be on *mao*, on the human plate it may fall on *yi* or on the boundary of *jia* and *mao* — so it is not the same, is it?

Let me put the most fundamental question. Whether it is a grave or a house: **do the plants, the sand and the water around the place where you are building, or where you intend to put the coffin, decide the**

fortune of that origin — or does the sitting and facing of the house or coffin decide the fortune of the origin?

A plain example. Here is an apple tree. The apple tree is a mountain; the coffin is a child's toy cat hung on the tree — that is, you have put the coffin or the house somewhere on the mountain. Turn the toy cat's face: does the apple tree suddenly have apples to eat? Turn it again: does the tree lose its apples? Turn it again: does the tree die? Turn it again: does the apple tree become a pear tree? Is any of that possible? Not remotely.

So why did the ancestors say that the sitting and facing of a house or coffin decides the fortune of "this apple tree"? Because their theory rests on a very mistaken notion: that man is the soul of all things, that man can rule the universe, that man can decide the fortune of the world.

Remember: man is very small in this world. The house we live in, or our ancestor's coffin, is to the whole mountain range and the whole earth what a louse is to an elephant. Turn the louse's head — does the elephant's leg break? Turn it again — is the elephant's tail gone? Turn it again — has the elephant's head become a tiger's? Not remotely. The elephant's ear does not become a rump because a louse on its body turned its head. Our ancestors made a very serious logical error: they believed man could rule the world. He cannot.

The world is material; matter determines consciousness; consciousness reacts on matter, and correct consciousness promotes the development of matter while mistaken consciousness obstructs it. Objective laws do not bend to human will. Act according to law and a man succeeds; act against it and he certainly fails. Law is objective — it "does not exist because of Yao, nor perish because of Jie." "The bolder the man, the bigger the harvest": during the Great Leap Forward this boundless inflation of the power of consciousness, in defiance of natural and economic law, cost the new China enormous losses.

By the same token, if a theory of feng shui — a theory of the relation between people and environment — is built on the notion that "man can decide

whether an environment is auspicious," then you should understand that the whole system is more wrong than right. Human reshaping of the environment is reshaping to a degree; it cannot alter natural law. Earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, even hail and snow — we can do nothing about them. Turn your face and the hail will not stop hitting you; the flood will not go around you. What matters is whether you are in the gully. If you live in the gully, whatever the orientation of your house, the flash flood will destroy it. What matters is the actual relation between the house and the flood.

Every plant and every stream in the environment decides a person's fate, decides the fate of a house and a coffin. It is not the sitting and facing of the house or coffin that decides the fortune of the plants and streams around it. That is a question of fundamental logic, and the traditional theory of orientation is an absurd theory. In practice you may use orientation theory if you like: as long as you get the dragon, point, sand and water right, as long as the point is accurately set, you may orient however you please.

2. On "the place where the energy concentrates."

The place where vein energy concentrates falls into one of two categories: it is either auspicious energy or inauspicious energy. When we build a house or place a coffin, we want to obtain the auspicious and avoid the inauspicious.

Since you hold orientation to be important, then when you orient you should point the person's head, or waist, or shoulder at the places where the auspicious energy is greatest, and turn the house or coffin away from the places where the inauspicious energy is greatest. You should watch, among the twenty-four mountains, for the strongest and the weakest auspicious and inauspicious energies: the auspicious at its maximum, the inauspicious at its minimum.

Take reaching for apples. In the east, at *jia*, *mao* and *yi*, there are three apples; in the northeast, at *chou*, *gen* and *yin*, three more; in the southeast, at

chen, *xun* and *si*, three more — nine in all. Do we not reach for whichever apple is biggest, handsomest and best? The direction in which we reach is our orientation. We do not reach for the apple that is half eaten by worms; that rotten apple is the inauspicious energy, not the auspicious. To orient is to obtain the auspicious and avoid the inauspicious.

There is no secret to orientation. To put it precisely: once the dragon, point, sand and water are all in order, you may orient however you like. Whatever orientation you think is good is good.

Of course we may learn something of the traditional theories. The Sanhe school orients by the water mouth; that is one reading of orientation. The Xuankong school has its own. At one and the same site, one master says sit *jia* and face *geng*, another says sit *yi* and face *xin*; bring several masters of different schools to the same graveyard and their orientations will never agree. **The traditional theory of orientation is precise, but it is a theory for fooling people: in practice it cannot be operated. Every operation is an estimate, and beyond estimating there is nothing — there is no way whatever to make orientation precise. A theory that cannot be operated and does not match the facts is an erroneous theory. That is the secret of orientation.**

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

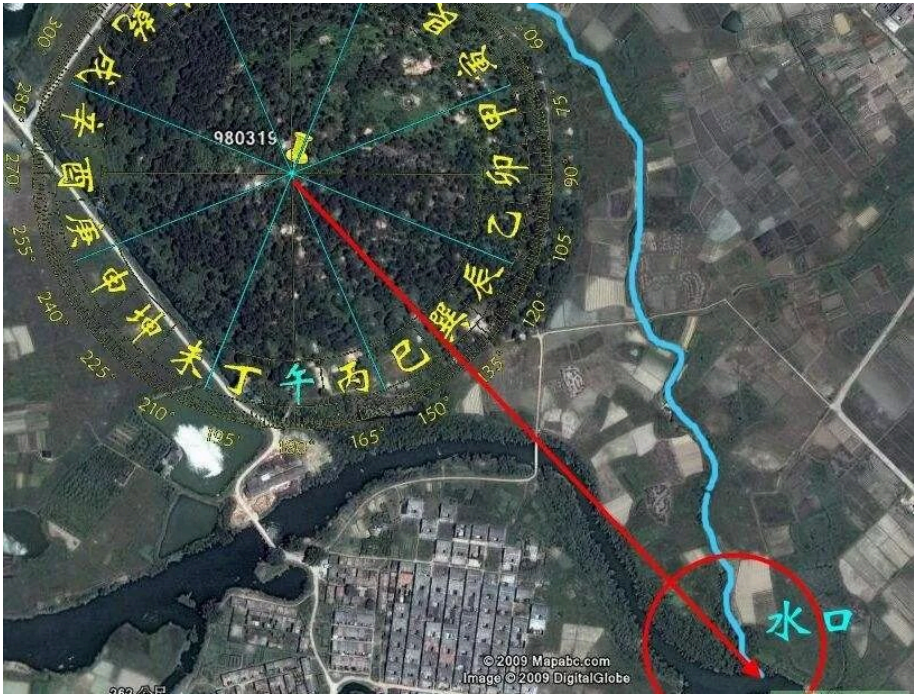
Can the “Sitting and Facing Fenjin” Theory Actually Be Applied?

2017-11-16 · 688 words

> **Translator's note.** Five questions, asked in public at a national conference, which between them dismantle the *zuoxiang fenjin* method without anyone having to raise a voice. The fourth is the one that ends the conversation: if you set the sitting by the centreline of the coffin, have you opened the lid to check that the bones are on that centreline? The essay is short because it does not need to be long. Read together with “Setting the Orientation” and “Can the Fenjin Method Be Applied?” it forms a single, patient demolition.

Zuoxiang fenjin — sitting, facing, and the fenjin — means the directions of the front of a house (the facing) and the back (the sitting), or the direction of the head of the corpse (the sitting) and the feet (the facing) in a grave. The “sitting and facing” is the general direction within a range of fifteen degrees; the fenjin is a further and finer determination within a range of a few degrees.

Chinese traditional feng shui, as it was handed down, produced this situation: because the sitting-and-facing-fenjin theory is the easiest thing in the whole subject to learn and apply — a man with no education at all can master it in a day or two — this most useless and least scientific theory spread everywhere and was accepted by great numbers of people. It also became the main trick of the swindlers in the trade. Meanwhile the most scientific and practical theories in Chinese feng shui, being beyond the grasp of the average person, were abandoned and forgotten.



Traditional feng shui treats the fenjin theory as extremely important, holding that it is a decisive cause of a site's fortune. At a number of national feng shui conferences, in front of every master lecturing on how the fenjin theory decides a site's fortune, I asked only four questions.

Question one: when you bury a dead person, do you set the orientation and fenjin by the centreline of the coffin (or the urn), or by the centreline of the corpse?

Every master said: by the centreline of the coffin or urn.

Question two: according to your own theory, *should* the orientation and fenjin be set by the centreline of the bones, or by the centreline of the coffin?

Every master answered: in theory, by the centreline of the bones.

Question three: when the coffin is lowered into the pit, are the coffin's centreline and the bones' centreline one hundred per cent coincident?

Every master said: not necessarily — the bones can shift sideways in the coffin, or tilt.

Question four: since at burial the bones' centreline and the coffin's centreline are not necessarily coincident, why do you set the orientation by the coffin's centreline? When you set it that way, have you ever opened the lid to check whether the bones lie on that centreline? Are you setting an orientation for the dead man, or for the box? Are you burying a box, or a person?

At this point none of the masters could answer, or ever did.

Question five: in a reburial of collected bones, or a burial of ashes, how do you tell the head from the feet? If you cannot separate head from feet, how can you possibly set a sitting and a facing, let alone a fenjin? Is this not deceiving yourself and others?

So: this theory, flawless on paper, cannot be operated at all in practice. What does that show? Only that the sitting-and-facing-fenjin theory is an armchair theory; that it cannot decide a site's fortune at all; and that the masters who propagate it do not understand the fundamental theory of the subject, and can only use this armchair material to impose on clients and students. There are at least a hundred further objections to the fenjin theory and to the use of the compass; the interested reader may consult my blog or this account. There is no need to go further here. I hope friends will form a correct understanding of the fenjin theory, and not ruin themselves with it and then go on to ruin others.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Reading Sand and Water in the Twenty-Four Directions

2021-05-02 · 645 words

> **Translator's note.** The eight-palace table, stated compactly, and the mechanism behind it: four directions deliver *ordered* energy from sand, four deliver ordered energy from water, and what the body needs is ordered energy. The most interesting sentence is the admission in the second paragraph — the method is right, but its accuracy decays as you use it on more households. That is a more honest claim than the trade usually makes, and it is consistent with everything else in this collection: a surface rule applied to surface features works until the stratum underneath disagrees.

You must be clear on this point, because the 290 configurations make use of it: in the eight directions, and the twenty-four directions within them, is the sand auspicious or inauspicious, and is the water auspicious or inauspicious?

Anyone who has studied the Golden Lock and Jade Gate, or the *Guolu Yinyang*, will have no trouble here. That basic classification is correct. But if you want to read sites accurately by the Golden Lock and Jade Gate, the more you read the less accurate you become. By the time you have looked at ten thousand households your accuracy will be around forty or fifty per cent. Look at a hundred and it may be eighty or ninety. Look at ten or twenty and it may be a hundred. The auspicious and inauspicious character of sand and water in the eight directions must be memorised.



In the four directions **east, southeast, southwest and north**, sand is auspicious and water is inauspicious.

In the four directions **northeast, northwest, south and west**, water is auspicious and sand is inauspicious.

As to why these eight directions differ, we have explained it in class through physics. For a human life to run normally and stay alive, for a person to make money smoothly and rise smoothly in office, the body must obtain **energy in ordered motion**. If the body obtains energy in disordered motion, then you will fall ill, or lose money, or lose your post, or divorce, or go to prison. The reason we can maintain our state normally is that ordered energy dominates in the body. When disordered energy takes the lead, that person is close to death, or to great calamity.

So, knowing that a person needs ordered energy to be fortunate and disordered energy to be unfortunate, we must ask: where does ordered energy come from, and where does disordered energy come from? By strict reasoning

and a modern scientific reading, we know that the energy coming from **sand** in the four directions east, southeast, southwest and north is ordered energy, while the energy coming from **water** in those same four directions is disordered. Obtain disordered energy and misfortune is inevitable.

When we look at feng shui scientifically, we can know precisely where to obtain ordered energy and where to avoid disordered energy, and when we can obtain the one and avoid the other. Then we have a real degree of control over our own fate. We cannot, afterwards, change our fate in its essence — but in the acquired environment we can obtain the energy that lets us move up and down within the level our innate environment fixed for us.

Acquired feng shui cannot turn a tractor into an aircraft carrier. But we can change the engine and the tyres on the tractor's chassis, and build it a tin body, and raise its performance substantially. That is the reform of a fate. So the sand-and-water fortune of the eight palaces and twenty-four mountains must be memorised. This is not the place to teach basic knowledge, but you should be able to remember it after one look at the book. Which is why we require those who come to study to know the basics of the twenty-four directions, and to know the ten gods of the four pillars.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Reading Feng Shui in an Apartment Block

2020-07-05 · 1,777 words

> **Translator's note.** The most directly useful article in the practice layer for a reader outside China, because it is about flats. The method is a cascade: choose the district, then the compound, then the building, then the unit, then the floor plan, then the room — and at every level compare the *largest* energy sources, not the nearest ones. Two warnings recur: the best-view building is not the best-feng-shui building, and the cheapest flat in a compound is sometimes the best one. The closing passage on why a badly-sited household can still get rich — the bad energy has to go somewhere, and it goes into the marriage or the body — is the most interesting claim in the piece.

There are two sides to feng shui in city apartment blocks.

First, how to *choose* a building.

Second, how to *read* a building's fortune.

Choosing and reading are inverse operations. When you choose, you hold the compass and look at which building is good and which is not. When you read, you put the compass down and look at whether this building is good.

What follows approaches the question from the side of choosing.

First principle: choose from the large to the small.

“Large” means the district: whether to choose in the eastern part of the city or the western, the southern or the northern.

Second: having settled the district, settle the compound within it; then the building within the compound; then which entrance or stairwell of that building; then which floor plan; then, facing several rooms, which is suitable

as the master bedroom, which as a study for the child, which as a guest room, which as storage. Finally, when furnishing, mind the placement of the sand-and-water objects — the television, the computer, the fish tank.

At every level — compound, building, entrance, flat — the reference standard is **the largest-energy object in the surroundings.** Great energy means great consequence in fortune. So when choosing a building, an entrance or a flat, watch the largest-energy objects outside the compound: a natural hill, a river, a lake. And watch the large artificial features inside the compound: a rockery, an outdoor pool, a water feature. Do not fix your eyes on where the compound's main gate is. Do not fix them on where the drains — the water mouth — run off. The Sanhe school is obsessed with incoming and outgoing water; choose your site that way and you are asking for trouble.

The examples below make the method concrete.

Inside a compound, to judge whether a building is good, do not stare at the roads. Stare at the largest-energy object.

Example 1.



Step one: the largest-energy feature in this compound is the artificial water system in the middle, with twelve buildings around it. Water is auspicious in the northeast, northwest, south and west; inauspicious in the north, east, southeast and southwest. So the building that gets the most auspicious water gets the most good, and the one that gets the most inauspicious water gets the most harm.

Building 1: water to the northwest — auspicious. Building 2: water to the north and northwest — half and half. Building 3: water to the north — inauspicious. Building 4: water to the northeast — auspicious. Building 5: water to the east — inauspicious. Building 6: water to the east and southeast — inauspicious. Building 7: water to the southeast — inauspicious. Building 8: water to the southeast — inauspicious. Building 9: water due south — auspicious. Building 10: water to the southwest — inauspicious. Building 11:

water to the southwest — inauspicious. Building 12: water to the southwest — inauspicious.

The candidates are therefore buildings 1, 4 and 9.

Which of the three is best depends on what you need, because auspicious water in the northeast, the northwest and the south does different things. Auspicious water in the south, at *bing*, *wu* and *ding*, bears more on the development of a career: if you are seeking office, building 9. Auspicious water in the northeast, at *chou*, *gen* and *yin*, bears more on money: if you want income to flow in from every direction, building 4. Auspicious water in the northwest bears more on achievement in cultural and academic life: if you want your child to get into a good university, building 1.

But water alone is not the whole picture; you must also look at what other large-energy sand and water objects stand around the three.

Building 4 has water to both east and west — water in opposite palaces, which is inauspicious.

Building 1 has flat ground to east and south, which counts as zero; auspicious sand to the southwest; auspicious water to west and northwest; a little water to the north, slightly inauspicious; auspicious water to the northeast.

Building 9 has auspicious water to the south; east and west form a balanced system; northeast, north and northwest are zero.

Comparing the three: building 1 is best, with the greatest auspicious energy; building 9 is next; building 4 is the weakest.

And do not assume that the compound's “king building” — the one everybody wants — has good feng shui. The king building has the best *view*. A good view is not good feng shui.

Step two: having chosen building 1, it has four stairwells, and their feng shui differs considerably. Which is best is again decided by the eight directions.

Entrance 1: auspicious water to the west and northwest. Entrance 2: auspicious water to the northwest; the west is balanced, zero. Entrance 3: west and northwest both balanced, zero. Entrance 4: the west is effectively sand; the ground plane to the east is zero; the northwest water has no effect on it.

Comparing the four, the best feng shui in this building belongs to entrance 1.

Step three: entrance 1 has two flats, and again there is a question of which is better.

The eastern flat has water due north; the western flat does not. Comparing the two, the western flat's feng shui is better.

Choosing a site is a process of comparing energies. If the compound is small and has no water feature or rockery inside, and the main gate is visible, you may treat the main gate as water when choosing a building.

Example 2. Compare buildings A, B and C.



Building A: to the south, the compound's largest auspicious water; to the northeast, also auspicious water; elsewhere level.

Building B: to the southeast and east, large inauspicious water. The northeast has auspicious water, but the eastern water draws it over and converts it into inauspicious water. Elsewhere level.

Building C: auspicious water to the west and northwest, but the whole northern sector is inauspicious water.

Comparing the three, building A has the best feng shui.

Note: where a neighbouring palace converts a feature, the smaller the energy of the converted object, the more completely it is converted.

Example 3.



In a compound laid out like this it is hard to find an ideal site. Comparatively, the southeast part is better, because the west and northwest carry auspicious water.

Note: the cheapest flat in a compound may be the one with the best feng shui. The expensive part of a compound does not necessarily have good feng shui. Feng shui and scenery are two different concepts and must not be confused.

Example 4. How to choose a bedroom within a flat.



The master bedroom has a large bathroom to its east — inauspicious. It has a television to the north — slightly auspicious.

The second bedroom has a large bathroom to its south — auspicious. To its east is the living room, and the living room has a television — auspicious.

Comparing the two, the second bedroom's feng shui is better than the master bedroom's. It is better to sleep in the second bedroom over the long term.

Note: do not assume that a bedroom with an en-suite is better because it is convenient. Convenience is not feng shui. A view is not feng shui either.

Example 5. Another standard for choosing a bedroom.



The master bedroom has two bathrooms side by side to its east — inauspicious.

Second bedroom A has a bathroom to the south — auspicious — and a bathroom to the southeast — inauspicious. Half and half.

Second bedroom B has a bathroom to the south — auspicious — and a bathroom to the southwest — inauspicious. Half and half.

Judged purely by the large-energy bathrooms, there is no good bedroom in this flat.

An insight. In a city, the overall environment makes it easy for people to make money. So what happens to a household with bad feng shui that nonetheless gets rich and rises? Where does the bad energy go? It goes into affairs — and marriages and families break up; or into illness — and people go into hospital. With bad feng shui, the bad energy has no outlet, so it expresses itself as disaster in the body or the mind.

Example 6.



The master bedroom has a bathroom to its north — inauspicious. To its northeast are a bathroom and a kitchen. The bathroom cannot drain away all the kitchen's energy; taken as a whole the northeast is water, but water

containing sand — auspicious with a trace of the inauspicious. To the east are two bedrooms and the living-room television — auspicious. Elsewhere zero. On the whole this flat's master bedroom is auspicious.

Note: in a flat, the entry door may be classified as water, but do not read fortune by the door, because the entry door is normally shut. If you get it right by the door, it is pure coincidence.

Reading a site means seizing the principal contradiction. A mistake that people trained in traditional feng shui make very easily is failing to distinguish principal from secondary. They walk in and say: “that painting hanging there is why you lost money this year.” The client did lose money this year, so the statement was correct — but the loss was not caused by the painting. It was probably caused by the kitchen, the bathroom, or the television, because a painting's energy is nothing beside theirs. (The painting, as an information field, can be used to *predict* what is happening to the client; but it is not the cause of what is happening. Many people think taking the painting down will change the situation, and in fact when the painting comes down the client's luck does not improve.) Change your thinking: do not assume that because your reading was right, the thing you named was the cause.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

There Are True Dragon Points in City Buildings Too

2017-12-25 · 1,279 words

> **Translator's note.** The companion to “Reading Feng Shui in an Apartment Block”, and the more provocative of the two. If you accept that two flats in the same stack have identical surroundings, then the sand-and-water method cannot distinguish between them — which is exactly why the trade invented floor-selection rules. Lü's alternative is to compute where the ground planes of the neighbouring blocks neutralise one another, and read the floor at that height. Two field cases follow, with outcomes stated flatly. Whether or not one accepts the mechanism, the argument that floor-choice lore has no basis is well made, and the two case records are unusually specific.

In mountains or on plains, in cities or in villages, true dragon points are everywhere. The greatest energy belongs to the **vein-qi point** on the stratum that carries the vein's qi. Next comes the **focal point** formed by a combination of sand and water — which can only be called a sub-true dragon point, since its energy is not comparable to a vein-qi point. Then there are the **sand-and-water points** found by orientation and the examination of sand and water, which hardly deserve the name at all: their energy is very much smaller than a focal point's.

But whether vein-qi point or focal point, all of them differ in the size of their energy and in its auspicious or inauspicious character. Not every true dragon point produces ministers, and not every true dragon point is auspicious. How to judge which is which we will leave aside here.



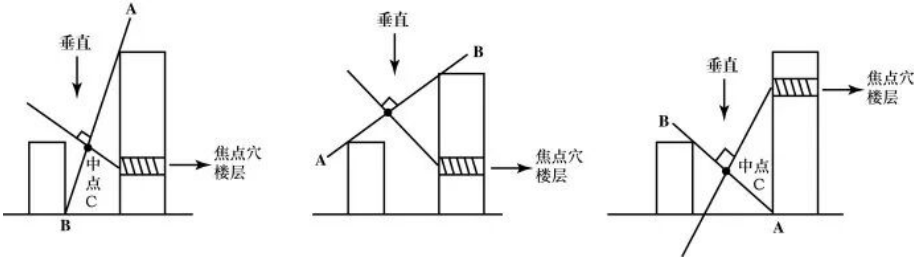
I want to talk about feng shui in city buildings. In the city we normally judge by sand-and-water orientation. But consider a single stairwell in a block where every floor from the first to the top has an identical plan: from the point of view of sand-and-water orientation there is no difference in the external environment at all, and usually no great difference in the interior either. From the ground floor to the top floor, the sand and water on the ground do not change the fortune of one floor relative to another — all that changes is that their influence weakens as the distance grows.

So if a flat's sand-and-water orientation is auspicious, our masters conclude that all hundred flats from the first floor to the hundredth have the same fortune, and the only question is what kind of fate the occupant has. Hence the many theories for choosing a floor. Objectively speaking, those theories are castles in the air with no correct theoretical basis whatever. They are armchair theory.

Is there, then, in a city building, a standard whose energy is far greater than sand-and-water orientation? There certainly is: **the true dragon point — the focal point.** Every building has focal points, and every building's focal points are some auspicious and some not. The focal points of a city building can be evaluated by a scientific, mathematical calculation, and the standard is

precise and scientific. If the building's focal point carries auspicious energy, the occupants are fortunate; if inauspicious, they are not.

Before the examples, a simple diagram of how to find a building's focal point. (The theoretical basis, briefly: the focal point is the position at which yin qi and yang qi are neutralised.)



Two examples.

1. Meizhou, Guangdong. A few days ago I was reading a building for an official in Meizhou. He lives on the second floor of a six-storey block; a five-storey block stands to its east. Judged by sand-and-water orientation, all six flats in his stairwell, from the first floor to the sixth, are highly auspicious — all eight directions favourable. If all eight directions are favourable, and the layout of floors one to six is identical, then all six should be fortunate. Without knowing who lives on which floor, which master could say which of those six floors is best and which worst? The focal-point theory answers it easily. As established, a focal point's energy is far greater than a sand-and-water point's; what sand-and-water orientation evaluates is only a sand-and-water point. And if a sand-and-water point happens to sit on an inauspicious focal point, very little of its auspicious meaning survives.

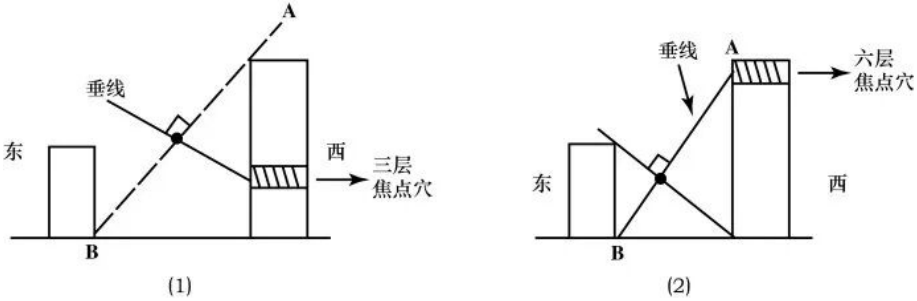
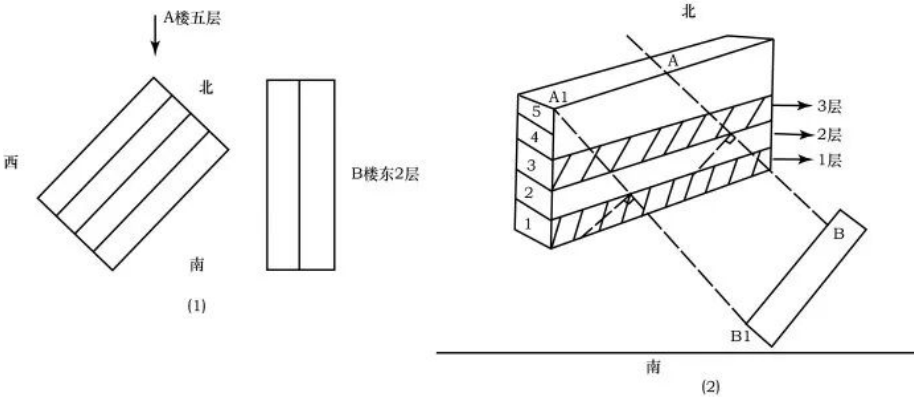


Figure 1 shows the focal point formed by the ground planes of the six-storey block to the west and the five-storey block to the east: it falls at the third floor of building A. Figure 2 shows the corresponding focal point on the opposite side: it falls at the sixth floor. So the third and sixth floors of building A are both focal-point floors. The official lives on the second. Because the energy at both of those focal points comes from **inauspicious sand to the west**, both are inauspicious. I predicted that once people moved in on the third and sixth floors, disasters would follow one another.

The facts: on the third floor the husband's career stalled and the daughter suffered a calamity; on the sixth floor, from the day the family moved in, misfortunes came one after another and the family fell apart. Floors one, two, four and five were all peaceful, smooth and fortunate.

2. An army family compound at Lugouqiao, Beijing.



Buildings A and B meet at an angle. For building A, the further north you go, the narrower the gap between A and B; the narrower the gap, the lower the point at which the perpendicular bisector of the line joining A and B crosses building A — down at the first floor. The further south in building A, the wider the gap; and as the gap widens, the crossing point rises to the third floor. So for the four stairwells of building A running north to south: the northernmost focal point, in stairwell 1, is at the first floor; in stairwells 2 and 3 at the second floor; and in stairwell 4, the southernmost, at the third floor. And because the energy at these focal points comes from **inauspicious sand to the west**, all of these floors are inauspicious.

This was a case I read. The facts: in stairwell 1, first floor, the husband died and the mother and child were left alone in poor circumstances. In stairwells 2 and 3, second floor, every household suffered serious calamity. In stairwell 4, the occupant had been a factory director; after moving in he took up with a woman, was badly cheated, and cost the state-owned enterprise over a million yuan — he made the money good out of his own pocket and loans, escaped prison by a hair, and fell into depression with a standing inclination to suicide.



Clusters of buildings can form focal points of even greater energy.

From these two examples I believe friends can see which theories in this field are scientific and which are armchair theory for fooling people. The real theory for judging city buildings and floors is the theory of seeking the dragon and setting the point. Here we have discussed only the focal points *between* buildings; there are focal points of far greater energy formed by **clusters** of buildings, and using the energy of such a point — when it is auspicious — can produce descendants of great wealth and high rank.

With this theory we can find, in a city's blocks, the building and the floor with the greatest auspicious energy, and live there in great good fortune. We can equally find the building and floor with the greatest inauspicious energy, and so avoid harm and live in peace. If you want to change your own fate, or to become a master of the first rank, then learning this theory is the only and the best choice.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Reading a Public Cemetery

2020-07-11 · 1,342 words

> **Translator's note.** Public cemeteries are the hardest case in practice, because the rows of identical graves give the eye nothing to work with. The solution here is a rule about what to ignore: anything without individual character counts as flat ground, and only the conspicuously raised or sunken counts as sand or water. The second half is a genuinely unusual idea — that a cemetery's energy is a finite resource already partly consumed by earlier burials, which is why the article advises reading the neighbours' fortunes before buying a plot, and why it says the last family into a good spot gets nothing.

1. When surveying a public cemetery and setting a point in it, you face hundreds and thousands of graves laid out in ordered rows. Many masters walk in and have no idea how to begin, and cannot tell one grave from the one next to it.

The root cause is not only the margin of error in feng shui theory. It is also, and mainly, a failure of method. In fact, surveying and setting a point in a cemetery works exactly as it does anywhere else. The only difference is this: in a cemetery, treat every grave in front of, behind, left and right of your point that has the *same* configuration as your point as though it did not exist — as ground level. Anything conspicuously raised — a structure, a knoll, a grave — must be read as sand. Anything sunken — a pit, a small gully — must be read as water.

In a word: anything in a cemetery that is obviously special is sand or water; anything with no individual character and no particular energy is treated as

absent. That is to say, taking the point as origin, if there is no special-energy object nearby, extend outward from the origin until you reach one, and only then read sand and water. Everything in the interval before that object counts as flat ground.

Once your thinking has turned this corner, reading a cemetery is exactly like reading a grave anywhere else. If your theory is correct, you will not misread and you will not set the point wrongly.



2. We know that the energy stored in any thing is fixed, not unlimited. Likewise the auspicious and inauspicious energy held by the sand and water of a cemetery is fixed, not unlimited. In a cemetery of fixed energy, the question of **grabbing the feng shui** becomes very important.

The reasoning is simple. Suppose a cave holds a hundred kilograms of gold and jewels, and a hundred people set out from their homes to fetch it. Assume no fighting and no snatching: whatever you get, you keep. Plainly, the first man into the cave carries out the most, and the last man in gets nothing.

By the same token, if there is a landmine ahead, the first man to step on it is the one who suffers; the men behind can step on the very same spot and

nothing happens. There remains, of course, the question of whether you can find the cave, or step on the mine at all. Understand this, and you understand the significance of grabbing feng shui in a cemetery.

The principles are these.

1. In feng shui we call a mountain range (or a river) a dragon vein. Along a dragon there are many auspicious points, many dangerous ones, and a great many ordinary points that are neither greatly auspicious nor greatly dangerous. The purpose of setting a point is to draw on the energy stored in the dragon — and every thing has two sides, so the dragon's stored energy is partly auspicious and partly dangerous.

Set your point on an auspicious spot and you draw auspicious energy, and your descendants prosper. Set it on a dangerous spot and you draw dangerous energy, and your descendants end in poverty and without heirs. Set it on an ordinary spot, neither greatly auspicious nor greatly dangerous, and you draw neutral energy, and your descendants live ordinary lives as common people.

So to make the descendants prosper you must find an auspicious point on the dragon. In a cemetery, because so many are buried there, the auspicious points may long since have been taken. Even if one can still be found, you may well be the man who found the cave but walked in last, and you will come away with nothing. Which is to say: **if you want your descendants to prosper greatly, you had better not choose a public cemetery.**

But then again, if you only want peace and security for your descendants, then in a cemetery you need only avoid the dangerous points. And if you are not the first family into the cemetery — if eighty per cent of it is already occupied — then even burying your ancestor on a dangerous point will not bring any very great disaster, because most of the dangerous energy has already been drawn off by others. Bury on the very worst point, however, and disaster will still come.

2. If you do find an auspicious point in a cemetery, the best thing is to investigate the families buried within three metres in every direction. What matters is how those families have fared since they buried their ancestors there. If they have prospered since the burial, and the burial is some years old — five years or more — or they have had children since, then the auspicious energy there has largely been drawn off, and you should choose again.

When choosing again, look first *downstream* of those graves. Because qi flows from high to low, there is quite likely still a good deal of energy below, and a point set downstream will be comparatively auspicious. Whether there is energy downstream depends on the course of the dragon. Generally, if the qi flows deep inside the mountain, there will be a good deal of energy downstream. If it flows near the surface, the energy downstream will be very small or gone — and in that case you can still intercept some residual qi *upstream*.

Everywhere in the country you see **"following the feng shui."** When one family becomes greatly wealthy and honoured, many others bury their ancestors in front of and behind that family's grave, thinking to grab some of the good feng shui. In fact, not one household in a hundred gets what it hoped for.

3. Having found an auspicious point in a cemetery, first write down in a notebook every auspicious sand and water feature in the eight palaces and twenty-four mountains, both in the large pattern and the small. Then use the theory of **birth-order positioning** to determine whose prosperity those auspicious directions decide — which birth order, in which generation. Having established that, go and investigate the families buried within three metres: since their burial, has a child of that birth order in that generation been born, or has a person of that birth order in that generation already risen in office or made money?

If neither has happened, bury your ancestor quickly. After the burial, if you yourself are that person of that birth order in that generation, and you catch the auspicious conditions of the **timing system**, you will prosper on schedule. If your family bears such a child, that child will grab the greater part of the auspicious sand-and-water energy and become wealthy and honoured in future. By the same token, at a dangerous point it is that person of that birth order in that generation who will suffer great calamity.

4. All of the above is the geographical system of Lü-school feng shui. Beyond it you must master the timing system as well, because only so can you grasp how the strength of the energy rises and falls, and so choose the burial date or the moment for adjustment correctly — and only then will the auspicious energy of the site arrive on schedule, bringing office, wealth, children and the removal of calamity.

CHAPTER TWENTY

Which Floor Is Auspicious?

2020-07-07 · 342 words

> **Translator's note.** A short piece that answers the single most common question a Chinese house-buyer asks a geomancer, and answers it in an unexpected order: safety first, feng shui second. The 9/11 observation is not decoration — it is the argument. The second half takes the floor-element theories apart by showing that three respectable systems assign the first floor to water, to metal and to earth respectively.

Our view, in natural-science feng shui, is as follows.

First, safety comes before everything. It is better not to buy high. You must guard against fire, and buying below the fifth floor is preferable. In the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center, almost nobody above the fifth floor got out alive. Flooding in buildings is usually not a serious problem; what most endangers human safety now is fire. The Buddha spoke of the four great elements: earth, fire, wind and water. Buddhism holds that when the world is destroyed, it begins with fire, and fire destroys the whole world. I think Shakyamuni may have been right. **Without safety there is no feng shui.**



Second, the feng shui consideration. When people talk about feng shui they raise the question of the floor: which floor should I buy? Many fortune-tellers say: your chart lacks earth, you need to supplement earth, the fifth floor belongs to earth, so buy the fifth, tenth or fifteenth floor.

But is the fifth floor earth? Not necessarily at all — because nobody has settled what the fifth floor actually is, and the ancients did not know either. Take the first floor. By the sequence of the five phases, the first floor is water. By the bagua numbering *qian* one, *dui* two, the first floor is metal. By the structure of the earth, the first floor is earth, because the ground is earth, and all things are born from earth and return to it. So there is no way to say what any given floor is. Since that is so, **buy whichever floor you like** — that is best.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

How Do You Read Feng Shui for an Only Child?

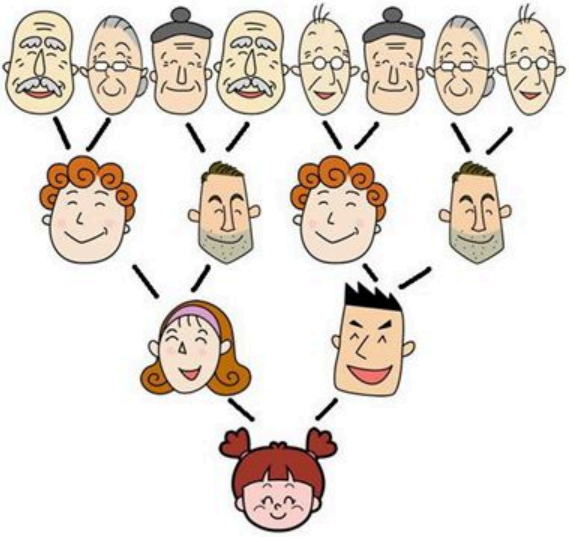
2020-06-04 · 324 words

> **Translator's note.** A very short piece, written for readers raised under the one-child policy, and it turns on a simple point that is easy to miss: with siblings, the feng shui of a house is divided among them according to birth order; with an only child, there is no division, so the whole configuration — good and bad — belongs to one person. The accounting image (add up what you owe, add up what is owed to you) is how the comparison is meant to be made.

An only child owns all three hundred and sixty degrees of the feng shui. So the first thing to see is whether his own position falls on auspicious sand and water or on inauspicious.

If his position is auspicious, then however inauspicious the surrounding sand and water may be, they only pull him down by a degree. But if his position itself is inauspicious, and the surrounding sand and water are inauspicious too, then he is finished.

Second, add up the energy of all the auspicious sand and water, and add up the energy of all the inauspicious sand and water, and compare the two. Whichever is greater tells you whether this only child's fortune is good or bad.



It is like adding up everything you owe and everything owed to you, and seeing whether your balance is positive or negative.

Nobody shares an only child's feng shui, good or bad; it is all his. Have you not noticed? When parents are paralysed, and there are several siblings, one contributes money and another contributes labour. An only child must contribute both. But turn it around: if the parents have property, nobody will contest the inheritance with an only child; where there are several siblings, the estate must be divided.

The reasoning in feng shui is the same. Several siblings divide the auspicious and inauspicious energy among them. An only child gets all of it.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Does Feng Shui During Pregnancy Affect a Child’s Fate?

2020-03-10 · 572 words

> **Translator's note.** The central claim of the whole practice layer, stated in its plainest form: the feng shui of the house where the mother spent her pregnancy sets the *level* a person's fate will occupy, and everything afterwards can only polish within that level. The mould metaphor does all the work. It is worth reading beside the two essays on the true dragon point — the same argument, one from the side of place and one from the side of time.

What is pregnancy feng shui?

It is the natural feng shui environment of the house in which a person, while in the mother's womb, spent most of the mother's pregnancy — and specifically the environment within fifty metres of that house.

It also includes, during the pregnancy, the natural feng shui environment within the small pattern of the mother's ancestral graves and the father's ancestral graves.



Whenever we speak of feng shui here, we mean the feng shui environment of natural science, not humanistic feng shui. If we meant humanistic feng shui, then prenatal education, personal relationships and the like would count as pregnancy feng shui too.



Pregnancy feng shui is the natural environment in which a person grows from a fertilised egg. The natural environment has an enormous influence on the formation and growth of every person. In a toxic environment, a child may be born with a congenital disability. In an environment with cats and dogs carrying parasitic disease, a child may be born liable to all kinds of stubborn illness. In an environment with strong electromagnetic fields, a child is quite likely to develop leukaemia. These are the visible effects of pregnancy feng shui.

The more important side of pregnancy feng shui is this: **it has a decisive influence on the level of a person's fate.**

Because pregnancy feng shui is a mould. Whatever the mould, ten months later it produces that product. If the mould has defects, the product — the child — will have defects of every kind.

If the mould of pregnancy feng shui has the defect of “short life,” the child will be short-lived. If it has the defect of “poverty and begging,” the child will be poor and beg. If it has the virtue of “great wealth,” the child will be greatly

wealthy. If it has the virtue of “high office and honour,” the child will hold high office and be honoured.

Pregnancy feng shui is the mould that produces a person. The quality of the mould decides the quality tier of the person produced. Where the finished product is used, and how it is ground and adjusted — that is the work of acquired feng shui. But if the product came out with a congenital defect, no amount of use, grinding or adjustment will turn that defective person into a flawless one.

Everyone in the world spends money hiring tutors, sending children to cram schools, buying tonics — never realising that if you choose the mould of pregnancy feng shui well, you need no tutors and no cram schools at all, because your child will be so intelligent as to succeed by self-study. Why would such a child need to be taught by others?



“Do not lose at the starting line” does not mean not losing at nursery and primary school. It means not losing at pregnancy feng shui. Lose there, and there is no hope left.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Can Ancestral Graves Affect the Fate of Descendants?

2017-11-07 · 1,007 words

Translator's note. The question every client asks first, and the one the collection answers most carefully. The argument is not traditional — it does not appeal to the classics — but built on heredity and on the observed fact that close kin react at a distance. The mobile-phone mast is the metaphor that carries it: the bones transmit, the terrain around the grave determines whether the signal gets out, and the living are the handsets. The last paragraph is worth noting: an expensive tomb decides nothing, and a large construction can damage the very vein it was built to honour.



What is an ancestral grave?

An ancestral grave is the place where an ancestor's bones are buried or kept. That place may be open country, it may be a house, it may be a public columbarium — any place at all. The landscape and vegetation around the place where the bones are buried or kept make up the feng shui environment of the ancestral grave.

Several thousand years of practice have confirmed that the feng shui environment of an ancestral grave is closely related to the fate of every one of its descendants. Contemporary science cannot yet explain the mechanism at the root, and some people flatly deny that any such relation exists. But we may still hope to understand and explain the matter by rational argument.



That the residential environment can affect a person's fate is established by science. In a very noisy environment a person's physical capacity and thinking are both seriously impaired; live there long enough and hallucinations of

hearing and sight appear, then dizziness, then mental disturbance. That is the most visible effect of environment on a person. As for the subtler and deeper influence of the earth qi — the information-energy field — formed by a residential environment, we need only recall the “haunted houses” and “inauspicious dwellings” reported from all over the world, and the harm they do to their occupants, to see that the residential environment does affect a person's fate.



But why should an ancestral grave also affect a person's fate?

A person is born of parents, and the parents of grandparents. Modern science has established that a person inherits information — genes — not only from the parents but indirectly, in part, from the grandparents as well. Because of this inheritance of information, there is between close kin a fairly strong bond of invisible, intangible information. In real life, when one member of a family meets with great calamity, relatives a thousand or ten thousand li away will at that very hour feel oppressed, agitated, visibly changed in body and mind.

That is the typical expression of the information bond between kin. Even between people who are not kin such bonds sometimes appear: the everyday phenomenon of “speak of Cao Cao and Cao Cao arrives” is enough to show objectively that there exist between people channels of information we do not yet understand.

After death, so long as the bones or ashes have not been scattered and dispersed — or completely rotted into the soil and merged with it — this inherited information continues to communicate with the living relatives, all the time. If the geographical environment of the place where the bones are laid forms an auspicious configuration of earth qi — an auspicious environmental information-energy field — then the living relatives receive auspicious information and energy, and those who receive auspicious information and energy are themselves auspicious. Conversely, if the earth qi of the ancestral grave is a dangerous and unfavourable field, the relatives receive dangerous, unfavourable information, and they meet with calamity after calamity and difficulty in everything.

By way of analogy: the bones or ashes are a mobile-phone mast. The qi field of the burial place is the landscape in which the mast stands. The living relatives are the handsets. As long as the mast is not broken — that is, as long as the bones are not scattered — clear signal from the mast means the handsets receive clear audio and data. But build the mast at the bottom of a deep ravine, and even if the mast itself is in perfect order, the handsets cannot communicate. Which is to say that the terrain where the mast stands seriously affects how well the handsets work.

In the same way, only if the qi field of the ancestral grave is auspicious — only if the environmental feng shui configuration is favourable — can the ancestors' bones transmit auspicious information to their descendants, and only then are the descendants fortunate.

So: change the geographical configuration of the ancestral grave and you change its qi field. Change the qi field and the descendants' fate changes accordingly.

One qualification, though. For people already born before the grave was changed, the change can only raise them *within* the level of fate they were born with — unless the grave is very substantially remade, in which case their level can be raised by one grade. For those born after the change, they reach easily the level that the new qi field sets. It is like a television station that used to broadcast by microwave, so that your set received poorly, and now transmits by cable: the set is the same set, but reception is much better than before.

So changing the feng shui of an ancestral grave certainly can change a person's fate.



The quality of a site is decided by the auspicious or inauspicious energy of the vein. The energy of the sand and water around the point is only focal energy, and cannot produce great wealth or high office. As for the structures raised outside the tomb — however carefully designed, however lavish and imposing — they decide nothing about the feng shui. Their force is at most like the fine-tuning knob on a television. A magnificent, luxurious tomb may be nothing but a façade, a flower without fruit; and sometimes the very scale of the construction damages the vein's qi.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Ancestral Graves and the Family Home

2017-10-30 · 957 words

> **Translator's note.** One of the earliest pieces in the collection — signed Guangzhou, July 2003 — and still the clearest statement of the ranking that the whole system rests on. The argument is mechanical rather than mystical: the dead stay put, so a point's energy acts on them without interruption, and they pass it on; the living move about the house all day, so they never sit in one place long enough to receive a steady influence. Hence the grave decides the constitution and the house decides the clothes. The well-and-water metaphor at the end also answers the obvious objection about reusing a good grave.

Yin dwelling means the ancestral grave; *yang* dwelling means the family home.

Over many years of work in this field I have met every kind of person and every kind of theory. On the relation between yin-dwelling and yang-dwelling feng shui there have always been three positions: those who know yin dwelling deny yang dwelling; those who know yang dwelling deny yin dwelling; and those who know both decline to say which weighs more — they argue yin dwelling is decisive when discussing yin dwelling, and yang dwelling is decisive when discussing yang dwelling, according to the needs of the moment.

In my view there are only two ways to establish whether a theory is correct: the test of practice, which is fundamental, and sound theoretical derivation. There is no third way. On that basis, let us examine which of the two weighs more in its effect on a person's fate.

1. In practice. With yin-dwelling feng shui we can accurately judge the fortune, misfortune, wealth or poverty, honour or meanness, longevity or early death of each branch of a dead man's descendants; and from the configuration of the grave and the magnitude of the sand-and-water energy we can accurately judge the *degree* of each. With yang-dwelling feng shui this is very difficult. The qualitative judgement and the quantitative estimate are next to impossible — unless one resorts to the trade's trick of inferring from ordinary life: see a mansion, conclude wealth; see a thatched hut, conclude poverty; see parents a hundred years old, conclude longevity; see no sign of children's things in the house, conclude there are no children. What yang-dwelling feng shui *can* do is judge, year by year, which aspect — money, office, illness, injury — will be favourable or not; and in that it is accurate enough.

2. In theory. The difference follows from an everyday fact. The occupants of a house do not sit motionless at one spot for a whole day, a whole month, a whole year. They are constantly changing position — changing the origin. Because the origin keeps changing, the occupants cannot receive the continuous influence of the energy at any one point in the house, which weakens the effect of the house on them, since every point within a house has its own energy.

With a grave it is otherwise. The dead do not move. The energy of a given point acts on them exclusively, persistently, without interruption. And so the dead — bones or ashes — transmit that fixed, exclusive, persistent energy to their descendants without interruption, and that information is not blocked by time or space. (Objectively, the longer the time and the greater the distance, the more the influence weakens; but between a dead man and his closest kin the weakening is almost nil. Only where the generational gap is very large is the weakening obvious.)

This determines that **yin-dwelling feng shui is fundamentally decisive**, while yang-dwelling feng shui produces only a change of degree — small

ailments, small misfortunes, small disasters. It cannot be decisive.

From this analysis it should be easy to see that a person's wealth or poverty, honour or meanness, longevity or early death, fortune or disaster, and the degree of each, are entirely decided by the ancestral grave (including the environment of the pregnancy). Yang-dwelling feng shui, apart from the pregnancy environment, only makes the fortune of the grave fluctuate in degree.

In plain terms: **the grave decides a person's physical constitution; the house is only the clothes he wears — of different thickness, different quality, different pattern. Whether a man is healthy is not decided by his clothes.**

At this point someone will ask: on your reasoning, if another person were buried in the same grave as a provincial governor's ancestor, would another provincial governor be born? A good question, and a far-sighted one. Understand that the energy contained in any thing is a fixed quantity, not unlimited. A well holds a fixed amount of water; it cannot be drawn on for thousands of years without end. In the same way, the auspicious or inauspicious energy stored in any grave is finite. If that energy has been fully drawn out by the first governor, then burying another person there will certainly not produce a second one. But if the first governor's family drew out only a small part of the energy the grave holds, then after a second person is buried there, his descendants will certainly include a governor or someone of higher rank — because most of the energy remains unused, and is left for others to draw on.

Put it another way: if the energy of a grave is ten thousand yuan, and the first dead man's descendants spent only three thousand, then the second man's descendants still have seven thousand to spend. But if the first family spent all ten thousand, then the second man's descendants have nothing but poverty.

There are a great many cases in practice that bear this out. This has been a digression, but perhaps it will be of some use to students and friends.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Are the Ming Tombs a Good Feng Shui Site?

2020-03-06 · 1,174 words

> **Translator's note.** The case study that the whole practice layer has been building toward. Thirteen imperial tombs, chosen by the best geomancers the Ming court could hire, in a valley that satisfies every classical criterion — and eight emperors born after the tombs were made, none of whom reached forty. Lü's explanation is the vein-qi stratum: the points were set at the edge of the qi-bearing layer, or on it but not at its most concentrated spot. The three pre-emptive rebuttals in the middle — you cannot say the imperial geomancers were incompetent, or disloyal — are the strongest part of the argument, because they close the escape routes.

The Ming tombs outside Beijing are the “dragon points” of thirteen Ming emperors. And yet not one of the eight Ming emperors born *after* those imperial tombs existed lived past forty. The Chongzhen emperor, born after the Zhaoling tomb of the Longqing emperor was made, not only lost the dynasty but died at thirty-five. Before him, the Tianqi emperor, Zhu Youxiao, lived only twenty-three years. And the other eight of the sixteen Ming emperors who did live past forty were all born *before* the tombs outside Beijing existed.

A person's fate is decided by the feng shui of the ancestral graves before his birth, and by the feng shui of the house where his mother spent most of the ten months of pregnancy. Changes to the ancestral graves after his birth, and the feng shui of the houses he

later lives and works in, cause only a fluctuation within the quality tier that the pre-natal grave and dwelling fixed for him.

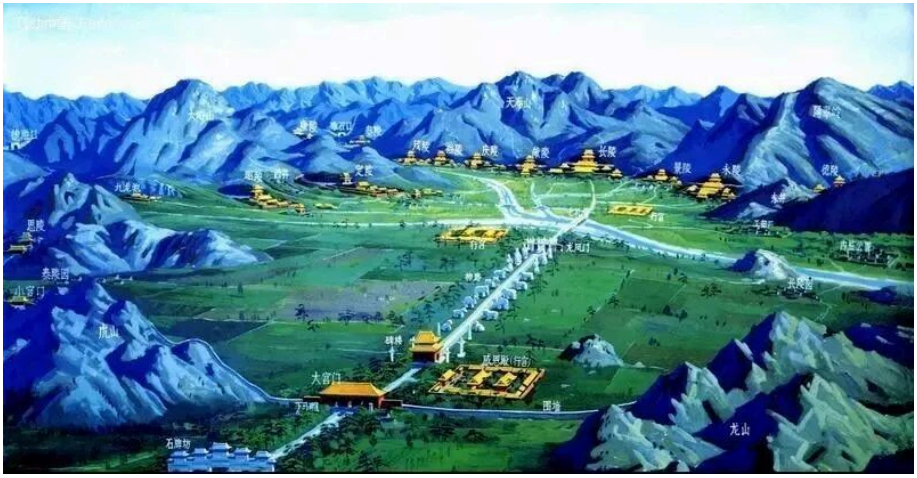


Eight emperors born after the dragon points of the Ming tombs existed died young, and the dynasty fell. What does that show? That the Ming tombs are not a treasure site? The answer is: they are not.

If you have walked the tombs of each of those emperors, you will find that the dragon of the Ming tombs comes from far away, its vein energy is enormous, the hills surround and the water embraces, the sand and water are affectionate — it really is a treasure site. So why did a treasure site produce eight short-lived emperors?

If you understand two things — **which stratum of the dragon the vein's qi is stored in**, and **how that energy gathers** — you will see it. None of the thirteen imperial tomb points was set in the stratum where the vein's qi lies, at the position where the energy is most concentrated and can be most

fully used. The points were set at the *edge* of the vein's qi; or, where a point did sit on the qi-bearing stratum, it was not at the most concentrated spot on it. So although their descendants became Sons of Heaven, they received no inexhaustible supply of vein energy, and one after another died young.



Map of the Ming tombs.

The Zhaoling of the Longqing emperor and the Qingling of the Taichang emperor were set even further off: upstream of the stratum from which the qi pours away. The consequence was that the Chongzhen emperor, Zhu Youjian, born afterwards, drew little energy from the Zhaoling which fixed his pre-natal fate, and could get no post-natal replenishment from the Qingling of his father, the Taichang emperor. With no energy of fate left to draw on, he lost the dynasty and took his own life.

The essence of feng shui is **using the vein energy of the dragon**. Where that energy lies is decided by **the structure of the dragon's strata** — not by the dragon's outward shape, nor by hills around and water embracing. The shape and the embrace are the *surface* of feng shui, not its substance.

I have surveyed every imperial tomb in China that can be surveyed, dynasty after dynasty. With the theory of strata structure and the accumulation of energy in strata, the great events that befell the later emperors of each dynasty can be explained completely, in feng shui terms. With the traditional theory of the treasure site, and with liqi, they cannot be explained at all.

Someone may say I do not understand liqi, and therefore cannot explain it. I am willing to concede that. But the emperors of successive dynasties, burying their predecessors, would hardly have hired a man who did not understand liqi — would hardly have hired a geomancer inferior to you. If you dismiss every liqi master the imperial courts employed, and hold that none of them understood liqi as you do, then I have nothing more to say.

Someone may say I do not understand the form-school theory of the treasure site, and therefore cannot explain it. I concede that too. But I cannot work out this: did the imperial form masters not understand the form-school theory of the treasure site? If they did, how did they come to set points that were short-lived and lost dynasties? And if you say they did not understand it and only you do, then again I have nothing to say.

And if you say the imperial geomancers deliberately set the wrong points and the wrong liqi — then let me ask: the imperial geomancers were a team, not one man. Was there not a single one in the whole team loyal to the emperor? Was the emperor so incompetent as to staff his site selection entirely with enemies?

Which shows plainly: the essence of feng shui lies inside the dragon, not outside it. For if the essence lay outside, the geomancers employed by every dynasty would not have set points that left later emperors short-lived or cost them the throne — since it is impossible that the imperial geomancers did not know the form school and the liqi school, impossible that they were inferior to today's masters, who cannot even read the old books, let alone translate them.

The reason the imperial geomancers set wrong points is entirely that **they saw the dragon's outward shape and not its internal structure.** Every geomancer in every age has inferred where the vein's qi lies by observing and analysing the dragon's external features — finding the true dragon point by reasoning from outside to inside — and error was therefore unavoidable. Find the location of the vein's qi directly, from the internal structure of the dragon, and the thing becomes as easy as turning over a hand.

Every dragon has a true dragon point, but their energies differ. Only a point with more energy than every provincial-and-ministerial-level point in the country will produce imperial rank; only a point with more energy than every geomancer-level point in the country will produce provincial-and-ministerial rank. But any true dragon point at all is more auspicious than an ordinary point.

Friends who want to understand the real technique of seeking the dragon and setting the point may read the relevant essays on my Sina blog; and by walking the imperial tombs of the Ming for themselves, they will understand what a true dragon point actually is.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

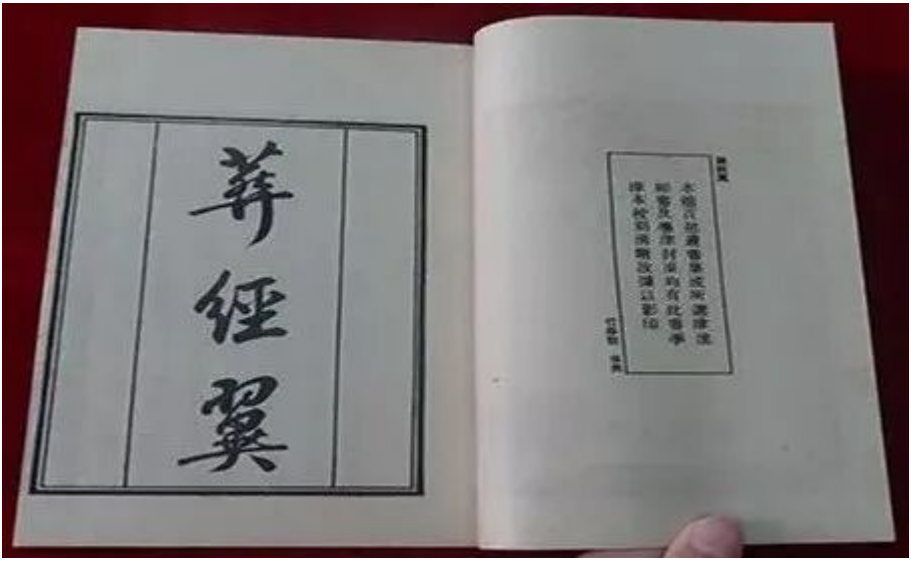
The Zangshu of Guo Pu: Text, Meaning and a Scientific Reading

2017-11-23 · 3,242 words

> **Translator's note.** The closing piece of the practice layer, and the right one to end on: the founding text of the whole tradition, read through and then marked. Two things are worth knowing before you start. First, this is not a translation — the author paraphrases the *Zangshu* line by line in modern Chinese, and the English here follows his paraphrase, not Guo Pu's original, which is why the register is plainer than the fourth-century text. Second, the second half is a ten-point audit in which he accepts some of the classic and rejects the rest, most sharply the claim that qi stops at water. Read it as a working geomancer arguing with his own scripture.

The *Zangshu* — also called the *Book of Burial* — was written by the Eastern Jin scholar Guo Pu. It not only discusses feng shui and its importance but sets out concrete methods for reading a site, and it is the ancestor of Chinese feng shui culture and one of the great curious books of Chinese divination.

Many of the *Zangshu*'s propositions are not necessarily correct. What follows is an exposition of its content, and does not represent either my endorsement or my rejection of them.



(For reasons of length the original text is not reproduced here.)

Burial is for the purpose of using the inexhaustible energy in the earth. The energy that flows in the earth becomes wind when it moves outside, clouds when it rises, rain when it descends; flowing within the earth it gives rise to all things.

Children are part of their parents' bodies. When the parents' bodies receive energy, it is passed to the children; and when the parents' bones are buried, they pass the earth's energy on to their descendants. When the copper mountain in the west collapses, the bronze bell in the east rings; when the plants outside grow in spring, the seeds indoors sprout. These are the proofs.

The energy in the earth flows along the lie of the mountains; when the range continues and then stops, the energy too gathers and stops. Energy is in the trunk of the range and in its branches; with the range it is everywhere. Blown by the wind without protection, it disperses; meeting water, it halts.

What we call feng shui is the method by which people use the energy that flows in the earth. The best feng shui is energy that halts on meeting water;

the second best is storing the wind so that the energy is not blown away. For even along the main flow of the earth's energy, part of it will stop; and even away from the main flow, scattered energy will gather. So long as the earth's energy can be used, whether deep or shallow, the site may be called good. Earth is the root of energy — where there is earth there is energy. Energy is the root of water — where there is energy there is water. Hence at a high site the bright hall should be deep; at a flat site it should be shallow.

Energy flows following the form of the earth, and so gives rise to all things. A range that winds and is majestic, that turns and returns, where motion and stillness are in harmony, where yin and yang join, where the earth is thick and the water deep, where plants grow vigorously, where the form stops and the energy gathers — such a place brings forth all things, and is noble as a thousand chariots, rich as ten thousand in gold. It is a supreme site.

A point site values flatness; a range values change. Where the range begins to change, the energy begins to change; where the range's change ends, the energy stops and gathers. In the range's changes lies the way to use auspicious energy. Where the point has auspicious energy there must be a swelling of earth; where the range's change reaches the place where energy stops, there must be a river or a gully alongside. If the mountain's changes flow smoothly and return with affection, it is forever auspicious without misfortune. Where ridges are layered and the changes are hard to tell apart, see the small in the large and the large in the small. Where host and guest ridges cannot be distinguished, do not bury. Where the main ridge towers and the branches lie low, wherever the change halts there must be ground flat as the palm of a hand. Bury the main peak at the mountain's foot, and the branch ridges high. If the range changes abnormally, the earth's energy pours away. So burying a person is truly difficult, and observing the changes of ranges does indeed dazzle the eye and confuse the mind.

Whatever the changes, the orthodox method is to bury at the junction of ranges. In choosing the place, begin from the source of the range's changes and bury where the dragon stops. Examine whether the dragon is useful or not; take what is beneficial and avoid what is harmful. Ride it shallow, take it deep; open it to pass, close it to fix. Ride metal and face water — take from above and below; sink earth and seal wood — weigh left and right. Hide the eight winds outside; secrete the five phases within. Heaven's light descends, earth's virtue bears up; yin and yang are joined; the five soils are present and the four are complete — azure dragon, vermilion bird, white tiger, black tortoise. This is how the gentleman seizes the creation of heaven and earth to change fate. Skill of eye and depth of practice are the root of it: move toward completeness and avoid defect, raise the low and add to the high. The changes lie wholly in the mind, and by generalising from one case to the next the work may rival creation itself.

A good site: the range runs on in rise and fall like flowing water, like a galloping horse. It comes like a galloping horse and stops like a horse lying down. It is like a man clutching ten thousand treasures and not daring to breathe; like a man who has prepared a fine meal and bathed and fasted; like a bulging sack; like a vessel filled with things. Like a dragon, like a phoenix, now soaring, now coiling; like a bird crouching; like a hundred beasts squatting; like an emperor in his dignity, the bright hall open before him, all the hills attending, dragon and tiger embracing, host and guest greeting one another in order, the four animals upright and distinct. As for the five harms not coming near and the eleven incompletes — these are secondary matters.

There are five mountains that may not be buried. First, energy is useful by flowing and giving rise to things; a bare mountain's energy gives rise to nothing, so a bare mountain may not be buried. Second, energy flows along the range; a broken mountain has no flow, so a broken mountain may not be buried. Third, energy flows within the earth; a rocky mountain has no earth, so a rocky mountain may not be buried. Fourth, energy gathers where the

mountain's force stops; a mountain merely passing through has no place where energy stays, so a passing mountain may not be buried. Fifth, energy gathers where ranges meet; an isolated mountain has no range to meet, so an isolated mountain may not be buried. The bare, the passing, the broken, the rocky and the isolated produce new dangers and consume the blessing already accumulated.

In reading a dragon, the force of the range is the hardest thing to judge, the form of the range next, and a single part of the range easier still.

A range whose force is like ten thousand horses descending from heaven is an imperial vein. Force like a towering wave, ridge upon ridge, is the vein of a general or a minister. Force like a descending dragon with water curling round and clouds following is ground for one of the three dukes. Force like layer upon layer of tall buildings with luxuriant plants is ground for a founding minister. Force like a startled snake fleeing, twisting and slanting, destroys state and family. Force like spears and halberds is ground for execution and imprisonment. Force like flowing water is treacherous ground.

Form like a man bearing a heavy load, with a towering ridge within the range — buried lawfully where the ridge stops, it is ground for a risen prince or marquis. Form like a swallow's nest: within the nest is ground for an enfeoffed vassal. Form like a wall set on its side, with a ridge coming from far behind and curved water encircling four times in front, is ground for a pillar of the state. Form like an inverted pot: its summit is ground for wealth. Form like a standing cap is ground of goodness, brightness and joy. Form like a vessel for counting tallies is ground where all affairs fall into confusion. Form like an inverted boat is ground where women sicken and men go to prison. Form like a horizontal desk is ground where descendants die out. Form like a sword laid flat is ground for murder and robbery. Form like an upturned knife is ground from which calamity cannot be escaped. Form like a heap of disordered clothes is ground for jealous women and wantons.

Forms like an ox lying down, a horse galloping, a flying phoenix, a snake extending and winding, a soft-shelled turtle or a turtle — distinguish them by the water. An ox lying down governs wealth; a phoenix dancing governs honour; a snake winding governs danger. A form like a hundred insects writhing is nowhere usable. But more important still is the method of the four responses.

Within a single dragon, look at the force from afar and at the point-star's form close at hand. If force and form agree, it is auspicious; if they oppose, inauspicious. Bad force with good form is mostly bad; good force with bad form brings disaster at once. If the dragon's force winds and rises and falls, but the outer qi does not stop and gather and the inner qi is scattered in the earth, then — as the classic says — a point that does not store qi is a burial of rotting bones. For wind can blow the living qi away, and dragon and tiger sands can block the wind; but countless points are empty on the left and missing on the right, open in front and broken behind, and the living qi is blown away entirely — as the classic says, a leaking point is a burial that rots the coffin. The classic says also that water can halt and gather the inner qi, and so water bounds the dragon. A thousand feet is force, a hundred feet is form; when the force has come and the form has stopped, with joining in front and parting behind, it is an auspicious burial.

The earth has four forces, and qi comes from the eight directions. So at a burial site the left is the azure dragon, the right the white tiger, the front the vermilion bird, the back the black tortoise. If the black tortoise lowers its head, the vermilion bird dances, the azure dragon winds and the white tiger is docile, it is a greatly auspicious site; if the opposite, it is ground of breaking and death. So a white tiger crouching is called “holding the corpse in its mouth”; an azure dragon squatting is called “envying the master”; a black tortoise that does not lower its head is called “rejecting the corpse”; a vermilion bird that does not dance is called “flying away.” Use the compass to fix the directions and a rule to measure the distances. Where branch ridges

serve as dragon and tiger, they must embrace like an elbow at the point where the branch stops. Where a river or gully serves as vermilion bird, water that rushes and churns is ground of weeping. The water of the vermilion bird depends entirely on the magnitude of its energy: incoming water is auspicious, facing water greatly auspicious, departing water that does not return means imprisonment and extinction. Water that winds and turns, murky and slow, looking back at me and unwilling to leave, is greatly auspicious water. Mountain coming and water returning gives honour, wealth and long life; mountain imprisoned and water departing without feeling is ground where state and family are destroyed. The soil of the point should be fine and firm, moist but not wet, lustrous as cut jade, with the five colours complete — that is auspicious ground. If the soil is dry like grain in a pit, wet like cut flesh, or the point holds springs, sand or gravel, it is inauspicious ground.

There are three auspicious conditions in a point and six inauspicious ones in a burial. Hiding the spirit and matching the new moon, welcoming the gods and avoiding the ghosts — choosing the time — is the first auspicious condition. Yin and yang joined, the five soils present and the four complete — a good site — is the second. Refined practice and a skilful eye, able to seek completeness and avoid defect, to raise the low and add to the high — a master's skill — is the third.

A yin-yang error — the orientation — is the first inauspicious condition. The year and season out of joint — the date — is the second. Small power aiming at something great — greed — is the third. Relying on one's own accumulated blessing — not believing in feng shui — is the fourth. Usurping above and pressing below — fraud — is the fifth. Strange transformations and weird apparitions — credulous belief in heresy — is the sixth.

Though the point be a jewel, bury with these six and it is no better than throwing away a corpse: no auspicious energy will be obtained.

Where the dragon's force has stopped and the point-star stands high, with a river in front and a ridge behind, that is where the knot forms. Bury at the nose or the forehead and it is auspicious and flourishing. Bury at the dragon's horns or eyes and it is extinction. Bury at the ear and it is ground for a marquis or a king. Bury at the lips and it is ground of death and injury. Bury at the belly or the navel and it is ground of great blessing for later generations. Bury at the chest or the ribs and disaster arrives at once. The fortune or misfortune of a burial on a dragon comes as quickly as an echo in a mountain valley.

To read the *Zangshu* scientifically and objectively helps us to understand feng shui correctly, and helps the subject to develop soundly.

1. The *Zangshu*'s account of *why* burying an ancestor's bones affects the fate of descendants is only a conjecture, with no scientific basis. But the objective fact is this: once an ancestor's bones are buried in a place, the feng shui of that place affects the fate of the descendants. That is iron fact.

2. "Qi disperses when ridden by wind and halts at the boundary of water" is not necessarily correct in practice. The energy in a dragon vein is stored in the strata; it does not disperse because wind blows on it, and it does not necessarily stop gathering when it meets water. Whether the vein's energy stops is decided by the strike and the undulation of the strata. There are far too many cases of the qi-bearing stratum passing under a river and continuing on the dragon on the far bank; it emphatically does not "halt at the boundary of water." And the energy in the strata differs greatly with the distance and size of the dragon: if the stratum's energy is great, it does not fear the wind at all; if it is very small, no absence of wind will make it auspicious. Objectively, though: however great the energy, it is somewhat better not to have it blown apart than to have it blown apart.

3. What is feng shui? It is the method of finding the point at which the vein energy of a dragon gathers most, is greatest, and can be used to the fullest

extent.

4. The vein's qi in the strata has no essential relation to the rise and fall of the mountain's outward form or to its shape. Judging a dragon's fortune by its external configuration and setting a point on that basis is not necessarily correct. Seeking the dragon and setting the point should take the qi-bearing stratum as its object of observation.

5. Wealth and poverty, honour and meanness have no direct, decisive relation to the size of the bright hall. The degree of wealth, rank, longevity or early death is decided by the magnitude of the vein's energy, not by the bright hall.

6. The doctrine of the five unburiable mountains is partly right and partly wrong. Whether a site can be buried is decided by the strike of the strata in the range and by the position within the range of the stratum that carries the qi. Mountains of the five kinds have produced great wealth and high rank in numbers beyond counting; and ground that is not of the five kinds has produced poverty, meanness and early death in numbers like the sands of the Ganges.

7. There is no necessary or absolute relation between a “treasure site” and “hills around, water embracing, sand and water affectionate.” The embrace is only a secondary condition of a treasure site. Hills around and water embracing is a **focal point**, not the **vein-qi point** of the dragon. The vein-qi point is the true dragon point, and the true dragon point is found by means of the strata. The substance of a “treasure site” is that it must lie on the stratum in which the dragon's vein qi is stored.

8. The doctrine of “a thousand feet is force, a hundred feet is form” — the discussion of the mountain's force and form — is of little practical value. In practice it is very hard to find a treasure site by this theory. To gull people, of course, it is extremely useful. Students need only understand what the old text means.

9. The doctrine of the azure dragon, white tiger, vermilion bird and black tortoise is not especially accurate. Go and look at a few real sites that have produced great men, and you will understand how much use the four animals actually are in judging fortune.

10. Of the "three auspicious conditions and six inauspicious," only two are entirely correct: that good feng shui is auspicious, and that a good geomancer is auspicious. The rest is idealist talk about human morality. **Feng shui has nothing to do with human morality.** Given a treasure site, the worst man in the world will prosper there; given bad ground, the best man in the world will be left without descendants, poor and dying young. The facts of ordinary life will tell you that these propositions are wrong. As an exhortation to do good they have some merit. But understand: they have not the slightest connection with scientific feng shui.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

Energy Channels in the Mountains

2022-11-24 · 786 words

> **Translator's note.** This is the mechanism that explains one of the oldest complaints about feng shui — why three graves in a row, sharing one view and one hillside, produce three entirely different families. The answer is not that the graves are different. It is that the energy arrives at a point, and only one of the three points is on the path. The umbrella analogy is the author's, and it is unusually good.

Two graves side by side. Twenty centimetres apart. One family prospers for three generations; the other produces clerks and misfortunes. The classical answer is that the sites differ. The answer here is that the sites are identical, and the **arrival points** differ.

How a ridge makes a channel

An energy channel is formed by relay.

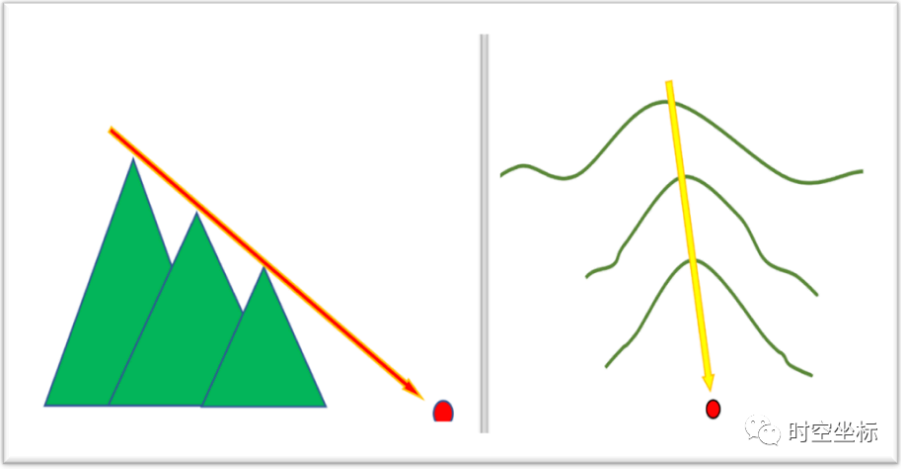
Take three peaks descending in height, one behind the other. Qi of the *chonghe* kind — the balanced, harmonised qi that this system treats as the useful form — exists inside a mountain mass, but most of it arrives from space and settles on the surface. Once it lands, or once it spills out of a ridge, it does not spread evenly in all directions. It runs downhill, and it hands itself on.

The first peak discharges onto the second. The second receives that and discharges a larger quantity onto the third. The third discharges to the ground. What reaches the bottom is not a third of the total; it is the accumulated total, funnelled.

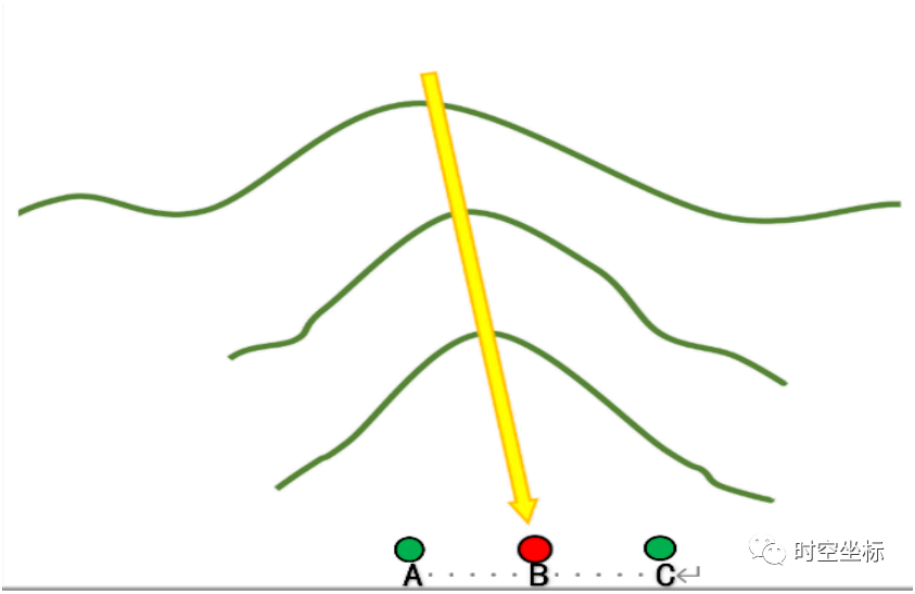
That funnel is the channel.

Why only one of three points receives anything

Place three origin points at the foot of the slope — call them A, B and C, in order along the direction the energy is running. Only B sits on the channel. A and C do not.



Three peaks descending; the relay runs down the line of the ridge.



A, B and C are three origin points. Only B is on the channel.

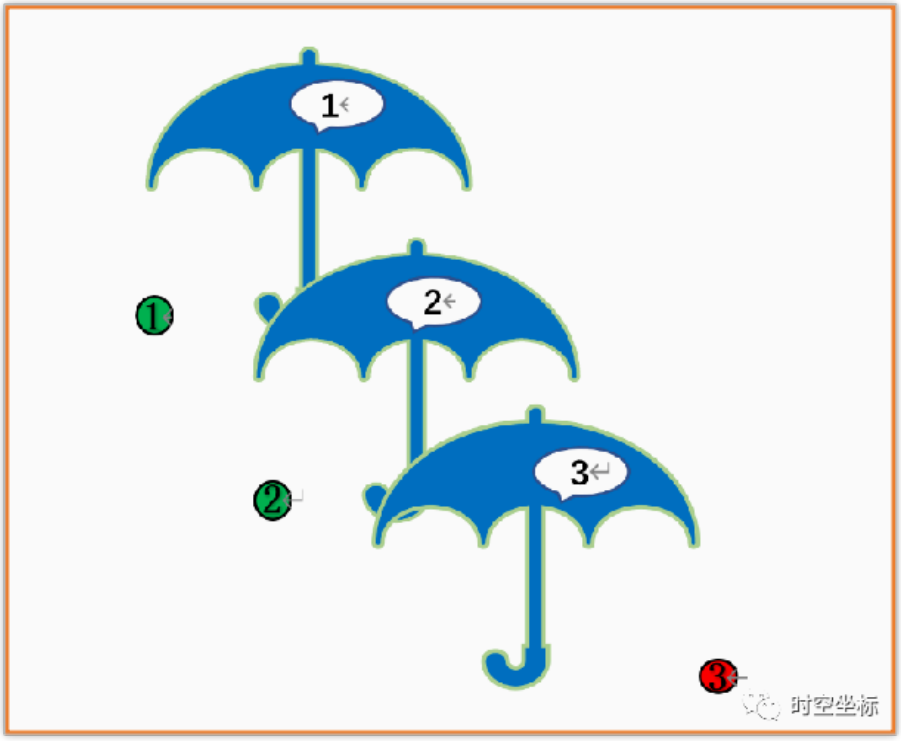
If A, B and C are the graves of three brothers, twenty or thirty centimetres apart, facing the same eastern slope, the consequence is immediate. The eldest son of household B receives the whole eastern contribution. The eldest sons of A and C receive almost none of it — not because their sites are bad in some general sense, but because the energy is not landing where they are.

This is the ordinary explanation for the family plot that produces one wealthy branch and two unlucky ones. Three grandfathers are buried in a row; the second grandfather's descendants all do well; the first and third produce nothing but trouble. Practitioners who do not understand channels look at the three graves, see one identical eastern view, and have no way to distinguish them — so they tell the family that the difference is fate, or virtue, or the stars.

The relay, in umbrellas

If you have held an umbrella in the rain, you already have the model.

Open three umbrellas in a line, each lower than the one before, all tilted the same way. Rain falling on the highest runs off its edge onto the canopy of the middle one, which now carries its own rain plus what it received, and passes both down to the lowest. The lowest umbrella discharges everything — three canopies' worth — onto the ground at one point.



Three canopies in series; the third receives the accumulation of all three.

That is a channel. Not a metaphor for one — the same structure: a series of collectors at decreasing height, each passing its total to the next, discharging at the bottom.

What it is good for

Two practical uses.

Family plots. Once you can see the channel, the question of which branch prospers stops being a moral question and becomes a geometric one. Which grave is on the line? Which is thirty centimetres off it? The answer is visible.

Public cemeteries. This is where the method earns its keep. A modern cemetery is a grid of near-identical plots on a hillside, and practitioners who rely on the shape of individual graves are reduced to guessing, because the shapes are the same. But the channels are not the same. The rows cut across the slope at different heights; some plots sit on a relay line and some sit in the gaps between them. Two plots in the same row, six feet apart, can receive entirely different quantities.

That is also why the same cemetery can produce one prominent family and dozens of ordinary ones without anything being wrong with the cemetery. The site is not a single thing. It is a surface with paths across it, and most people are standing between the paths.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

Reading a Site by the Sea

2020-07-01 · 920 words

> **Translator's note.** A short technical piece that turns on one distinction most readings miss: zero is not water. A sea or a large lake is treated as the zero plane — an absence, not an expanse of the water element — and the rest of the site is read against it. The worked example at the end is a grave above the Fujian coast; the images in the original carry Chinese labels and have been omitted here.

The method for coastal and lakeside sites rests on a single definition, and if the definition is wrong everything downstream is wrong. It concerns what the sea is: not an expanse of the water element, but an absence of terrain — the zero plane against which every other height is measured.

What counts as sea

Not every body of water. The category covers open, unbroken water — the sea, a very large lake, water with no far shore you can see. It does not cover a small bay, a reservoir, a river, a pond, or a canal.

The reason for the restriction is that the method treats this kind of water as **the zero plane**: the baseline against which every elevation in the surrounding terrain is measured. A reservoir has a far bank, and the far bank is a hill. An open sea has no far bank, so it supplies the datum.

Zero is not the water element. This is the point that gets lost. In this system, water is an element with a direction and a character; zero is a reference surface, like the sea-level line on a map. A site with sea to its east does not

have water in the east. It has **nothing** in the east, and everything else is measured from that nothing.

The three configurations

Sea to the east, a hill to the west. East is zero. The hill in the west is sand. That is the whole reading: one zero, one sand, the rest of the compass filled in against them.

Sea to the east, but high buildings between you and it. Now the sea is not your datum. If the buildings on that side are taller than your site, they block the line, and the sea has no bearing on you at all — the buildings are what you are reading. This is common in coastal cities, where a sea view sells the apartment and the tower next door determines the feng shui.

Sea to the east, but everything between you and the water is lower than you. Then the whole run from your site down to the shoreline is treated as zero, not just the water itself. You are standing at the top of a zero slope, and the reading is made from your elevation outwards.

When there is water beyond the hill

A more complicated case, and the one that separates careful readings from careless ones.

East is open sea. West is a low hill. Beyond the hill, a river.

Here the hill in the west is sand, but it belongs to the **local** frame — the near field, the immediate setting of the site. The river beyond it is water, and it belongs to the **large** frame — the first ring of the wider landscape. The sea in the east remains zero throughout.

The mistake is to treat the sea and the river as two waters facing each other across the site — what this system calls paired water in opposition. They are not a pair. The sea is a datum and the river is an element, and a datum cannot

be paired with anything. Read the sea as water and the entire configuration inverts: a site that should be read as receiving good water from the west is read as receiving water from both sides, and the verdict flips.

The instruction in the original is to imagine the sea surface as wind moving across a field of wheat — a plane, textured, continuous, and flat. That image keeps the category straight. Wheat is not water.

The worked case

A successful businessman in Fujian. His grandmother's grave.

East of the grave: open sea, unbroken to the horizon. West of the grave: a gentle sand slope rising. West of that slope: a river.

Read with the sea as zero: the river in the west is the large-frame water of the site, and the slope between is the near-field sand. The man is the eldest grandson of the deceased. In the positional system used here — which assigns compass sectors to family members by generation and birth order — the eldest grandson of the main line falls in the western sector.

He is therefore positioned in the auspicious water of the large frame, which is the river. The reading and the outcome agree, and the agreement depends entirely on not counting the sea as water. Count it as water and the western river becomes half of an opposed pair, the sector loses its status, and the same grave reads as ordinary.

The general lesson

Coastal sites are where the difference between a defined term and an undefined one becomes visible. Practitioners who treat “water” as a mood — anything wet, anywhere — produce readings that cannot be checked, because nothing in them is fixed. Fix the sea at zero and the rest of the site has to be

measured. That is the whole benefit of the definition: it removes the freedom to call the result either way.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

Shopfronts on a Street

2020-07-03 · 962 words

> **Translator's note.** A street is not a river. The piece reaches that conclusion by a neat piece of reasoning: assume the street is water, work out what follows, and note that the prediction fails on every shopping street in the country. The original includes a diagram with Chinese labels — orientation and unit numbers drawn on a plan — which has been replaced here by a table.

Two definitions govern a row of shops facing a road, and both are counter-intuitive. The road is not a river, and the corner is not a corner. Get either wrong and the whole row reads backwards — which is why so many confident verdicts about commercial streets are simply inverted.

1. **The street is zero.** Not water, not sand. Zero.
2. **A crossroads is water.**

Get either wrong and the row cannot be read.

Why the street cannot be water

Suppose we treat the road as water and follow the consequences for a row of shops on its northern side, call one of them A, and a row on its southern side, call one of them D. Assume the other directions are identical for both.

For the northern shop A, the road lies to its south. Then the south-east and south-west of A are inauspicious water and its south is auspicious water — two bad, one good.

For the southern shop D, the road lies to its north. Then the north-east and north-west of D are auspicious water and its north is inauspicious water — two good, one bad.

The prediction follows immediately: **every shop on the southern side should do better than every shop on the northern side.** Not on average. Always.

That is not what streets look like. On any commercial road, the northern side has its successes and its failures, and so does the southern side, in roughly equal numbers, in every city, in every decade. A theory that predicts a clean split and is contradicted by the visible arrangement of every high street is not being applied badly. It is the wrong premise.

Why zero is the right premise

Step back and ask what a street physically is.

A street is a shared surface. It carries the same traffic past every unit on it, receives the same rain, drains the same way. It has no preference among the shops it serves. When a storm floods the road to knee height, the water enters every doorway on both sides.

A thing that affects everyone identically cannot be the cause of their differences. The street's contribution is a constant across the row, and a constant cancels out of any comparison. What makes one unit prosper and its neighbour fail must lie somewhere the two do not share: the terrain behind them, the buildings opposite, the heights and water in the directions that differ from unit to unit.

So the street enters the calculation as zero — the baseline from which each unit's own surroundings are measured. This is the same role the sea plays on a coast. It is present, it is large, and it contributes nothing differential.

Reading a row

Take a row of six units on the north side of an east–west road, with identical flat ground to their east and west. What distinguishes them is what lies to their north — behind the shops — and in their diagonal sectors.

Unit	North	NE / NW	SE / SW	Verdict
B	auspicious sand	auspicious water	—	strongly auspicious
C	auspicious sand	inauspicious sand	—	somewhat inauspicious
E	inauspicious sand	—	auspicious sand	somewhat auspicious
F	inauspicious sand	—	inauspicious water	strongly inauspicious

Note what the table does and does not say. It does not rank the six units against the units across the street. It ranks them against each other, on the same side, on the basis of differences that actually exist between them. Unit B and unit F may be fifteen metres apart and facing the same road, and one is strong and the other is ruinous — because the ground behind them differs, and the diagonals differ.

The double-street case

Some rows are bounded by a street at each end, or front and back. Both streets are zero.

This is the point at which careful readers make a specific error. Having accepted that a street is zero, they then look at two streets flanking the row and treat them as a **pair** of waters in opposition — one element on each side of the site, both large, both influential.

There is no pair. There are two zeros. A zero on each side of a site is not a symmetrical water configuration; it is a baseline on each side, leaving the row to be read from its internal heights and from the remaining directions. The error matters because paired water in opposition has its own rules — and applying those rules to two streets would produce confident verdicts about a situation the rules were never designed for.

The general rule

The lesson generalises past shopfronts. Before reading any site, decide what each large feature is — element, or datum. A datum is something that affects all positions equally and therefore explains no difference between them. An element is something that arrives with a direction and a quantity, and therefore does.

Most confident readings go wrong at this first step, and they go wrong in the same direction: treating a shared, neutral surface as though it were an active element, and then building a theory of the neighbours' fortunes on top of it.

CHAPTER THIRTY

Is There Such a Thing as Reverse Feng Shui?

2020-07-17 · 789 words

> **Translator's note.** A strange doctrine, and a real one: some practitioners hold that a brothel, casino or prison has “reverse” feng shui, and must therefore be read backwards — good becomes bad, bad becomes good. The refutation here is a single analogy, and it is decisive. The original ends with a contact number for consultations; it has been removed.

The claim is made often enough to have become a school: premises of certain kinds — nightclubs, casinos, prisons — have feng shui that runs in reverse, and must be read in reverse. An auspicious direction in such a building is said to produce the opposite of what it would produce anywhere else. It sounds like sophistication. It is a way of accounting for failures in ordinary readings.

The prison test

Take the claim at face value and ask who is affected.

A prison contains two populations: the inmates and the guards. They occupy the same building, the same cells, the same exercise yards, the same corridors. If the building's feng shui runs backwards, then it runs backwards for both.

The consequence is unavoidable. If the site is genuinely inverted, then the staff — who spend their working lives in it — should suffer the same shortened lives and the same injuries as the prisoners. There is no mechanism by which a reversed energy distinguishes between a person in a uniform and a person in a cell.

Is that observed? Prisons are grim places, and their staff do carry occupational stress. But the claim being made is not about stress. It is that the *same building* delivers *opposite* verdicts depending on the occupant's legal status. Nothing in the physical description of the site could produce such a split.

If a prison's feng shui must nonetheless be good for the people who live and work in it — and it must, or the doctrine of the site doing anything at all collapses — then it is governed by the same rules as a house.

The casino's own interests

A casino exists to take money. That is its function, and it is not a moral question here; it is a description of the business.

Now consider what a badly-sited casino actually experiences. Fire. Flood. Armed robbery. Customers who fight inside it and shoot at each other. These are not symbolic harms. They are the standard failure modes of a cash-heavy venue, and they are exactly what an inauspicious site is said to produce.

So a casino with bad feng shui does not become a casino where bad luck is good. It becomes a casino that burns down. The building does not know what business is conducted inside it, and it does not reverse its behaviour when it finds out.

Energy does not read the sign above the door

The underlying point is simple enough to state without any technical vocabulary.

Energy is a physical quantity. It does not change its nature according to the purpose of the building it passes through. It acts on living things — plants, animals, people — by the same rules in every case. It does not become a sword when it reaches an animal, or gold when it reaches a person.

Nor does it have intentions. A thing without intentions cannot decide to behave in reverse because the premises are used for gambling. Water runs downhill; it does not run uphill when it arrives at a nightclub. If a practitioner tells you that water reverses at a casino, ask him what the water is doing at the casino's residential floors, or in the flat next door, or in the drains beneath the car park.

What is actually being described

The reverse-feng-shui doctrine exists to solve a problem the practitioner has, not a problem the building has. When the theory predicts prosperity for a site that then fails, there are three honest responses: the theory is wrong, the reading was wrong, or the site changed. The reverse doctrine offers a fourth: the site is a special case where the theory inverts.

That fourth option costs nothing and explains everything, which is the signature of a device rather than a finding.

The rule that replaces it

Read the site. Do not read the business.

A site that produces wealth will produce wealth in a casino, a restaurant, or a warehouse. A site that produces loss will produce loss in any of them — including, as the original puts it bluntly, a brothel. The trade does not modify the physics. If it did, the reading would no longer be a reading of the site at all, but a reading of the customer's industry, and there would be no reason to visit the building.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

Is Feng Shui a Science?

2021-01-20 · 838 words

> **Translator's note.** The argument here turns on a definition the author supplies himself, and it is not the academic one. What he calls the "humanities" is any body of knowledge that can be read two ways and still sound right — a field with no test it can fail. Whether or not one accepts the label, the test he proposes is usable: name one question about a house that has exactly one correct answer, and see whether the tradition can answer it twice, in opposite directions, and be paid both times.

The *Yijing* itself is a work of philosophy — a humanity, a social science, call it what you like. That much is uncontroversial.

But the prediction systems that grew out of it are not. They claim to describe how the physical world acts on a person, and a claim of that kind is either true or false. Feng shui, on this account, belongs with the natural sciences. It is not a branch of the humanities, and it is not a social science.

What the distinction actually means

Stated bluntly: a humanity is a body of knowledge that can be used to talk people into things, because it has no standard of right and wrong, and therefore can be interpreted however the speaker needs it interpreted.

A natural science has three marks:

1. **You cannot bluff with it.** If I hand you a hundred, it is a hundred. I cannot tell you it is a hundred million and be believed.
2. **It has strict criteria for judgment.** Not preferences — criteria.

3. **It cannot be read at will.** A hundred is a hundred. It does not become something else because the reading would suit me better.

Feng shui should work the same way. Is a door facing another door auspicious or not? There ought to be one answer. If I can call it auspicious when it suits me and inauspicious when it does not, then the sentence is not a claim about the world. It is sales copy.

The door that proves the point

Traditional practitioners have a standard routine for this situation. Your door is large, your neighbour's door is small, and the two face each other.

If your household prospers, the master says: *the large door has been eating the small door*.

If your neighbour prospers, the same master says: *all the energy of the large door has flowed into the small one*.

Both outcomes, one theory, no possibility of being wrong. That is what a humanity looks like in practice — and it is why the reading costs nothing to produce. A natural science cannot do this. Before the fact, it has to say which way it will go.

The real question about a facing door has three parts: what kind of door faces what kind of door, which direction faces which direction, and — the one that decides it — **whether the energy between them circulates.** Answer those and you have an answer. Skip them and you have a story.

The hallway screen

The most expensive consequence of the humanities approach is the entrance screen — the panel that goes up inside the front door in almost every new

southern Chinese apartment, on the reasoning that a door opening straight into a room is bad.

Sometimes the screen is correct. Most of the time it is wrong.

Think about what a screen does physically. It blocks a passage. If the passage was carrying good energy into the house and bad energy out, then blocking it is exactly the same as holding your nose and mouth shut while telling yourself you are breathing more carefully. Households like this needed the corridor's circulation; they have sealed the only opening they had.

The rule is not “screens are good” or “screens are bad.” The rule is directional:

- If auspicious energy flows **in** from that direction and the house's own bad energy flows **out**, a screen is actively harmful. Do not build one.
- If inauspicious energy flows **in** and the house's good energy flows **out**, a screen is necessary. Build one.

Same door, same room, opposite prescriptions — because the answer depends on a measurement, not on a saying.

Why this matters beyond one hallway

The point of the example is not the hallway. It is that without this distinction you have no way to judge which of the inherited schools is right and which is wrong, because every school can be defended in the same unfalsifiable way. The moment you accept that feng shui is a natural science, the test becomes available: ask what the claim predicts, then go and look.

And the converse holds. Anyone who tells you that feng shui is a social science, or a humanity, or a matter of cultural feeling, is telling you in advance that his statements cannot be checked. That is a convenient position for the person making the statements. It is not a convenient position for the person paying for them.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

Energy and Circulation

2021-01-26 · 793 words

> **Translator's note.** Two criteria, and nothing else. Almost every disagreement about feng shui in the English literature is about forms — this shape, that corner, this animal on the roof. This piece argues that forms are irrelevant unless they change the size of an energy and whether it reaches the person in question. The bomb analogy is the author's, and it does the whole job: a detonation can be enormous and still be none of your business.

Two things decide whether a site is auspicious, and only two. Everything else — the shape of the hill, the animal on the roof, the name of the star — matters only insofar as it changes one of them. A layout can be textbook-perfect and still deliver nothing.

One: the quantity of energy

Size decides. Even an inauspicious energy, if it is small, amounts to nothing inauspicious. An auspicious energy that is small amounts to nothing auspicious either. If you tell someone you have made money and they ask how much and the answer is one cent, the question of auspiciousness has already been settled — by the number.

This is why a practitioner has to keep watching that one quantity. What produces fortune and misfortune is energy, not configuration. A layout can be textbook-perfect and still deliver nothing, because nothing was delivered.

And there is a second half to this criterion, which is easy to forget: **does the energy have anything to do with me?** An atomic bomb detonating in

Japan releases an enormous quantity. It also leaves a household in China untouched. The size was real. The relevance was zero.

Two: whether it circulates

The bomb in Japan did not reach China because its energy did not travel to China. This is the second criterion, and in practice it eliminates more claims than the first.

There is no shortage of poison in the world. If you did not swallow it, it has no bearing on your life. Put it in your mouth, inject it into your vein, and now that same poison is decisive. Nothing about the poison changed. The path changed.

Money is the same. Money exists everywhere and is of no use to you until it reaches your account — until it reaches the point you are standing on.

This is what the old books call the *origin point* (原点, *yuandian*) — the person, the bed, the coffin, the shop counter, the specific spot whose fate is being read. A malefic hill in the distance is not a malefic anything until its energy arrives at an origin point. A river that turns beautifully two valleys away is a landscape, not a benefit.

What this rules out

Once these two criteria are in place, most of the popular vocabulary loses its footing.

Balance. Practitioners say feng shui is about balance — light and dark, yin and yang, colour and material. Consider what balance would mean under the two criteria. If one atomic bomb goes off in Britain and one in Japan, the two are balanced. Has China thereby become fortunate? A knife in the chest is unbalanced. A second knife in the back restores the balance. Is the patient better off?

Balance is a property of a picture. It is not a property of what reaches a person.

Configuration alone. A house can satisfy every formal rule in every school and still be a poor site, because the rules describe shape and the outcome depends on quantity and arrival. Conversely, a site that looks wrong by the books can be excellent for one member of a family and ruinous for another, because the origin points differ.

The water mouth. The classical instruction is to look at the water mouth first — where the valley drains. It is not a bad thing to look at. But if the water mouth has no path to your origin point, the observation is scenery. Someone else's wife being beautiful is not a reason for you to be pleased.

Where this leaves the practice

When you read a site, or change one, the whole method reduces to two questions:

1. How much energy is arriving, and of what kind?
2. Does it reach the origin point, or does it stop somewhere else?

Everything else — the names of the stars, the shapes of the hills, the position of the furniture — is either a way of estimating those two answers or it is decoration. Decoration can be pleasant. It should not be billed as a cause.

An energy that does not exist is a fiction. An energy that exists but does not reach you is also a fiction, in the only sense that matters to the person who paid for the reading.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

Four Ounces, One Thousand Pounds

2021-01-17 · 744 words

> **Translator's note.** The idiom 四两拨千斤 — "four ounces deflect a thousand pounds" — is the standard justification for every small remedy sold to counter a large problem: a mirror against an office tower, a charm against a roof corner. The piece is a single sustained objection, and it is arithmetic rather than metaphysics. It is also the fullest statement of an argument that appears in compressed form elsewhere in this archive.

A practitioner stands in your doorway, points at the corner of a building opposite, and tells you it is cutting into your house. What is to be done? He has a mirror for it. Or he will draw a talisman and hang it there.

Does it work?

It does, he says. Four ounces can move a thousand pounds.

Do the arithmetic

Let us accept the ratio for the sake of argument and see what it implies.

The building opposite weighs some tens of thousands of tonnes. If four ounces of mirror can move a thousand pounds of building, then to deflect that structure proportionally you would need a compass weighing a tonne or two — bolted to your wall, swinging on a pivot, physically pushing the tower aside. Nobody sells that. The mirror on your lintel weighs a few hundred grams.

The idiom, taken literally, does not describe a small remedy. It describes a lever of enormous mechanical advantage, and the whole point of a lever is that

the load is on the other end of it. There is no lever here. There is a disc of glass.

Where the idiom comes from, and why it does not transfer

Four ounces really can deflect a thousand pounds — in a fight. If a large man charges you, meeting him head-on is expensive; stepping to the side and redirecting his momentum costs almost nothing. That is the technique the phrase describes, and it is real. But notice the conditions: you need a body already in motion, a direction to borrow, and a point of contact.

Now put an infant in that position. Your daughter has just given birth. Tell the baby to deflect you. She has the technique available to her in principle — and she has nothing to apply it with. She does not have four ounces. Or suppose she does, and you are not a thousand pounds but ten thousand: the required force scales with the load, and four ounces becomes four pounds, which she also does not have.

The metaphor works when the small side has leverage. A mirror has none.

One grain of rice

None of this means the mirror does nothing at all. It does something. It is simply not something that can be counted.

If you have not eaten for three days, one grain of rice has an effect. It is a real grain, and it does what a grain does. It also does not address the fact that you are starving. To describe that grain as “food” in a way that implies the hunger is handled is not a lie about the grain. It is a lie about the scale.

This is the honest status of most remedy objects: real effect, negligible magnitude. What they reliably produce is the feeling that something has been done — which is not nothing, and which is not what the client paid for.

The injection

A mother takes her child to the clinic. The child is frightened of the needle. The mother says: don't be afraid, it won't hurt. The child stops crying. The injection is given.

Did it hurt?

Of course it hurt. The reassurance did not remove the pain; it changed the child's behaviour while the pain was happening. That is a genuine effect, and it is worth having. But if a doctor told you a treatment worked because the patient stopped crying, you would not accept it as evidence about the disease.

Why the saying survives

The saying survives because it is load-bearing. Remove it and the product line collapses. A mirror that can deflect a building justifies its price; a mirror that provides reassurance at the level of a grain of rice does not. The phrase is not a mistake about physics. It is a necessary piece of sales language, and it has been repeated so often, by people who never did the arithmetic, that it now sounds like tradition.

It is not tradition. It is a ratio nobody checked.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

Why You Cannot Pin a Mountain

2021-01-18 · 854 words

> **Translator's note.** Companion piece to the previous one, and a sharper case. “Dian xue” (点穴) normally means striking a pressure point on the body; here it means putting an object in your own courtyard to “paralyse” a mountain that is troubling you. The objection is not that the object is the wrong object. It is that the target is in the wrong place, and that a small thing cannot restrain a large one — the same argument, applied where it is hardest to answer.

A practitioner looks at the hill across the valley, tells you it is harming your household, and offers a solution. You put something in your own courtyard — the details vary, and imagination is permitted — and by doing so you “pin” the mountain. Pinned, it can no longer affect you.

Where is the point being struck?

Start with the geography. A pressure point is a place on a body. If the mountain is the body, then the point to be struck is on the mountain.

So why is the object in your courtyard?

Put the question concretely: who hangs a mirror on the neighbour's house to fix their own feng shui? Nobody, because nobody would be allowed. The neighbour would take it down, and the neighbour would be right to. Yet the same practitioner will explain, without embarrassment, that pinning the mountain from your own garden works — that by acting on your own property you have restrained an object on someone else's.

That is not a technique. It is a category error with a price attached.

Even granting the premise

Suppose we grant it. Suppose the practitioner can locate the mountain's vital point — a claim worth examining in itself — and suppose his object is placed precisely there. What is the object?

A pillar. A figurine. A needle of some kind. Anything the customer will buy.

The mountain weighs what a mountain weighs. The question is the same one the mirror raises: where does the force come from? If a single column could hold a mountain in place, engineering would be a much simpler profession than it is. Nothing in the procedure addresses magnitude. It addresses only the customer's willingness to believe that a small object aimed at a large one constitutes control.

The purpose of a dragon

There is a deeper problem, and it is not physical.

The point of working with a dragon vein — the ridge line said to carry the earth's energy — is to **use** it. You want its energy to arrive at your site. You want the vein's accumulated qi to flow into your grave or your house.

Now consider what pinning does. It stops the thing from moving. A dragon that cannot move delivers nothing. The old stories even supply the object for it: the sea-calming needle, the pillar that fixes the sea in place. If you drove that into your dragon, you would have succeeded in killing the only asset you had. Why would anyone want this?

The image is worth keeping because it shows what the technique actually is. It is a story about domination, dressed as a story about benefit. The two do not fit together, and the practitioner never has to notice, because the customer does not ask what happens after the mountain stops moving.

Which point, and who decides?

Underneath all of this sits an unanswerable question: where is the point?

The practitioner says it is where he says it is. Press him. What theory establishes that this spot and not the one three metres away is the mountain's vital point? What measurement distinguishes them? What observation would show that he was wrong?

There is no such observation, which is exactly why the claim can be made confidently. A statement that cannot fail is cheap to produce and impossible to refute, and in a market where the client cannot check, cheap and unfalsifiable wins.

The pressure-point concession

None of this denies that pressing points on a human body can do something. It can. Certain points, pressed correctly, relieve particular complaints. That is a real, limited technique with a real, limited range.

But notice what it cannot do. If pressure points decided fights, the champions of full-contact competition would all come from the tradition that has studied them most carefully for the longest time. They do not. A trained fighter standing in front of you, free to move, is not going to be stopped by a thumb.

And a bullet does not look for a point at all. It goes through the chest and the outcome is decided by where it went and how much energy it carried. **Energy decides who lives and who dies.** Not the location of a point.

The same holds for buildings. Pinning, deflection, the four ounces and the thousand pounds — all of these may be well-intentioned, and none of them works unless the intervention reaches the required magnitude. Below that threshold the entire vocabulary is decorative. Above it, you no longer need the vocabulary, because you are doing something that can be measured.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

The Fortunate Live in Fortunate Places

2021-01-31 · 535 words

> **Translator's note.** 福人居福地 — "the fortunate live in fortunate places" — is the most quoted line in the whole tradition, and also the most useful to the person quoting it. The argument below takes it apart with three questions and no technical vocabulary. It is the shortest piece in this batch and possibly the most damaging, because it requires nothing from the reader except consistency.

There is a saying every practitioner knows: the fortunate live in fortunate places. It sounds like wisdom. It is a way of never being wrong.

The demolition takes three questions.

First question

If you are a person of fortune, and a person of fortune will naturally end up on a good site, then what do you need a feng shui master for?

Either the site finds you or it does not. If it finds you, the consultation is unnecessary. If it does not, then fortune is not sufficient to produce a good site, and the saying is false at the first clause.

Second question

If the fortunate can live in fortunate places by virtue of being fortunate, then what is the master for at all? I have the merit; every place I choose is a good place; I do not need to pay anyone.

Practitioners still charge. That is the tell. A doctrine that makes the practitioner unnecessary would not be repeated by practitioners for a thousand years unless it were doing some other work.

Third question

If the fortunate live in fortunate places, then feng shui theory does nothing. The site is not what made the household fortunate; the household's fortune is what made the site. The causal arrow points the other way, and the entire technical apparatus — the forms, the directions, the sand and water, the compass — is idle machinery.

What the saying is for

So why does everyone repeat it?

Because it converts every outcome into a verdict on the client.

- If you prosper, the site was good. The master chose well. He collects.
- If you suffer, you lacked fortune. The site may have been good; you were not the person it was good for. He collects nothing, and owes nothing.

Notice that no observation can damage this position. Prosperity confirms the master. Disaster confirms the client. There is no third possibility in which the reading was simply wrong, and therefore no possibility of a refund, an apology, or a corrected method.

The comparison that matters

A doctor who tells you that the treatment works if your body cooperates is saying something true and specific: there are measurable limits, and here they are. A practitioner who says the same thing without ever naming a limit is

saying something else — that he has no idea whether his method works, and has arranged the language so that he will never have to find out.

The difference is not cynicism. It is whether the claim can be checked. A claim that assigns all success to the technique and all failure to the client's character is not a claim about the world. It is a claim about the client, made after the fact, in whichever direction protects the fee.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

Feng Shui Cannot Fix Laziness

2026-04-11 · 688 words

> **Translator's note.** Every consultant needs a sentence that explains failure in advance, and in this trade it is: *I have fixed your feng shui, but you must also work hard*. The piece is a short exercise in consistency. It does not ask whether feng shui works. It asks what a practitioner is implicitly claiming when he says his method can change a career but not a habit.

The line is familiar. The master finishes the adjustment, packs his compass, and says: the feng shui is done. But you must work hard. If you do not work hard, the best adjustment in the world will come to nothing.

On the surface this is unobjectionable. Of course a person who does nothing gets nothing. Without action there is no result to speak of — not a good one, and not a bad one either.

But look at it from the angle the practitioner himself insists on: the relationship between a site and a fate.

Rank the things

He has just told you what feng shui can do. It can make you an official. It can make you rich. It can keep you from dying young. It can keep you from getting cancer.

Now compare the items on that list with the item he says it cannot do.

Which is the larger claim — that a house can determine whether you live or die, or that a house can determine whether you get out of bed? Which is more

plausible as an effect of moving a wall: a change in your income, or a change in your willingness to work?

If a method can reach the large item, it can reach the small one. A force capable of turning a clerk into a magistrate is not going to be defeated by a preference for sleeping late. The claim is internally inconsistent the moment the two are placed side by side.

The reverse reading

Take the sentence seriously and it gets worse.

Is laziness hard to fix? Is it really the kind of thing that lies beyond the reach of environmental influence?

Consider what actually changes a lazy person's behaviour. Being told off in front of others. Being watched. Having the money supply cut. These are all changes in the external environment. They are not subtle, and they work — quickly, reliably, and without a compass.

So the practitioner is in an odd position. He is saying that rearranging the furniture and the surrounding hills cannot produce diligence, when plain social pressure produces it every day. If his method cannot do what a scolding does, on what basis does it claim to do what surgery does?

The child at the desk

The version of this that clients hear most often concerns children. The practitioner adjusts the house. The child still will not study.

Now the claim has to be made explicitly. If the adjustment cannot even produce a child who opens a book, what is being promised when the same practitioner says the boy will be sent abroad, will inherit a billionaire's fortune, will take over a conglomerate?

There is no version of this that survives being said out loud. A method that fails on the small, near, verifiable thing — will he do his homework this week — has no business being sold on the large, distant, unverifiable one.

Why the sentence is popular

The sentence is popular because it is free insurance. It costs the practitioner nothing and covers every outcome:

- The client prospers: the adjustment worked.
- The client fails: the client did not try.

And because it sounds like moral advice rather than a technical claim, objecting to it makes you sound like the sort of person looking for an excuse not to work. That is the trick. It is not an argument about feng shui at all. It is an argument about your character, deployed at the exact moment when the feng shui claim would otherwise have to be tested.

Anyone who says it has already told you that his method cannot be evaluated. Believe the sentence, and act accordingly.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

Missing Corners: Why the Theory Does Not Hold

2021-02-04 · 1,310 words

> **Translator's note.** "Missing corner" (*quējiaˇo*, 缺角) is one of the most repeated claims in popular feng shui: a floor plan that is not a perfect rectangle, and some sector of life is said to be damaged. This essay argues that the claim is not merely inaccurate but commercially manufactured — and the last section shows exactly how a practitioner can make it appear to work on any home, every time.

A flat with a corner cut off is supposed to damage one part of your life, and a flat without one is supposed to protect it. The claim is repeated so often that it is treated as elementary. It is not elementary, and it is not true. What follows is six arguments, in the order the original gives them: what the record shows, what a modern city actually contains, why the claim is made, what a missing corner can and cannot do, why it is not the deciding factor, and finally how the reading is made to succeed.

1. What the record shows

Look at the facts first. In the old society, only the rich had houses without missing corners; the houses of the poor nearly all had them. If missing corners were inauspicious, that pattern should mean the rich flourished and the poor did not.

It does not mean that. Wealthy households died out more often than poor ones. Large landholding families frequently ended without heirs, while poor

households had child after child. There is an old saying that the poor man has many sons, and it is an observation, not a joke.

The same pattern holds in an industrial society. Birth rates among manual workers and farmers are not lower than among the comfortable urban professional class — they are markedly higher. The better the material conditions, the fewer the children; the harder the conditions, the more. This is not a matter of chance. Every organism under existential threat reproduces harder. Laboratory animals under lethal pressure breed at higher rates, not lower. During major wars, human fertility tends to rise rather than fall: the faster the dying, the faster the births.

And the dynastic founders are the counter-example that settles the argument. The Zhu family house that produced the founding emperor of the Ming had missing corners. So did the Zhao family house that produced the founding emperor of the Song. Your own family house had no missing corners — your grandfather was a landlord, and here you are reading fortunes. A missing corner and the fortune of a house are simply not the same variable. That is the factual record.

2. In a modern city, every flat has them

Now suppose a house has ten thousand missing corners. Congratulations — I would trade a house with none for it, and I will tell you why.

Ten thousand missing corners means at least eight hundred or a thousand separate flats. And in a contemporary city, is there any flat without one? The moment a building has a lift shaft or a stair core, the floor plate is no longer a rectangle. Essentially one hundred per cent of urban flats have missing corners. Many rural houses do not.

So compare the two populations. Are the urban people in their corner-cut flats less happy, less prosperous, less healthy than the rural people in their

rectangular ones? Look at the visible facts rather than the theory. The more missing corners a household owns, the wealthier it tends to be — because owning many flats is what wealth looks like. The fewer, the less. This needs no reasoning at all. As I have said elsewhere: when logic and science cannot settle a question, look at the facts.

3. Why the claim is made

Why do practitioners talk about missing corners? Because talking about missing corners generates work.

Every flat in the city has them. A claim that flags a defect present in every building in the country produces an unlimited supply of clients and an unlimited supply of remedies to sell. This is a commercial mechanism. It has nothing to do with whether the claim is true.

4. A missing corner is not always inauspicious

Speaking rationally, a missing corner is not uniformly bad. It is sometimes slightly good. It can be either.

The reason is straightforward: what a missing corner removes is a sector of the building, and whether that sector was carrying auspicious or inauspicious sand-water determines the sign of what was lost. Cut away a bad sector and the building is improved. The direction of the effect depends on the direction of the cut.

5. It is not the deciding factor

Whether a missing corner is auspicious or inauspicious, it does not determine the fortune of the house.

The fortune of a dwelling is decided by what lies outside it. If a munition works explodes next door, no amount of rectangular floor plate will help you.

If the surrounding terrain and the incoming sand-water are wrong, no floor plan can correct them.

So ask the practical question: if a missing corner does not decide the outcome, why fix your attention on it? It is a secondary factor. Where is the account of the primary one?

6. How the reading is made to succeed every time

Here is the part that matters, and it explains why the claim survives in the market.

A missing corner can be used to hit the target every single time. Readers who have not seen the mechanism will not understand how that is possible. The answer is that any urban flat has at least a dozen missing corners, and a dozen missing corners is a dozen independent claims, each attached to a different domain of life. Watch how it is done:

- This corner is why your finances are unstable.
- That corner is why your child's marks are disappointing.
- This one means your spouse will stray.
- That one means the woman of the house falls ill.
- This one means your husband is bullied at work.
- That one means the child is sickly.
- This one points to cerebrovascular trouble in the father.
- And this one indicates that your husband has a romantic entanglement.

If she objects that her husband has no such entanglement, the answer is ready: the time has not yet come, the energy is not yet sufficient. With one flat's worth of missing corners a practitioner can cover an entire life. And if the subject is illness rather than conduct, the same method assigns this corner to the liver, that one to the lungs, this one to the stomach, that one to the

limbs, this one to the head. One of them will land. The client will not suspect anything, because the claims were generated from the building rather than from the person, and the person will recognise themselves in whichever one happens to fit.

I have seen this work on people who knew better. Had I not explained the mechanism to them, they would have concluded that the reading was uncanny.

This is not prediction. It is a technique for producing the impression of prediction, and it is the reason practitioners who lead with missing corners should be treated as salesmen rather than readers.

So does a missing corner matter at all?

It can. As said above, it can have an effect — a secondary one, often small enough to ignore. What it cannot do is carry the weight that is placed on it: it cannot decide whether a dwelling is auspicious, it cannot assign a life event to a person, and it cannot be diagnosed from a floor plan alone.

The theory of missing corners is not a fragment of feng shui that has been handed down imperfectly. It is a commercial device dressed as one.

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

The Green Dragon and the White Tiger: Direction, Not Left and Right

2018-02-24 · 1,446 words

> **Translator's note.** Almost every English-language feng shui text gives the four animals as *left* green dragon, *right* white tiger, *front* vermilion bird, *back* dark warrior. This essay argues that the left-right reading is a convenience that only holds when a building faces south, and that the animals carry fixed compass directions derived from the twenty-eight lunar mansions. The classical quotations are given in translation, with the Chinese titles in brackets for readers who want to check them.

The standard formula in the feng shui literature is *left green dragon, right white tiger, front vermilion bird, back dark warrior*. It is repeated as though it were a definition. It is not a definition, it is a shorthand — and a shorthand that silently assumes a building faces south. Take the shorthand for the rule and the readings go wrong the moment a building faces anywhere else.

Where the four animals come from

The four animals did not begin as descriptions of a house. They are groupings of the twenty-eight lunar mansions (二十八宿) as those stars appear on the celestial sphere.

Join the stars of the seven eastern mansions with a line and the figure resembles a dragon. East belongs to wood, and the colour of wood is green, so the seven eastern mansions are called the Green Dragon.

Join the seven western mansions and the figure resembles a tiger. West belongs to metal, and the colour of metal is white, so the seven western mansions are called the White Tiger.

Join the seven northern mansions and the figure resembles a turtle. North belongs to water, and the colour of water is black, so the seven northern mansions are called the Dark Warrior.

Join the seven southern mansions and the figure resembles a bird. South belongs to fire, and the colour of fire is red, so the seven southern mansions are called the Vermilion Bird.

The derivation decides the assignment. The Green Dragon can only be east. The White Tiger can only be west. The Dark Warrior can only be north. The Vermilion Bird can only be south.

East green dragon, west white tiger, south vermilion bird, north dark warrior is therefore the only reading consistent with the astronomy the animals were drawn from. Turning it into *left, right, front, back* breaks the link to that astronomy entirely.

What the derivation fixes

Once the four animals are anchored to compass directions, they stop being a description of the observer and become a property of the site.

That matters because left and right are not properties of a site. They are properties of a person standing on it. Walk around the same grave and the left side becomes the right side. The eastern mansions do not move when you walk.

The passage in Guo Pu that starts the confusion

The *Book of Burial* (葬书) attributed to Guo Pu contains the line: *bury with the left as green dragon, the right as white tiger, the front as vermilion bird,*

the back as dark warrior.

That single sentence is the source of the entire modern formula. But Guo Pu was the founding figure of the tradition. He cannot have been ignorant of where the four animals came from, and he cannot plausibly have made an error of this kind — an error that a later text points out in considerable detail.

The later text is *Guan's Geographical Guide* (管氏地理指蒙), chapter twenty-seven, "Explaining Left and Right":

> To call left and right "dragon" and "tiger" is to speak of a house sitting north and facing south. But if a grave faces east instead, then the north is named the Green Dragon's wood and the south is named the White Tiger's metal. The labels become perverse, the names tangled and out of order.
>
> Consider: the five notes take *gong* as their root, and *shang*, *jiao*, *zhi* and *yu* are ranged beneath it by kind. The centre takes earth as its standard, and the positions of metal, wood, water and fire divide from there. Only by taking the front, back, left and right of one's own body can one speak of the four configurations and get them true. For wood is green in colour and its virtue is figured as the dragon; metal is white and its virtue is figured as the tiger; water is black and its virtue is the dark warrior; fire is red and its virtue is the vermilion bird. The directions of these four figures and the four configurations of the body do not correspond.

The last sentence is the argument in miniature. The four animals belong to four fixed directions. The four "configurations" belong to the body of whoever is standing there. They are two different coordinate systems, and the formula that identifies them is a category error.

Why Guo Pu was not wrong

If Guo Pu is right, then Guan is wrong. If Guan is right, then Guo Pu is wrong. If Guo Pu is right about left and right, then the derivation of the four animals

is wrong. If the derivation is right, then Guo Pu's sentence is at least imprecise.

None of the principals can have made a basic error, and the derivation is not in doubt. So the only reading consistent with the facts of Guo Pu's own period is this: in his time, houses and graves were laid out to be **sheltered from the wind and open to the sun** (背风向阳). In the northern hemisphere, sheltered-and-sunlit means **sitting north and facing south**.

In that one orientation, and only in that one, left is east, right is west, front is south and back is north. The shorthand is exactly correct. Guo Pu used it because in his world it was always true, in the same way that a modern writer might say "the sun rises on your left" when describing a walk he always takes facing north.

The shorthand is not the doctrine. It is a description of the doctrine under one standard orientation, and it inherited the authority of the man who wrote it long after the orientation stopped being standard.

The same shorthand in "first, second and third branch"

This is not the only place the tradition mistook a convenience for a rule. The same thing happened with the *zhangfang, erfang, sanfang* (长房、二房、三房) theory — the claim that the first, second and third "branches" of a family are affected differently by a grave, by branch meaning the eldest son's line, the second son's line, and so on.

Read strictly, the terms cannot mean the children who are presently alive in that order, because the reasoning collapses immediately.

Suppose the man who is now the eldest was not the first pregnancy. A miscarriage, a stillbirth, an infant death — any of these, and the person now called *zhangfang* is not the first-born at all. Suppose his father had a child by

another woman before him, or his mother had a child by another man. The person now called *zhangfang* may be the third or fourth child of that parentage.

And if the terms track whoever is presently alive, then the theory produces absurdities on its own terms: the eldest dies, the second son becomes *zhangfang*, the second dies, the third becomes *zhangfang*. A category that changes occupant when someone dies cannot be the thing a grave acts upon.

The only coherent reading is that *zhangfang, erfang, sanfang* mean **the first, second and third birth order** — the first child borne, the second, the third — not the first, second and third son currently living. Once that is understood, the theory has a definite referent, and it is the same kind of shorthand as left-and-right: a convenient label that points at a real distinction and then gets mistaken for the distinction itself.

What to test in the field

The practical claim is checkable, and it should be checked on real sites rather than argued about in the abstract.

Take a set of graves and dwellings, read each one twice — once assigning the animals by east, west, south and north, once assigning them by left, right, front and back — and compare which reading matches what is actually observed at the site.

The claim of this school is that the compass reading is substantially more accurate, and that the gap widens in proportion to how far a site departs from facing south. A site that faces south cannot distinguish the two methods, because there the two methods are the same method. That is exactly why the error survived: for centuries, most of the sites anyone bothered to read were the ones where the shorthand worked.

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

Reading the Feng Shui of a Temple

2020-07-16 · 1,469 words

> **Translator's note.** The saying that opens this piece — *the best feng shui sites in the world are all occupied by temples* — is common in Chinese, and so is the conclusion drawn from it: that a temple's feng shui must be read backwards. The essay rejects both. It also takes up a question Western readers rarely meet: whether the fate of a monk or a priest can be read at all. The original names a specific abbot in a legal dispute; that example has been generalised.

Temples stand on famous mountains and beside great rivers, their incense halls are never empty, and their collecting boxes are never light. From this people conclude that the finest sites in the world have all been taken by religion, and that a temple must therefore be read by inverted rules — auspicious where a house would be inauspicious, inauspicious where a house would be auspicious.

Both conclusions are wrong, and they are wrong for the same reason: they read a building's success off one variable when at least five are in play.

The claim, and why it is wrong

A temple is a building. People live in it. Its incense burns brightly or dimly for reasons that can be listed and checked, and geography is only the first of them.

The claim that the mountains and rivers are reserved for temples confuses cause with selection. Temples are on famous mountains because that is where

people were willing to build them, and because a mountain site draws visitors for reasons that have nothing to do with the quality of its sand and water. The site was chosen for scenery, prestige and accessibility. Those are real advantages. They are not feng shui advantages, and they do not prove that the site is auspicious in the technical sense.

What actually decides whether a temple thrives

Take the factors in order of strength.

First: location, meaning transport and population. A temple thrives where people can reach it and where there are people to reach it. The Potala Palace in Lhasa draws constantly, and it would draw nothing if it stood on the summit of Everest. Nothing about its sand and water would change; everything about its footfall would. Within a single region of equal prosperity, a temple on a road with a dense population around it will, other things being equal, always outdraw one on a back road with few neighbours.

Second: what is enshrined, and who is doing the practice. Given equal location, the draw depends on which deity is honoured and on the cultivation of the monks or priests who serve there. Better practice draws more people. A larger and older institution draws more people. And a deity whose function matches what the surrounding population actually wants draws more people than one whose function does not.

Third: feng shui. With location and institution held equal, the better the site, the stronger the draw.

Note what the ordering does. Feng shui is a real factor, and it is the third factor, not the first. A practitioner who reads a temple's prospects from sand and water alone is doing what a shopfront reader does when he ignores the street.

Fourth, and this is why the third factor is hard to isolate: a temple that has stood for centuries has probably earned its site. Long survival is evidence that the site works, because institutions that sit on bad sites do not survive wars, fires and dynastic changes for a thousand years. So the causal arrow runs both ways, and a reading that treats the site as the sole cause will overstate it every time.

The practical consequence is a checklist rather than a verdict. To judge a temple, assess five things: the sand-water configuration, the transport, the population density, the institution's history, and the cultivation of its clergy. Only the first of the five is feng shui. A reading that stops at the first is not a stricter reading, it is a narrower one.

The same applies in reverse when a site is being chosen. A temple sited on excellent sand and water with no road and no neighbours will not thrive. Site selection has to weigh transport, population and the clergy who will serve there, alongside the terrain.

Why temple feng shui is not read backwards

This is where the tradition goes badly wrong, and it goes wrong in a way that is easy to expose.

The argument for inversion runs like this. Monks and priests are practitioners, not householders, so ordinary rules do not apply. If a temple's feng shui were excellent, the place would be crowded from morning to night, and the clergy would have no quiet for practice. Therefore a good temple site must be a bad site by household standards.

The argument sounds coherent until you ask what a building without energy actually does to the people inside it. Invert the rules completely and you have asserted that a temple has no energy. Three consequences follow, and none of them is compatible with a functioning monastery.

Poverty. If the site carries nothing, the temple has nothing. The clergy go hungry and leave. A community that cannot feed itself cannot sustain a practice, let alone a tradition of a thousand years.

No visitors. If the site draws nothing, nobody comes. A temple with no one in it cannot teach, cannot serve, and cannot transmit anything to anyone.

Short and damaged lives. People who live on a site without energy are subject to the same consequences as anyone else — illness, accident, early death. A monastery whose residents are sick and dying young is not a place of cultivation. It is a place of attrition.

The inversion theory is a rationalisation of the fact that temples sit on sites that look unusual by household standards. Mountains, cliffs, springs, isolations — these are chosen for scenery and for the kind of retreat that religious institutions want. They are not evidence that the rules reverse. A temple's sand and water are read exactly as a house's are read, because the energy does not know what kind of building is standing in it.

Can a monk's fate be read?

Traditional prediction, and a number of well-known practitioners, hold that the fate of monks and priests cannot be calculated. They are said to have left the world — *fangwai zhi ren*, people outside the boundaries — and to be beyond the reach of the systems that read ordinary lives.

This is not a limit of the subject. It is a limit of the method being used.

Whatever the ordination, the person still eats, drinks and breathes. The classical formula is that anyone still within the three realms and not yet beyond the five elements remains governed by the five elements. A body that takes in food, water and air is a body in the same field as every other body. What changes with ordination is the *content* of a life, not its mechanics.

What actually happens is narrower and more interesting: certain domains go blank because the ordinary markers are absent. A monk who does not marry has no marriage state to predict. A monk with no children has no children to predict. Those questions are not unanswerable, they are inapplicable.

The remaining domains are entirely readable. A temple has money or it does not, and its abbot handles funds or does not. There is status and the lack of it, health and the lack of it, safety and danger, disputes and litigation and the absence of both. Anyone who has watched a major temple through a public controversy knows how visible those domains are, and how sharply they can turn.

So the correct statement is not that the clergy are beyond prediction. It is that the reading has to be aimed at the domains that a monastic life actually contains. A method that fails on monks is a method with a gap in it, not a subject with a gap in it.

What this changes for a practitioner

Three things, and they are all corrections of habit.

Read the temple as a building, with the same rules as any other building, and let the five factors carry the weight they actually carry. Do not invert anything; inversion is a story told to explain why mountain sites look strange.

Do not treat the site as the whole cause. An old temple has survived for reasons that include its site, but also its institution, its location and its luck.

And when the subject is a monk or a priest, ask which domains exist before asking whether the chart can be read. Most of the apparent failures in this corner of the field are questions that were never applicable in the first place.

CHAPTER FORTY

Reading Feng Shui in Water Country

2020-07-02 · 1,399 words

> **Translator's note.** In a water town — Shaoxing in Zhejiang, or Venice — the houses are surrounded by canals and people travel by boat. Read by the ordinary sand-water rules, such a place is a disaster: water on every side, and water in opposing palaces. The people who live there are prosperous. This short piece gives the correction, and it turns on one idea: a grid of water everywhere is not water, it is the baseline.

A water town inverts almost every assumption a feng shui reader carries in from dry land. The house is not on a site with a stream running past it. The site is a strip of land inside a network of waterways, and the waterways are the roads.

Apply the ordinary rules literally and the verdict is catastrophic. Water lies to the east, the south-east, the south, the south-west, the west, the north-west, the north and the north-east. Every palace holds the same element. Worse, every palace has its opposite palace holding the same element as well. This is the condition called *opposing palaces holding the same water* (对宫同水), and in a conventional reading it is about as bad as a site can get.

And yet the people of these towns are prosperous, healthy, and long-established. Some of the most successful families in Chinese history come from exactly this landscape.

The contradiction is not a defect in the rules. It is a defect in how the rules were applied — specifically, in what the reader chose to call water.

Why the standard reading fails here

The error is one of scale, and it is the same error that makes a reader condemn a whole city block for having no empty land.

On dry land, water is an interruption in the ground: a river, a pond, a ditch, a road. Because it is an interruption, it is a local feature, and its position matters — water in the east means something because the east is otherwise land.

In a water town, water is not an interruption. It is the substrate. Every plot is bounded by it, every route runs along it, and its level is the same everywhere because the whole network is connected. A feature that is identical in all eight directions cannot discriminate between them.

A variable with the same value everywhere carries no information. That is the whole correction, and it explains why the rules had to be adapted rather than abandoned.

The water grid is the zero plane

Treat the canal network as the **zero plane** — the flat baseline against which sand and water are measured, exactly as flat open ground is the baseline on dry land.

This is not a figure of speech. The reasoning is the same in both cases. On dry land, a field of wheat or a market garden is not read as a feature; it is the ordinary surface of the earth, and it does not tilt the reading in any direction. In a water town, the water network plays that role. It is the field. Treat it as the field.

Two consequences follow.

First, the canals do not count as water for the purpose of the eight-direction reading. They are not in any palace; they are under all of them. A reader who

counts them will produce the absurd verdict described above, and will then have to invent a theory to explain why the actual town contradicts him.

Second, ponds that are continuous with the network are treated the same way. A pond fed by the canals, at the same level, part of the same body of water, is also zero. It is not an independent feature and cannot be assigned a direction.

What remains, once the grid is set to zero, is the small set of things that genuinely interrupt it.

Crossings are the water

The features that do count are the **crossings** — the places where waterways intersect, where four branches meet at a junction, where a junction opens into a wider pool.

A crossing is a local concentration of water at a specific point, and that point sits in a specific palace. Read it the way you would read a pond on dry land: identify the palace the crossing occupies, and judge it by the ordinary rule for water in that palace.

Two of these deserve specific mention because the tradition treats them as fatal. A crossing sitting on the *chen* position, and a crossing sitting on the *hai* position, are both read as indicating a short life. These are the two positions the school treats as sensitive for longevity, and they apply here exactly as they apply elsewhere.

The opposing-palace condition has not disappeared, it has merely moved down a level. If there is a crossing in the south-east and another crossing in the north-west, the two still form an opposing pair, and the pair still sits across the origin point. The reading is the same as on dry land: this combination is severe. The difference is that the pair is now made of two specific junctions rather than of the general presence of water, which means the reader has to find them rather than assume them.

This is the practical gain. In a town where everything is water, the only things that can be located are the junctions. So the junctions are what you read.

Inside the house

Inside the building, nothing changes. The interior is read in the ordinary way, and the ordinary assignments hold.

Kitchens are sand. Electrical equipment — refrigerators, televisions, computers, the meter cupboard — is sand. Bathrooms are water. A fish tank is water. The house inside a water town is not a special case, because indoors the water network is not present at all; what is present is the same set of objects that would be present in a house anywhere else.

The one thing to keep in mind is that the interior reading and the exterior reading use different baselines. Outside, the canals are zero and only the crossings count. Inside, the ordinary object assignments apply. Confusing the two produces either a house with no features at all or a canal network read as a moat.

The exception: graves not surrounded by water

There is one case where the grid does *not* get set to zero, and it is important enough to state separately.

For a **grave** in a water town, the rule holds only if the grave is actually enclosed by the water network — water on all sides, part of the same connected system. In that case, read it exactly as a house is read, with the grid as zero.

But if the grave is *not* enclosed — if it sits at the edge of the network, or on a tongue of land with water on two or three sides and dry land on the others — then the network is no longer a baseline. It is a feature, and it must be read as water in whichever palaces it actually occupies.

The reason is the same reasoning as before. Zero is not a thing, it is a relationship: a surface that surrounds the site equally in all directions. A grave at the edge is not surrounded equally. The water there has a direction, and a direction is information.

Getting this wrong is the most common error in water-country readings. A grave on the edge of the canals, read as though it were in the middle of them, will be judged inert when it is in fact sitting on a strong water configuration — and the resulting prediction will be wrong in whichever direction the water actually lies.

The general lesson

Water country is worth studying even for readers who will never work in one, because it isolates a principle that is easy to miss on ordinary ground.

Sand and water are not substances. They are roles, assigned by comparison to a baseline. Change what counts as the baseline and the same physical landscape yields a different reading — not because the rules changed, but because the reference did.

A river beside a house is water. A river that surrounds the house on every side, at the same level, as part of a connected network, has stopped being water and become the ground. The physical fact is identical. The role is not.

CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

Which Directions Want Sand and Which Want Water

2020-05-20 · 953 words

> **Translator's note.** This is the lookup table of the school: which of the twenty-four directions want sand, which want water, and which want to be left alone. The original illustrates it with a labelled compass diagram; the diagram has been replaced here by tables. Read the two tables together — the eight-palace summary is the coarse version, the twenty-four-mountain list is the one practitioners actually use.

Every reading of a site, whether a house or a grave, comes down to the same question applied twenty-four times: what stands in this sector, and is that the right thing to have there?

The school answers with a fixed standard. It does not vary by region, by building type, or by the fortunes of the occupant. Twenty-four sectors, three possible verdicts, and the verdict is a property of the sector rather than of the site.

The eight palaces

Start with the coarse grid. Divide the site into eight palaces around the origin point and the rule is:

Palaces	Sand	Water
East, North, South-east, South-west	Auspicious	Inauspicious
South, West, North-east, North-west	Inauspicious	Auspicious

Four want sand. Four want water. The two sets interleave rather than sitting in two halves, which is why the arrangement cannot be reconstructed from memory and has to be learned as a list.

The twenty-four mountains

The working version divides each palace into three, giving twenty-four sectors of fifteen degrees each.

Group	Sectors	Wants
Eight	*Ren* 壬 · *Gui* 癸 · *Jia* 甲 · *Yi* 乙 · *Xun* 巽 · *Si* 巳 · *Kun* 坤 · *Shen* 申	Sand
Seven	*Bing* 丙 · *Ding* 丁 · *Geng* 庚 · *Xin* 辛 · *Qian* 乾 · *Gen* 艮 · *Yin* 寅	Water
Nine	*Zi* 子 · *Wu* 午 · *Mao* 卯 · *You* 酉 · *Chen* 辰 · *Xu* 戌 · *Chou* 丑 · *Wei* 未 · *Hai* 亥	Neither

Eight plus seven plus nine is twenty-four. Every sector is accounted for, and every sector has exactly one instruction.

The first two groups are straightforward: an auspicious feature of the named kind, an inauspicious feature of the other. The third needs care.

The nine that want nothing

The third group is the one that requires care, because it is the group most often read wrongly.

These nine sectors are not neutral in the sense of being unimportant. They are sectors where an imposed feature of either kind does damage. The instruction is to let them be: no built structure, no tree, no water feature, no decorative object placed deliberately.

In practice this is a rule of restraint, and it is more restrictive than it sounds. A reader who treats these nine as "anything goes" will place sand where sand is

harmful, and the resulting condition is worse than a merely inauspicious sector, because there is no good version of the sector to return to. The only available state is the undisturbed one.

Who is affected, and how much

Two questions remain after the verdict is given: which person does this sector govern, and how strongly.

Who. The assignment of sectors to people is not part of this table. It comes from the system of positional correspondences by birth order — which relative is fixed to which layer of the site's layout. The same inauspicious sector will bear on one member of a family and pass another by entirely, because they are not positioned on the same point. A sector cannot be read as "bad for the household"; it has to be read as bad for a specific person, and the system that names that person is a separate body of rules.

How much. Two factors set the magnitude.

The first is timing. A sector's condition produces its effect when the annual cycle and the distance factor arrive together. If only one arrives, the effect is present but small. This is why the same feature can sit in a house for twenty years without incident and then produce a run of trouble in a particular year: the feature was always there, the timing was not.

The second is the strength of the feature itself. A five-storey building in a sector and a garden bench in the same sector are not the same amount of sand. The verdict is identical; the magnitude is not.

Using the table

Three cautions, all of them things this table does not tell you.

It does not tell you what is sand and what is water. That determination comes first and is a separate judgement. A kitchen is sand. A

bathroom is water. A road is water. A street in a commercial district may be zero. A canal network may be zero. Get the classification wrong and the table will give you a confident answer to the wrong question.

It does not tell you the sign of a complex. A sector is rarely occupied by one thing. When several features of different character occupy the same sector, they combine, and the combination is read as a whole rather than by adding verdicts. The table gives the baseline; the combination gives the reading.

It does not tell you what to build. The nine sectors that want nothing are the clearest case, but the principle is general: this table describes what a site's features do to its occupants, not what an occupant should install to obtain a result. A remedy is a different kind of operation, with its own limits — among them the fact that an adjustment works on the margin, never on the structure.

CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

Bones and Ashes: Does Cremation Change Ancestral Influence?

2020-03-04 · 1,069 words

> **Translator's note.** Cremation is now the majority practice in much of Europe and North America, and the question that follows — if my ancestors were cremated, or their ashes were scattered, is there any ancestral feng shui left to read? — is one that Chinese sources almost never address, because burial was the norm. This piece addresses it directly. Its answers are more radical than most Western readers will expect, and they are arrived at from the school's own premises rather than from sentiment.

Two questions get run together whenever this subject comes up. The first is whether a cremated ancestor still affects descendants at all. The second is whether ashes and a buried body have the same effect.

They are separate, and the answers are different in kind. On the first, the answer is yes: both affect descendants. On the second, the answer is yes, but only slightly, and the difference is smaller than the difference between a good site and a bad one.

Both affect descendants; bones slightly more

A buried body and a container of ashes both exercise influence on the descendants of the person they came from. Neither is inert.

Bones carry slightly more of it. The reason given is one of quantity rather than kind: the ashes are a smaller portion of what the body was, and on the school's

account the influence scales with the amount of matter that remains in relation to the line. Less matter, less coupling.

That is the whole of the difference. It is real, and it is small.

Why the quantity matters — and what follows from it

Take the principle seriously and a striking consequence follows.

If the influence runs through what remains of the body, then a family that does not want ancestral influence has a simple remedy available: disperse the ashes. No grave, no ancestral influence, and the household is subject only to its own dwelling.

This is stated as a technical observation, not as a recommendation. It follows from the mechanism, and the school states it plainly: with no ancestral grave, the inauspicious energies that a grave can transmit are no longer received. The descendants are then affected by their own dwellings and by nothing upstream of them.

It is worth flagging how radical this is in the Chinese context, where the ancestral grave is treated as a permanent obligation. The argument here is not that the obligation should be abandoned. It is that the mechanism is a mechanism, and it can be described without being recommended.

The Tibetan case as evidence

The proof offered is ethnographic rather than experimental, and it is a good one.

Tibetan families practise sky burial, and so have no ancestral graves at all. On the ordinary account, such families should be entirely outside the reach of ancestral feng shui — no grave, no influence, nothing to read.

That is precisely what the school says, and it names what remains. For a Tibetan, only two kinds of feng shui apply: the dwelling the family occupies, and the place the mother lived during the pregnancy. Everything that a Chinese household attributes to the ancestral grave is, for a Tibetan family, simply absent.

The case does double duty. It confirms that the grave is a specific mechanism rather than a general metaphor for ancestry, and it supplies the substitute: when there is no grave, the pregnancy-period dwelling carries the weight.

Scientifically, no grave is the better arrangement

Put the moral question aside for a moment and follow the logic.

If the grave transmits both auspicious and inauspicious energy, and if a family has no control over what a grave's site actually is, then a grave is a risk as well as an asset. Not having one removes the risk along with the asset.

The stated conclusion is that from a purely technical standpoint, no ancestral grave is the safer configuration, because the inauspicious component is no longer received at all.

This is where the tradition and the technique part company, and the essay says so. Chinese custom holds that the bones and ashes of ancestors cannot simply be discarded, that a family without ancestors is not a family. That is a moral position, and this school does not argue against it. It only notes that the position is moral rather than technical, and that the two should not be confused when a family is deciding what to do.

Why cremation is the cleaner option

The practical recommendation is cremation, and the reasoning is not feng shui at all — it is hygiene.

Ashes are clean. They have been through temperatures that leave nothing alive in them. A container of ashes can be kept in a house without any concern of that kind; the essay states that it can be kept at home without difficulty.

Bones are a different matter. A body buried in the ordinary way, or bones recovered and brought indoors, carry a wide range of pathogenic organisms. Handling them is genuinely hazardous. The essay puts it bluntly: bringing the bones home can be dangerous to your life in a way that bringing the ashes home is not.

So the recommendation is cremation, on grounds that would be accepted by any public health authority, and the feng shui difference is small enough that it does not outweigh them.

The conclusion that matters

The comparison between bones and ashes is being asked at the wrong scale.

One hundred per cent influence and eighty per cent influence do not turn a wealthy man into a beggar. The difference between them is a matter of degree within a range. What matters is not which material remains, but whether the influence that arrives is auspicious or inauspicious.

A well-sited grave with ashes in it will do more for a family than a badly sited grave with a complete skeleton. A family that has followed the mechanism to its logical end — no grave at all — is not in a worse position than one with a mediocre grave. It is in a different position, and on this account a cleaner one.

The question to ask is therefore not "where are the remains" but "what is the quality of the site, if there is a site." That question has an answer. The other one, in most of the cases where it gets asked, does not change anything.

CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

When Relatives Compete for the Same Feng Shui

2020-06-05 · 1,317 words

> **Translator's note.** Two terms carry this piece. *Rending dingwei* (人丁定位) is the assignment of each descendant to a fixed point in the site's layout, made by birth order rather than by name or gender. The "minor layout" and "major layout" (小局, 大局) are nested rings around the origin point — near ground, then the first ring, then the second. Once you accept that assignment, an awkward consequence follows: several relatives can be pinned to the same point, and one sector's energy has to be shared among them.

Positional assignment seems like a neutral bookkeeping device. It tells you which relative a sector governs, so that a reading can be specific instead of vague — this sector affects the eldest son, that one the fourth, that one the seventh.

Follow it through and it produces a result most practitioners never mention. If two relatives occupy the same point, they draw on the same fixed quantity of energy. One of them getting more means the other getting less.

That is not a flaw in the system. It is a prediction the system makes, and it explains a pattern that every family knows and no theory accounts for: why excellence so rarely repeats across two generations of the same line.

The setup

Take a grave belonging to a couple. Their descendants include a first son, a fourth son and a seventh son.

Under the assignment rules, these three do not sit on the same point. The first son is fixed in the minor layout. The fourth is fixed in the first ring of the major layout. The seventh is fixed in the second ring.

Now each of the three has children. Suppose the first-born of each is a boy. Call them A, B and C.

A, B and C are all eldest grandsons of the deceased. Under the rules, every eldest grandson is fixed to the **first ring of the major layout** — regardless of which son fathered him.

So A, B and C all sit on the same point. And that point is the one already occupied by the fourth son.

The collision

Work through who shares with whom.

A, the eldest grandson through the first son, is fixed to the first ring. So is his uncle, the fourth son. A and his uncle are competing for the same energy.

B, the eldest grandson through the fourth son, is fixed to the first ring. So is his own father. B and his father are competing.

C, the eldest grandson through the seventh son, is fixed to the first ring. So is his uncle, the fourth son. C and his uncle are competing.

And A, B and C are competing with each other as well, since all three occupy the same point.

A single sector, one fixed quantity of energy, divided among four people who are not in the same generation and not in the same branch.

Why father and son compete

The case of B and his father is the one worth dwelling on, because it is the most familiar and the most uncomfortable.

Father and son fixed to the same point means the same sector supplies both of them. A sector's energy does not multiply because two people depend on it. If the father's portion is large, the son's is correspondingly small.

The conclusion the school draws is blunt: if the father is outstanding, do not expect the son to be outstanding as well. The son is not being denied by fate or by temperament. He is drawing on a supply that has already been drawn on.

This is offered as an explanation rather than a rule of universal application. Two things can be true at once — the mechanism can be real, and the family in front of you can have other factors at work. But as an account of a very common pattern, it has the merit of being specific: it does not say that talent skips generations, it says that position is shared.

The general rule

The assignment follows birth order, counted in threes, and it steps outward by one ring for each group of three.

Children of the deceased — sons and daughters alike, the rule does not distinguish:

Birth order	Fixed in
1st, 2nd, 3rd	Minor layout
4th, 5th, 6th	First ring of the major layout
7th, 8th, 9th	Second ring of the major layout

Grandchildren of the deceased — again regardless of gender:

Birth order of the parent who is the deceased's child	Fixed in
1st, 2nd, 3rd	First ring of the major layout

Birth order of the parent who is the deceased's child	Fixed in
4th, 5th, 6th	Second ring of the major layout
7th, 8th, 9th	Third ring of the major layout

Read the two tables together and the collisions become visible immediately. A child of the fourth to sixth birth and an eldest grandchild through any of the first three children both land in the first ring. Those are precisely the pairs described above.

Note also which layer is being counted. For grandchildren, the birth order that matters is that of the *parent* — which child of the deceased the grandchild descends from — not the grandchild's own order among siblings. This is where many readings go wrong, and it is why two cousins can end up in the same ring while their own older brothers do not.

To place a specific person, the ring assignment has to be combined with the directional assignment. The tables say which layer a person occupies. They do not say which compass sector that layer corresponds to at this particular site. Both are needed before a reading can be made.

The exception: a father buried with two wives

There is one configuration where a person carries two positions at once, and getting it wrong produces errors in practice.

Take a man buried together with two wives. Wife one bore him a first son. Wife two also bore him a first son. Call the second of these two sons B.

Read from the father's grave, B is the second son. Read from his own mother's grave, B is her first son.

While B's mother is alive, B must be treated as the second son. The grave in question is the father's, and from the father's line B is second.

But when B's mother dies and is buried with the father, the situation changes. Now B is read both ways: as the second son through his father, and as the first son through his mother, because both parents now lie in the same grave.

The consequence is that B **holds two positional points simultaneously** — one in the east, one in the north in the example given — and both act on his fate at the same time.

A reader who treats B as having one position will misjudge him in one direction or the other, and will not know which, because the error is in the premise rather than in the application.

What this changes for a practitioner

Three corrections, in order of how often they are needed.

Do not read a sector as belonging to "the family." It belongs to a list of named people, and the list may be longer than expected because positions repeat.

Do not read a person as having one position until you have checked the parental structure. A second marriage, a remarriage, a burial of two spouses together — each of these can double a position or move one.

And when a family reports that one branch thrives and another does not, check the rings before reaching for character or luck. Two brothers in different rings are not in competition. Two relatives in the same ring are, and the explanation may be structural rather than personal.

CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

Sky Burial and Water Burial: Reading Feng Shui Without a Grave

2017-11-29 · 1,138 words

> **Translator's note.** Sky burial and water burial leave no ancestral grave, and critics of this school have used that fact as a refutation: if there is no grave, what is there to read? The original answers with some heat — much of it directed at fellow practitioners by name-calling, which has been reduced here to the argument itself. The substance is a substitution: when there is no grave, the dwelling of the pregnancy takes its place. Anyone who has read the earlier essay on pregnancy-period feng shui will recognise the mechanism.

The challenge is usually put as a trap. Tibetan families practise sky burial, some coastal communities practise water burial, and neither leaves a marked grave that descendants can tend. If feng shui is read from graves, the argument runs, then these people must be outside its reach — and a theory that cannot read them is a theory with a hole in it.

The challenge fails, and it fails for a reason that is visible in the question itself.

The question answers itself

Sky burial and water burial are not exotic variants of grave feng shui. They are the **absence** of a grave.

So the question "how do you read feng shui for a sky burial" reduces to "how do you read feng shui for a family with no ancestral grave." That is not a special case. It is the ordinary condition of a great many people — migrants,

the dispersed, families whose graves were destroyed or whose burial records were lost, and anyone in a society where cremation and scattering are normal.

A reader who cannot answer for a family without a grave cannot answer for a large part of the modern world. That is the real gap, and it is not created by Tibetan practice.

What replaces the grave

The substitution is stated flatly: for a person with no ancestral grave, read **the dwelling the mother occupied during most of the pregnancy**.

This is not a fallback invented for the occasion. The school holds that the pregnancy dwelling and the ancestral grave act on the same thing — the level of a person's fate — and act with comparable force. That is why the earlier essay in this archive could compare them directly, and why a family with a strong grave but a poor pregnancy dwelling does not get the result the grave alone would predict.

The reasoning is about exposure. A person's formation happens somewhere. For nine months before birth, that somewhere is one building, occupied continuously, through the whole of the period in which the body and its constitution are being assembled. If a site's configuration acts on the people who live on it, then the site a person lived on before being born is the site with the longest uninterrupted contact of their life.

For a family with a grave, the two sources combine, and the grave is usually the stronger of the two because it acts across generations rather than across months. For a family without a grave, one source remains, and it is sufficient to make a reading.

Why siblings born in the same house differ

The obvious objection comes next, and it is a fair one: if siblings were all born in the same house, and that house is the substitute for the grave, why do they have different fates?

The answer is the same mechanism that governs graves, applied one level down.

Siblings share a dwelling, but they do not share a **positional point**. Under the assignment rules, each child is fixed to a different layer of the site's layout according to birth order. Different layers correspond to different sectors. Different sectors contain different sand and water.

So the house is the same and the reading is not. One child's point falls in a sector with good sand; another's falls in a sector with harmful water; a third's falls in one of the nine sectors that want nothing. Same building, three different verdicts, because the building is not being read as a whole — it is being read at three points.

This is exactly why the crude version of feng shui, which assigns a verdict to a house and then applies it to everyone inside, produces so many failures. A house is not auspicious or inauspicious in general. It is auspicious for the people positioned on its good sectors and inauspicious for the people positioned on its bad ones.

Why a shared site runs down over generations

One more objection, and it is the sharpest: if the pregnancy dwelling substitutes for a grave, why can several generations not all be read from the same house?

Because the energy in a site is finite.

The comparison the school uses is a vessel. A container of a fixed size holds a fixed amount of water, and a fixed amount of rice. If more people eat from it, each gets less. The vessel does not refill because the queue is longer.

A site — auspicious or inauspicious — holds a fixed quantity of energy. As the number of people depending on it increases, the share available to each declines. The tenth generation living in the same house is not receiving what the first generation received. It is receiving a tenth of it, or less.

This is why the same house can produce a distinguished line for two generations and then produce nothing remarkable for five. The site did not change. The division did.

It also explains why a grave can serve a large family without visible dilution while a dwelling cannot: the grave's energy is tapped across a wider span and at a different level, and the assignment rules route different descendants to different layers rather than piling them all on one point. A dwelling has no such depth. Everyone who lives in it is living in the same small volume.

What this establishes

Three things, in ascending order of usefulness.

A family without a grave is not outside the system. It has one fewer input, not zero inputs.

The pregnancy dwelling is a real reading, not a consolation prize. For a great many people alive now — the cremated, the scattered, the migrated, the descendants of the uprooted — it is the only reading available, and it is enough to establish a level.

And the reason siblings differ is not mystery. It is position. The same reason applies whether the site is a grave or a house, which is the point: the method does not have a special case for Tibet. It has one method, and it reads whatever site a person was actually exposed to.

For a reader in a country where almost nobody has an ancestral grave, that is not a marginal application of the tradition. It is the main one.