

Matthews, M.R. (2019) *Feng Shui: Teaching About Science and Pseudoscience*

Chapter 4

Feng Shui Practice

Feng shui was never just a speculative or metaphysical worldview; from the beginning, it was connected to practice; it impinged on all features of life. 'Qigong' means 'working with qi'. Masters and practitioners ascertained the good and bad chi quality of an area to determine the location and orientation of tombs, the siting, configuration and fit-out of domestic and government buildings, to advise on lifestyles, to determine where in the body to place acupuncture needles, to identify auspicious times for significant state and personal occasions, and to foretell futures.

The Domain of Feng Shui

In China, for at least three thousand years, feng shui in one form or another has dictated major commercial and domestic siting and construction decisions as well as the proper internal arrangement of offices, homes, kitchens, gardens, furniture and decorations (Mak & So 2015). One expositor of Daoism has described traditional feng shui siting procedure as:

The expert would try to find a site that sloped to the south while it was protected from the north, with a hill on the east (wood) larger than one on the west (metal), so that the Green Dragon of Spring might prevail against the White Tiger of Autumn. Valleys were *yin*, but so were rounded hills – in contrast to the *yang* of precipitous heights. The west and north were *yin*. The east and south were *yang*. The perfect site was three-fifths *yang* and two-fifths *yin*. (Welch 1957, p.133)

For the same period, countless millions have relied on feng shui astrological guides to make business decisions and for the timing for significant personal and family events (Lim 2003, Lip 2008), and to guide their decisions in romantic and personal life (Hsu 2003, Leung 2010). Feng shui, for example, has an impact in the Asian hospitality industry where decisions about the location, layout, furnishings, decorations and marketing of hotels, resorts and restaurants are all dependent on advice about good feng shui. If an institution's bad feng shui is known or advertised by rivals, poor patronage and economic loss follows.¹

This commitment to the reality of universal chi is well stated by Lillian Too:

Feng shui prescribes auspicious orientations for harnessing mysterious metaphysical forces that float in the air and the space that surround us. Practitioners describe these forces as chi and colourfully describe it as the dragon's cosmic breath. (Too 1998, p.6)

She goes on to say:

The influence of yin and yang cosmology in the practice of feng shui is a universal reflection of the way the Chinese view the Earth's energies. ... Yin and yang are viewed as primordial forces that possess completely opposing attributes. (Too 1998, p.48)

¹ In the marketing of Hilton International Hotels prominence is given to their high feng shui ratings (Perry-Hobson 1994).

Too, in one book that had eleven printings between 1994 and 1998, offers advice on the chi-enhanced shape of dwellings:

Avoid triangular shaped houses, or houses that have too many corners. The angles created give off unfortunate *sha chi* and are not conducive to the attraction of good chi flows. ... Another unlucky configuration is the U-shaped house. Residents living in such homes suffer from unhappy marriages, and will be plagued with frequent quarrels. (Too 1994, p.45)

And in the same book:

A single tree facing your front door could cause havoc in our family life by blocking good chi from entering your home. If it is on your own land, cut it down. If it is outside ... you may have to re-orientate your main door. ... A steep angled roofline facing your front door brings severe bad luck, causing illness amongst children and family members, and even worse, creating problems for your career and business because *sha chi* created is powerful. (Too 1994, p.50)

The International Feng Shui Society (UK) also affirms the omnipresent reality and therapeutic property of chi, stating:

Chi, or *qi*, is the oriental word for the vital intangible natural energy that emanates from everything in our universe, a combination of both real and abstract forces: energy from the earth's magnetic field, sunlight, cosmic influences, colour vibrations, the nature of our thoughts and emotions, the form of objects, the quality of the air around us. Depending on whether it flows harmoniously or not, chi influences how a place feels and how we feel in it.²

Chinese architecture and construction styles have long been informed by feng shui (Chen & Wu 2009). The styles were largely unchanged over thousands of years, and they were widely admired. The individual palaces, homes, offices, gardens, tombs, bridges, and so on, were not conceived or understood in isolation; or just by reference to architectural norms or principles. They were understood as part of the overall cosmos inhabited by man with this understanding explicitly given by feng shui theory. The architectural norms were to reflect this underlying, stable cosmic reality; they were not expressions of changing fashion blown hither and thither by commercial or other interests. Nigel Pennick writes:

Chinese practitioners of Feng-Shui, believing that spirits travelled in straight lines, combated them by making winding paths to prevent demons from approaching temple doors. For additional protection, they constructed a spirit wall in front of the entrance, creating a corner unnegotiable by straight-line fliers. (Pennick 1979, p.66).

The situation was comparable to that informing the construction of churches and mosques. In these cases, it was not just architectural principles or norms that governed design, but Christian and Islamic theology. The clear difference with China was that feng shui guidance went all the way down the construction ladder from palaces to city gardens, to humble homes. This is nicely seen in a report of Ernst Boerschmann who went to China in 1906 at the bequest of the German government, who long had Treaty Ports in China, to report on Chinese culture and construction. He travelled widely, and reported on feng shui and its impact on the built environment:

² <http://www.fengshuisociety.org.uk/>

One imposing conception of the universe is the mainspring of all Chinamen, a conception so comprehensive that it is the key defining all expressions of life ... especially fine arts and architecture. They exhibit in nearly every work of art the universe and its idea. The visible forms are the reflex of the divine ... In the microcosm is recognized and revealed the macrocosm (Boerschmann 1912, p.542; in Parkes 2003, p.190).

And he was impressed with the harmonizing of construction and landscape:

The large cities and almost all others are located in the most clever concord with the natural conditions to combine most advantageously the industrial interests with the most beautiful environment possible. The manner in which the Chinese artistically build their structures to harmonize with the natural environment is astonishing. (Parkes 2003, p.190)

In a following publication, Boerschmann comments:

that feeling of restful comfort and harmony of our soul [that] arises at the sight of Chinese buildings. For we not only enjoy the unity of the extensive edifices and grounds with the immediate surroundings and nature, with which we feel ourselves a part in the picture of the buildings and the landscape. We also feel that the buildings themselves, nay, even their ornaments must somehow be imbued with nature's living spirit for them to evoke this mood of consummate peace. (Boerschmann 1924)

The Chinese, of course, had no monopoly on building design, garden layout, and landscaping that evoked 'feeling of restful comfort and harmony'. Capability Brown (1716-1783), the eighteenth-century English landscape designer, had a renowned reputation for doing just that. So did Peter Lenné (1789-1866), the Prussian landscape designer. And many more all over the world. Restful comfort and harmony can be had without feng shui.

Along with guidance in construction and outfitting of dwellings, came various forms of geomancy, divination, or fortune telling (Han 2001). Traditionally feng shui was linked to geomancy; it was an Eastern version of astrology that was so routine across the entire ancient and medieval worlds, and that still lingers in the modern world, both East and West. William Spear the author of *Feng Shui Made Easy* writes: 'feng shui tells you more than how to arrange your furniture, it tells you how to change your life' (Spear 1995, p.8). Another advocate stresses:

The aim of geomancy [feng shui] has always been the reestablishment of balance, the restitution of the cosmic order by modifying human activity according to complemenary rather than contrary deeds. The dual forces of construction and destruction have been harmonized as far as possible. (Pennick 1979, p.161)

Form and Compass Schools

The first formalization, and naming of feng shui, occurred in Guo's [Kuo P'o] 4th century AD *Book of Burial* (Zhang 2004). Guo made more systematic what had been a long pre-existing, heterogeneous, cosmological and divination tradition. By the beginning of the Tang dynasty (618-906 AD), feng shui had divided more sharply into two schools: The Form or Landscape school, which was the orthodoxy of the time, and the later Compass or Directions school which was the emergent or innovative stream. Both presuppose the existence and influence

of chi; they digress about its origins, indicators, influences, and means of utilization.³ As with the Islamic schism in the 7th century Middle East, the Christian schism in 16th century Europe, the Communist schism in 20th century Russia - these schools continued, predictably with a degree of internecine feuding and mutual charges of fraud and heterodoxy, up to the present time.

The Form school attended to gross and dominating features of locations – valleys, ridges, mountains, rivers, lakes, winds – as indicators of chi lines and chi movement. As Guo, who has been quoted above, stated:

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. (Paton 2007, p.427)

This proto-geophysics is overlain by a descriptive ‘metaphysics’ wherein the ridges are called dragons, with easterly hills being home to the green dragons, westerly hills being the domain of white tigers, northern hills are black turtles, while the southern features are vermilion phoenixes. These are all metaphors for something in a metaphysical geography. Thus sculptures, drawings, and paintings of dragons are omnipresent in China. Using the theories and devices available, the feng shui masters identified beneficial sites and made recommendations about how best to master the site’s good chi.

Traditionally they attended to the seven natural features of any site: mountains, water, soil, direction, wind, time and land-shape. Surface and visible water was important for the chi-rating of a site, but so also was subterranean water, the location of which was ascertained by dowsing methods – either a dowsing rod or a pendulum (Birdsall 1995, pp.193-204). In modern times feng shui masters consider high-rise buildings as well as mountains, and fish ponds as well as streams. It is important for them to refer to municipal drainage plans so as to know the location of major sewer pipes and their relation to the site. Building over a sewer pipe is a feng shui no-no.

A 14th century Form School classic is illustrative of feng shui core ideas, and also of the schismatic tensions in the tradition at the time:

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 [compass school] 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. (Paton 2007, p.429)

In the 17th century, Shen Hao, another promoter of Form School orthodoxy, took serious exception to the Compass School heterodoxy of his time; saying the practitioners were lazy charlatans who preyed on the credulity of the people. In a work published in 1652, twenty years after Galileo’s *Two Chief World Systems*, and thirty years before Newton’s *Principia*, he wrote:

³ For the origins and history of the two major feng shui streams, see at least March (1968) and Paton (2007).

There have since appeared in the world eyeless ones, who climb and gaze out but cannot tell departing from approaching [dragons, or waters]; go up and go down but do not know the fronts [of landforms] from their backs. They see only the confused motions of the compass needle, think it is a marvellous object and deify it. ... They say: I remember clearly, there is no need to climb mountains, we can sit down and discuss geomancy. These are called the Directionists [*Fang wei chia*]. Each makes his own theories. From the T'ang dynasty to the present there has always been a great ruck of them. (March 1968, p.262)

And he warns against taking the easy route to feng shui knowledge on account of it being so well trode by imposters and charlatans:

Those who first made up the Planets and Trigrams theories, and talked of Directions, were deluded men; others after them perpetuated the theories. As the then masters [of geomancy] refuted them with might and main, they dissembled by giving themselves the name *Li ch'I chia*; and those who heard their theories supposed that what was being imparted was the *li* [principle] and *ch'I* [breath, material force] [of the Neo-Confucians] – which, however, it is not. I know of no 'principle' if one departs from shapes [*hsing*] nor any 'breath' if one discards terrain [*shih*]. But climbing is laborious, and you cannot let someone else go and look in your stead; whereas sitting and talking is easy, and the compass is convenient to handle comfortable for the consultant, comfortable for the client. This is why those who talk of directions and *li ch'I* have multiplied and have written book after book. (ibid.)

He offers some explanation for the constantly re-generating large pool of believers in the fanciful:

But if you must denounce heterodoxy without its rationale, it can argue against you, so you must know all twenty-four authorities' Yin-Yangs and Five Elements before your refutation will succeed. Strong-minded and impatient people usually just decide anyhow, knowing nothing, and heedless people also dislike the trouble of climbing mountains and enjoy the ease of sitting and talking. This is why the words of the Directionists or *Li ch'I chia* take fresh life each day and proliferate more each month. Those struck by the poison are like smoke dissipated and fire extinguished, and never have a chance to reason out the source of their misfortunes. (ibid.)

Shen Hao, of course, does not reject feng shui or its principles as developed in his own Form School tradition. It is only the beliefs of the *rival* feng shui school that are foolish and that cater for the 'lazy minded':

I grieve that the gentry will not interest themselves in (geomantic) lore, but put their trust in rustic matters and so imperil their parents and prepare disaster for their prosperity. (ibid.)

Contemporary Form School adherents frequently speak of it as the 'ecological' or 'environmental' school of feng shui. One Australian form school maintains that:

Form School Feng Shui follows natural principles and works with chi energy. The knowledge of form school Feng Shui regarding chi energy is based on the concept that form defines energy. Although this understanding of how the surrounding forms of the natural world affect human beings has been the basis of traditional wisdom all over the world throughout history, it was in China that it was honed to a fine science, due to the long period of continuous civilization there. Thousands of years of accumulated and synthesized knowledge are contained in the universal principles of Form School. ... It is the true traditional Chinese Feng Shui.⁴

⁴ See <http://www.bluemountainfengshui.com/about/form-school/> , accessed 4.12.2017)

As its older Chinese precursors did, this Australian operation is scathing of the competing Compass school, saying that these schools are mostly faith-based, they are not common-sensical, and they do not have a solid theoretical foundation. Rather they have:

imported and bundled Asian superstition, folklore, and regional beliefs together confusing many on the true practice of Feng Shui. They also use many so-called Feng Shui gadgets such as miniature fountains, hanging crystals, and Bagua mirrors as remedies in a house to attract prosperity or expel evil. As many people always like a silver bullet approach to solve their personal problems and in hopes to bring love and fortune, this practice became popular in a rather short time. But, this new age hype also declined quickly.⁵

Lillian Too, a Singapore-based feng shui consultant to 'the stars' and big business, author of numerous feng shui books, and international feng shui entrepreneur,⁶ recommends:

Look for land with compact, reddish loam. Such soil is full of the celestial breath of life or CHI. Avoid hard rocky soil. ...If the grass on your land is especially green and lush, it is a place of good feng shui. Fertile land is good feng shui. Dry, arid, rocky land is not. (Too 1994, p.23)

She advises not to buy and build on land where hills are being cut immediately above because: 'Injured dragons hovering above, create bad feng shui' (ibid., p.23). She does say that 'Buildings with a view of water in front is excellent feng shui' (ibid., p.25), but warns that:

Dirty water creates *sha chi* [bad chi] which brings unlucky vibrations, especially ill health for residents. It is worse if the water smells of decaying materials, or is muddy. It requires the presence of clean, free flowing water before wealth feng shui exists. (ibid., p.25)

And further suggests:

Avoid locations on hilltops; in cul-de-sacs; facing a T-road junction, or a straight-line structure like transmission lines and railway tracks. These areas are most susceptible to being influenced by poisonous CHI which bring ill health and bad luck. (ibid., p.27)

Maurice Freedman, in a study of feng shui site selection in the New Territories of Hong Kong, found that for acknowledged good sites:

A site is protected from high winds by its hills. Places from which streams and rivers flow too directly and too fast are avoided. An ideal site is one which nestles in the embrace of hills standing to its rear and on its flanks; it is then like an armchair, comfortable and protecting. (Bennett 1978, p.122)

Simple commonsense and experience provides the same guidance for many of the foregoing decisions as does expensive feng shui consultation – don't build on windy hill tops or alongside polluted streams, etc. – so in these cases feng shui is harmless, though expensive. But in many cases the expensive advice though novel, is useless, and detrimental to self-interest. Consider the advice: 'do not build along or near straight-line structures'. If

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Her website says she is the author of '80 best-selling books [on feng shui] that have been translated into 30 languages'; after a corporate career, she learnt feng shui from a master who had made 'many businessmen into truly prosperous billionaires and multi-millionaires' (Too 1998, p.8).

this means do not build beside a busy highway or railway, then there might be commonsense grounds for not doing so, (provided of course that you can afford to build in a more expensive, less trafficked location). But if your business depends on easy access to road and rail, then the advice is silly. To build a home alongside an abandoned rail line or little-used road, might be perfectly sensible. To bring into the already complex decision making (location, cost, mortgage repayments, distance to work, etc.) feng shui considerations about straight lines encouraging bad chi, is just a distraction and a useless one.

Dismissing Form School criticism, Too says: 'Compass school feng shui takes you deeper and allows you to discover powerful methods of seriously enhancing your luck' (Too 1998, p.16). Another adherent says:

The 'Compass School sect', is more technical, since a compass, protractor and meticulous graphs, as well as suspicious days determine a configuration. Feng shui practitioners of this discipline are mathematically inclined and have the minds of structural engineers. (Rolnick 2004, p.13)

Though this author does disarmingly add: 'Though it must be said a great deal of "magic" goes along with this science' (ibid.). Stephen Skinner, another contemporary advocate who has degrees in philosophy and geography from University of Sydney, tries to balance the two schools by saying:

In the Form School the principles are clear but the practice is difficult ... with the Compass the principles are obscure but the practice is easy. (Skinner 1982, p.13)

As with religious and political schisms and heresies, how is the right and wrong side of this feng shui Form/Compass cleavage to be settled? There is disagreement in science, and prolonged competition between theories, paradigms, and research programmes, but a feature of science is that these can by deliberate and widely accepted methods be settled.

Rolnick does not ask the philosophically interesting question: How much magic can be mixed into a system and it still remain science? Magic, religion, and astrology were, famously, all pursued by Isaac Newton (Figala 2002, Mamiani 2002). But they were not 'mixed in' with his science; the latter could be, and of course was, separated from the former. The latter thrived and was the foundation of modern science; very few developed Newton's astrology, or his distinctive, heterodox, Arian religious position.

Feng Shui in Hong Kong

Hong Kong is the pulsing centre of the feng shui industry. One scholar writes that: 'Nowhere in the world is feng shui so intensely integrated into every aspect of social, religious and commercial life as in Hong Kong' (Bruun 2008, p.136). One website announces that:

Today Hong Kong is the unofficial heart of feng shui practice. In a city where more than 10,000 masters (called geomancers) now ply their craft, you can feel the power of feng shui everywhere.⁷

Feng Shui has dominated construction and related-decision making in Hong Kong for centuries, if not millennia. In 1964 the government was to erect a water reservoir in Sheung

⁷ <http://www.hotelclub.com/blog/the-power-of-feng-shui-in-hong-kong/#full-info>

Kwai Chung district, it was objected to because the construction would cut veins of the green dragon that protected the district. The *Hong Kong South China Morning Post* of June 9, 1964 reported that:

As a result of these objections, the District Officer, Tsuen Wan, accompanied by PWD (Public Works Department) engineers, visited Kwei Chung and located another site for the proposed service reservoir. This does not interfere with the villager's *feng shui* and the issue was thus settled. (in Bennett 1978, p.24)

Jack Potter, an anthropologist, wrote in 1970 that 'Most roads in the New Territories have a serpentine quality that is due more to feng shui requirements than to bad engineering' (in Bennett 1978, p.24). At the same time, the villagers of Ping Shan claimed: 'that numerous people who once dwelt at the rear of their village died off because the Hong Kong government erected a police station on the hill behind their village which cut off their flow of feng shui' (ibid).

In the 1960s feng shui consultants lobbied successfully for a new high-rise, high-cost residential block in Repulse Bay to have a huge gap (8 floors by 4 floors) constructed in its centre to allow for the uninterrupted passage of *qi* (chi) from the mountains behind to the ocean in front. The *qi* lines traced the movement of the northern dragons that came through the valley to their regular resting place in the bay. Subsequent buildings in Repulse Bay, and then many other locations, also had to provide a 'dragon hole' for chi to flow from interior hills to ocean.⁸



⁸ Dragons have a special place in Chinese thinking and culture; they subsist in a shadow world between the real and imaginary. Some mountain chains and ridges are deemed to be dragons and are conduits for the passage of chi.

Fig. 4.1 Feng Shui Buildings, Hong Kong

No real estate, from humblest apartment to grandest residence, is sold without feng shui advice or certification. In 2010 a multi-million-dollar law suit rumbled through the court system because a large tower proved unprofitable and the developer sued his feng shui advisor for providing poor advice which it was claimed resulted in low occupancy of the building. The legal case, and philosophical interest, depended on being able to identify poor feng shui advice independently of the occupancy rate. Suing the advisor *before* the building was opened would have crystallised this matter, but that did not, and does not, happen. That would be too much like a controlled scientific test, something requiring more diligence than is commonly found in the feng shui business. The case suggests that the adequacy or otherwise of feng shui advice is not in-principle determinable, but only in practice, namely who believes in it and who does not.

Nearly all Hong Kong businesses, big and small, and government departments, consult feng shui experts to determine auspicious dates for deals and programme launches; to create interiors and environments that will bring good fortune for a business; to guide against creating bad feng shui for others that might result in costly legal battles and compensation claims (Emmons 1992).

In 2010 the *South China Morning Post* forced the Hong Kong government to admit that it regularly pays millions of dollars in feng shui compensation when it realigns roads, digs tunnels, builds bridges, plants trees or in any other conceivable way disturbs feng shui or the flow of positive energy. The government admitted to payments of £6 million, but refused to open its books so most commentators think the figure is distinctly understated.⁹ The government also freely admits to paying millions of pounds in compensation to residents and businesses whose feng shui is adversely affected by private construction that it approves; the government becomes a feng shui insurer. This predictably generates a huge mega-million-yuan feng shui litigation industry.

When the new rail link between Hong Kong and the mainland city of Guangzhou was constructed in 2011, seventeen residents whose feng shui was adversely affected were each given half-a-million US dollars to pay for a consultant to perform ‘cleansing rituals’. Sceptical observers, and those with a more scientific habit of mind, might say that the ‘cleansing rituals’ amount to a commercial shakedown, with feng shui masters and local landlords colluding to launch outrageous claims against the government before splitting the proceeds. Doubtless this is indeed what happened. The mafia could take lessons.

On the advice of a feng shui master, Hong Kong Disneyland in 2005 realigned its entrance gates 12 degrees, tilted the whole site several degrees to obtain a better alignment with the mountains behind and sea in front, placed a curve in its entry road so as to better capture for itself the positive *qi* flowing in the vicinity. Additionally, Disney set up ‘no fire’ zones in kitchens to balance the central Five Elements of feng shui (fire, water, earth, wood and metal), and chose an auspicious opening date according to the traditional calendar (Bruun 2008, p.140). It is indicative of the reach of feng shui belief that one of the world’s biggest companies made these mega-million-dollar adjustments to its construction programme just on the advice of, highly-paid, feng shui masters. All of this extra expense would have been

⁹ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/hongkong/8206601/Hong-Kong-government-spends-millions-on-feng-shui.html>

added to the admission price and eventually paid for by Hong Kong families patronizing the park. Feng shui practice has impact beyond its principals.

The getting, and acting on, feng shui advice is expensive. Countless Hong Kong feng shui consultants have become millionaires. Tony Chan, one such high-end consultant extracted, in the years up to 2007, £60 million from one very rich woman developer while another consultant charges \$16,000 per hour for auspicious real estate investment advice. The standard ‘tycoon’ rate is £2-3 per square inch of building (Moore 2011).¹⁰ These might be towards the upper end of the feng shui fee schedule, but all the way down the status pole, such consultative service is obligatory and not cheap. Even when consultation is done via the telephone, as many web services offer, it is still expensive. Money so spent is not spent on other necessities of life: food, education, leisure, lodging.

All of these examples, disputes and legal cases, raise the general question of the ability and legitimacy of science to settle them. This is a fundamental decision that needs be made across countless areas of life; and science classes are ideal places for students to receive training in such decision making. It will be argued in Chapter 11 that, given the massive, consequential, and very public nature of feng shui practice in Hong Kong, Taiwan and elsewhere, its basic claims about chi, its mechanisms, and its human impacts, should be appraised in science classes and, even better, appraised in some coordinated teaching between science, social science, history, and philosophy classes.

Feng Shui in Taiwan

In 2004 the *Taipei Times* (17 October 2004) estimated that there were 30,000 feng shui practitioners in Taiwan. And they are kept busy. After an especially bad train derailment in Taipei, the Transport Minister sought the advice of a feng shui master who divined that the main station had bad feng shui, including a faulty bagua symbol on its premises, and so the ministry realigned at considerable expense the station’s south entrance (Bruun 2008, p.135). The opposition transport spokesman counter-claimed that the accident had nothing to do with feng shui but rather with inadequate technical systems and human error due to poor management practices.

Whether the opposition claim was an in-principle claim that feng shui has nothing to do with anything, and so nothing to do with the derailment; or a particular claim that in the case of this accident, feng shui misalignments could not be blamed, is unclear. The former claim, if made explicit, could be politically damaging; it would be akin to a US politician declaring for atheism, or for higher taxes. But the disagreement about the cause of the derailment is one that only a scientific investigation can resolve, and hence the recurrent question: Can science judge feng shui claims? The affirmative answer is argued in this book.

As with elsewhere in Asia, feng shui matters regularly end up in Taiwanese courts that determine culpability for bad feng shui advice or for engaging in practices that negatively impact the feng shui of both the living and the dead. Planting trees that overshadow a grave is taken as adversely affecting the spirit of the person buried there and is an actionable offense in law. A simple classroom exercise would be to have students be ‘expert witnesses’ for the prosecution and defence in such trials. They could become familiar with notions of evidence, connections between evidence and hypothesis, the authority of testimony, the

¹⁰ This is not a typo; the cited price is per square inch of dwelling.

demarcation of scientific from other claims, the separation of science from pseudoscience, and much more.

Feng Shui and Western Architecture and Construction

Richard Taylor, the author of a contemporary manual giving advice on utilising feng shui in the modern city, relates that: 'By interpreting the hidden and mysterious forces of the universe, Feng Shui provides a practical approach to environmental planning' (Taylor 2002, p.9). He goes on and states its foundational principle as:

The theory of Feng Shui, just like Chinese medicine, is based on the five elements. The five elements control and oversee everything in the universe, and channel and balance the chi of the individual and of his surroundings. Each of the elements – fire, earth, metal, water, and wood – represents a specific energy. These energies are found in a perpetual interrelationship, and their composition, or 'arrangement', creates harmony or disharmony. (Taylor 2002, p.20)

As with so much, if not all, feng shui advocacy, this has an initial appearance of science; scientific language is in fine display. The manual talks of positive chi lines (curvy) and negative chi lines (straight and angular), and over many pages advises on how, in construction and fit-out, to maximise the former and minimise the latter. For instance, do not build in the shadow of a tall building that blocks sunlight, do not build at the crown of a T-intersection, build near water, and so on. If negative chi cannot be avoided, it lists the eight traditional feng shui remedies for alleviating the situation: mirrors, light, plants, water, crystals, wind chimes, flutes and colour (Taylor 2002, p.137). It offers homely, so to speak, advice on creating, among many other things such as toilets (do not have them opening into a living room) and bedrooms (located away from the front door), good house entrances because:

The entrance to the house is of primary importance. It must be well lit, welcoming, inviting, and pleasant to the eye, and it must be sufficiently broad to permit beneficial chi easy entrance to the house. ... A sufficient amount of space in the entrance area is an important characteristic in good Feng Shui. It enables a greater amount of chi to enter the house, broadly and freely. (Taylor 2002, p.89)

Needless to say, there is no specification of how wide; or of entrance area to volume of house; nor any guidance about chi measuring instruments in order to determine optimum chi movement. The entire chi domain is a 'measurement-free' zone. There is the appearance of science, maybe even the pretense of science, but there is no science. Measurement, and concern with exactitude, is a requirement of scientific practice.

Multi-millionaire (by her own reckoning) consultant Lillian Too's advice on building a good feng shui home has already been given:

Avoid triangular shaped houses, or houses that have too many corners. The angles created give off unfortunate *sha chi* and are not conducive to the attraction of good CHI flows. ... Another unlucky configuration is the U-shaped house. Residents living in such homes suffer from unhappy marriages, and will be plagued with frequent quarrels. (Too 1994, p.45)

She is clear about the necessity of good planning and siting. In particular:

Protect your homes and offices from killing *shar Chi* that are created by the presence of malignant poison arrows which point at your place of abode or your place of work. ... These poison arrows are symbolic instruments or structures which are pointed, straight, angled, sharp or hostile. (Too 1994, p.118)

Too is not alone in offering this advice. There was uproar in Hong Kong when the new Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation headquarters was built with sharpe 'poison arrow' lines sending *shar chi* into adjacent buildings. Some of these placed cannons on their roofs to kill the bad chi. Eventually under legal pressure the HSBC had to alter its arrow lines upwards.

Such manuals are sold by the thousands in both the East and the West, becoming in many cases university textbooks. Consequently, it is increasingly common for architectural design and building construction in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Vancouver, Toronto, London, Sydney, Auckland and most major cities around the world to be directed by feng shui principles.

Serious Western architectural and construction books¹¹ and scholarly articles¹² are devoted to feng shui informed location, design, placement and construction. Indicative of the construction-industry embrace of feng shui, and its 'scientific' patina, is the title of a recent book: *Scientific Feng Shui for the Built Environment: Theories and Applications* (Mak & So 2015).

For decades developers in Vancouver have been building 'four-free' apartment blocks (no 4th floor) and the Toronto suburb, Richmond Hill, has banned the numeral 4 in street numbers. Lillian Too informs readers that:

... the number 4 is regarded as being inauspicious. Anything that ends in this number spells death, loss and problems. Thus, level 14 in a multi-storey building carries bad luck connotations that are even more severe than the western 13 ... House addresses that have the dreaded 4 usually cannot get sold, while apartments on level 4 are hugely unpopular. (Too 1998, p.68)¹³

Indicative of the normalisation of feng shui is that universities in China and the US now teach courses on feng shui and architecture. One scholar has written:

In recent years feng shui has grown surprisingly popular in Western Europe despite a lack of clear understanding about how and why it is practised. Its proliferation within the architectural profession can be observed at all levels from the selection of building sites to interior design. (Hwangbo 1999, p.191)

An Australian architect, in the Introduction to his Feng Shui manual, wrote:

I first became aware of feng shui about 10 years ago when a \$20 million project I was building in Sydney's Chinatown district was assessed by a Chinese geomancer and feng shui practitioner. His major recommendations included realignment of the escalators so that the 'wealth did not flow out' and a delay of one week before we could start demolition and

¹¹ See Alexander (1987), Gallagher (1993), Rossbach (1987) and Taylor (2002).

¹² See Marafa (2003), Chen & Wu (2009), Hwangbo (1999, 2002), and Mak & Ng (2005).

¹³ In Pinyin, the number 4 is *sí*, whilst death is *sǐ*, so by familiarity, number 4 should be avoided.

construction. We were [only] allowed to start on a particular day at a particular time ...
(Birdsall 1995, p.9)

In Southern California, having positive feng shui lines, namely soft or curvy ones, is a featured consideration in the marketing of certain cars and there is even a radio station that gives regular updates on the state of regional and local chi energy lines. It is reported that in Los Angeles feng shui consultants, some earning as much as \$750 an hour, were recruited from Hong Kong and Taiwan to redesign entire buildings and, where necessary, install structures that could ward off negative energy surreptitiously infiltrating a room or edifice (Queenan 2002).

Feng Shui on the Web

Advent of the worldwide web has dramatically expanded feng shui influence and business opportunities. Even in the most isolated places on earth, a feng shui consultation is only one click and one credit-card charge away. There are thousands and thousands of feng shui sites on the web that list hundreds of thousands of happy corporate and individual clients. One UK site alone mentions among its satisfied customers: Coca Cola, Orange, British Airways, Hiscox Insurance, Hilton Hotels, Marriott Hotels, BRE (Building Research Establishment), University of Westminster School of Architecture, the National Health Service, and many more. There are feng shui sites for consultants, businesses, retail outlets, teachers, societies, associations, colleges, practitioners, conferences, seminars, publications, diplomas, and much else. The following are examples of feng shui services found in a 15-minute English language, web search:¹⁴

(1) Jerry specializes in both residential and commercial Feng Shui utilizing Xuan Kong Feng Shui. In addition, Jerry is an expert in Four Pillars of Destiny, Plum Blossom and *Qi Men Dun Jia* divination. Jerry is currently researching on a higher level of divination known as Da Liu Ren. Jerry has taught Chinese Metaphysics which included topics in Feng Shui and Destiny in London, Hong Kong, Singapore, Australia, Russia, Spain, and Mexico.¹⁵

(2) There are many schools of Feng Shui and we utilize as many as we can in order to give our clients optimum results. Some of the schools of Feng Shui we use are: 4 Pillars of Destiny, Flying Stars, Bagua, Form School. In laymen's terms, it is about laying out rooms, furniture, introducing colours, elements and objects in order to create a positive change in one's life, family, home and/or business.¹⁶

(3) Feng Shui store, the place where Practitioners, Masters, consultants and enthusiasts from every corner of the world buy their enhancers, cures, crystals, water fountains, Chinese coins, kwan yin, pi yao, wu lou, 2015 Tong Shu Almanac, six coins, salt water cure, 2015 cures kit, six rod wind chime, fu dogs, bagua mirrors, Buddha's, three legged toads, dragons and so much more.¹⁷

(4) For those of you who are previous clients make sure you book in for your Annual Update for 2015 – the Year of the Wood Goat. Remember, for best results you need to have this

¹⁴ Using French, Spanish, Portuguese, Danish, Thai, Japanese, or any of probably 100 other languages, and spending not 15 minutes but fifteen hours searching, hundreds of thousands of feng shui websites could probably be located. All offering advice, commodities, and taking money.

¹⁵ See: <http://www.whitedragonhome.com/about/masters/jerry-king>

¹⁶ See: <http://www.globalpalaceoffengshui.com.au/>

¹⁷ See: <http://www.fengshuiweb.co.uk/>

information PRIOR to the changeover date of 4 February 2015. This service is highly recommended to ensure a healthy, wealthy and positive relationship filled year in 2015.¹⁸

(5) Time is the single most important difference between the types of feng shui. Black Hat centers around 'placement' whereas classical feng shui understands that place is relative to time – just like we are subject to the changing of time. Time is a very important construct of classical feng shui. In other words, you can't just 'feng shui and forget it'.

Feng shui is a dynamic *living energy* that shifts and changes with the months and year. That's why there is so much emphasis on the annual feng shui, that details about each year – whether it's a rooster, dog, or boar – play a role in the energies that occur during the year and that act differently upon your home, you and everyone in your home.¹⁹

(6) Good feng shui in your home or office does not bring you wealth if you do not strive for it, but it does give you the necessary support to attract the energy of money. Feng shui helps you create an environment, both at home and in your office, that strengthens you and helps attract the energy of wealth.

The best feng shui money energy foundation is having your home and business free of clutter, displaying symbols that speak to you of wealth, using specific feng shui cures such as crystals, specific images and even essential oils to raise the feng shui energy in your home.²⁰

(7) ASIA'S LEADING FENG SHUI EXPERT AND MENTOR is coming to Australia to spend 3 hours sharing Real Feng Shui secrets previously kept hidden behind closed boardroom doors. This is the opportunity for you to learn authentic Feng Shui tools and knowledge from a mentor with over \$5 Billion Dollars of property consultations under her belt.

Aur's Authentic Feng Shui is entirely different from any other style anyway. Aur has spent the last 25 years conducting property private consultations for many of Asia's wealthiest and most influential individuals and companies, including the First Lady of Malaysia, Property Developer TCC Group (owned by Charoen Sirivadhanabhakdi, net worth: \$15.5 Billion), Beauty Gems (jeweller to Asia's Royalty and elite), plus Big Brands such as Makro, Philips, Swarovski and Cisco. Aur also hosted her own TV show on the topic of Feng Shui for nearly 10 years in Thailand, sharing her wisdom and giving live examples of Feng Shui by visiting fan's homes around the country. However, Aur is not like other Feng Shui consultants. She practices a completely unique style of Feng Shui currently unheard of outside of Thailand.²¹

(8) There are many systems of date selection. There is the Xuan Kong Da Gua Date Selection method, the Grandmaster Dong System, the Great Sun Formula, Qi Men Dun Jia etc. These methods require an in-depth knowledge of Chinese Metaphysics.

The 12 Day Officers method is a simple system that is based on the concept that each day is governed or influenced by a certain type of 'qi'. There are altogether 12 types of 'qi' that is repeated every 12 days, hence the 12 Day Officers.

The 12 types of 'qi' have names and are order in a fixed sequence. They are Establish, Divest, Full, Balance, Stable, Initiate, Destruction, Danger, Success, Receive, Open and Close.

¹⁸ See: <https://www.everythingfengshui.com.au/>

¹⁹ See: <https://redlotusletter.com/classical-feng-shui-and-western-black-feng-shui-the-6-critical-differences-confessions-of-a-former-black-hat-practitioner/>

²⁰ See: <http://www.knowfengshui.com/feng-shui-money-wealth-tips/>

²¹ See: <http://www.meetup.com/vital-life/events/235134045/?rv=ea1>

Establish is the leader of group and it falls on the day where the earthly branch is the same as the earthly branch of the month.

Each of the 12 Day Officers (or types of 'qi') has a function and is suitable for certain type of activities. Of the 12 days, only Success Day and Destruction Day have clear cut positive and negative aspects respectively. The others have both positive and negative aspect and the trick is to match the correct day to the right activities.²²

(9) Feng shui somehow always seems to offer a solution to both interior design and healthy living conundrums. Truthfully, it's no wonder that people throughout centuries have turned to this ancient Chinese system of spacial arrangement to bring harmony into their homes—which is why we're not surprised that this practice can also be used to crank up the heat in our bedrooms. For those curious about this Eastern practice's power to boost the energy flow between the sheets, feng shui pro and relationship expert Alison Lessard has some sage advice to impart.

The easiest way to feng shui your way to better sex? According to Lessard, you've been doing it (and by that, we mean organizing your furniture) all wrong if your headboard is under a window or your feet are facing the door. "Both of these placements make your chi (energy) fly out of the room, which could leave you feeling drained and not well-rested," she says. To maximize energy flow, she recommends positioning your bed in a place where you can clearly see the door but aren't directly in line with it. If that's not an option, try hanging a small mirror on the wall that's opposite of your bed in order to reflect the door.²³

Such examples go on without end. The educational and cultural challenge is how to prepare students do deal with such arrant and fraudulent nonsense if they, friends or family happen to enter its orbit. Comparable psychological and social mechanisms are at work when people are attracted to, then ensnared in any of thousands of cults.

The above-mentioned Lillian Too can be taken as an example from the hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of feng shui consultants and practitioners who offer their services on the web. She has clearly contributed to and benefited from the trans-cultural migration of feng shui ideology out of its Chinese cultural base. She offers rolling residential courses which move around the globe and around the calendar. For payment of USD2,200 participants in these courses can attend lectures covering topics such as:

- The fundamentals of Feng Shui practice
- The anatomy of luck
- The different types of Chi in Feng Shui
- Understanding the *iching*, the *taichi* and the two *pakuas*
- Unlocking secrets from the *yang pakua* compass,
- Practicing defensive Feng Shui & disarming 'killing breath'
- Feng Shui for interiors and auspicious configurations
- Using the *pakua* in the microcosm and macrocosm of dwellings
- The three methods of demarcating Chi
- East west compass method of Feng Shui for individuals
- East west compass method of Feng Shui for dwellings
- Flying star Feng Shui
- Finding and activating your personal 'bag of gold'

²² See: <http://www.absolutelyfengshui.com/dateselection/the-12-day-officers-pt-1/>

²³ See: <https://www.mydomainehome.com.au/feng-shui-for-better-sex>

All of this is base, fraudulent hucksterism; it is staggering that the spells fool anyone, but fool millions they do. But, of course, feng shui has no monopoly on hucksterism; the world is awash with it.²⁴ The current US President has ridden its wave all the way to the White House. Two scholars have drawn a sobering conclusion:

People just love to believe, and our research shows that eighty percent of them will believe things a gorilla wouldn't. They'll cheerfully empty their wallets to anyone with a twinkle on his tongue and a pseudoscience in his pocket. Astrology, biorhythms, ESP, numerology, astral projection, scientology, UFOlogy, pyramid power, psychic surgeons, Atlantis real estate – they're all good business. (Glymour & Stalker 1982)

All of the foregoing examples of contemporary feng shui practice might be seen as the investigation of *external* or *environmental* feng shui, and the making of appropriate life-style, design and construction decisions in the light of ascertained local feng shui conditions. But there is also *internal* chi which is the basis of all Traditional Chinese Medicine, qigong belief and the daily practice of millions and millions of people. Once you commit to the existence of an all-pervasive life-force, energy, chi or *qi* that binds together the heavens, nature and man, and governs their harmonization, then the next step is to admit its existence and powers *within* bodies; and to then move to control, redirect and manipulate its flow to enhance personal good effects (wellness) and minimize bad effects (illness). Qigong masters supposedly can externalize their own chi for the good or ill of their audience, patients or clients. This is a multi-million-dollar business, more properly called a racket.

Feng shui is not always presented so clearly as nonsense. The fundamental, and defining basis, of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) is identification and mastery of chi; and hence enabling the balance of the vital yin and yang 'forces'. TCM is enthusiastically endorsed and supported by the Chinese Government; it is a multi-billion-dollar export industry. Likewise, chi-manipulating acupuncture is a mega-billion-dollar industry and professional occupation. In the UK, 65% of respondents to a YouGov poll (2017) thought that acupuncture should be included in the National Health Service as a free treatment. This medical/health dimension of feng shui will be discussed in Chapter 5. It is an obvious case of philosophy of science meeting serious social policy. Perhaps more generally, it is a matter for serious social psychology: What leads millions of people to believe feng shui claims and regulate their life by them?

Divination

Since the beginning, feng shui has been intimately associated with geomancy, one of numerous systematic forms of divination that have a long history in Asia,²⁵ but also in Africa, the Middle East and Europe. In the Chinese tradition, divination was anchored in cosmology: humans and the cosmos were one, the energies of the latter were manifest in the movement of heavenly bodies, in the shape and configuration of the environment, and in the constitution of the individual. The diviner's task was to see or intuit, and then calculate the local and personal aggregation or trajectory of energy and ascertain how it would unfold in the future. As Joseph Needham relates:

²⁴ There is a large literature by historians, sociologists, social psychologists and philosophers on the subject large-scale gullibility and credulity. See at least Alcock (2018), Andersen (2017), Shermer (1997), and Stalker & Glymour (1989).

²⁵ See March (1968), Needham & Ling (1956, pp.346-365), Pennick (1979), Skinner (1980, 1982, 2011), and Smith (1991).

From the highest antiquity the Chinese had the conviction that it was possible to foretell the future, as least in so far as the affairs of princes and States were concerned, by processes of divination which gave a yest-or-no answer. The oldest technique was no doubt scapulimancy, the heating of tortoise carapaces or ox and deer shoulder-blades with red-hot metal, and the interpretation of the resulting cracks. (Needham & Ling 1956, p.347)

He details, at length, various other standard divination techniques – physiognomy (from facial characteristics), chiromancy (from finger prints), oneiromancy (from dreams), glyphomancy (from ideographic name characters) – and mentions their occurrence across Asia, the Middle-East, and Europe. In the Dao tradition, divination was more than just foretelling, its cosmological foundations were explicit:

In Taoist thinking, divination is not simply predicting the future and relying on these predictions to live. Rather, it is a way of appreciating the flux and permanence of the Tao and directly perceiving the interdependency of all things. (Wong 1997, p.119)

The name ‘geomancy’ has its roots in two Greek words, *gaia* (earth) and *manteia* (divination); so there is *geōmanteía* which translates literally to ‘foresight by earth’, or ‘earth divining’. Other widely used divination techniques were: pyromancy (divination by fire), hydromancy (by water), and aeromancy (by air). One practitioner and author of numerous books on the subject, writes:

Geomancy could be defined as the art of obtaining insight into the present or future by observing the combinations of patterns made in the earth or on paper by a diviner allowing his intuition, or ‘the spirits of the earth’, to control the movement of his hand or pencil. (Skinner 2011 p.33)

Clearly there is a gap between ‘spirits of the earth’ and ‘movement of the diviner’s hand’. This gap can be, and has been, filled in many ways, most notably by charlatans, the desperate, and the deluded.

The practice of divining good and bad fortune by the spread of blown sand, the fall of nuts and other geo-related means, had older origins in the Arab world (Skinner 1980, p.14). The mixed Arabic-Sino tradition created, in the second century BC the geomantic compass, or luopan compass, consisting of a circular, flat, inscribed wooden or brass plate, usually with 40 concentric rings and 24 direction lines, and a centered south-pointing lodestone needle (Skinner 2008). Most science museums have exhibits from ancient times, and modern ones can be bought across the counter or online in most ‘esoteric’ stores. Lillian Too explains the geomantic function of the feng shui compass:

In feng shui, the attributes of the elements influence each of the eight sectors of the compass. The four cardinal and four secondary directions each have a corresponding element. So the easiest method of creating good feng shui is simply to energize the element of each compass sector. Understanding element attributes is thus essential. (Too 1998, p.42)

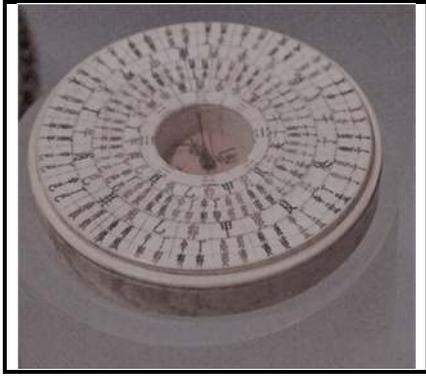


Fig. 4.2 Geomantic (Lu pan) compass

Too elaborates the five-element ontology, or Wuxing, of feng shui, saying:

The theory of the five elements is basic to all branches of Chinese divinitive practice. From astrological fortune-telling to oracle forecasting, understanding the productive and destructive cycles of the five elements – how they interact with each other to create positive auspicious energy or negative inauspicious energy – is what offers potency to the practice. (Too 1998, p.42)

She provides a standard elaboration of these elements. Fire is ‘the ultimate yang element’; water is ‘the wealth energy in feng shui’; earth is ‘the grounding energy and epitomizes the heart of feng shui’; wood ‘brings growth, expansion and advancement, it is the direction of the east and the southeast’; metal ‘is the element of the west and the northwest, it symbolizes the strength of heaven and the power of the patriarch’ (Too 1998, p.43).

Feng shui and geomancy had separate but related origins and catered to different concerns – the former for locating local chi currents and hence propitious locations for tombs and dwellings, the latter for foretelling a person’s future good or bad fortune. The sixteenth-century Jesuits referred to feng shui as ‘geomancy’ and subsequently in many circles the terms became interchangeable (Skinner 2011, p.36).²⁶ There was, of course, some connection, as in Chinese cosmology, the heavens, earth, man are all interconnected; one’s location and connection to the earth is not unrelated to one’s good and bad fortune; everything in the world was related through chi movement, and so an understanding of the present configuration allowed extrapolation to the future. Nigel Pennick, a student and promoter of international geomantic practices, writes:

In geomancy, the world was conceived as a continuum in which all acts, natural and supernatural, conscious and unconscious, were linked in a subtle manner, one with the next. In this world view, the incorrect performance of an act, such as misorientating a building, was not merely doomed to fail in achieving its desired objective, but would also bring unforeseen and uncontrollable consequences. Conversely, if the correct manner was applied at the right place and time, the procedures would reflect not only what had gone before, but also what was about to happen. (Pennick 1979, p.12)

²⁶ Nigel Pennick in his book on Geomancy, says that feng shui is simply the Chinese variant of universal geomancy (Pennick 1979, p.10).

He adds:

This philosophy underlies the Tarot, the *I Ching*, the Malagasy Sikidy, and numerous other forms of divination involving the creation of patterns to foretell the future. (Pennick 1979, p.12)

I Ching or *Book of Changes*

The ancient cosmological fount of geomantic dimension of feng shui was codified during the Bronze Age (10th – 4th centuries BC) in the Confucian classic *Book of Changes* (*I Ching* pronounced 'yee jing'). It is commonly thought to have been first composed at the end of the Yin and beginning of the Zhou dynasty, about 1,000 BC. It is not so much a book in the ordinary literary sense of the term; it is a collection of 64 six-line diagrams, with titles and interpretation. The volume is foundational for both the Confucian and Taoist traditions in China and beyond. It has influenced the entire history of Chinese culture to the present day, being aptly described as:

the mother of Chinese divination, having fostered both its diversity and persistence; ... feng shui is anchored in its perception of reality ... it stands out as the single most important book in Chinese civilization ... comparable to the sacred scriptures of the other great civilizations. (Bruun 2008, pp.100-101)

The book's impact has extended over three thousand years and has now spread well beyond China, being embraced in the counter-cultural, multi-cultural and post-modernist West over the past fifty years.²⁷ The book is based on the metaphysical idea that the universe is founded on two opposing forces, Yin and Yang. Yin is the female, passive, accommodating force; while Yang is the male, hard, decisive force. What is pervasive in this ancient understanding, cosmology or worldview was the conviction that somehow the heavens, the earth and human life were interconnected, coordinated and inter-dependent; they constituted a trinity, and future circumstances could be foretold. Divination, or future-telling, is the book's *raison d'être*; though 'fortune telling with guidance' seems to be the common practice. That is: 'this is your fortune unless you stop this' or 'this is your fortune if you do this'. George Hulskramer, an interpreter, translator, and enthusiast says: 'In the *I Ching*, all forms of life and also the functions of the human spirit are associated with Yin and Yang' (Hulskramer 2004, p.1). This was the 'perception of reality' that underwrote the theory and practice of geomancy or divination; movement in the heavens can be studied so as to inform terrestrial events and social and personal circumstances.

A populariser of *I Ching* wrote:

As with other divination, like the Tarot, this is a way to obtain guidance about our current situations and possible future events. The true power in any divination practice is to connect with spirits and unseen powers. Spirits and powers that our conscious selves refuse or are unable to acknowledge.

²⁷ Fritjof Capra (1984) being perhaps its most influential promoter. For the text and commentary see: Huang (2010), Reifler (1974), Rutt (1996), Shaughnessy (1997), Sorrell & Sorrell (1994), Wilhelm, H. (1960, 1977), Wilhelm, R. (1950). For a 'Plain English' interpretation see Hulskramer (2004). On the book's Western dissemination and influence see Smith (1998). The classic critical commentary is Needham & Ling (1956, pp.304-345).

Connecting with these unseen powers with openness allows them to guide us to our unconscious wisdom we hid deep within our minds. The I Ching is a way of communicating and seeing solutions that are otherwise missed by our conscious selves.²⁸

Tradition has yin and yang represented by a trigram of three lines where each line is either a solid (yang) or broken (yin) line. There can be eight combinations of the three lines. These are standardly arranged in an eight-sided shape, around a squared yin-yang symbol. This arrangement is called the Pa Kua. According to legend, four thousand years ago a celestial turtle emerged from the Lo river, and an arrangement of numbers on its back held the secret to unlocking the mystery of the trigrams. Subsequently centuries of scholarly debate have gone into these unlocking mysteries.²⁹

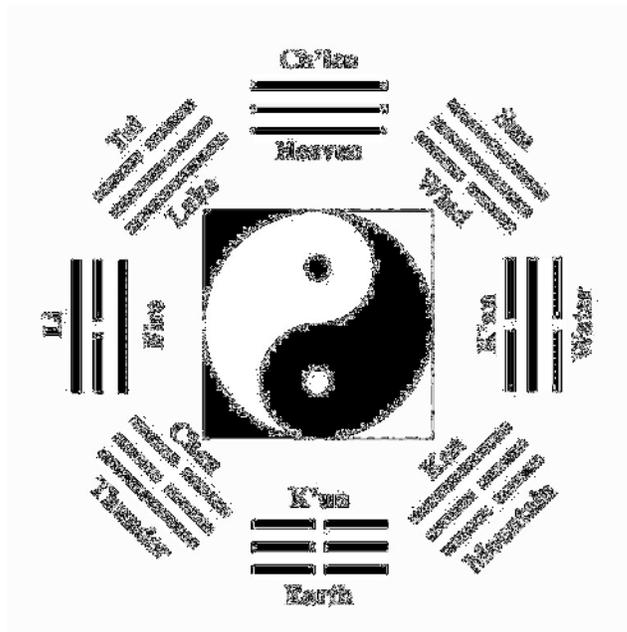


Fig. 4.3 The yin-yang Pa Qua³⁰

The *I Ching* is structured by creating an eight-by-eight matrix of these trigrams with one row along the top and one column down the side. The result is 64 hexagrams. Each hexagram, with its top and bottom trigram and a 300-word commentary, constituted one of the 64 chapters in the original *I Ching* book.

²⁸ See: <http://www.theartofancientwisdom.com/i-ching/>

²⁹ The central Yin-Yang symbol is the core of the South Korean flag.

³⁰ From: <http://www.theartofancientwisdom.com/i-ching/>

Hexagram Key

TRIGRAMS	Ch'ien	Chên	K'an	Kên	K'un	Sun	Li	Tui
UPPER	☰	☳	☵	☶	☷	☴	☲	☱
LOWER	☰	☳	☵	☶	☷	☴	☲	☱
Ch'ien ☰	1	34	5	26	11	9	14	43
Chên ☳	25	51	3	27	24	42	21	17
K'an ☵	6	40	29	4	7	59	64	47
Kên ☶	33	62	39	52	15	53	56	31
K'un ☷	12	16	8	23	2	20	35	45
Sun ☴	44	32	48	18	46	57	50	28
Li ☲	13	55	63	22	36	37	30	49
Tui ☱	10	54	60	41	19	61	38	58

Fig. 4.4 *I Ching* Hexagram Table

Ch'ien	Chên	K'an	Kên	K'un	Sun	Li	Tui
Heaven	Thunder	Water	Mountain	Earth	Wind	Fire	Lake

So in the above table, hexagram #1 is a purely yang, all its six lines are solid; hexagram #2 is purely yin, all its six lines are broken. The remaining 62 hexagrams are mixtures of yang and yin.

An early interpretive 10-chapter book, *Annotations on the Changes*, published about 500 years after the *I Ching*, maintained that:

therefore, change (*yi*) has a supreme force (*taiji*) which generates two 'yi', that is, a yang line (—) and a yin line (--); from these four digrams, 'xiang' are generated, and then eight 'gua'. (Dong 1996, p.125)

The master's skill is to interpret each hexagram and to know its applicability to a person's life and circumstance. As Hulskramer explains:

If we consult the *I Ching*, seeking one of these sixty-four hexagrams, what we end up with is not only a Yin-Yang pattern consisting of six lines, but also practical advice based on this pattern. (Hulskramer 2004, p.3)

Bruun, Hulskrammer and other commentators, repeatedly say that the *I Ching* is comparable to the sacred scriptures of the other great religions. It has been commented upon by countless thousands of scholars over a period of three thousand years, beginning with a philosophical essay, the *Great Commentary*, attached to one of the earliest versions of the book. The Enlightenment philosopher, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716), was perhaps the first of the many European scholars to interpret and struggle with the work. His immediate interest was its binary arithmetical, ON/OFF, SHORT/LONG structure (Dong 1996).

But the well-known interpretative problems involved in reading and understanding Biblical, Koranic, Talmudic, Upanishadic, Verdic, Mormonic, and other sacred scriptures pale into insignificance compared to interpreting the *I Chin* text, or more correctly hexagrams. For example, consider hexagram #8.

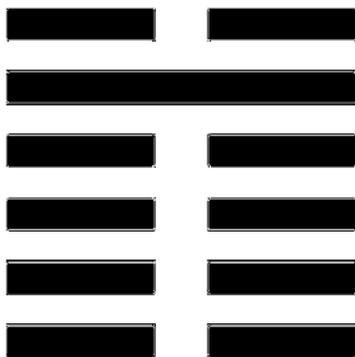


Fig. 4.5 *I Ching* Hexagram #8³¹

Hulskrammer writes:

all Yin lines are grouped around a central leader, the Yang line in the central position. Water and earth are working together harmoniously. Water descends unhindered to earth and the earth absorbs it willingly. This produces the image of brotherhood. ... Leader and followers respect, complement and help each other ... for the wellbeing of the whole. (Hulskrammer 2004, p.24)

While Sam Reifler, who provides 'A New Interpretation for Modern Times' understands the same hexagram ('Seeking Union') as:

You are the creation of a culture, of a society, of a brotherhood of shared experience, and of a family. Even your own individuality is only a concept that – like all others – owes its existence to the community of man. (Reifler 1974, p.48)

How to decide between Hulskrammer and Reifler, or thousands of other diverse interpretations of hexagram 8? It is a moot point how any interpretation could be disputed, or at least disputed in a way that had a conceivable end point. Much less of course how any 'true' lesson might be inferred from whatever interpretation might be agreed upon. The very

³¹ From: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:I_Ching_hexagrams#/media/File:Iching-hexagram-08.svg

nature of the *I Ching* book lends itself to interpretation and lesson-drawing without end. It is hardly surprising that one simple listing of the chapter/hexagrams with basic commentary runs to 560 pages (Huang 2010).

As the text is acknowledged as a religious classic, it is instructive to compare and contrast its translation and issues of interpretation with those confronting the sacred texts of other religions: – *Torah, Bible, Koran, Ganth, Book of Mormon, Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* and so on. In these cases, there is a text to work with and hermeneutical principles are applicable; nevertheless, each has a multiplicity of interpretations that have given rise to sects, schisms, and religious wars. *Sans* wars, the *I Ching* is no different.

Whatever the interpretation of any hexagram, the method of its application for any individual is peculiar. Hulskrammer says that to use or consult the *I Ching* for any question or circumstance, you do not begin with a Dictionary or Concordance, rather you begin with a lottery:

First formulate your question. Take three identical coins. The value is irrelevant. Heads is generally allocated the value of three and tails two, but it works just as well the other way around, as long as you are consistent. Enclose the coins in your cupped hand and shake until you feel the time is ripe to let them fall. ... According to tradition, a seven indicates a solid or Yang line and an eight a broken or Yin line. ... To end up with a six-line pattern, or hexagram, you need to throw the three coins six times and work from the bottom up. (Hulskrammer 2004, pp.5-6)

Each of the six throws of the three coins draws each of the six lines of the hexagram, one at a time. Having drawn the hexagram, one then looks up its ‘meaning’ in the *I Ching* table cum chapters.

Sam Reifler, in his ‘New Interpretation’ says that the above coin oracle needs be supplemented by the ‘yarrow-stick oracle’ in order to fully grasp the message of the *I Ching*. Beginning with a bundle of 50 yarrow stalks cut to the same length and held in the left hand, he guides the reader or initiate through sixteen steps:

remove one stick with the right hand and set it aside, divide the bundle into two random batches, reduce the batch by counting off bundles of four sticks with the right hand, grasp the right-hand batch between the thumb and forefinger of the left hand, ... the total number of sticks in the left hand is now either nine or five, set them aside ... using sticks in the discard pile, repeat above steps ... the first line, the lowest line of the hexagram, is now determined by the number of sticks in each of the remainder piles ... (Reifler 1974, pps.8-9)

But that is not all:

To determine each of the remaining lines of the hexagram, going from the lowest to the uppermost, repeat the entire ritual, steps 1-16, using the entire bundle (including the stick first cast off in Step 1. (Reifler 1974, p.9)

And if, by chance at the end of all of this, you have constructed hexagram # 43 ‘Breakthrough’ then you have learnt that:

You are threatened by forces opposed to your principles. For the moment these forces have been diverted and the threat is minimal, at an ebb. Take advantage of this weakness both to protect yourself and to exert your own influence on your adversaries. (Reifler 1974, p.185)

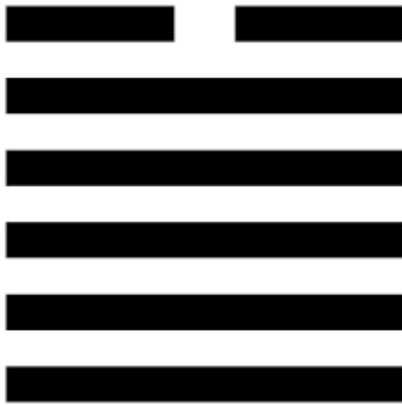


Fig. 4.6 *I Ching* Hexagram 43³²

But if the sixteen steps lead you to hexagram #64, then you have learnt that:

You are trying to make sense out of a strange, unprecedented situation. You and the people involved with you are so disparate, so unsympathetic to each other, so out of touch with each other, that you must exist in a constant state of alertness and readiness. (Reifler 1974, p.271)

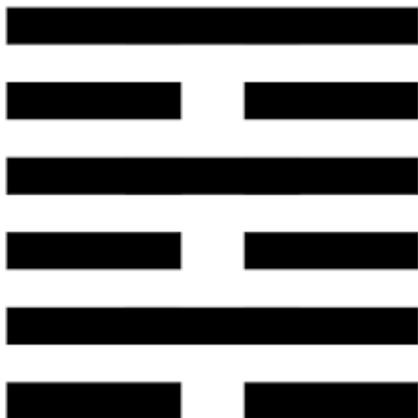


Fig. 4.7 *I Ching* Hexagram 64³³

Both the yarrow-stalk and three-coins method of being directed to a particular *I Ching* hexagram are both cumbersome. Not surprisingly, a more immediate, low-attention, high-tech method has been developed. Hence:

The easiest way of casting the I Ching is to use our “[Visionary I Ching](#)” app, which preserves the mathematical odds of the yarrow stalk method for each line, as well as preserving an

³² From: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:I_Ching_hexagrams#/media/File:Iching-hexagram-43.svg

³³ From: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:I_Ching_hexagrams#/media/File:Iching-hexagram-64.svg

energetic connection, because it depends on the way you shake or the timing of how you click on the app to determine which of the four kinds of line you get.³⁴

At this stage, one wonders how different such an outcome might be from just spinning a wheel with 64 sectors, or simply picking one of 64 cards, and going to the selected hexagram and then reading one's future.

Conclusion

What can be said about these *I Ching* interpretative disputes about 'the single most important book in Chinese civilization', about which hundreds of thousands of books have been published? A sympathetic interpreter writes:

The *I Ching* is a hodge-podge of Chinese culture from pre-Taoist wisdom to Confucianism and even more decadent, Machiavellian-type philosophies. (Reifler 1974, p.6)

Joseph Needham discusses, at length, the book, its history and contested interpretations (Needham & Ling 1956, pp.304-345). He correctly identifies it as an inhibitor of the development of modern science in China:

I fear that we shall have to say that while the five-element and two-force theories were favourable rather than inimical to the development of scientific thought in China, the elaborated symbolic system of the *Book of Changes* was almost from the start a mischievous handicap. It tempted those who were interested in Nature to rest in explanations that were no explanations at all. The *Book of Changes* was a system for *pigeon-holing novelty* and then doing nothing about it. Its universal system of symbolism constituted a stupendous *filing-system* (Needham & Ling 1956, p.336)

He summarizes that it:

Originating from what was probably a collection of peasant omen texts, and accumulating a mass of material used in the practices of divination, it ended up as an elaborate system of symbols and their explanations (not without a certain inner consistency and aesthetic force), having no close counterpart in the texts of any other civilisation. (Needham & Ling 1956, p.304)

For Needham, its deleterious effects on general thought, and particularly on incipient scientific thought, arose because:

These symbols were supposed to mirror in some way all the processes of Nature, and Chinese medieval scientists were therefore continually tempted to rely on pseudo-explanations of natural phenomena obtained by simply referring the latter to the particular symbol to which they might be supposed to 'pertain'. Since each one of the symbols came, in the course of the centuries, to have an abstract signification, such a reference was naturally alluring, and saved all necessity for further thought. (ibid.)

In the West, Needham's negative judgement fell upon unhearing counter-cultural and counter-scientific ears that were singing the praises of the classic text. But if nothing else, it needs be recognized that there is a huge 'opportunity cost' involved in *I Ching* 'studies': the millions of person-hours that have gone into interpretation and exposition of the hexagrams,

³⁴ From: <https://divination.com/how-to-consult-the-i-ching/>

could have been more productively spent on advancing Chinese science, technology, medicine, infrastructure, housing, diet, cooking or any other socially productive occupation. In other words, on the science-informed modernization of China.