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WINDS, WATERS, AND EARTH ENERGIES:
FENGSHUI AND SENSE OF PLACE

In China, and now throughout the world, the question of *qi* and the correlative issue of *fengshui* have been encumbered with a mishmash of obtuse superstitions dictated by the most retrograde kind of charlatanism. But this does not prevent this question, if one disengages it from these accretions, from bearing vitally on the reality of being human – and indeed at the very foundations of human existence, including our own, however non-Chinese we may think ourselves.

Augustin Berque

When one reflects on the problems that beset nature and the environment at the beginning of the 21st century, it is clear that China, with its huge population and ongoing modernization and industrialization, is going to be one of the major contributors to those problems as well as an important factor in the search for solutions. What is striking about most of the current discussions of environmental questions is just how parochial are the terms in which they are conducted – presupposing a Cartesian-Newtonian view of the natural world as a mass of “dead matter in motion”, deriving from natural-scientific discourse that arose in western Europe during the seventeenth century. It is worth recalling that most human beings throughout most of human history have understood the natural world in a variety of quite different ways from this.

Numerous among those human beings are the Chinese, who have pursued sophisticated scientific investigations into the natural world for millennia without its ever occurring to them that they might be investigating anything like “dead matter”. But the enormous efficacy of the Cartesian-Newtonian worldview, especially in having made possible the wonders of modern technology, is now so predominant that many regard it as *true*. Without denying its efficacy in letting us manipulate the natural world toward our desired ends, we do well to consider the extent to which its prevalence encourages environmental degradation, and to entertain as plausible – and experientially accessible – a very different view deriving from the classical Chinese tradition.

Along with acupuncture, the best-known representative of Chinese science today is *fengshui* (風水). The end of the twentieth century saw an explosion of publications on the topic: a search in the Harvard libraries database for titles

containing the words “feng shui” in August 2001 yielded 72 titles, while a similar search at Amazon.com came up with 368, all published in English and most since 1990. The boom, then, has been on the popular level rather than the scholarly. A corresponding internet search yielded the addresses of an astounding “around 252,000” websites. (A slight consolation was that the very first listing happened to be for a site describing itself as “dedicated since 1995 to helping Feng Shui shed its snake-oil-and-incense image.”)

A cursory perusal of this mass of resources suggests that a large number of people in the United States and Western Europe are paying fengshui “experts” large sums of money to align their expensive coffee tables with their even more expensive sofas, in the hope of bringing more wealth, and perhaps some happiness, into their already affluent households. This seems a gross perversion of the basic spirit of fengshui – which would say that happiness, and certainly some wealth, would come more easily if these people simply sold off all the furniture and other clutter that’s obstructing their contact with their natural surroundings. In view of the obscurity of its origins, it is unclear how much mystification and charlatany entered into the practice of fengshui during its early development, but I believe we can draw from its more commonsensical aspects some pointers for deepening our understanding of our relations to nature and the environment.

Fengshui is often translated as “geomancy”, though the two graphs that comprise the term simply mean “wind” and “water” respectively. (The practice was originally known under the more formal name of kanyu (堪輿), meaning “canopy [of Heaven] chariot [of Earth]”). Let us ignore the mantic and divinatory aspects of the practice as distracting from its more down-to-earth applications, as well as the panoply of arcane symbolism of colors and animals and planets and stars, which the uninitiated find mystifying – and which perhaps accounts by the same token for fengshui’s surge of popularity in the New Age. Much of the exoticism that so fascinates homeowners in California these days does not transfer well at all. The association of the east with the Azure Dragon and the White Tiger with the west works in China because of the directions of the Yellow Sea and Tibetan Plateau respectively. Transposed to Southern California, this schema would have the White Tiger floating in the Pacific Ocean and the Azure Dragon shivering in the High Sierra.

Astronomy and astrology do play a role in fengshui, and there is no denying that since the planets and stars that slowly circle round above our heads are part of our natural environment at every moment, they may indeed have an influence on our activities. But this is so vast a topic that it is only practical to restrict the notion of place to the sublunary realm and narrow our focus to those aspects of fengshui that might enhance our relations to this more down-to-earth sense of place.

The ambiguity of fengshui – as between a practice encouraging charlatany based on mystification and a set of sensible recommendations grounded in sensitivity to the natural environment – is reflected in an ambivalence pervading the history of its reception in the West.

EARLY RECEPTION

The first European-language monograph devoted to fengshui is by Ernest John Eitel, a German pastor who heard “a call from the Lord to preach the gospel to the Heathen” and went to Guangdong province in China in 1861 with the Evangelical Missionary Society of Basel. Unlike many of his colleagues there, Eitel quickly became fluent in Chinese and developed great enthusiasm for the culture. After several years he transferred to the London Missionary Society, married an Englishwoman, and assumed British nationality. He was dispatched to Hong Kong in 1870, and the same year he received a doctorate from the University of Tübingen for his research on Chinese Buddhism. He gave a series of lectures on fengshui at Hong Kong City Hall, the revised texts of which were published under the title *Fengshui: The Science of Sacred Landscape in Old China* (1873). In this work, as well as in his writings on Chinese Buddhism, the author proceeds from the premise of the revealed truth of Christianity (Wong, 2000: 74–5).

Eitel begins by warning the reader that the Chinese have “made Feng-shui a black art” on a par with the arts of the astrologers and alchemists of Medieval Europe. “Practically speaking it is simply a system of superstition, supposed to teach people where and when to build a tomb or to erect a house so as to insure for those concerned everlasting prosperity and happiness,” while on another level fengshui is “but another name for natural science.” In the same sentence as the empiricist in Eitel deplores the “absence of practical and experimental investigation,” the theologian in him admires in Chinese natural science its “spirit of sacred reverence for the divine powers of nature.” While on the one hand he regards China as “childishly ignorant as regards matters of intellect,” he also expresses the fervent wish that “our own men of science had preserved ... that sacred awe and trembling fear of the mysteries of the unseen ... which characterize these Chinese gropings after natural science” (Eitel, 1973: 4–7).

In spite of his ambivalence, Eitel offers an even-handed chapter on astrology which mentions the imagery associated with the four directions: the Azure Dragon with the east, the Sable Warrior (or black tortoise-and-snake) with the north, the White Tiger with the west, and the Vermilion Bird with the south. He also connects the Five Planets (Jupiter, Mars, Saturn, Venus, Mercury) with *wuxing* (五行), the Five Processes (wood, fire, soil, metal, water), and the dragon and tiger with male and female energies in the earth’s crust, which he likens to positive and negative magnetic currents.¹ The most favorable site will be where the dragon and tiger energies come together (ch. 2). A chapter on numerology relates the fengshui compass to the system of divination developed in the *Yijing* (*I Ching*, or *Book of Changes*, ch. 3).

Eitel then discusses the notion of *qi* (氣) as “the breath of nature” in its alternation between expanding and reverting. “Between heaven and earth there is nothing so important, so almighty and omnipresent as this breath of nature. It enters into every stem and fibre, and through it heaven and earth and every creature live and move and have their being.” There are two basic principles

of siting according to fengshui: exposure to wind (*feng*) results in the breath's being dissipated from a site, while if water (*shui*) runs away from the site in a straight and rapid (rather than a slow and meandering) course, it will similarly deplete the local breath (ch. 4).

Eitel lays appropriate emphasis on fengshui's concern with the reciprocity between the human being and natural environment: "It is the boast of the Feng-shui system that it teaches man how to rule nature and his own destiny by showing him how heaven and earth rule him" (ch. 5). The chapter on "the history and literature" is disappointingly slight, perhaps reflecting the limited array of materials accessible to the author, who sums the subject up as "a strange medley of superstition, ignorance and philosophy" (ch. 6). A pejorative tone also pervades the concluding chapter, where fengshui is dismissed as a "farrago of nonsense and childish absurdities" and "the blind gropings of the Chinese mind after a system of natural science." In view of the open-minded manner in which he presents some of the more sensible features of fengshui, one suspects that the good Reverend may have protested too much at the end in order to avoid discomfiting his superiors in the London Missionary Society.

A contemporary of Eitel's from England, Edwin Joshua Dukes, wrote a book called *Everyday Life in China* that was published in London by the Religious Tract Society in 1885. The conclusion of the chapter entitled "Feng-Shui, the Biggest of all Bugbears" condemns the practice for obstructing the dissemination in China of Christianity, trade, and empirical science (Dukes, 1885: 159). In discussing the way fengshui involves the whole community (including its dead) in the planning of any new building project, the author waxes so ironical that his attempt to condemn unintentionally commends what may now be seen as its major benefits with respect to the environment.

It will suggest itself at once to the reader that if we ignorant European outsiders were to live where we choose in China, to build as we like, to make roads and railways, to erect telegraph posts, to quarry stone wherever we saw any to our fancy, to delve recklessly into the bowels of the earth for coal, we should, in the opinion of the Chinese, be like "a maniac scattering dust" and "a fury slinging flame." We should put steeples to our churches and tall chimneys to our factories, and in doing so commit the unpardonable crime of upsetting the serenity of the spirit-world. No vengeance would be too dire to execute upon the rash mortal who could disregard the interest of his fellow-creatures in such a manner (Dukes, 1885: 151-52).

The intended irony aside, it is hard to imagine a more passionately ecological exhortation to take into account the natural surroundings and neighbors, living and dead, when deciding where and how to encroach upon the environment.

The next substantial treatment of fengshui to appear in a Western language, by J. J. M. de Groot in a chapter of the third volume of his monumental work, *The Religious System of China*, deprecates its subject throughout its 120 (large) pages. While containing more historical detail than Eitel's account, the chapter's focus is narrower: on "the part it plays in grave-building" (De Groot, 1897: 937). The author begins by characterizing fengshui as "a quasi-scientific system, supposed to teach men where and how to build graves, temples and dwellings, in order that the dead, the gods and the living may be located therein exclusively, or as far as possible, under the auspicious influences of nature" (935).

Two pages later, however, we learn this about the practice and the culture that produced it:

Fung-shui is a mere chaos of childish absurdities and refined mysticism, cemented together, by sophistic reasonings, into a system, which is in reality a ridiculous caricature of science ... It fully shows the dense cloud of ignorance which hovers over the whole Chinese people; it exhibits in all its nakedness the low condition of their mental culture, the fact that natural philosophy in that part of the globe is a huge mount of learning without a single trace of true knowledge in it (937-38).

One will not expect to learn much from a mind as narrow as De Groot's, vast though his scholarship may be, and aside from a wealth of historical detail there is little here that was not presented in Eitel's much more concise account.

By the end of the chapter De Groot has worked himself up into paroxysms of outrage at the pernicious effects of fengshui practice: "At the outset a benumbed viper, it has, carefully fostered by the nation, developed into a horrid hydra suffocating the whole Empire in its coils and deluging it with its venom throughout its length and breadth" (1048). A far cry indeed from the beneficent Azure Dragon that Eitel sincerely strove to understand some twenty-five years earlier. And when De Groot concludes by wondering whether "foreigners may be able to shed some rays of the light of science upon the Middle Kingdom" or whether its inhabitants may be "stamped for ever with the total incapacity to rise to a higher level of mental culture," his answer is a pessimistic "no" and "yes" (1055-56).²

By the time De Groot delivers the American Lectures on the History of Religions in 1911, his contempt seems to have diminished somewhat, though his animosity toward unscrupulous fengshui practitioners still blinds him to the value of some of the underlying philosophy. He writes, for example, of the "philosophical nonsense of the [five] elements" (De Groot, 1912: 300). The grounds for his animosity turn out to be the way fengshui is "an obstacle to all sorts of enterprise which might be of the greatest advantage to the people: the cutting of a new road or canal, the construction of a new bridge, a railroad, tramway, or telegraph line" (316). Seen in the light of the subsequent environmental devastation wrought in the name of technological progress, an obstacle that makes us pause to take into account the features of the landscape may not necessarily be a bad thing. It was in the following year that a professorial chair for Sinology was first established at the University of Berlin, with the querulous De Groot as its first occupant.

We learn from De Groot that the predominance of ancestor reverence in ancient China, based on the belief that the spirits of the dead continue to inhabit this world in which they resided bodily, gave rise to the idea that the site and orientation of the tombs in which the dead were buried would determine the quality of their influence on their living descendants. Proper placement of the houses of the dead ensures that the *qi* emanating from the ancestors will enhance the energies of the living descendants and bring good fortune. Even though the living reside on the earth for far shorter periods than the corpses of the dead reside in it, it is natural to suppose that the site and orientation of our residences while alive will similarly affect the quality of our lives. For the

living, then, fengshui can be said to concern “the relations to the surrounding nature, the influence of the landscape on the beauty of the buildings and the happiness of the inhabitants” (Boerschmann, 1924: viii).

These are the words of a contemporary of De Groot’s, Ernst Boerschmann, whose writings evince a refreshingly different attitude toward the Chinese level of mental culture. Boerschmann went to China in 1906 for a three-year visit sponsored by the German Imperial Government, for the purpose of “an investigation of Chinese architecture and its relation to Chinese culture” (Boerschmann, 1912: 539). He is fascinated and impressed by almost all manifestations of Chinese culture he encounters in the course of his extensive travels.

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 (542).

It was right at this time that De Groot published a study of this central idea in Chinese culture, according to which the macrocosm is not only represented or revealed in the microcosm, but can also be regarded as actually present in certain special or ritually defined areas. He calls this idea “universism” (De Groot, 1912).

Boerschmann was especially impressed by the aesthetic effects of fengshui practice, as evidenced by the ways the architecture is integrated into the landscape.

The large cities and almost all others are located in 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 (Boerschmann, 1912: 572).

This admiration does not derive from a mere aestheticism, but from a view that seeks to balance “industrial interests with the most beautiful environment possible” – a view that seems to have been sadly obscured in the current rush (which builds on momentum initiated with the Revolution of 1949) to modernize the Middle Kingdom.³

Boerschmann also took numerous photographs of landscapes, buildings, and statuary, which he published in the magnificent volume, *Picturesque China: Architecture and Landscape* (1924). In his introductory essay he ascribes the harmony between buildings and landscape in China to the influence of fengshui, which consistently favors curved over straight lines. This is because straight lines are thought to be conduits of noxious winds and energies, *fengsha* (風煞) and *shaqi* (煞氣) (Feuchtwang, 1974: 115). The result is

... 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 (xiii).

To this no longer so vital spirit Boerschmann’s photographs are a most handsome tribute.

It was not until the 1950s that Western scholars began serious attempts at a comprehensive understanding of Chinese science, as signaled in particular by the first volumes of Joseph Needham’s monumental work *Science and Civilisation in China*. Needham devotes large sections of his second volume to the philosophies of nature found in Daoism and “the school of Naturalists” (the so-called *Yin-Yang* thinkers), the theory of *wuxing* (the five elements or five processes), symbolic correlations and correlative thinking, and the system of the *Yijing*.

We have here for the first time a comprehensive, scholarly, and open-minded account of the philosophical and scientific background from which fengshui emerged. The practice of “geomancy” itself, however, Needham relegates to a chapter on “the Pseudo-Sciences”, considering it under the heading “Divination” along with such practices as scapulimancy (prediction of good or bad fortune on the basis of the behavior of ox and deer shoulder-blades when subjected to heat), astrology, chronomancy (divination to determine a favorable time for action), cheiromancy (palmistry), and the like. Operating on the straightforward definition of fengshui as “the art of adapting the residences of the living and the dead so as to cooperate and harmonise with the local currents of the cosmic breath [*qi*],” he devotes four pages to a brief history and description of the practice (Needham, 1956: 2: 359–63).⁴ After remarking on its advantages and drawbacks, he concludes that “all through, [fengshui] embodied a marked aesthetic component, which accounts for the great beauty of the siting of so many farms, houses and villages throughout China” (2: 361).

It will help at this point to broaden our focus and consider some basic features of the Chinese worldviews from which fengshui arose. The major background assumption that needs to be highlighted is the understanding of the world as a dynamic play of forces, or energies, rather than an aggregate of material things, with a corresponding emphasis on “becoming” over “being”. In other words, China has always inclined toward “process” rather than “substance” cosmologies.

COSMOLOGIES OF *qi*

The philosophers of the classical period in China did not begin to develop cosmologies until around the middle of the third century BCE, before which time cosmological speculation was the business of astronomers, diviners, physicians, and others at the imperial court.⁵ Philosophical Daoist cosmology then sets the direction for two millennia of subsequent Chinese thought in understanding the cosmos as a field of energies known as *qi*. In a later chapter of the Daoist classic *Zhuangzi* we read: “Man’s life is the assembling of *ch’i*. The assembling is deemed birth, the dispersal is deemed death ... Running through the whole world there is nothing but the one *ch’i*” (ch. 22).⁶ Since breathing is a process that distinguishes the living from the dead, it was natural to think of the breath as a manifestation of the energy that animates the cosmos

Corresponding to inhalation and exhalation are two forms of energy: "All things can now be conceived as condensing out of and dissolving into a universal *ch'i* which as Yang (☰) is pure and so free moving and active, and as Yin (☷) is impure and so inert and passive" (Graham, 1989: 328).

A *locus classicus* for this idea is the beginning of the third chapter of the syncretic Daoist text known as the *Huainanzi* (mid-second century BCE):

The Dao began in the Nebulous Void.
The Nebulous Void produced spacetime;
Spacetime produced the primordial *qi*.
A shoreline (divided) the primordial *qi*.
That which was pure and bright spread out to form Heaven;
The heavy and turbid congealed to form Earth ...
The conjoined essences of Heaven and Earth produced yin and yang.
The supercessive essences of yin and yang caused the four seasons.
The scattered essences of the four seasons created all things.

(3: 1a: 1, in Major, 1993: 62)⁷

Here *qi* is characterized as the source of all things, the variety among them depending on where they lie on the spectrum from the most rarefied ("pure and bright") to the most condensed ("heavy and turbid") forms of energy. A remarkably similar idea seems to have arisen independently in ancient Greek cosmology, and especially in the thought of Anaximenes, for whom the "underlying nature is one and infinite [and identified] as air." In particular he writes of condensation (*puknotēs*) and rarefaction (*manotēs*) as the two basic transformations of this one "nature".

It differs in its substantial nature by rarity and density. Being made finer it becomes fire, being made thicker it becomes wind, then cloud, then (when thickened still more) water, then earth, then stones; and the rest come into being from these ...

It is always in motion: for things that change do not change unless there be movement ... The most influential components of generation are opposites, hot and cold (Kirk and Raven, 1963: 144–45).

Like the *Huainanzi*, the Daoist compilation known as the *Guanzi*, which contains passages dating from around the third century BCE and earlier, includes numerous passages concerning cosmological ideas relevant to our topic. They deal with themes such as the *wuxing*, conduct appropriate to the four seasons, and the parallels between the microcosm of the human body and the macrocosm of the landscape. In keeping with the Daoist idea that pure *qi* is transformed first into wind, or breath, in the realm of Heaven and into water in the realm of Earth, a chapter of the *Guanzi* begins: "Water is the original source of the myriad things, the root of all that lives, that from which beautiful and ugly, worthy and unworthy, foolish and eminent are born. Water is the blood and *qi* of Earth, like that which courses through the muscles and veins."⁸ Of interest here is the naturalness with which aesthetic and moral qualities are said to derive from the natural phenomenon of water, the allusion to circulation of the blood and oxygenation of the muscles, and the correspondence between channels of energy in the body and the earth. There is an ancient parallel in Greek thought, again according to Anaximenes: "As our soul, being air holds

us together and controls us, so does wind [or breath] and air enclose the whole world" (Kirk and Raven, 1963: 158).

At one level the emphasis on isomorphism between human body and landscape comes simply from an appreciation of environmental influences. The chapter from the *Guanzi* just quoted ends by reiterating water as "the source of the myriad things" and then discussing the influence of water quality in the seven major states on the constitutions and characters of each area's inhabitants. "The water of Qi is forceful, swift, and twisting. Therefore its people are greedy, uncouth, and warlike. The water of Chu is gentle, yielding, and pure. Therefore its people are lighthearted, resolute, and sure of themselves" (*Guanzi*, ch. 39). The conclusion is that the sage who would transform the world has to understand the influences of bodies and flows of water on the human body.

A similar discussion of environmental influences, with an explicit focus on the importance of the local *qi*, is to be found in the *Huainanzi*.

Various sorts of earth give birth, each according to its own kind.
For this reason, the *qi* of the mountains gives birth to a preponderance of men;
The *qi* of the low wetlands gives birth to a preponderance of women ...
The *qi* of stone produces much strength.
The *qi* of steep passes produces many cases of goiter ...
All things are the same as their *qi*; all things respond to their own class.

(4: 7a: 1, in Major, 1993: 167)

The list of topographical *qi* influences runs to fifteen items. Politically speaking (and the political is usually present in classical Daoism) the ruler will be better able to govern, like the corresponding sage in the *Guanzi*, if he understands the kinds of environmental influences operating on the constitutions of his subjects. Physiologically speaking, one is advised to pay attention to the energetic background or context of all beings with whom one comes into contact. The point is made with reference to the three facets of the individual in the *Huainanzi*'s first chapter:

Thus, if one's physical form is placed in an unsuitable abode, it will become incapacitated;
If one's *qi* is made to fill what it does not rightfully fill, it will be leaked;
If one's spirit is active when it is not suited to act, it will grow dim.
These three are what one should watch over carefully (Lau and Ames, 1998: 131–32).

Among the ten-thousand things traditionally said to have been produced by yin and yang after they separate out from the primal unity, there are five in particular that one should watch over carefully.

WUXING: THE FIVE PROCESSES

As mentioned earlier, Needham provides a wealth of information concerning early Chinese science and cosmology, but in this section I draw instead from the more recent work of A. C. Graham, because of its more philosophical orientation. A fourth-century BCE historical text known as the *Zuo Commentary* (to the *Annals* of Lu) lists six kinds of atmospheric influences or energies: "Heaven has the Six *Ch'i* ... shade [*yin*] and sunshine [*yang*], wind and rain, dark and light." Here *yin* and *yang* refer in their pre-philosophical

use to the shady and sunny sides of a hill respectively (north and south sides in China, as in any place in the northern hemisphere), and thus also have to do with cold and heat as well as dark and light.

Corresponding to the Six Ch'i of Heaven are the Five Processes (*wuxing*: literally, "five goings," "transitions," "conducts," or "doings") associated with Earth: wood (木), fire (火), soil (土), metal (金), and water (水). The three terrestrial elements of the ancient Greek conception of the four elements – earth, water, and fire – are significantly different from their counterparts in China. Rather than referring to static elements that form the building blocks of the world, *wuxing* denotes the five primary phases of transformation through which the cosmic or telluric energies pass (Needham, 1956: 232–61; Wang, 2000: 3). An important early mention is in the *Hongfan* (*Great Plan*) chapter of the pre-Qin Dynasty *Shujing* (*Historical Classic/Book of Documents*), where the Five Processes appear at the beginning of a list of nine groups of things necessary for good government, immediately followed by the "five things to do":

1. The five processes: (1) Water: wetting, sinking. (2) Fire: flaming, rising. (3) Wood: bending, straight. (4) Metal: yielding to moulding. (5) Soil: permitting sowing and reaping.
2. The five things to do: (1) Demeanour: respectful. (2) Speech: accordant. (3) Looking: seeing clearly. (4) Listening: hearing clearly. (5) Thinking: understanding.⁹

Rather than enumerating abstract names of classes or properties of things, these items refer to actual, perceptible processes with dual aspects: not just wood, but wood as bending or straight; not just looking, or clear sight, but seeing clearly. There is also the Daoist idea here, reminiscent of the *Laozi*, that good governing emulates the way of nature (*tiandao*: 天道): the five natural processes are presented as basic and the five things for humans to do as secondary.

The Five Processes generate each other (*xian sheng* 相生) in cyclical sequence:

Wood generates fire, bursting into flame.

Fire generates soil, reducing wood etc. to ash.

Soil gives birth to metal, in veins of ore beneath the earth.

Metal gives birth to water, liquefying when heated.¹⁰

Water generates wood, nourishing the growth of plants.

Any natural environment is constituted by the ceaseless self-generation of these five phases, and insofar as we develop a sense for how each gives rise to the next, we stand to benefit, in our concern to shelter and nourish ourselves throughout our own transformations, from harmonizing these with the perpetual changes of the world.

This generating cycle of the Five Processes is derivable from, and thus correlated with, the four seasons and the four directions:

| | | | | |
|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|
| Wood | Fire | Soil | Metal | Water |
| Spring | Summer | | Autumn | Winter |
| East | South | (Center) | West | North |

Soil, as the most basic of the processes, is assigned the central place, or "here" position, among the four directions. Fitting it into the cycle of the four seasons is a problem, the most elegant solution to which, in view of soil's intermediary as well as central function, has been to assign it to the third lunar month of each season (Schipper, 1993: 35).

For inhabitants of the northern hemisphere, the correlation of south-north (the Chinese compass puts south at the top and north below) with summer-winter makes sense in view of the movement of the sun's position through the seasons. Since many parts of China receive more precipitation during the summer monsoon than other seasons, the correlation of these pairs with fire-water is based rather on early Chinese cosmogonies that remark the tendency of water, as yin to fire's yang, to withdraw into the cold and dark. If the cycle of the seasons begins in spring, as the day begins with the sun's rising in the east, it is as natural to correlate these as to pair autumn with the west. The correlation of the wood-metal pair with spring-autumn works insofar as "branches and leaves grow in spring and turn brittle, rigid, metallic in autumn" (Graham, 1989: 344). And at least for places nearer the center than the periphery of the Middle Kingdoms, wood is found in the forests of the east and metals in the mountains to the west.

A second cycle involving the Five Processes, in which they "conquer" or "overcome" one another (*xiang ke*: 相克), was recognized on a different basis from the directions and seasons:

Soil conquers water, by damming or absorbing it.

Wood overcomes soil, by digging with spade and plow.

Metal conquers wood, by cutting with the blade.

Fire overcomes metal, by melting it to liquid.

Water conquers fire, by extinguishing.

By contrast with the purely natural generating cycle, this one reflects the practices of hydraulic engineering and irrigation, agriculture, carpentry, and metallurgy – all activities that intervene in natural processes in such a way as to direct them toward human purposes. The Greek idea of the four elements as the essential components of a material world goes along with an understanding of gods and humans as creators and makers of things through the introduction of formative powers from outside and with a view to a pattern or paradigm external to those things (even if internal to the mind of the creator). The notion of the Five Processes, however, is part of a cosmology in which ceaseless transformations are driven by the cosmic energy that flows through the particulars according to patterns that emerge from the place of those particulars within the larger matrix. In such a world human beings thrive by creatively engaging these transformations in the appropriate ways – ways that it is the aim of Chinese medicine and fengshui practice to articulate. In any particular place, for example, one will find manifestations of several or all of the Five Processes, and the quality of the different parts of the place will depend on whether the processes are in more creative or destructive relationships.

Thanks to the general Chinese predilection for correlative thinking, wood-fire-earth-metal-water were soon correlated with a large number of other phenomena: with the five viscera (Spleen, Lungs, Heart, Kidneys, Liver), the five constituents of the body (muscles/membranes, skin, pulse/blood, bone/marrow, flesh), the five tastes (sour, bitter, sweet, acrid, salt), the five kinds of creatures (scaly, feathered, naked, hairy, shelled), the five measures (compasses, weights, plumbines, T-squares, balances), the five colors (blue-green, yellow, red, white, black), the five notes of the pentatonic scale (*que, zhi, gong, shang, yu*), the five numbers (8, 7, 5, 9, 6), and so forth.¹¹ In the political realm the conquering cycle was seen to be reflected in the succession of historical dynasties: the Yellow Emperor, the Xia, the Shang, the Zhou, and the dynasty to come. Since the correlations may appear to become rather tenuous when one goes beyond those with the seasons and directions, let us consider a fact that appears to set the basis of the major ones on relatively firm ground.

Graham points out the remarkable correlation between the generating and conquering cycles: "In the one required to correlate with the seasons and directions each Process is generating the immediate predecessor of the Process it conquers." This is remarkable because the conquering cycle is independent of other correlations and presumably stems rather from hands-on experience in working (with) the Five Processes. He also shows how this correlation can be subsumed under a larger pattern from the cosmology of the *Huainanzi*, and also how, when the Five Numbers are added to the correlation between the generating and conquering cycles, a "magic square" is produced in which the numbers add up to 15 in every direction (Graham, 1989: 344).¹²

Just as the Five Processes were from the outset correlated with "the five things to do", so they are also naturally applicable to energetic transformations within the microcosm of the human body.¹³

EARTH AND SYMBOLIC BODY

It is common for Daoism to extend the correlation between the body and the landscape to the country understood as the state. The *Huangdi neijing* (*Inner Classic of the Yellow Emperor*), the oldest surviving Chinese medical text (from around the 3rd century BCE), has this to say about the various parts of the body: "The heart functions as the prince and governs through the *shen* ["soul"]; the lungs are liaison officers who promulgate rules and regulations; the liver is a general and devises strategies" (ch. 8, cited in Schipper, 1993: 100). Kristofer Schipper has shown how the theme of "inner landscape" runs through the entire Daoist tradition, beginning with commentaries on the *Laozi* that emphasize the parallels between the body politic and the individual's body: "The Sage's rule over the country corresponds to the rule over the body" (Schipper, 1993: 191).¹⁴ Again the macrocosm provides patterns for microcosms.

Numerous works and commentaries in the Daoist Canon provide detailed accounts of the inner landscape in terms of ancient Chinese mythology and yin-yang and wuxing cosmology, accounts based on Daoist techniques of meditation and introspection. Although they hardly form a system, Schipper

observes that, "the fundamental themes recur with surprising regularity throughout all descriptions of the inner landscape." The first part of his paraphrase of the accounts in the second-century *Laozi zhongjing* (*Laozi's Classic of the Center*) gives an idea of how rich and expansive these inner landscapes are:

The landscape of the head consists of a high mountain, or rather a series of peaks around a central lake. The lake lies midway between the back of the skull and the point between the eyebrows. In the middle of the lake stands a palatial building, where there are eight rooms surrounding a ninth, central one. This is the Hall of Light (*mingtang*), the house of the calendar of the kings of ancient China [built in the form of a mandala of the universe]. In front of this palace and the lake around it, lies a valley (the nose). The entrance to the valley is guarded by two towers (the ears) (Schipper, 1993: 105–06).

These correlations continue through the rest of the head area with its valleys and lakes and streams and fountains; the thorax with its sun and moon, Pole Star and Big Dipper, Scarlet Palace, Yellow Court, Purple Chamber, and granary or warehouse; the abdomen with its great ocean, inverted mountain, and the Cinnabar Field – *dantian* (丹田), root of the human being and origin of the wuxing.

Few have patience or time for the practice required to discover such vast and rich inscapes, and if those who do have not undertaken Daoist practice, they are unlikely to discover such structures as the Hall of Light – but perhaps rather their non-Chinese equivalents. At any rate, to entertain in general the idea of an "imaginal" space or places within the body of the imagination, which is not so foreign to the Western traditions, would help us situate our activities more fruitfully in the natural environment insofar as our perception of it is conditioned by projections from the landscapes within.¹⁵

Attention to the correlations between yin and yang qi, the Five Processes, and the five viscera reminds us of our ongoing embodiment in the current physical circumstances prevailing in a particular place in the world. As the seasons proceed, the cosmic qi alternates between yang and yin: yang qi is in the ascendant from the beginning of spring and reaches its highest point in midsummer; it then diminishes as the yin qi begins to increase, which peaks at the winter solstice. It will make sense to try to harmonize the currents of qi in one's body with the larger ebbs and flows outside, and the *Inner Classic* recommends precisely this, in conjunction with four of the five viscera from the wuxing system. (The spleen, in the central position, is omitted.) A. C. Graham suggests helpfully that seasonal activities connected with crops provide a metonymic transfer to the qi associated with the corresponding viscera:

| Four Seasons | Spring | Summer | Autumn | Winter |
|--------------|----------------|------------|--------------|--------------|
| Qi | Coming to life | Growing up | Gathering in | Storing away |
| Five Viscera | Liver | Heart | Lungs | Kidneys |

For each season, and the kind of qi that predominates in it, the text encourages certain activities on the part of the individual that will keep him in tune with the tendency (for example, "coming to life") of the natural forces of that season.

Each prescription is followed by a proscription of going against the qi of the season, on pain of harming the respective internal organ, which will in turn inhibit the tendency (“growing up”, both of crops and processes internal to the body) of the upcoming season. Graham’s summation of the import of the entire discourse cannot be improved on:

The measures good for one’s health ... are the measures one is moved to take when one understands how the seasons act on the body ... Man is in spontaneous interaction with things, but responds differently according to the degree of his understanding of their similarities and contrasts, connexion or isolation ... To know how things compare and connect, in particular whether in connecting they support or conflict with each other ... is to know their patterns (*li*) and the Way which unites them all (Graham, 1989: 355–56).

It is on such grounds that a fuller awareness of the relations between our own energies and those of our physical environment will be conducive to our flourishing.

Corresponding to these seasonal prescriptions and proscriptions concerning the individual’s health are chapters in several classic texts – notably the calendrical chapters of the *Lu Spring and Autumn* and the “Four Seasons” chapter of the *Guanzi* – which advise the ruler how best to govern according to the season. The way *not* to do this (and this applies to the ruler of the individual body as well as to the ruler of the state) is by having in mind a fixed image of one’s goals, to be pursued in resolute disregard of environment or season. This would correspond to a flouting of fengshui principles by cutting through the landscape in straight lines rather than following the curvilinear transformations of the dragon.

BRIEF HISTORY OF FENGSHUI

The historical beginnings of fengshui are shrouded – appropriately for such an enigmatic science – in mystery. Marcel Granet cites as perhaps “the first mention of beliefs that are at the origin of geomancy” a passage in the *Book of Songs* (*Shijing*; 9th to 5th centuries BCE) where the founder of a town is said to have observed “the shadows” (which would have indicated south) and also “the surrounding yin and yang” (Granet, 1926: 1: 20). Feuchtwang remarks in this connection that the application of fengshui principles to the layout of towns and cities is apparently much earlier than to houses and graves.

Another indication of an awareness of fengshui principles comes from a story concerning Meng Tian, the Qin Dynasty general who supervised the building of the first part of the Great Wall. Construction was begun in 221 BCE: “He ... built a Great Wall, constructing its defiles and passes in accordance with the configurations of the terrain. It started at Lin-t’ao and extended to Liaotung, reaching a distance of more than ten thousand *li*.”¹⁶ Thanks to its following the contours of the land, the Wall is traditionally seen as resembling a great dragon, which is an image that comes to refer in fengshui to any important topographical formation. In 210 BCE, upon the death of his patron, the first Qin Dynasty emperor, Meng fell victim to a dastardly political plot and was ordered to commit suicide. On hearing the news, he is said to have

cried out in uncomprehending lamentation over this cruel stroke of fate. Then, on reflection, he said gravely: “Indeed I have a crime for which to die ... I have made ramparts and ditches over more than ten thousand *li*, and in this distance it is impossible that I have not cut through the earth’s veins [*di mo*: 地脈]: this is my crime.” He thereupon swallowed a lethal dose of poison. Another feat of engineering that is more likely to have cut into the earth’s veins is a road that Meng Tian built on the orders of the First Emperor a decade after the Great Wall was started, in the course of which he “made cuts through the mountains and filled in the valleys, over a distance of one thousand eight hundred *li*” (Bodde, 1940: 61, 55–56).

The *mo* of *di mo* (“earth’s veins”) corresponds to something in the human body like veins or arteries or pulses, but more closely to the acupuncture meridians, since no physical “envelope” for the flow is perceptible. General Meng’s concern for respecting the earth is often echoed in the Ming period, which saw a special flourishing of garden culture in China. Fear of damaging the “earth’s veins” fueled opposition to gypsum mining in Taihe county in the fourteenth century, and the government prohibited the digging of ponds in Nanjing “lest they damage the *qi* of the earth in the imperial capital” (Clunas, 1996: 181). The sixteenth-century author of the *Nongshuo* (*Talks on Farming*) writes eloquently of “energy arteries running within the earth” and how “earth and bone are like the arterial system of the human body which carries the energy-blood” (cited in Hay, 1985: 42). When the body is understood as an organism within the larger organism of the environment, its various energetic pulses (*mo*) correspond to the dynamic configurations referred to earlier as the earth’s “lifelines” (*shi*: 勢).

In a survey of the history of fengshui the Ming Dynasty author Wang Wei writes: “The theories of the geomancers have their sources in the ancient Yin-Yang school. Although the ancients in establishing their cities and erecting their buildings always selected the sites (geomantically), the art of selecting burial sites originated with the *Burial Book* [*Zangshu*] in twenty parts, written by Guo Pu [276–324] of the Jin Dynasty” (cited in March, 1968: 261). Central to the *Zangshu*, also known as the *Book of Funerals*, is the idea that certain sites are blessed with flows of especially vitalizing energy known as *sheng qi* (“vital breath”, “life energy”), which is a phase of the larger circulation of cosmic energies: “When the *ch’i* of *yin* and *yang* breathes out it is wind. When it ascends it constitutes the clouds, and when it falls it is rain. It travels on and in the ground and becomes vital *ch’i*. Vital *ch’i* travels on and in the ground and engenders the myriad things.” Vital *qi* is further subject to the forces of wind and water: “The [*Burial*] *Classic* says that *ch’i* rides the wind and disperses. When bounded by water, it halts” (*Zangshu*, cited in Bennett, 1978: 9–10). With respect to a place characterized by multiply dividing streams, the *Shuilongjing* (*Water Dragon Classic*) says: “If the wind shakes the willow branches, or if the wind bends the grass whether passing over the position or not, it will mean trouble, and even meandering water will not justify the site. It will bring decay and sickness” (Feuchtwang, 1974: 139).

Water molds the natural environs from the outside in obvious ways, primarily

through watercourses' cutting into the earth, but also through precipitation's sculpting the shapes of mountains over time. Winds, too, move earth, if not mountains, over the long term, in ways less obvious than waters, since the movement of air is itself invisible, becoming perceptible only through its effects on water, vegetation, and loose soil. But fengshui is concerned with winds and waters in a deeper sense too: with the invisible "breath of the earth" discussed above, and with the "flows" of qi beneath the earth that were thought to be responsible for the formation of minerals (Needham, 1970: 3: 637, 650).

The art of proper burial consists, then, in choosing a site with favorable life-breath. Guo Pu puts it succinctly by saying, *cheng sheng qi* (乘生氣), "burying [is a matter of catching] life-breath" (cited in March, 1968: 256). The understanding of qi expressed in the *Zangshu* has been aptly characterized as:

... 'the breath at the origin of things, forever circulating,' which flows through the whole of space, endlessly engendering all existing things, 'deploying itself continuously in the great process of the coming-to-be and transformation of the world' and 'filling every individual species through and through' (Jullien, 1995: 91–2).

The quality of a place, according to Guo Pu, depends on the local *shi*, meaning configurations of earth-energy (which François Jullien translates in this context as "lifelines"): "The vital breath circulates along the lifelines of the terrain and is concentrated at the points where they come to an end." John Hay draws a helpful distinction between *shi* (勢) as "dynamic configuration" and *xing* (形) as "form" or "shape" of concreted objects. "It is the changefulness of *shi* that is lasting, whilst the fixedness of *xing* is transient" (Hay, 1985: 53). On the fengshui understanding of a landscape, *shi* refers to both the "veins" of earth through which the qi flows and also the "skeletal structure" or "spinal column" of the terrain. In order to perceive the dynamic configurations of a landscape, it is necessary to gain some distance for a broader perspective: "The lifelines are visible from a thousand feet away, the particular configurations of the terrain from a distance of one hundred feet" (*Zangshu*, as cited in Jullien, 1995: 93). Another way, as Jullien suggests, is to consult an appropriate masterpiece of Chinese landscape painting, the primary principle for which was to "achieve the *shi*" of the landscape (99).

Another important source of ideas behind fengshui is the *Huangdi zhaijing* (*The Yellow Emperor's Siting Classic*), attributed to the fifth-century thinker Wang Wei. As the title leads one to expect, a central idea in this text is that of *zhai* (宅), meaning "site/siting" or "place/placing": "All human dwellings are at sites ... sites are the foundation of human existence" (cited in Bennett, 1978: 5). A *zhai* is therefore not merely some location in abstract space, but rather a place as defined both by a particular topography and by the kinds of human activities that take place in it.¹⁷ Since an inhabited place is a dynamic locus of flowing energies, the *Siting Classic* addresses the temporal as well as the spatial aspects of fengshui practice: "Every year has twelve months, and each month has positions in time and space of vital and torpid *ch'i* [*shengqi*: 生氣 and *siqui*: 死氣]" (Bennett, 1978: 7). Human activities undertaken at times of vital qi are more likely to be successful than at times when the qi is torpid. The quality of qi also varies within smaller cycles, such as the diurnal. Manfred Porkert

characterizes *shengqi* as "the quality of energy during the *yang* hours of the rising sun (midnight to noon) ... [which has] a quickening and invigorating effect on active enterprises," and the opposite for the *yin* hours from noon to midnight (Porkert, 1974: 172–73).

The *Siting Classic* also asserts an isomorphism between a *zhai* and a human body, a correlation that is central to Daoist thinking about the relations of the human being to the landscape. "The forms and configurations are considered to be the body; water and underground springs are the blood and veins; the earth is the skin; foliage is the hair; dwellings are the clothes; door and gate are the hat and belt" (Bennett, 1978: 13).

In spite of the prevalence of all these ideas, it was not until the Tang dynasty (618–906) that fengshui theories and practices began to be synthesized and formalized into a distinct school named as such.¹⁸ Wang Wei's historical survey distinguishes two schools, one using the "Jiangxi method" and the other the "Ancestral Hall" or "Fujian method", both of which he claims are derived from Guo Pu (March, 1968: 261). The latter (founded a century or two later) is also known as the "compass" school, and it emphasizes the importance of the Eight Trigrams of the *Yijing* and the Five Planets, as well as the indispensability of the geomantic compass. Since this school's methods are more abstract and pseudo-scientific, it seems to have been infected by more charlatantry than its counterpart and is thus of less interest in our present context.¹⁹

The school employing the Jiangxi method is also known as the "form and configuration" (*xing shi*) school, because of its concern with intuiting the configurations (*shi*) of qi from the shapes or forms (*xing*) of the landscape. It was apparently founded by an imperial fengshui master by the name of Yang Yunsong (ca. 840–888). In its consideration of mountains and watercourses, the Form and Configuration School lays particular emphasis on the motif of the dragon as a pattern to be found in "all topographical formations" (Feuchtwang, 1974: 141), as indicated by the titles of such important treatises by the founder as the *Hanlongjing* (*Classic on Arousing the Dragon*) and the *Yilongjing* (*Classic on Approximating the Dragon*).

It may, however, be better to talk of the dragon as an image for all *vital* topographical formations, since some places may simply be "dead" in terms of the flows of qi. As a later author, Shen Hao (17th century), puts it:

Surely nothing but the writhings of the magic dragon is an adequate figure of the mountain-ridges' permutations. What does not resemble the permutations of the magic dragon does not realize the subtle geomantic essence. Therefore it is said: if it has permutations, call it dragon; if it has none, call it barren mountain (cited in March, 1968: 256–57).

This is not the Azure Dragon as an image for one of the four directions, which is culturally and geographically specific to China, but "a universal symbol of the powers of nature" and especially of "the power of [self-]transformation" (Feuchtwang, 1974: 149–50). Since Chinese culture is based on the premise that all events in the world are continually transforming themselves, the dragon is its perfect emblem. It is also an archetypal image common to an amazingly wide range of cultures and mythologies, in some of which its meaning is negative by contrast with its generally auspicious quality in China (Hay, 1994).

To fully appreciate sciences based on becoming rather than being, on energy rather than matter, we need to reorient our ways of perceiving our environment. In introducing his discussion of the notion of *shi* as “lifelines” in the earth, François Jullien recommends that we stop regarding nature as “an object of science” in the Western sense. “Rather, we should here perceive nature intuitively, through the sensibility of our bodies and their activity, as the single common principle within and outside us that operates throughout reality and explains how the world is animated and functions. Let us imagine a new ‘physics’ and stop thinking of nature abstractly” (Jullien, 1995: 91). If this idea seems too exotic – a physics associated with a transformation in our experience – we might recall that there exists something similar in the Western tradition, with the Stoics and Epicureans. As Pierre Hadot puts it, “Contemplation of the physical world and imagination of the infinite are important elements of Epicurean physics. Both can bring about a complete change in our way of looking at things. The closed universe is infinitely dilated, and we derive from this spectacle a unique spiritual pleasure” (Hadot, 1995: 87–8).

Just as the breath that animates the human body through bringing oxygen to the blood is invisible (the misty exhalations in cold weather being water vapor rather than air), so the cosmic breath animating the body of the earth cannot be seen, although it can be felt or otherwise sensed.²⁰ The science of acupuncture, which is closely related to fengshui, has been slow to gain acceptance as valid on the part of practitioners of Western medicine. The main reason is that its background assumptions are so different, and there is also that fact that the meridians (*jingluo*: 經絡) through which the currents of qi flow through the human body are invisible, and Western researchers were looking for literal conduits such as veins or nerves.

Corresponding difficulties arise with the idea of energies flowing through the earth (in the broad sense, including watercourses, vegetation, and the other processes of metal and fire) along “lifelines” that cannot be directly seen but can be intuitively discerned by the well-trained practitioner. This notion should, however, be less mysterious to Western physicists since the discovery of the earth’s magnetic field (the magnetosphere) whose energies flow along lines that are similarly invisible. Indeed the Chinese appear to have been the first to understand the phenomenon of magnetism, with 3rd century texts referring to the “south-controlling spoon” – a piece of lodestone carved into the shape of the Northern Dipper (*Ursa Major*). These Chinese discoveries naturally took place within the context of fengshui (Needham, 1969: 71ff; 1962: 4/1, 229–334).

I should like to conclude with some reflections on how, through the medium of practice in the arts, one might come to an experiential understanding of the reasonable ideas and features of fengshui as a basis for their application to everyday life.

RELEVANT ARTS, FINE AND MARTIAL

We saw that Guo Pu understands the lifelines of the land as both its “skeletal structure” and its “veins”, and when the Form and Configuration School of

fengshui applies the image of the dragon to any important topographical formation, it is on the assumption that the dragon is animated by qi flowing through its bones as well as its veins. This idea is associated with the distinction between the “mountain” (*shan*: 山) and “waters” (*shui*: 水) qi animating a landscape (*shanshui*), with peaks and ridges as skeletal structure and watercourses as veins, and it is also exemplified in one of China’s greatest contributions to the world’s art, landscape painting (Feuchtwang, 1974: 141–48). François Jullien quotes and comments upon the tenth-century aesthetician Jing Hao on this topic:

Under the painter’s brush, as in nature, ‘the aspects of mountains and waters are born from the interaction of vital breath and the given layout to which that force imparts dynamism.’ In China, the purpose of painting is to rediscover the elemental and continuous course of the cosmic pulsation through the figurative representation of a landscape (Jullien, 1995: 94, also 95–102).

Thus an excellent way of learning to discern the lifelines in a landscape is to study Chinese landscape paintings – which is in itself one of life’s great pleasures.

Another great Chinese contribution to the world of the arts, again associated with fengshui, is the art of the garden. We saw earlier that fengshui allows for certain kinds of human intervention in order to improve, when necessary, the conditions of a particular site – though the tragic figure of Meng Tian stands as a reminder of the dangers of too deep an intervention. As an important adjunct to the dwellings of the living in China – of the well-to-do in particular – the garden provides an opportunity to put the principles of fengshui into practice.

The classic garden manual, the seventeenth-century *Yuanye* (*Craft of Gardens*) by Ji Cheng, talks of the way a well constructed garden, where one has “visualized the balustrades as if they were in a painting,” can “flood the heart with intoxication” and create “a pure atmosphere around our tables and seats [so that] the common dust of the world is far from our souls” (Ji, 1988: 43–44). Chinese gardens would often be laid out in such a way as to “borrow” features of the neighboring landscape, by offering views from within the garden of a local mountain or lake. A basic premise of the Chinese garden is the microcosm/macrocosm correlation we saw between the body and landscape; the well designed garden sets up a pattern of energies that corresponds to the dynamic configurations of a larger landscape – and indeed energies just as powerful thanks to the amplifying effect of miniaturization.²¹

As the sterling work of John Hay in this field has shown, the most important components of the Chinese garden are generally the rocks: “Rocks were both the frame of the garden and the foci of visual attention” (Hay, 1985: 17). As forces of nature, rocks are powerful configurations of qi, not only as “bones of the earth” analogous to the human frame, but also as “kernels” of energy. “The essential energy of soil forms rock ... Rocks are kernels of energy: the generation of rock from energy is like the body’s arterial system producing nails and teeth ... The earth has the famous mountains for its support ... Rocks are its bones.”²² The garden is then above all an environment of energies in which the human body can restore itself and renew its strength, insofar as its own minerality

(minerals make up a good part of our dry weight) is surrounded and enhanced by that of the rocks.

Certain rocks are regarded as especially powerful configurations of qi because they are microcosms of mountains, smaller configurations of the huge telluric forces that thrust land up into the sky. Others, such as the greatly prized Taihu rocks, formed of limestone deposits from the floor of Lake Tai that are three hundred million years old, are more zoomorphic, resembling enormous sponges of billowing stone (Hay, 1985: 36). These rocks exemplify the three foremost qualities according to Chinese aesthetics of stone: leanness, surface texture, and foraminate structure – all of which help reveal to the outside the vast interior forces that formed the rock. The properly arranged garden is a prime example of the benefits of fengshui. Simply to be in the presence of such magnificent kernels of energy, let alone to contemplate them aesthetically, brings tonic strength to the human organism.

For those of us who do not have the luxury of a garden, there are other ways of cultivating an appreciation for the relations between the body's energy configurations and those of the environment – through practices such as *qigong* (氣功): literally, “energy work”, a self-healing art that combines movement and meditation, and *taiji quan* (太極拳), “Great Ultimate bare-hands-combat-technique”, one of the softer martial arts to have been developed in China. Anyone who is skeptical about the existence of the qi that flows through and energizes the body need only try some qigong exercises (for example, the set known as the *ba duan jin* (八段錦), or “eight sections of brocade”, often used as a warm-up for *taiji* practice) in order to experience the flow of qi in his or her own person. As in yoga, the breath (itself a manifestation of the cosmic breath in the human body) is central to *taiji* practice. The practitioner is encouraged to breathe smoothly and deeply from the *dantian* (the “cinnabar field” discussed above, located a couple of inches below the navel) throughout all movements.

Taiji quan is believed to have originated in the Southern Song Dynasty (12th to 13th centuries), though an alternative – less well-attested – tradition traces the practice back to the time of the Six Dynasties (3rd to 6th centuries). It incorporates numerous ideas from Daoism, although the first part of its name refers all the way back to the “Great Treatise” appended to the *Yijing*, where the *Taiji* (Great Ultimate, Primal Beginning) is said to “engender the two primary forces” of yin and yang (Wilhelm, 1967: 318). Various accounts explain how yin and yang generate the wuxing, the five viscera, and so forth – accounts that harmonize with all that has been stated above concerning the correlations between the body and the environment (Despeux, 1981: 16–21, 40–58; Needham, 1962: 2: 460–64).

In accordance with the ancient Chinese conception of the human being as inhabiting the space between the earth and the heavens, *taiji* encourages an awareness of our bodily activities in this milieu and a sense that all our movements depend on our current configuration of energies in relation to the forces of heaven and earth. Entertaining the image of the head's being suspended from the heavens by an invisible cord encourages a sense for the way our energy maintains the upright posture, while the injunction to let the shoulders

and elbows relax and drop down positions us with respect to gravity and the earth. The practice also invokes our relations to other inhabitants of the milieu between earth and heaven insofar as many of the movements are named after animals. The Yang style, for instance, includes movements such as: grasp bird's tail, crane spreads wings, carry tiger to mountain, fend off monkey, raise hand pat horse, part wild horse's mane, snake creeps down, golden cock stands on one leg, step back ride tiger, and so on.

While the natural spontaneity of the animal is taken as a model, the means of emulating it are anything but natural; one has to practice the moves over and over, employing thought, imagination, and memory, for a long time before spontaneity comes. Subsequent practice brings about precisely what fengshui encourages – a greater awareness of the relations between one's activities and the configurations of the surroundings, whether natural or built.

An appreciation and/or practice of such arts helps us understand how ideas from fengshui may be integrated into contemporary worldviews. They are admittedly incompatible with Cartesian-Newtonian understandings of the cosmos – to which we are in any case no longer obliged to subscribe. The Cartesian perspective is singularly parochial, and however much it might further our domination of nature through technology, this is no reason to think it will help us flourish in other ways. The sensible core of fengshui seems by contrast quite compatible with the physics and biology of the 21st century, and the corresponding modes of experience are at any rate accessible to anyone nowadays with an open mind and opened senses.

Unless one has the luxury of choosing a place to live and building a dwelling there, there is no opportunity for engaging in the practice of fengshui as siting or participating in the architect's decisions concerning the orientation of the house in relation to prevailing sun, wind, rain, and terrain. But one can always change the ways a living space is configured in a residence already built, by the simple expedient of becoming more aware of one's activities in relation to the surroundings. It is thus possible to improve the positioning of bed, dining table, chairs, work table, etc., without going to the expense of hiring an expert consultant. A little common sense combined with heightened sensitivity to place goes a long way. Opportunities to set up one's work space will generally be more limited than in the home, but improvement is usually possible nonetheless.

One might take encouragement from those writers on fengshui like Shen Hao who emphasize intuition. Coming upon a place that is right, he writes,

One's eyes are opened; if one sits or lies, one's heart is joyful. Here the breath gathers, and the essence collects. Light shines in the middle, and the magic goes out on all sides. Above or below, to right or left, it is not like this ... Try to understand! it is hard to describe (cited in March, 1968: 259).

Among contemporary scholars, no one has put it better than François Jullien, who paraphrases Guo Pu as follows:

Not only my own being, as I experience it intuitively, but the entire landscape that surrounds me as well, is continuously flooded by subterranean circulating energy ... The most glorious sites will be those where it is most densely accumulated, where the circulation of the breath is

most intense, its transformations most profound ... By rooting one's dwelling here rather than elsewhere, one locks into the very vitality of the world, taps the energy of things more directly (Jullien, 1995: 92).

If in response to such an expression of the more sensible tenets of fengshui we could become suspicious of the modern conceit that we can be at home anywhere, regardless of the telluric and atmospheric forces around us, we would surely witness a greater flourishing of human lives and the natural environment on which they depend.

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NOTES

¹ For an early classic correlation among the Five Processes, four directions and center, the five planets, and five symbolic animals (with a yellow dragon corresponding to earth in the central position), see the third chapter of the *Huainanzi* (Major, 1993: 70–73).

² As for the level of Chinese mental culture, we might note in an aside the number of discoveries and inventions that originated in China and East Asia: printing, gunpowder, the magnetic compass, “mechanical clockwork, the casting of iron, stirrups and efficient horse-harness ... segmental-arch bridges and pound-locks on canals, the stern-post rudder, fore-and-aft sailing, quantitative cartography” (Needham, 1954: 1: 15; 1969: 11).

³ For an account of the extent of the assault on the environment during the revolution, see Shapiro, 2001.

⁴ The quote is cited from the article by H. Chatley in Samuel Couling's *Encyclopaedia Sinica* (1917).

⁵ See Graham, 1986: 325. The next few paragraphs are based on the section “The Cosmologists” in his *Disputers of the Tao*, 315–70.

⁶ Chinese transliteration has changed from using a system called Wade-Giles (*ch'i*) to the one preferred today, Pinyin (*qi*). In cases where the quotations come from older sources, I have retained the Wade-Giles transliteration.

⁷ My colleagues Roger Ames and Hans-Georg Möller have warned in private communications that this translation may be misleading and contradict the picture I am otherwise trying to convey of early *qi*-based cosmologies. For the term *sheng*, “was born out of” would be better than “began” and “gave birth to” or “vitalized” preferable to “produced”. The ideas to be avoided are those of an independent “producer” and any kind of creation *ex nihilo*: it is rather a matter of ceaseless “taking shape” or “vitalizing” from formless “chaos”. See Ames and Hall, 2001: 19–30, and Möller, 2001: 114–29.

⁸ *Guanzi* ch. 39, cited in Graham, 1989: 356. Translation modified, by emending the first word, *di* (earth) to *shui* (water), on the basis of the reasons given by Rickett in the commentary to his translation (Rickett, 1998: 2: 98–100).

⁹ Graham, 1989: 326, except that for the sake of the structure I have used Needham's translation for the characterization of soil in the last sentence of the Five Processes section (Needham, 1956: 243).

¹⁰ Needham (1956: 2: 255) suggests as another basis for this generation the way metal mirrors exposed to the night air attract or secrete “sacred dew”.

¹¹ See the table in Needham, 1956: 2: 262–63, who notes that over a hundred groups of correlations(!) are mentioned in the extant texts as a whole (2: 264). The situation is further complicated by the fact that some of the authors of the many texts in which these further correlations appear arrange them differently. See, for instance, John Major's commentary on the Five Processes in the *Huainanzi* (Major, 1993: 185–89) and the section “Han Cosmologies” in Hall and Ames, 1995:

256–68. The initial capitals of the names of the five viscera remind us that the Chinese terms as used in medicine refer to the entire functions of the physical organ and its associated meridian.

¹² For a more detailed treatment of this issue, see Major, 1984.

¹³ For the role of the “Five Evolutive Phases” in Chinese medicine, see Porkert (1974: 43–54).

¹⁴ For the full argument, see especially the chapters “The Inner Landscape” (pp. 100–12) and “Keeping the One” (pp. 130–59).

¹⁵ “Imaginal” is a coinage – to avoid the ontologically denigratory connotations of “imaginary” – of the great scholar of Islamic philosophy Henry Corbin, in his works on the archetypal imagination (such as *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi*). Nietzsche is one of the few Western philosophers to have been interested in the idea of inner landscapes: see Parkes, 1994, chapter 4, “Land- and Seascapes of the Interior”.

¹⁶ Cited in Bodde, 1940: 54.

¹⁷ Western philosophy has generally devoted far more thought to abstract space than to lived place. For a judicious restoration of this imbalance, see Casey, 1997.

¹⁸ For example, the *Guanshi dili zhimeng* (*Mr. Guan's Geographical Indicator*) attributed to the third-century author Guan Lo, the *Zhangshu* (*Book of Funerals*) attributed to Guo Pu, and Wang Wei's *Huangdi zhajing* (*The Yellow Emperor's Siting Classic*); see Needham, 1956: 360.

¹⁹ A comprehensive account of the practices of the Fujian School, with fascinating descriptions of the geomancer's compass, is to be found in Feuchtwang, 1974: 18–95.

²⁰ Needham (1959: 3: 469) notes the parallel between the idea of *qi* animating the earth and Aristotle's notion of the two terrestrial emanations (*anathumiasis*), one aqueous (*atmidodestera*) and one gaseous (*pneumatodestera*) (*Meteorologica*, I, iv [341b6 ff.]).

²¹ The classic work on this topic is Stein, 1990: see, especially, part one: “Trees, Stones, and Landscapes in Containers”, and “Survey of Themes”. For a brief history of the remarkable petromania and litholatri (worshiping rocks and stones) that have characterized the Chinese tradition, see the first two sections of my essay in Berthier, 2000.

²² From the 86-page entry on “rock” in the eighteenth-century encyclopedia entitled *Classified Contents of the Mirror of Profound Depths*, cited in Hay, 1985: 52. See also Needham (1959: 3: 637) who cites the late sixteenth-century *Great Pharmacopoeia* (*Bencao Gangmu*): “Stone is the kernel of *qi* and bone of the earth.”

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