

THE “SAN CAI” APPROACH TO FENG SHUI ANALYSIS AND DESIGN.

Howard Choy (Cai Hong 蔡洪) B.Arch.¹

ABSTRACT

This paper is an extension of the presentation made at the 2006 Hong Kong Conference entitled “Towards an Inter-cultural Approach to Modern Architecture and Planning Using Feng Shui”, where the concept of a Feng Shui Paradigm and the San Cai Methodology were first introduced.

Zhouyi 周易 or the Book of Changes was the earliest written source to describe the San Cai 三才 concept of Tian 天, Di 地 and Ren 人 or Heaven, Earth and Human as being “San Cai Zhi Dao” 三才之道 or the Dao of the Three Abilities.

Tian Dao 天道 or the Way of the Heaven is concerned with Yin and Yang 陰陽, Di Dao 地道 or the Way of the Earth is concerned with Soft and Hard (Gang Rou 剛柔) and Ren Dao 人道 or the Way of Human is concerned with Benevolence and Righteousness (Ren Yi 仁義), that is human virtue or Ren De 人德.

By looking at the various layers relating to these three concepts of what is above, what is below and what is in the middle in a Feng Shui situation, one can come to an understanding of the Ben Xing 本性 or the Original Character of a site and is able to take advantage of what is desirable or auspicious (Ji 吉) and avoid what is undesirable or inauspicious (Xiong 凶), without destroying the natural context and being Ziran 自然 or Self-Thus at the same time.

This paper attempts to explain the philosophy and the methodology behind the San Cai concepts and how they can be used in practice to achieve “Design Harmony” - the theme of this conference.

KEY WORDS

San Cai, Feng Shui Paradigm, Yin and Yang, Tian Di and Ren, Methodology, Harmony, Ziran, Ben Xing, Analysis and Design.

¹ Practising Feng Shui Architect and teacher, director of Feng Shui Architects Pty. Ltd. Sydney and arqitektur.ac Berlin. Brunnenstr. 181, 10119 Berlin Germany. +49/30/28385-855, Fax -857.
Email: fengshuiarchitect@hotmail.com
Website: <http://arqitektur.com>
Blog: <http://www.howardchoy.wordpress.com>

INTRODUCTION

The term San Cai 三才 was first mentioned in Chapter X of the Great Treatise of the Zhouyi 周易 or the Book of Changes, “There are in it (the Hexagram) the Way of Heaven, the Way of Human and the Way of Earth, it then takes the San Cai and doubles them (to form the six lines)”.²

Further on in the Chapter II of the Remarks on the Hexagrams, “To establish the Way of Heaven is called Yin and Yang, to establish the Way of Earth is called Soft and Hard (or Weak and Strong) and to establish the Way of Human is called Benevolence and Righteousness, each embraced the San Cai and being repeated (to form the six lines)”.³

Thus the term San Cai was originally referred to the six Yao lines in a Yijing Hexagram, with the character San 三 meaning three and the character Cai 才 having a similar meaning to Cai 材 (with an additional wood radical to the left) as in materials and qualities or as in abilities, talents and aptitudes.

James Legge in his translation of the Zhouyi called the San Cai the Three Powers, whereas in the Book of Rites, it is said, “To educate is to exhaust a person’s ability or Cai 材 (where) ability means the Dao”, therefore the San Cai is also referred to as “the Tian Dao (the Way of Heaven), the Ren Dao (the Way of Human) and the Di Dao (the Way of Earth)”⁴, together they are called “San Cai Zhi Dao” 三才之道 or the Dao of the Three Abilities, where Tian Dao is the Yin and Yang Qi of Heaven, Di Dao is the Soft and Hard character of Earth and Ren Dao is Benevolence and Righteousness virtue of Human.

Why the need for “San Cai Zhi Dao”?

In the first paragraph of Wing-Tsit Chan’s “A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy”, he wrote, “If one word could characterize the entire history of Chinese philosophy, that word would be humanism – not the humanism that denies or slights a Supreme Power, but one that professes the unity of man and Heaven (Nature)”.

So the unity of Human and Nature, often encapsulated in the classic phrase “Tian Ren He Yi” 天人合一 (“Heaven and Man combined into one”), has been a dominant force throughout Chinese history and philosophy, where Heaven, Earth and Human are correlated and this relation is best expressed by the concept of “San Cai Zhi Dao”.

This unity of Human and Nature became a model of the universe in traditional Chinese philosophy and the idea of Heaven above and Earth below with Human in the middle formed the three essential components of the world with each having its own function and essence tightly woven and overlapping with each other to form a holistic structure.

² 易经系辞下云：“有天道焉，有人道焉，有地道焉，兼三才而两之”

³ 说卦云：“有天道焉，有人道焉，有地道焉，兼三才而两之”

⁴ 礼记学记云：“教人不尽其材” 郑注：“材，道也” 三才即天道、人道、地道”

“San Cai Zhi Dao” by definition, puts an emphasis on harmony and balance, and see Heaven above and Earth below not as a separate entity to Human but as a Qi continuum or a Qi Chang 氣場 (Qi Field), where the parts interact and affect each other. This allows for a holistic worldview where checks and balances are built into the system and thus laid the foundation for the proper function of the San Cai Methodology to follow.

THE DIFFERENT MEANINGS OF THE SAN CAI TERMS TIAN, DI AND REN OVER TIME.

Apart from the Yijing explanation given earlier, different period of time and different schools of thoughts defined the San Cai terms Tian, Di and Ren in a different way.⁵

Tian or Heaven

In ancient times, the oracle bone scripts has the Tian 天 character written as Ren 人 with a large head, that is Tian represented something large and above a person. Round about the time of late Shang 商 and early Zhou 周, Tian is referred to as the sky above a person and gradually it took on an additional meaning of a Di 帝 or a Shen 神 (a “spirit” in a Chinese sense) above that can confer the potential of Ji-Xiong 吉凶 (the potential of auspicious and harmfulness) on a person below. From then on Tian and Ren appeared as separate characters in written forms. However, human on earth can always communicate with Tian or Tian Di 天帝 above with rituals like the “Gui Bu” 龜卜 or Divination with a Turtle Shell.⁶

Towards the late Western Zhou period, Shi Ba-Yang 史伯陽 used the two Yin and Yang Qi of Earth and Heaven to explain the origin of earthquakes and in the Spring and Autumn period, there appeared the theory of “The Six Qi of Heaven and the Five Xing of Earth”⁷. Further developments in Chinese thoughts and philosophy changed the meaning of Tian, which took on a materialistic character encompassing all that is subtle and changing. From then on, the meaning of Tian became multivalent and numerous, for example, there is the Tian that represented Nature⁸, there is the Tian that represented the Dao and being Ziran⁹, there is the Tian that represented Dao-de or virtuous behavior, there is the Tian that represented ideas and thoughts and there is the Tian that represented the heavenly bodies as well as the Tian that represented the cycles of time and hence a person’s fate¹⁰, etc.

⁵ Li Gen-Fan 李根蟠 in his article, “The Theories of Tian Ren He Yi and San Cai” (“天人合一”與“三才理論”), gave a good overview which the writer has used as his main reference.

⁶ This roughly is the beginning of the separation and the co-operation between Human and Heaven and it is interesting to note that the character Tian evolved from the character Ren and Tian Di came after, reflecting the “human-centric” character of the Chinese thoughts

⁷ “天有六氣，地有五行” where the six qi referred to the seasonal changes and the Wuxing is applied to the corresponding changes in nature.

⁸ The Heaven in Dong Zhong-Shu’s 董仲舒 writing is about the mutual resonance between Heaven and Human (Tian Ren Gan Ying) 天人感應, it referred to the outward appearance of Nature to Human

⁹ Laozi’s Daodejing 老子道德經 spoke about “Tain Fa Dao, Dao Fa Ziran” 天法道，道法自然.

¹⁰ “Tian Ming” or Heaven’s Fate in Feng Shui refers to the cycle of time calculated from a person’s time of

Di or Earth

When it comes the concept of Di 地 the Chinese is more precise, as referred to by Guan-Zi 管子 in his writing “Shui Di” 水地 (“Water and Earth”) being “the origin of 10,000 things and the source of all that is living”.¹¹ In an agrarian society like traditional China, the quality of the earth is paramount to the survival of its population, so the term “li” 利, meaning profits or benefits, is often used in conjunction with the character Di, because Di Li 地利 or being in the right place and using the right resource, will give one the benefit of increased productivity and profit, therefore to choose the appropriate land to use is an important factor for survival. It was mentioned in “Zuo Zhuan” 左傳 “To seek the suitability of the soil (ie. Earth) is to know its benefits”¹².

Like-wise, the popular saying “Tian Shi, Di Li, Ren He” 天時地利人和 or “Being in the right time, at the right place and doing the right thing” is used to describe the desirability of making sure that the quality of the land is appropriate to the needs of the occupants and the timing is right, with the people live in harmony with each other.

Ren or Human

The concept of Ren 人 in San Cai has a different connotation to the western understanding of what constituted a Human, which in the Chinese context, is not just an individual existing alone with other individuals, but a part of Nature as a whole. Therefore, a Human never thinks of conquering Nature and is separated from Nature (note Nature in this context can also mean Tian or Heaven, as well as the physical nature). Therefore when the Chinese use the phrase “Ran Ding Sheng Tian” 人定勝天 or “Human is sure to win over Heaven”, one needs to look closely at the meaning “to win”.

Xun Zi 荀子 in his writing “Tian Lun” 天論 spoke about “to win” over Heaven is to gauge the will of Heaven.¹³ That is to understand the rhythm of Nature and restrict our activities to within the limit of what is reasonable so as not to destroy Nature, because Nature in this sense is Heaven and it is inseparable from Human. Being Human not only needs the knowledge to understand Nature, but also to understand the limitation of being a Human as part of Nature. Hence in a Feng Shui consultation, the first thing to find out is the physical and emotional needs of a client and the limitation of resources available.

The meanings of the individual term Tian, Di and Ren may vary over time, but the interconnectedness of all things never deviated from the Chinese thoughts. The San Cai concept is in essence a call to comply with Nature, to respect her rhythm and to work with the limitation of space, time and resources that are available. The San Cai 三才 or the Three Abilities are in fact the San Yi 三宜 or the Three Appropiates, according to Li

birth, contrary to popular belief, it has nothing to do with being lucky or unlucky.

¹¹ “萬物之本原，諸生之根源” —（管子，水地）

¹² “物土之宜而布其利”

¹³ “制天命而用之”。制＝制約

Wei” 無為 – achieving the most with the least, thus likely to arrive at a solution that is “not only functionally efficient but ritually correct”.¹⁸

THE SPECIFIC MEANINGS OF THE TERMS TIAN, DI AND REN IN THE SAN CAI METHODOLOGY

The San Cai terms as mentioned earlier have to be specified to fit in with the architectural analysis, planning and design process, and by adding the character Qi and the specific functions used, the methodology can guide the environmental designers to investigate the various layers as a Qi Field of influence working on each other to arrive at an understanding of the Ben Xing of the situation before embarking on the planning and design process.

Experience has shown that when enough information and knowledge are gain regarding the nature of the site and the users involved, the planning and design solutions will tend to be more holistic and appropriate, responding better to the context and the needs of the users in an effortless “Wu Wei” way.¹⁹ The solutions are not forced; they came naturally as an arrival point of a process, the result is a design without designing, where everything fit together seamlessly as though they always meant to be that way.

Heaven Qi

On the tangible level, analyse the effects of the heavenly bodies on us, such as sunlight and shade, cold wind and warm breeze, the weather pattern and the seasonal changes. At the same time, on the intangible level, analyze the effects of spatial orientation and the cycle of time using the Liqi Pai (Compass School) methods like Xuan Kong Feixing 玄空飛星 (Flying Stars) and Bazhai 八宅 (Eight Houses) based on the Yili 易理 (Principle of Chnages) such as Yin and Yang and Wuxing Sheng-Ke 五行生剋 and Bagua correlations.

Earth Qi

On the form and configuration level, analyze the physical components of a site, such as the topography and the composition of the land, location and sitting, external appearance, aspects and prospects, internal layout and interior design, etc. This should be done on a macrocosmic level as well as microcosmic by looking in and looking out of a site. On the formless level, analyze the subtle effects of the atmosphere and the nuances created by the physical form as well as by patterns like vehicular and pedestrian movements. In the landscape, study the five components of a land pattern (Di Li Wu Jue 地理五訣), namely to trace the Dragon, look for the Sands, located the Feng Shui Spot and the Facing. In an urban setting, study the Siling 四靈 or the Four Mythical Animals model, namely the Black Turtle at the back, the Azure Dragon to the left, the White Tiger to the right and the

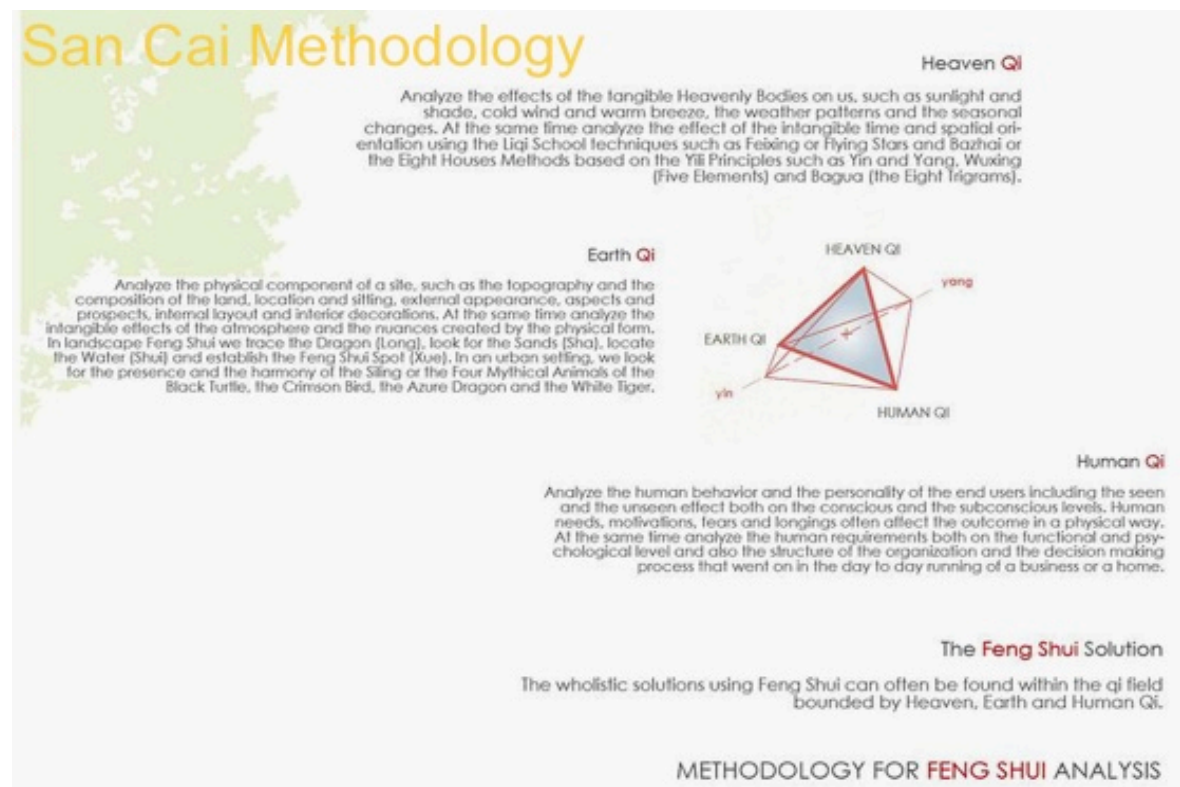
¹⁸ Feuchwang, Stephen (1974). *M.A. Thesis, “An Anthropological Analysis of Chinese Geomancy”*. Vientiane, Laos.

¹⁹ Our office, arqitektur.ac, has used this methodology in Feng Shui consultancy and architectural work in the last few years, and some of the work examples are being presented in this and last year’s conference either by the writer himself or by his partner Gyda Anders. Michael Rapp, another presenter in this conference, also uses this methodology in his work with great success.

Crimson Bird at the front ensure there is Qing 情 (affection) and Gan-Ying 感應 or mutual resonance between the users and the natural and built environment.

Human Qi

Human needs, emotional fears and hidden longings, although unseen and formless, often affect the outcome in a physical way, so it is important not only to analyze the functional requirements of a client but also the psychological needs both on the conscious and the unconscious level. Always work with a clear brief if possible and when doing commercial Feng Shui, there is also a need to analyze the organizational structure of a business and the decision making process. Because Feng Shui puts the human being at the center of its equation, both the Heaven Qi and the Earth Qi need to respond to the Human Qi to be successful.



CONCLUSIONS

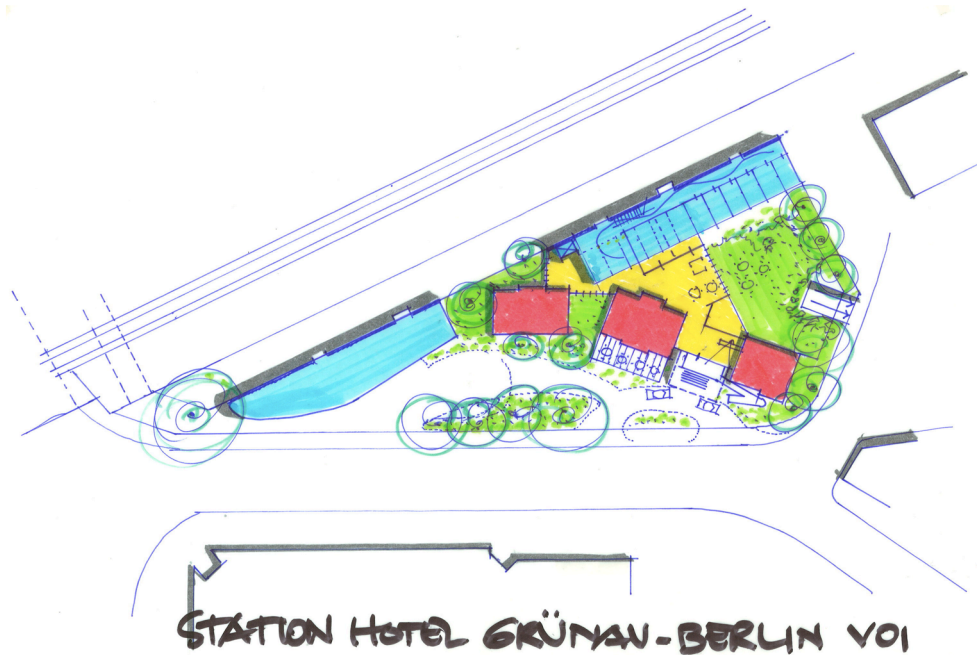
Using the San Cai Methodology will eventually produce an architecture that is responsive, not only to the environment but also to the emotional and the spiritual needs of the end users. San Cai, by its definition and structure, is holistic and comprehensive where Human and Nature (Heaven and Earth) became a whole in content and aspiration, as Zhuang Zi 莊子 remarked long long ago, “Heaven, Earth and I exist together, 10,000 things and I are One”. 天地與我并生，萬物與我為一。

HOW THE SAN CAI METHODOLOGY WORK IN PRACTICE – A CASE STUDY: PROPOSED HOTEL GRUNAU IN BERLIN GERMANY

The proposed new hotel next to the Grunau Railway Station in Berlin is a student project done during a Master Class on Feng Shui and Hotel Development, which took place last year in Berlin, taught by Gyda Anders and the writer, Howard Choy.

One of the 3 student's schemes is showed below with the original architect's proposal

Site Plan with various views of the model showed below:

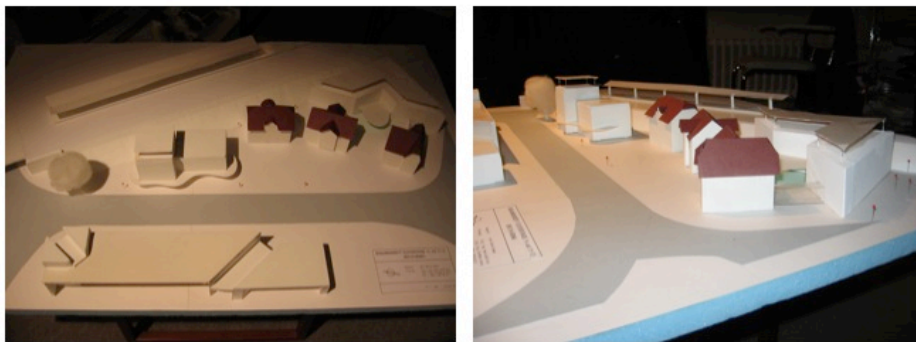


Left: Junction between old and new

Right: View from South-West where the old and the new combined to Ju Qi



Model of proposed scheme by the first Architect



As can be seen in the pictures of the two models, the outcome of the two designs has very different qualities and showed that there is a distinct positive influence coming from using the San Cai methodology for Feng Shui analysis and design.

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