

De Qi 'Obtaining Qi'

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There is an assumption made in *Fengshui* practice that all sites consulted on inherently 'have *shengqi*' to work with, but do they? This may not always be the case. There are certain base requirements outlined in the earliest classic text that clearly show what is initially needed to *De Qi* 'Obtain Qi' before one even begins trying to manipulate its flow and nature.

In *Fengshui* there are many ways to attract 生气 *Shēngqì* 'Generating Energy' and deflect 殺气 *Shāqì* 'Noxious Vapours', countless methods to direct and enhance the movement of *qi*, as well as numerous ways to find where it accumulates in its greatest concentrations. There is however, only a very short list of five prerequisites to establish the presence of *qi* onsite in the first place. This catalogue of conditions is drawn directly from the 葬书经 *Zàngshūjīng* 'Book of Burial Classic' by 郭璞 *Guō Pú* (276-324 C.E.). As the original source of all 形势派 *Xíngshìpài* 'Form & Force School' theory, written by a master who is arguably the grandfather of all *Fengshui*, its wisdom is irrefutable. All other theories born since can be considered merely footnotes to this fundamental manuscript.

THE ZANGSHU

The *Zangshu* itself is based on an earlier text and contains many of the former book's passages therein. The 汉 *Hàn* dynasty (206 B.C.E. – 220 C.E.) work 葬经 *Zàngjīng* 'Burial Classic' by 青乌先生 *Qīngwū Xiānshēng* 'Blue Raven Esquire' has been since lost, and now only lives through *Guo Pu*'s writings. *Guo Pu* himself was an enigmatic figure and many great stories abound of his colourful life as a diviner, astronomer, geographer and scholar. In his time he authored and edited many books, but it is the *Zangshujing* he is most known for in the study of *Fengshui*.

The book is made up of three parts – the inner, outer and miscellaneous chapters. This arrangement was formulated by later scholars and it is suggested that the material from the first section is the most authentic and less so in the second and third – which may indeed be the compilations of later authors. There have been many annotations and commentaries added throughout the dynasties since its first edition. Although the title *Zangshujing* translates as the 'Book of Burial Classic' it can in fact be thought of as 'The Book of Auspicious Siting'. The techniques it puts forward on gravesites were identical to those used in the siting of houses – being that, if it's good for the dead, it must be so for living. It also contains the first record of the name *Fengshui* 'Wind and water' and holds the impressive vintage of being the oldest complete manual for its practice.



DE QI

The term 得气 *Déqì* 'Obtain *qi*' is borrowed from Chinese Medicine. In Traditional Acupuncture practice it indicates the arrival of *qi* at a 穴 *Xué* '[Acupuncture] Point', the dull heavy sensation felt **after** the initial needle insertion. The word *Xue* can also mean 'hollow, cave, spot, node or lair'. In *Fengshui* this refers to the most auspicious location for constructing a dwelling within a given site (sometimes called the 'Dragon's Lair'), and *Deqi* applies to the arrival of *Shengqi* at this point. Applying the 罗盘 *Luópán* with its many compass based methods before determining whether *qi* has first been obtained is both incorrect and pointless.

GUO PU'S 5 CONDITIONS

This paper will translate key passages from the text and consider their possible interpretations and applicability. From this a handy 'obtaining *qi*' checklist for immediate and easy use in the field can be created. As analysis of the landscape is always the dominant approach in the Classical *Fengshui* model, all five are conditions of form. *Guo Pu* supports this theory when he teaches that underground internal *qi* is condensed by external superficial forms – allowing the practitioner to 'see the *qi*'. Each of the five conditions is confirmed by a series of references from the most important Inner Chapters and cases where relevant.

1. 山 *Shān* 'Mountain'

<p>丘壑之骨，冈阜之支，气之所随。 <i>Qiūhè zhīgǔ, gāngfù zhīzhī, qìzhī suǒsuí.</i> “The bones of hills and ridges, the branches of mounds and embankments, <i>qi</i> follows these.” - <i>Zangshujing</i>, Inner Chapter, line 9</p> <p>经曰，地有吉气，土随而起 <i>Jīngyǔē, dìyǒu jíqì, tǔsuíérqǐ</i> “The Classic says, when the ground has auspicious <i>qi</i>, the landscape conforms resulting in rising upward” - <i>Zangshujing</i>, Inner Chapter, line 37</p> <p>气以龙会 <i>Qìyǐ lóng huì</i> “<i>Qi</i> is [present] because of [mountain] dragons assembling” - <i>Zangshujing</i>, Inner Chapter, line 51</p>
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These statements illustrate how mountains both mutually collect *qi*, and how their physical presence indicates its gathering under the surface. They are in fact fundamental to the natural *qi* cycle (see below) and without them there is no initial focus for the *qi* to begin its journey that ends in an auspicious site and dwelling. This suggests that sites with no natural hills or peaks in the vicinity may not obtain *qi*. Of course in the urban environment, large buildings are often considered analogous to mountains and while this may be true, their effect at collecting *qi* would always be inferior, though perhaps still necessarily usable.

Historically this condition was considered so important in China that when the 故宫 *Gùgōng* 'Imperial Palace' was built in Beijing without the presence of a local mountain, the tremendous effort of creating the man-made 'Coal Hill' immediately behind the 'Forbidden City' was undertaken to satisfy this need.

2. 土 *Tǔ* 'Soil'

<p>土者，气之体，有土斯有气。 <i>Tǔzhě, qìzhītǐ, yǒutǔ sī yǒuqì.</i> “Soil, it is the body of <i>qi</i>, where soil exists there is <i>qi</i>.” - <i>Zangshujing</i>, Inner Chapter, line 18</p> <p>气行乎地中。 <i>Qìxíng hū dìzhōng.</i> “<i>Qi</i> travels through the ground.” - <i>Zangshujing</i>, Inner Chapter, line 20</p> <p>气因土行 <i>Qìyīn tǔxíng</i> “<i>Qi</i> travels by means of soil” - <i>Zangshujing</i>, Inner Chapter, line 49</p>
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The second condition clearly is soil. *Shengqi* travels through the ground, not by means of underground rivers as a few somewhat misguided modern authors may suggest, but through the soil itself. It is not too subtly implied here that earth makes up the physical form (body) of *qi* and allows it to move. Therefore where there is no soil, there cannot be movement and thereby *qi* cannot be sustained.

The concern here is with some styles of modern buildings that have no contact with the land due to high elevation, large cavity spaces underneath, or poor connection via a thick medium of concrete. In many cases the *qi* simply cannot travel to the structure and scientific research is beginning to uncover the problems for the occupants that can arise from this style of living, including depression, fatigue and infertility.

3. 化 Huà ‘Change’

势来形止，是谓全气。
Shìlái xíngzhǐ, shìwèi quánqì.
“Where configurational-force arrives and form ends,
this is called complete *qi*.”
- *Zangshujing*, Inner Chapter, line 24

经曰，形止气蓄，化生万物。
Jīngyuē, xíngzhǐ qìxù, huàshēng wànwù, wéishàng dìyě.
“The Classic says, where form ends *qi* accumulates,
transforming to birth to the 10,000 things”
- *Zangshujing*, Inner Chapter, line 33

气以势止
Qìyǐ shìzhǐ
“*Qi* is [present] because configurational-force is stopped”
- *Zangshujing*, Inner Chapter, line 50

The next concept is a more difficult one to grasp, perhaps because it is the least material of the group. After mountains have collected the *qi* and soil has granted it movement, it is the next phase that stops and condenses it. This is change or transformation in the land. Most commonly this comes in the form of difference of elevations, but can be less obvious. *Qi*, given the opportunity, will continue to move along through the earth unimpeded, this is of course unless it meets some variation in its path. Like an outcrop of rocks at a river bank causing a small whirlpool, the *qi* will be deflected from its path and coil around itself beside the terrestrial object. This is why the base of mountains were so popular with the ancients as locations for villages and communities. Like sediment collecting on a sandbar, *qi* accumulates here. The same can be said for sites adjacent to even a small depression in otherwise featureless terrain. Other examples of changes that can induce this situation might be variations in soils, the beginning or end of a prominent land form or vegetation.

In new developments on continually flat sites, such as reclaimed farmlands, there can often be difficulty in determining the best site without merely relying on the compass. Directions and positions should only be used to activate the energies already present, so how to decide the best location? This is where change becomes particularly important. Any variable in these situations must be investigated, it may be the mildest of transformations from bordering ditch to tree-line that obtains the *qi*.

4. 水 Shuǐ ‘Water’

经曰，气乘风散，界水则止。
Jīngyuē, qìchéng fēngsàn, jièshuǐ zézhǐ.
“The Classic Says: When *qi* rides the wind it is dispersed,
when it meets a boundary of water it is retained.”
- *Zangshujing*, Inner Chapter, line 10

气者，水之母，有气斯有水。
Qìzhě, shuǐzhīmǔ, yǒuqì sī yǒushuǐ.
“*Qi*, it is the mother of water, where *qi* exists there is water.”
- *Zangshujing*, Inner Chapter, line 18

支有止气，水随而比
Zhīyǒu zhǐqì, shuǐsuí ér bǐ
“[Topographical] Branches have retained *qi*,
water follows connected close together”
- *Zangshujing*, Inner Chapter, line 37

The intimate connection between water and *qi* is well known to anyone who has studied *Fengshui*. It is no surprise then, that water is one of the five. The verses above may also be familiar,

they are some of the most famous in the *Fengshui* literature. Similar to ‘changes’ above, water can be a boundary to *qi*, a point where it pools. Water however has the characteristic of being able to retain *qi* like a battery holding a charge. It is the only place in nature where *qi* is stored undifferentiated.

It is true that *qi* also moves with water, more freely than soil mentioned above, but it does not necessarily scatter as water flows away. Think of it as the water is moving away, but not the *qi*. *Qi* is present wherever there is water to varying degrees, existing within the water and escaping only when the water changes state. The presence of water is the clearest indication of *qi*, but ‘artificial waterways’ the name commonly given to roads within the cityscape, do not carry *qi* the same as true water. Elemental water must be present to prevent the dispersion of *qi* accumulated through the above stages. This is highlighted in the Chinese notion of gardens, traditionally containing a minimum of 1/3 water and of course the contemporary fascination with water features in the home.

5. 生 *Shēng* ‘Life’

<p>经曰，。。。内气止生。 <i>Jīngyuē, ... Nèiqì zhǐshēng</i> “The Classic says, ... underground <i>qi</i> stopped generates life.” - <i>Zangshujing</i>, Inner Chapter, line 13</p> <p>经曰，土形气行，物因以生。 <i>Jīngyuē, tǔxíng qìxíng, wùyīn yǐshēng.</i> “The Classic says, <i>qi</i> moves through landforms, causing things to take life.” - <i>Zangshujing</i>, Inner Chapter, line 19</p> <p>气以生和 <i>Qìyǐ shēnghé</i> “Life harmonises because of <i>qi</i>” - <i>Zangshujing</i>, Inner Chapter, line 47</p>

The final condition is an interesting one, in that while it is not an essential requirement for indicating *qi* has been obtained per say, it is perhaps the most obvious and important confirmation. Life is not a traditional feature discussed in *Fengshui* study of *qi*, but as living beings it is the ultimate result. If the goal of *Fengshui* is ‘fertility’ (in all senses of the term) then surely a flourishing of flora and fauna is the most convincing sign that the *shengqi* is ‘generating’ as it should. Wherever *qi* stops for long enough, growth is the inevitable result.

Of particular concern in the toxic world of today is the number of localities where nothing can grow. It is obvious that where life cannot survive, neither should humans. The same applies to populating mostly barren territory, previously only able to support specialised peoples in small numbers. There just isn’t enough *qi* to go around.

SUMMARY

Whilst not explicitly listed in this format within the *Zangshujing*, these five conditions of *Guopu* can be summarised, in order, as such –

1. 山 *Shān* ‘Mountains’ **collect** *qi*
2. 土 *Tǔ* ‘Soil’ **moves** *qi*
3. 化 *Huà* ‘Change’ **stops** *qi*
4. 水 *Shuǐ* ‘Water’ **holds** *qi*
5. 生 *Shēng* ‘Life’ **grows** from *qi*

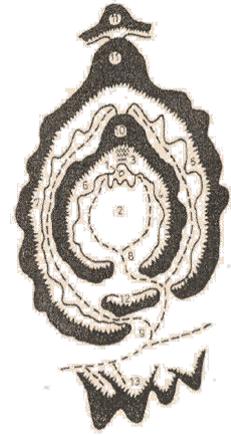
These five simple points drawn from this fundamental work can quickly and easily determine when a site should be selected or discarded. Unfortunately one or more of these parameters are often overlooked, and vast amounts of time and resources are potentially wasted searching for *qi* in the wrong places. Practical and effective systems like the one discussed here should be the primary consideration before beginning analysis, even for existing buildings. While they are difficult, if not impossible factors to change, they can be influenced by mindful application of classical *Fengshui* principles and traditional form school techniques.

COMPARISONS

Before concluding two other subsystems within the classical *Fengshui* knowledge base, warrant mention at this point. While they bear some similarity, as will be demonstrated, they do not however, amount to the same thing.

Practitioners of classical *Fengshui* could be forgiven for thinking *Guopu's* conditions are one and the same as the 地理五诀 *Dili Wujue* – ‘Five Secrets of Earth Principles’. This ancient list describes the Classical model of a site, which many know simplified as the ‘armchair formation’ –

1. 龙 *Lóng* ‘Dragon’ vein, ancestral arterial ridgeline that feeds to the site
2. 砂 *Shā* ‘Sand’ local topography of land features including mountains
3. 水 *Shuǐ* ‘Water’ rivers, lakes and streams
4. 穴 *Xué* ‘Point’ hollow, cave, spot, node or (dragon’s) lair
5. 向 *Xiàng* ‘Direction’ the way a site faces



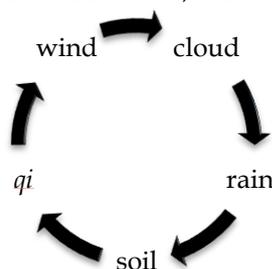
Parts of *Guopu's* list are incorporated within the *Wujue* (‘mountains’ and ‘water’) but not all. This is because the topic of this article concerns only the factors present at #4 of the above list – the *Xue* ‘point’. It is a micro view covering further details of finding *qi* at this one aspect.

Likewise the familiar construct of the four animal spirit mountain forms - 青龙 *Qīnglóng* ‘Cerulean Dragon’, 白虎 *Báihǔ* ‘White Tiger’, 玄武 *Xuánwǔ* ‘Dark Warrior [Black Tortoise]’ and 朱雀 *Zhūquè* ‘Vermillion Sparrow [Red Bird]’ all fall within the scope of #2 *Sha* ‘Sand’.

The second contrast is with the natural cycle of *shengqi* in the environment. Master *Goupu* comprehensively, yet succinctly, describes it in the *Zangshujing* thus –

阴阳之气，噫而为风，升而为云，降而为雨，行乎地中，而为生气。
Yīnyáng zhīqì, yīér wéifēng, shēngér wéiyún,
jiàngér wéiyǔ, xíng hū dìzhōng, érwéi shēngqì
 “The *qi* of *yin yang*, exhales and becomes wind, rises and becomes cloud,
 drops and becomes rain, travels through the ground, and becomes *shengqi*”
 - *Zangshujing*, Inner Chapter, line 17

This bears a remarkable similarity to the precipitation cycle (whereby cloud is formed through evaporation of water sources, condenses and falls as rain to flow through rivers and streams to the sea, back to begin the process again etc.) and is often quoted as an early understanding of this science. However, it is not. It is in fact the process by which *shengqi*, and not water, is formed. As



mentioned previously the two are very closely linked though, in fact *qi* is only able to complete this circuit via the transformations of water from state to state - where energy is released or reduced.

There is also understandably some overlap with *Guopu's* five conditions. The five steps to the natural *qi* cycle include ‘soil’ and ‘water’ as well as occurring in greater concentrations in mountainous regions, but do not directly correspond to the smaller scale occurrences onsite at a dwelling specific to this piece.

RESOURCES

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