



The Skeptics SA guide to Feng-Shui

Feng-Shui (pronounced fong shway), said to be the Chinese art of placement. It is a uniquely Chinese concept, and although based upon occult ideas so strong that they penetrate all of Chinese society, it is not strictly speaking a religious principle. It is not a sect, has no actual following. Many Chinese will even deny that it is part of their life, yet the very same individuals would never consider ignoring its theories and remain fearful of the Feng-shui Sien-Sang, the Feng-shui Doctors, (rather like Westerners who deny they believe in bad luck, but, just to be on the safe side, would never walk under a ladder).

While never actually defined in Chinese dictionaries, the name combines *feng*, meaning wind, and *shui*, meaning water, suggesting that, just as 'wind' is invisible, and that 'water' provides life, yet cannot be held by the hand, Feng-Shui represents the invisible occult forces which influence humankind.

The Chinese believed that the cosmos was a living entity, animated by the 'great male principle'. Composed of two aspects, the greater part, the heavens, (the macrocosm), was dominated by the male principle, while the Earth, (the microcosm), was dominated by the female principle. Maintaining a 'balance' or 'harmony' between the two was an invisible energy, or

life-force, *ch'i*, which flowed through all things. Thus Acupuncture is based upon the same idea, that this energy 'flows' through our body in pathways called 'meridians'. Blockages in the flow of this energy cause illness.

Because of the common link, it was believed that events in the heavens were reflected on Earth; this idea, summed up in the ancient maxim, As above, so below — was responsible for the origins of many ancient metaphysical doctrines, such as Astrology. Indeed, Feng-shui is strikingly similar to Astrology, replacing the stars with geographical features on Earth.

A naturalistic belief, it was originally used to find an auspicious dwelling place for a shrine or a tomb. However, over the centuries it... has become distorted and degraded into a gross superstition.¹

The ancient Chinese believed that humans were composed of two parts, the animus and the anima. After death the animus (the male principle) returns to heaven while, the anima, the negative, earthly, female portion, lies in its tomb. Provided the crypt has good Feng-shui, it will rest quietly, bringing blessings upon the surviving family members. If however the tomb has bad Feng-shui, the anima lacking

the ethical character of the animus will create havoc with the family, causing illness, death and destroying the family's wealth. It was therefore considered essential to placate the anima by ensuring that their grave was located in an appropriate location.

Feng-shui Doctors were consulted to locate an ideal site for a grave or tomb. This selection process was often a means of extracting considerable 'expenses' especially if the deceased's family were wealthy. The Doctors would sometimes take years to locate an appropriate location. Meantime the corpse was temporarily stored in a temple, or if the family was poor, under a shed, or rock, facing south.

What must be appreciated is that many of the teachings of Feng-Shui have been deliberately twisted so as to rationalize their relevance to Westerners. For instance, practitioners conveniently overlook the fact that this system evolved in the Northern Hemisphere, so that its principles really do not apply south of the Equator.

Likewise, when asked to explain the so called invisible energy called *ch'i*, Feng-Shui practitioners become rather vague, claiming that while *ch'i* kung masters can see this energy, the uninitiated, you and I, can only see its 'ef-

fects'. Yet, this so-called ch'i has no relationship whatsoever to any scientific concept of energy.

What is not generally mentioned is that there are two distinct aspects of Feng-Shui. The first is the 'mundane' aspect which is concerned with the rearrangement of physical objects. The second aspect relates to the 'transcendental' nature, the belief that there is a flow, or movement of energy throughout the invisible world. Just as in Acupuncture, where this energy is said to flow through 'meridians', so too this energy is said to flow through 'meridians' in space, in mountains, rivers, and even in buildings. Feng-Shui is thus sometimes called 'acupuncture in space', the idea being that, just as blockages in 'meridians' in the body can cause illness, 'blockages' in the natural flow of this energy field, can cause negativity to certain geographical locations.

While it is claimed that Feng Shui originated in China around about the 7th or 8th century CE its actual origins go much further back in time. Said by some to be based upon the *Chinese Book of Change*, it appears to be more closely related to Geomancy, an early form of divination, based upon finding hidden meanings in the natural shapes formed by mountains, hills, rivers, and lakes. In time it was extended to include relationships between the landscape and human structures, such as buildings, especially pagodas, and whether or not these would 'interact' negatively or positively with the environment.

Although said to be governed by precise rules,

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Feng-Shui has always been based upon plain guesswork. Locations were usually tested by building a 'temporary' pagoda or building, and if the crops are good, and no pestilence breaks out, and some talented youths in the district win honours at the local examinations, the Feng-Shui is proved to be good. ²

'Practitioners' of Feng-Shui make quite fantastic claims about its effectiveness. For instance Von Essen³ attributes the financial success of Hong Kong to the 'fact' that the city had been built on Feng-Shui principles. He conveniently ignores the fact that Hong Kong's economic success was primarily due to the British traders, who totally ignored the principles of Feng-Shui in both their buildings and their business operations.

Other ridiculous claims are 1 that our homes are repositories of stagnant 'psychic energy' which gathers in corners of rooms, and need to be regularly 'cleaned', or 2 that houses will often 'hold' energy patterns belonging to the previous inhabitants, and that new occupants of a house may be affected by these. It has been known for people to gain weight after moving into their new home, only to find that their predecessors were fat!⁴

The so-called energy involved in Feng-Shui is complete nonsense. Science can detect all forms of energy, yet they cannot detect ch'i. Others in the past have proposed the existence of unknown forms of energy, or radiation, e.g. N-Rays or Reich's Orgone, but when scientifically tested they were proven to be figments of imagination.

Feng-Shui is complete nonsense, nothing more than very old Chinese superstitions, 'dressed-up' so that it can be readily marketed to gullible Western New Agers. It would be more appropriately named Feng-Phooey!

References

- 1 Edwin Joshua Dukes, 'Feng-Shui', in *The Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*, T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1971, p 833
- 2 Dukes, *op cit*, p 834
- 3 Hermann Von Essen, 'Feng Shui Training Centre for South Australia', *New Age Guardian*, March/April 1998, p 10
- 4 Elle Summers, 'Space Clearing', *New Age Guardian*, March/April 1998, p 15

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