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## *FENGSHUI: A CONTINUATION OF “ART OF SWINDLERS”?*

### I. INTRODUCTION

In 1999 on an international *fengshui* tour comprising more than fifty participants from around the world, one of the seminar presenters, a Taiwanese *Guobao dilijia* (specialist on national geographical treasures) and the sixtieth generation of *fengshui* practitioner, He Jinzong, was told by a number of participants that they did not wish to discuss burial because this was not *fengshui*, not realizing that the term *fengshui* was first defined in Guo Pu's *Gu Ben Zang Shu* (The Book of Burial Rooted in Antiquity or The Book of Burial).<sup>1</sup> This is a typical case of people in one culture taking only those parts of other cultures that fit within their cultural norms, and thus creating new theoretical structures to make it easier to consume the specific knowledge. There are, however, precedents to such a commodification of *fengshui* within Chinese history. The author of the late Song Dynasty to early Ming Dynasty text, *Nan Jie Ershisi Pian* (Twenty-four Difficult Problems), deplors the “present day” practitioners who “absurdly match longevity, the receiving of favours, becoming an official and imperial prosperity with good and evil spirits and good and ill fortune, consequently causing the luck not to be buried and those buried not to have good fortune” and who “conduct the art of swindlers.”<sup>2</sup> This article considers the original concepts of *fengshui* as garnered from major *fengshui* writings in relation to some of the claims made by modern Western practitioners of the art. It concludes with some musings on the relationship between culture, knowledge, and philosophy.

### II. DEFINITION

*Fengshui* with the meaning of placement is first defined in the *Gu Ben Zang Shu*, which is accredited to the “father” of *fengshui*, Guo Pu, a famous scholar in Jin Dynasty (265–420 AD):

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The Classic says that if *qi* rides the wind it is scattered; if it is bounded by water it is held. Ancient men gathered it, causing it not to be scattered and curtailed its area of circulation. Hence this is referred to as *fengshui*. The method of *fengshui* is, first of all, to obtain water and secondly to store from the wind.<sup>3</sup>

The basic mechanism of the original concept of *fengshui* is also outlined in the *Gu Ben Zang Shu*:

*Qi* circulates through the earth according to the geodetic force of the earth. It gathers where the geodetic force stops. The *qi* follows the trunk of a hill and branches along its ridges. The Classic says that if the *qi* rides the wind it is scattered, if it is bounded by water it is held.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, the consideration is that *qi* courses through the land in lines or veins as found in acupuncture. In fact, the same character *xue* is used for both an acupuncture and *fengshui* point. Such a similarity is also apparent in the relationship between vitality and *qi*. Again this is perhaps best described in the *Gu Ben Zang Shu*:

The Classic says that when *qi* circulates through landforms, entities are thereby given life. The geodetic forces of the earth are the basic veins. The geodetic forces of the mountains are the basic bones. They snake either west to east or north to south, curling back on themselves as if crouching and waiting, as if with something in their grasp. *Qi* desires to proceed but it is cut off. It desires to halt and becomes deep. Where it approaches and accumulates, stops and gathers, there will be a clashing of *yang* with a harmonising of *yin*, the earth will be rich and the water deep, the grasses lush and the forests luxuriant.<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, in this cosmology fertility is synonymous with the accumulation of *qi* and the correct association of the male and female principles. However, it should be noted that this fertility is used within the context of the nourishment of the spirit of one's ancestors. Thus, it seems that the original context for dwelling sites in terms of *fengshui* was in relation to burial and nourishment of spirit.

Seemingly later, this concept of dwelling sites was transferred to the abodes of the living. The *Huangdi Zhai Jing* (Yellow Emperor's Classic of Dwelling Sites), attributed to Wang Wei in the Liu Song Dynasty (420–479 AD), states that:

The site is the focal point of *yin* and *yang* and the standard for human relationships. . . . In general, there is no place where Man resides which is not a site. Even though there may be only a difference in size, there are differences, so that, even if one lodges in a single room, there is both good and evil. For the large site there are many points to speak of. For the small site there are few points to discuss. There is disaster for those who violate this. When bad siting is corrected, misfortune will cease with the effect of medicine for illness.<sup>6</sup>

However, there is some evidence to show the theory on the importance on how the graves or houses are sited, according to the

principles of *fengshui* occurred much earlier in Chinese culture. For example, the Mengtian section of the *Shi Ji*<sup>7</sup> mentions local villagers complaining about the excavation of the surrounding land for the building of the Great Wall because of their fear of the disturbance of the veins of *qi* in the land in this process. This indicates that even though the term *fengshui* was not used at that time as a word synonymous to dwelling sites, its theoretical construct was in place some five hundred years before the *Gu Ben Zang Shu*.

### III. THE ART OF SWINDLERS

Subsequently, from Tang Dynasty to Song Dynasty there was a theoretical schism among the practitioners of *fengshui* into Xingshi Pai (the Form School) and Fangzhi Pai (the Compass School). The Compass School was founded by Wang Ji in Fujian in Song Dynasty. It used astrology and the trigrams of the *Yi Jing* as well as the compass to determine the indications of the topography. In contrast, the Form School held more to the older principles, which are found in the earlier texts outlined above. The founder was supposedly somewhat mythical personage of Tang Dynasty, Yang Yunsong in Jiangxi Province. His texts, such as the *Han Long Jing* (Shaking Dragon Classic), do contain an element of astrology, but there is no consideration of the compass.<sup>8</sup>

One text that gives us insight into the acrimony of this schism is the *Nan Jie Ershisi Pian*. This is an extended treatise on the theories of the Form School of dwelling sites and dwellings for both the living and the dead in relation to the energy of mountains and rivers written in the form of a problem-answer dialogue. It is particularly interesting because of its denigration of the Compass School and the use of *fengshui* in the pursuit of good fortune. Its quasi-scientific and strongly empirical tone is a precursor to the ecological stance that pervades many modern popular treatises on *fengshui*.<sup>9</sup> The authorship of this text is stated to be “anonymous” and there is no indication of the era from which it may come although it is found in the late Ming Dynasty (1628–44) collection, *Jin Dai Bi Shu* (Writings Forging the Mysteries) compiled by Mao Jin, and this with other textual evidence, particularly the place names used, point toward it probably being written between the late Song Dynasty and the early Ming Dynasty. The poverty of style in the writing of this text and the consequent difficulty of translation suggest that the author is not a scholar merely commenting on the concepts of *fengshui* but a practitioner—that is, a *fengshui xiansheng*—of the Form School, who had a stake in deni-

grating the practices of the then comparatively much newer and perhaps more popular Compass School.

Of particular interest is the distress of the author of the *Nan Jie Ershisi Pian* at the use of the principles of *fengshui* to ensure good fortune. This attack on the use of bearing associated with the search for auspiciousness occurs first in Problem 4:

The whole of this work discusses the form, force, feeling and nature of water. It is never ignorant of the important principles as are the practitioners of the theories of direction who absurdly match longevity, the receiving of favours, becoming an official and imperial prosperity with good and evil spirits and good and ill fortune, consequently causing the lucky not to be buried and those buried not to have good fortune. In deluding the world and misleading the people, nothing is worse than this.<sup>10</sup>

Another example of the negative stance of this author toward the practitioners of that time occurs in Problem 8:

The above 4 points are rejected by the present practitioners of the art, who indeed conduct the art of swindlers. Therefore generations guard their theories without change not knowing that their words are distant from the classics and go against the Way. Oh, the sorrow of it! How can there be an affair not modelled on the ancients or a righteousness that does not venerate the classics and yet still not be defiance against the correct?<sup>11</sup>

Thus, the skeptical distrust that many display around the world today toward “New Age” proponents of *fengshui* is reflected some seven hundred years earlier in Chinese culture, and seemingly by an actual practitioner himself. However, such distrust was certainly not all pervasive. As Huang Yi-long has pointed out, by the late Ming Dynasty a *fengshui* manual *Dili Ren zhi Xu Zhi* (What Everyone Should Know about Dwelling Sites) had become a best-seller.<sup>12</sup>

#### IV. PRESENT-DAY PRACTICE

The present-day practice of *fengshui* reflects somewhat a continuation of the dichotomy of, on the one hand, a knowledge system related to both the spiritual and the physical based on careful observation of the landform and its resultant fertility, and on the other, an amalgam of esoterica, both Chinese and non-Chinese, usually designed to improve the material fortune of adherents, a stance so denigrated by the author of the *Nan Jie Ershisi Pian*.

An example of the present day practice which seeks to understand the empirical knowledge base that is inherent in the tradition can be seen in the formation of various *fengshui* associations around the

world in countries as disparate as Australia, Poland, Italy, and Colombia, generally with the positive intent of attempting to garner a deeper conception of the origins of the practice. The problem that these associations face, however, is the dearth of primary material translated into a more accessible language such as English. Thus, the associations become beholden to tertiary sources of information from populist writers, many of whom pay scant attention to the original ideas of *fengshui*.

One attempt to increase the international knowledge base on *fengshui* using primary sources was the first scholarly international course on *fengshui* to be held at a university in Mainland China. This occurred at Central China Normal University in Wuhan in October 2005 and was organized by Professor Weng Yude, head of the university's Institute for Cultural and Historical Research, and Howard Choy, an Australian architect and *fengshui* practitioner.<sup>13</sup> The course was involved twenty-three days of intensive theoretical and practical study of the history and philosophy underlying *fengshui* principles and traditional Chinese architecture, taught by mainland academics with expertise in these fields. The course included field trips to such important archaeological and historical sites as the Han Dynasty Mawangdui tomb in Changsha, the Daoist sacred mountain Wudangshan, and Mao Zedong's grandfather's grave near Shaoshan in Hunan. There were some thirty-eight students enrolled in this course, mainly architects and interior designers. Indicative of the international popularity of *fengshui* was that this group came from twelve different countries, including Mexico and Slovakia.

At another place on the spectrum in relation to present day practices is the Black Hat Sect, an advocate of *fengshui* with its base in California. On the Sect's Web site, the founder, "Grand Master" Lin Yun states that his teachings involve geomancy, form school, Taoism, Yin Yang philosophy, exoteric Buddhism, Eclecticism, Metaphysics, *Yi Jing*, architecture, psychology, physiology, modern techniques of measuring electromagnetic fields, holistic healing, divination, Chinese folklore, Confucianism, Wu Xing (Five Element Theory), geology, geography, and plain old common sense. Such a wide range of areas of study is typical of the development of *fengshui*. The cosmology of the *Gu Ben Zang Shu* involved only *yin/yang*, the flow of *qi* in veins and the relationship of this to the shape of the land. As *fengshui* theory developed, more and more traditional Chinese cosmology was layered on top of this simple theoretical structure such that by late Ming Dynasty text, the *Shui Long Jing* (Water Dragon Classic), the cosmology includes *Wu Xing Shuo* (Five Phase Theory), *san yuan* (three principals) theory, and astronomy/astrology (particularly associated with the *Bei Dou* (Big Dipper) and the *wu xing* (five stars).

The following prose from the “*Xing Qian* (Star Seal)” section of the second chapter of the *Shui Long Jing* is indicative of this expanded cosmology. It is also very much indicative of the great amount of continuing disagreement at this time about the theoretical basis of *fengshui*, reflecting the earlier plaint of the author of the *Nan Jie Ershisi Pian*.

Like the beard of a shrimp and the eyes of a crab,  
 The fundamental theories are numerous and disorderly.  
 Because they stick together and rely on each other,  
 The method is on the lip and in the breast.  
 Yet the spirit is not passed on by the eye.  
 And the fundamental mystery is not passed on by the heart.  
 The mediocre teachers are confused.  
 They do not distinguish the Five Phases.  
 They are already bemired in their bindings.  
 Most of them also mistake the stars,  
 Indicating that life is death and insisting that falsity is truth.  
 Above they show contempt for the heavenly vault.  
 Below they destroy the form of the earth.  
 The spiritual radiance does not shine and daylight is dark and murky.  
 In the darkened hall there is resentment,  
 Until good fortune is diminished and life degraded.  
 These principles are muddle-headed.  
 Grant, receive, abide by and use the true mystery,  
 To enlighten and teach the men of later times.<sup>14</sup>

The width of cosmology of the Black Hat Sect is a continuation of the historical trend of trying to infuse *fengshui* theory with as much traditional Chinese cosmology and folklore as possible without regard to the theoretical simplicity of its origins. Moreover, the choice of name of the sect indicates an advocacy of the Buddhist influence on *fengshui* as, Black Hat, is a reference to a Tibetan Buddhist sect. However, the ancestor worship that is so integral to the original conception of *fengshui* is ingrained in early Chinese culture, much earlier than the late Han Dynasty encroachment of Buddhism into China, and an understanding of the basic principles of *fengshui* certainly appears to predate any Buddhist influence.

Another example of the use of the popularity of *fengshui* to advance ideas not associated with the early tradition is found in the popular writings of the English woman, Karen Kingston. Kingston openly states that she bases her ideas on Balinese exorcism techniques but still markets them under the banner of *fengshui*.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, one of the stranger ideas that Kingston advocates is the use of colonic irrigation as an extension of *fengshui* theory.<sup>16</sup> This denigration of traditional Chinese culture is humorously pointed out by the Australian satirist, Kaz Cooke, who writes in *Dumb Fengshui* that “[h]er research was severely hampered by her refusal to finish reading

the section about 'your cluttered colon' in *Clear Your Clutter with Fengshui* by Karen Kingston."<sup>17</sup> The mind-set that can advocate colonic irrigation as an extension of a long Chinese tradition involving ancestor worship as well as conflate Balinese and Chinese cultures harkens one very much to the plaint of the author of the *Nan Jie Ershisi Pian* against the present-day practitioners who make up their theories to steal from the masses.

This negation of the traditions of *fengshui* is particularly dissatisfying from the perspective of the history of science because the early Form School writings show an exceptional understanding of macro-geography and its relationship to fertility.<sup>18</sup> In the 1930s, a writer by the name of Qian Renzi discussed the traditional concepts of the principles of the earth on which much of the *fengshui* theory is based from such perspectives as chemistry, acoustics, electrical energy, stratigraphy, and mathematics. He saw an analytical side to the traditional principles of the earth and discussed the possible scientific meaning within a classical textual basis.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, even earlier, the renowned Chinese geologist, Weng Wenhao, wrote of such a scientific connection with classic *fengshui* theory in his 1925 treatise, *On Mountain Veins*.<sup>20</sup> This article outlines the history of the conception of mountain veins, or dragon veins, a concept integral to the Form School's *fengshui*. The first section of this article considers the development of the theoretical basis of dragon veins from the Qin Dynasty to the Qing Dynasty. The period associated with *fengshui* that Weng mentions is what he calls the Yi Xing<sup>21</sup> period, which saw the development of the theory of the relationship between mountains and rivers, a theory of *yi xing liang jie* (two extremities for the one movement). This period is said to have ranged from Tang Dynasty to Song Dynasty with the origin of the mountain veins considered to be the Kunlun Mountains at the western end of the Himalayan orogeny. Wang points out that the theories of *fengshui* (although he uses the term *kanyu*) were integral to this. He also states that these theories were very much based on observation.

There is even in the article an extensive quote from the beginning paragraph of the *Han Long Jing* of the famous *fengshui* author of the Tang Dynasty, Yang Yunsong, which points to the proposition that the vital energy (*shengqi*) of China originates in the Himalayas.

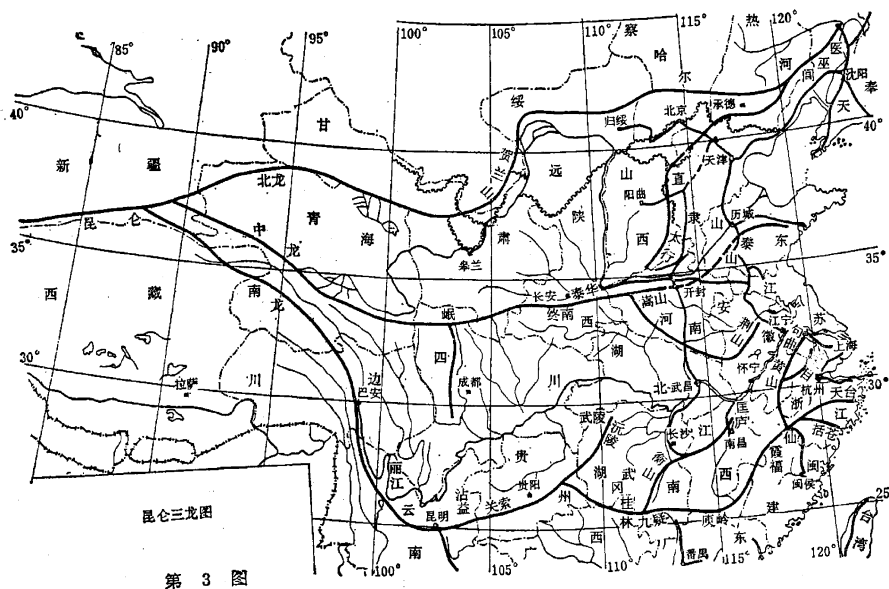
The Xumi<sup>22</sup> Mountains are the bones of Heaven and Earth, and amidst everything they are the chief entity within Heaven and Earth as is the human spine. They give birth to the loftiness of the four limbs of a dragon. The four limbs separate into the four worlds. South, north, east and west are the four tributaries. In the northwest the Kongtong mountains have several tens of thousands of entities. The

east enters the Three Han and is blocked by dark obscurity. Only the southern dragon enters the Middle Kingdom. The embryo of the clan and the conception of the ancestors are singular. The nine meanders of the Yellow River are the great intestines. The meandering of rivers is the bladder. By splitting the branches and opening the veins there is departure in all directions. The *qi* and the blood join and meet where the water stops. The great is the capital cities in the provinces of kings and emperors. The small is the prefectures and counties of nobles and gentlemen. Next are the prescriptions for small townships. Moreover, there is the wealth and good fortune at the centre of residences.

This consideration of the vital energy in China originating from the western end of the Himalayas is reinforced by a supposedly earlier late Han Dynasty text, *Qing Wu Xiansheng Zang Jing* (Burial Classic of Qing Wu Esquire), the commentary to which states that:

*Qi* congealed into the Kunlun Mountains, a form with crude substance. As there is separation into north and south, the southern dragon is *yang* and pure while the northern dragon is *yin* and turbid. As there is a beginning, there must be an end. As there is movement, there must be rest. With beginning there is return to the end, rest and movement again. This is governed by the Kunlun Mountains.<sup>23</sup>

The map below shows this relationship as seen by Weng Wenhao with the three dragons or mountain ranges of China originating at the western end of the Himalayas, that is, in the Kunlun Mountains.





Even though Weng Wenhao argues for the empiricism behind these *fengshui* theories, he criticizes them for the tendency at this time not to base mountain veins on the observed geology but on the line which was taken by the watercourses, thus creating an unavoidable false analogy. Moreover, Weng concludes that only Chinese scholars are able to understand the theory of mountain veins, which he dubs "orography" because, he argues, European geologists only consider geology from their own perspective and "why should we cut off our feet to make the shoes fit." This again is an indication of cultural biases of knowledge in relation to both the Europeans and Weng Wenhao himself.

## V. DISCUSSION

One philosophical implication of the developments of modern *fengshui* around the world is the bifurcation or oversimplified dichotomy of the concepts of East and West. An extreme example of this is the conflation of Balinese and Chinese cultures by Karen Kingston, but this type of oversimplification occurs every day in both the media and in political discourse on both sides of the polarities.<sup>24</sup> The problem with this, of course, is that present day Eastern and Western thought cannot be truthfully seen as polar opposites. Since at least, if not long before, the arrival of Marco Polo and then the Jesuits in China, there has been a give and take of knowledge and culture between the East and West. The most mundane example of this is that a Chinese cultural icon, the drinking of tea, has become an integral part of most cultures around the world. On a more philosophical level, both Leibniz and Spinoza referred to Chinese ideas when formulating their theories, and Francis Bacon stated that the bases of modern civilization were gunpowder, paper money, and the compass, not realizing that each of these was a Chinese invention, nor that each had been in use in China for centuries.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, it is well known that the ideas of the nineteenth-century Western intellectuals, Nietzsche and Marx, have been at the forefront of Chinese intellectual discourse for the past century.<sup>26</sup>

Nevertheless, an oversimplified demarcation of East and West, even if it is merely used as a normal human construct to describe the "other," still does not capture a global cultural understanding of knowledge. A simple example of this from the perspective of the history of science is the development of the freestyle swimming stroke. The first book on swimming was written by an Italian, Nicolas Wynman, in the sixteenth century. In this, Wynman stated that the breaststroke is the "scientific stroke."<sup>27</sup> However, freestyle, which is

now seen as the most efficient and certainly the fastest stroke, was actually developed in the South Pacific, especially in the Solomon Islands from where it was introduced into Australia to become known as the “Australian Crawl.”<sup>28</sup> Thus, one could posit a viable North/South dichotomy to enable an incorporation of southern knowledge systems developed outside of the East/West divide centered on the northern hemisphere.

Such a North/South dichotomy in relation to knowledge systems is particularly poignant to the case of *fengshui* because its theoretical origins seem to lie in careful geographical observation. The structures described by Guo Pu in the *Gu Ben Zang Shu* appear to be very much based on extended observation as to those structures which create the most fertile areas. An indication of Guo Pu’s extensive knowledge of the geography of China and thus that the *Gu Ben Zang Shu* has an empirical basis for its tenets lies in the fact that he remains the most famous commentator on the early geographic text *Shan Hai Jing* (The Classic of Mountains and Seas). The empirical/observational nature of early Form School *fengshui* is also reinforced by the following quote from Problem 5 of the *Nan Jie Ershisi Pian*:

In seeking out the dragon, observing the geodetic force and isolating a node one should ascend to the highest place in an area. At first investigate the external situation. Next, observe and record what is opposite. Then scrutinise the left and the right. Finally return to the place that has feeling and examine the subtleties in detail. It is necessary that nothing is lost. In general, in investigating a node, there is value in being detailed and leisurely. One should wait for when the grass is dry and (the leaves on) the trees have fallen. Ancient men first burnt the grass and then climbed the mountain. This was an excellent method. In the rain one can investigate the subtleties of the border. On a clear day one can observe the colour of its *qi* and the pattern of its veins. In the snow one can examine the relative thickness of where it accumulates, to ascertain where *yang qi* has gathered. The saying of the ancients that three years is spent seeking the land and ten years is spent isolating the node is prudent.

However, even though this geographical knowledge was developed from an extended area of East Asia, from a hemispheric perspective it was still local, and the overarching application of the ritualization of local knowledge systems can have unforeseen effects. A simple example of this is the celebration of the New Year based on northern hemisphere calendrical systems. Whether these systems are Eastern or Western, or solar or lunar in origin, all indicate a time just past the middle of winter, a time when life begins anew heralding the coming of spring. In contrast, in the southern hemisphere, celebrations of a new year at such a time actually pertain to the waning of life toward,

not away from, the coldness and comparative lack of fertility of autumn and winter.

However, to point out such oversimplifications is not as important as understanding the continuum of knowledge that these polarities entail, and the change in this continuum over time. In relation to *fengshui*, the Western perspective begins in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with commentaries by colonial administrators and missionaries working in China. Feuchtwang has stated that the first report is that of Yates in 1868,<sup>29</sup> but twenty years earlier Fortune,<sup>30</sup> a botanical collector for the Horticultural Society of London, was discussing the layout of tombs in terms of "*te-le*" and "*fung shwuy*." Eitel (1873) was the only one of these early writers to devote a complete monograph to the subject, but much of this work is inaccurate containing many ideas that are now considered unacceptable<sup>31</sup> and the writings of de Groot are generally thought of as providing a more thorough analysis.<sup>32</sup> However, all these writings show an overarching cultural bias perhaps inherent in colonial regimes toward what are perceived to be less powerful cultures. The following quote from Eitel is a good example of an understanding but equally dismissive mind-set:

Natural science has never been cultivated in China in that technical, dry and matter-of-fact fashion, which seems to us inseparable from true science. Chinese naturalists did not take much pains in studying nature and ferreting out her hidden secrets by minute and practical tests and experiments. They invented no instruments to aid them in the observation of the heavenly bodies, they never took to hunting beetles and stuffing birds, they shrank from the idea of dissecting animal bodies, nor did they chemically analyse inorganic substances, but with very little actual knowledge of nature they evolved a whole system of natural science from their own inner consciousness and expounded it according to the dogmatic formulae of ancient tradition. Deplorable, however, as this absence of experimental investigation is, which opened the door to all sorts of conjectural theories, it preserved in Chinese natural science a spirit of sacred reverence for the divine powers of nature.<sup>33</sup>

Eitel of course did not realize that the basis of his modernity as outlined by Bacon was found in this culture against whose science he took such a condescending stance, nor did he realize that armies in China had been largely immunized against smallpox by the use of the technique of variolation since the Song Dynasty, a process that entailed a solid depth of scientific thought and abilities.

The research of Feuchtwang in the early 1970s, however, was a major development toward a comparatively unbiased Western understanding of the concepts behind *fengshui*. Rather than be content with superficial considerations, Feuchtwang undertook an anthropological analysis of these concepts by the consideration of twenty-four differ-

ent manuals of instruction in the art of *fengshui*. In a similar scholarly vein, more recently Hong-key Yoon has undertaken careful research into the geographical implications of *fengshui*.<sup>34</sup>

Nevertheless, much of the popular Western literature on *fengshui* since the rise of its popularity in the West during the 1980s has focused not so much on outlining the traditional thought, but on the promise of longevity, wealth, and happiness or, to quote the *Shui Long Jing* (Water Dragon Classic), the prospect of “one hundred sons, and a thousand grandsons.” Within this focus, all Chinese occult and shamanic practices, such as eight character fate reading, face prognostication, and palm reading, are put forward as a part of *fengshui* theory. This can be understood in terms of the bifurcation of ideas mentioned previously, but the very popularity of *fengshui* in the West over the past twenty years needs further consideration.

One possible factor in the rise in popularity of modern *fengshui* is the negation of scientism by popular postmodern cultures. Scientism can be defined as “the inappropriate transfer of methods from the natural sciences, especially physics, to the social sciences, where the complexity of the object under research is usually much higher.”<sup>35</sup> Much has been written on scientism in relation to the twentieth-century Chinese culture<sup>36</sup> where there has been a continuous political and social tension between historical materialism, technological determinism, and empirical positivism on the one hand and Marxist, Confucian, and Western humanism on the other. However, in the case of *fengshui*, it is the rejection of scientism in the West that seems to be one of the major causes of its popularity. In the West there is a perception that much of the “magic” of life and the power of the individual has been lost to the powerful corporate conglomerates, which tend to hold the reins of scientific knowledge through dry statistical analysis. Thus, there has been a gradual increase in distrust of modern knowledge systems, whether they are economics or medicine, and a search for more meaningful humanistic knowledge systems that meld both the intellectual and the emotional. This is indicated by the marked rise over the past twenty years in the popularity of various esoteric knowledge structures with various “New Age” regimes, including *fengshui*. This is not isolated, however, to Western countries. Even in China there has been a marked increase in the popularity of various Daoist and Buddhist knowledge systems perhaps as a reaction to the materialist strictures over the past fifty years. The popularity of Falungong with the Chinese diaspora is but one example. In fact, according to Mayfair Yang, the general trend toward traditional practices has been so marked in Fujian Province that a new hybrid form of Capitalism has arisen based on traditional funereal rites centered on *fengshui*.<sup>37</sup>

In fact, the division between the two major schools of *fengshui* can perhaps be seen as a struggle between science and scientism, if the former is taken to be theory based on observation and the latter to be observation having to conform to theory. The original Form School based its dwelling sites on observation. The Compass School, however, with its integration of more and more of Chinese cosmological theory became less observation-focused such that observation needed to fit the theory rather than vice versa. For instance, it would certainly be very useful for traditional Chinese cosmology and the Compass School if a year had 360 days, but unfortunately it does not. Thus, the Compass School could be seen to have gone the way of scientism. After all, this school had a machine, the compass, at its base and so could claim to have the better knowledge/science to the unwary.

However, because of the comparative popularity of the Compass School (an estimated eighty percent of present day *fengshui* literature involves Eight Mansion Theory), the empirical base of traditional *fengshui* goes unrealized. Admittedly, its macrogeographic fertility theory may be flawed in not considering geology, but it has certainly added to the history of science. Moreover, traditional *fengshui* is an attempt to relate empirically based structures to feeling/aesthetics in that structure is necessary for dwelling sites but positive feeling must also be incorporated for a positive outcome. Thus, *fengshui* could be seen as an early attempt at humanistic science.

This attempt to mix structure, feeling, and spirit in traditional *fengshui* is perhaps the reason that there was such a strong negative reaction against it by European commentators when they first came across it in the nineteenth century. Bertrand Russell argued that as early as the twelfth century the Scholastics in Europe negated completely any manifestations of or studies into the arcane and esoteric as work of the Devil.<sup>38</sup> The philosophy and mindset of the nineteenth-century European commentators were certainly much changed from those of the Scholastics, but in a similar vein any perception of a science relating to burial and spirit such as *fengshui* would have still carried with it tag of occultism and the arcane, and therefore a general rejection out of hand of it having anything to do with science, as witnessed by the quote of Eitel above. In fact, more recently even Needham, the champion in the West of the depth and strength of science in China, described *fengshui* as a "grossly superstitious system" which had no great impact on the history of science.<sup>39</sup> However, Needham, himself, admitted that it "embodied a markedly aesthetic component, which accounts for the great beauty of the dwelling sites of so many of the forms, houses and villages throughout China."<sup>40</sup>

The above discussion of the incorporation of the traditions of *fengshui* by popular culture in the West and the strong negative reaction to it in scientific circles has led me to consider that what is occurring here is a cultural bias in relation to power and knowledge. Certainly, the negative reaction of the delegates on the *fengshui* tour to discussing burial mentioned in the introduction indicates a definite cultural resistance to an important concept within the tradition and the perceived power of the delegates' cultures enabled them to reject the teachings of a sixtieth-generation expert in the art that they had come to learn. That is, the power of their cultures enabled them to accept only those parts of the tradition that they perceived as being useful. This is what Weng Wenhao was pointing to in 1925 when he said that European geologists only consider geology from their perspective. Nevertheless, he himself displayed such a cultural bias in stating that only Chinese could understand the traditional theory of mountain veins.

However, it is not only in the area of *fengshui* that such cultural bias occurs. In a 1993 workshop paper at the Pacific Rim First Year in Higher Education Conference, Kutieleh and Egege argued that critical thinking is specifically a Western approach to knowledge claims in relation to international Asian students. This follows the arguments of those such as Atkinson<sup>41</sup> and Fox<sup>42</sup> that critical thinking is incompatible with Asian cultural attitudes. From the perspective of the history of science in China, such arguments are spurious at best, and reflect a continuation of the nineteenth-century Western approach exemplified by Eitel.

A case in point against such an idea that critical thought is specifically Western can be found in the field of geology. Shen Gua, an eleventh-century high official in the Song Dynasty bureaucracy famous for his clarity of thought, outlined the foundations of modern geology in the following translation of his writings:

When I went to Hebei on official duties I saw that in the northern cliffs of the Taihang mountain range there were belts (strata) containing whelk-like animals, oyster shells, and stones like the shells of birds' eggs (fossil echinoids). So this place, though now a thousand *li* west of the sea, must once have been a shore. Thus what we call the "continent" must have been made of mud and sediment which was once below the water. The Yu Mountains where Yao killed Kun was, according to ancient tradition, by the side of the Eastern Sea, but now it is far inland.

Now the Great (i.e. Yellow) River, the Zhang Shui, the Hu Tou and the Sang Qian are all muddy silt bearing rivers. In the west of Shenxi and Shanxi the waters run through gorges as deep as a hundred feet. Naturally mud and silt will be carried eastwards by these streams year after year, and in this way the substance of the whole continent must have been laid down. These principles must certainly be true.<sup>43</sup>

In this area of study, such critical contemplation of observation was not evident in Western thought until James Hutton supposedly laid the foundations of modern geology in 1802 more than 700 years after Shen Gua's postulations. The delay in the West can be traced to the biblical story of the flood overarching any purely observational theorizing.

A similar case of such cultural bias is the attempt by some present-day Western philosophers of science to tie science, freedom, and democracy inextricably to Christian metaphysics. Certainly, there has been some influence, but if the following quote from a history of philosophy of science discussion list were correct, the whole tradition of science in China would perhaps have to be expunged from the history of science, an outcome which would be untenable in relation to the knowledge of the world.

Locke's thought, like everyone's is based on some ontological understanding. Newton's thought was so instrumental to Locke. Specifically, if we move to far away from the understanding of essence, of the unchangeable and indestructible [sic] in nature and in man, well, Locke and free government will be swept into the dust bin of history. For what are inalienable rights based on. They are based on an ontology that sees reality as atomistic and indestructible, uniform and absolute. And as with Newton, these qualities of nature were based upon their theology which was grounded in Judaeo-Christian thought. We have moved away (in the U.S.) from the natural law tradition of Newton and Locke, of the law of Nature and nature's God. When we lose that we have lost the whole basis for freedom. And that is exactly the road we are headed down.<sup>44</sup>

As a final point in this discussion, this tying of Judeo-Christian thought inextricably to science is problematic from various points of view but specifically in relation to the history of humanity's effect on the environment. Elvin convincingly argues in his environmental history of China that the environmental destruction in China that saw unprecedented frequency and scope of famine in the Ming and Qing Dynasties was due to the advanced level of civilization, science, and technology in Chinese culture with "war and the logic of short term advantage" as the motive force. Interestingly, in terms of the present discussion, Elvin shows that the environmental aspects of *fengshui* theory and practice had some ameliorating effect on this environmental destruction, but over the long term such positive effects were overtaken and negated by the logic of short-term advantage.<sup>45</sup> Elvin also states that this use of the logic of short-term advantage can in no way be considered to be specifically Chinese, but is a trait, more generally, of the human species, the only difference being in relation to China the longer continuous duration of the civilization.<sup>46</sup> Thus, it may be more useful for historians and philosophers of science, such as

Bennett quoted above, that see scientific knowledge as being based in Western thought to cast their net more widely to include all knowledge systems based on observation whether they be from the east, west, north, or south.

## VI. CONCLUSION

To conclude, a consideration of the surge in the popularity of *fengshui* worldwide and the consequent selective incorporation of the tradition into the receiving cultures illuminates the relationship between different cultural traditions in terms of the oversimplification and thus bifurcation of East and West, the antiscientism of popular cultures, and the culturally biased nature of knowledge, especially by cultures that perceive themselves to be superior. To generalize, I argue that humanity survives using observation-based knowledge systems (i.e., science), no matter what the culture is. As a species, we do not run fast enough, our claws are not strong enough and we do not reproduce quickly enough to survive against other species unless we use such observation-based knowledge systems. Moreover, it is important within this striving for the survival of our species that we see the cultural and geographic biases of these knowledge systems. With an understanding of such biases and their relationship to war and the logic of short-term advantage, we may more readily see the value of traditional knowledge. We may also see more clearly the value of struggling with, rather than against, our own and other species for mutual survival. Thus, to enable the garnering of such knowledge, science rather than scientism should hold sway.

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## ENDNOTES

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21. A Tang Dynasty Buddhist monk who was renowned as a thinker, mathematician, and writer on *fengshui*. See Needham, *Science and Civilisation*, vol. 2, 363; and Huang, “Court Divination and Christianity.”
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## CHINESE GLOSSARY

Falungong	法輪功	<i>Huang Di Zhai Jing</i>	《黃帝宅經》
fengshui	風水	<i>Jin Dai Bi Shu</i>	《津逮祕書》
fengshui xiansheng	風水先生	Kanyu	堪輿
<i>Gu Ben Zang Jing Nei Pian</i>		Kunlun	昆倫
《古本葬經內篇》		<i>Nan Jie Ershisi Pian</i>	
Guobao dilijia	國寶地理家	《難解二十四篇》	
Guo Pu	郭樸	<i>Qing Wu Xiansheng Zang Jing</i>	
<i>Han Long Jing</i>	《撼龍經》	《青烏先生葬經》	
He Jinzong	何金宗	san yuan	三元

Shen Gua	沈括	xue	穴
shi	勢	yang	陽
<i>Shui Long Jing</i>	《水龍經》	Yang Yunsong	楊筠松
Wang Ji	王伋	yin	隱
Wang Wei	王微	Yi Xing	一行
Weng Wenhao	喻文豪	yi xing liang jie	一行兩界