

Dear Colleague,

Greetings. I hope that 2020 will be a satisfying and productive year for you. I am beginning a new project that perhaps you might like to contribute.

I have over the past five years been researching and writing a wide-ranging book on historical, philosophical, scientific, medical, cultural and educational issues occasioned by the growth of Feng Shui belief and practice both in and outside of Asia. The book was published by Springer at the end of 2019. A brochure giving the book's contents is attached. Also attached is a condensed account of its argument.

Feng shui is a significant subject with obvious cultural and educational ramifications, yet surprisingly it has generated very little critical, systematic scholarship; with almost no attention to the educational responsibilities and opportunities feng shui occasions.

As I would like to promote further discussion and research on the wide dimensions of feng shui I am writing to you and other colleagues in order to locate scholars who might have interests in various aspects of the topic and who would like to contribute to such research.

A much-published researcher and international science education leader wrote, in the *Asia-Pacific Science Education* journal (vol.1, no.1, 2015), of feng-shui related medical practice (acupuncture) that:

The underlying theory relates to *Qi*, universal energy, and its flows through the body. In the case of humans there are 26 pairs of safety energy locks (SELs) through which *Qi* flows, providing the life source to the body ... When a body is disharmonized, energy can be blocked at or close to the SELs, thereby disrupting one or more of the flows needed to distribute the life force to different parts of the body.

That a prominent senior professor writes so easily, and without hesitation, about chi universal energy, chi flows, SELs, and blockages – underscores the degree of penetration of feng shui thinking beyond its Asian homeland.

Philosophical and educational discussion of feng shui has some features in common with arguments about astrology, about complementary or holistic medicine, about debates on special creation and evolution, and about social-psychological research on why people believe 'unusual', 'minimally-evidenced', or 'science-rejected' contentions.

More generally in feng shui discussion there is overlap with arguments about teaching the Nature of Science (NOS), the place of multi-cultural and

indigenous science in school programmes, and with proposals for international STEM education. Is feng shui theory scientific? If feng shui is embedded in a culture should it be taught or at least not criticised? Does STEM education have any responsibility for addressing pseudoscientific belief and is feng shui in the latter category? Ideally, the general philosophical arguments and the localised ones concerning feng shui should inform each other.

What makes feng shui of special interest to science teachers is its explicit and central appeal to the supposed natural, 'scientific', and all-pervasive flows of chi energy through the universe and the body that impact on all aspects of life, health and living space. Science teachers should be able to say something informed and sensible about feng shui and its related worldview and practices; and students completing good science programmes should have some appreciation of the historical and philosophical issues occasioned by feng shui, even if the belief is not prevalent. The latter is the same argument for having an informed opinion about astrology even where it is not a common cultural practice.

Such good education depends on teachers having some competence and familiarity with the history and philosophy of science; and also with philosophy of education. Serious educational questions arise when there is a disjunction between student worldviews and the worldview of science. Such education depends on awareness of efforts to distinguish science from pseudoscience and how successful such efforts have been. It depends on how one understands naturalism and whether ideas of chi can be accommodated or otherwise in a naturalist worldview, or must naturalism be relaxed, as it has been in the past, to accommodate the widely believed entity. And there are many other matters that contribute to teachers making informed and sensible decisions about feng shui.

Whether to say anything, what to say, on what grounds, and for what purposes - are matters of contention that this project hopes to address.

A selected (110 item) and roughly categorised bibliography drawn from the book's references is attached. This gives some idea of the scholarly topography of the project.

The brief conclusion of the book is also attached. Participation in the project absolutely does not entail agreement with this conclusion; that is just my considered take on the subject. Assuredly there are more informed, sensible and nuanced understandings of the field than mine.

I anticipate the project resulting in either an anthology or a journal special issue; with either option having easily available web access. As both an editor and

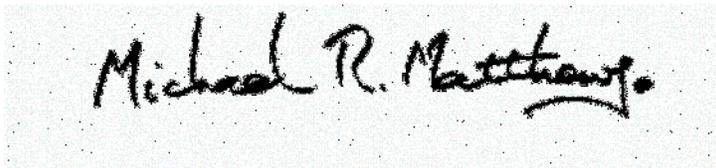
author I have had good relations with a number of journal and book publishers; I am confident that a well-reviewed collection of substantial papers would be welcomed as a special issue or anthology.

Would you like to contribute to such a project? Papers, 5-10,000 words would need to be completed by end of 2020, with review and revision completed by mid-2021, then publication by end of 2021. It may be possible to arrange a panel presentation of some contributions at one or other appropriate education or philosophy conferences in the first half of 2021 in Asia, North America or Europe.

If you would like to contribute, please do let me know by the end of January indicating what aspect of the topic you would write on. A 500-1,000 word abstract would be required by end of June. If you cannot contribute, or even if you can, I would appreciate suggestions of the names/emails of scholars who might be interested and who I could notify about the project. And if there is particular research that you feel is valuable and should be passed on to all, do let me know of it.

If you think you might contribute, or alternatively know that you cannot, letting me know early would be appreciated. No area or title needed at this stage. But final decisions and likely topic or area need be conveyed by end of this month.

Again, best wishes to you for 2020.

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light-colored background. The signature reads "Michael R. Matthews" in a cursive script. The "R" is particularly large and stylized, and the "Matthews" is written in a fluid, connected hand.

Michael Matthews
School of Education, UNSW, Australia.
m.matthews@unsw.edu.au

NB for ease of record keeping, this 'invitation' is attached as a pdf file.