

# CLASSICAL CORNER

*“Wisdom from the mouths of ancient sages to the ears of the modern practitioner”*



Hello and welcome to the Classical Corner. With each issue, in this new regular feature, I will be bringing you a quote from one of our famous *Fengshui* classics. Following the translation will be commentaries and interpretations with reference to traditional and modern scholars and masters. The emphasis will be on practicality and while the literature is old, there are always new applications.

In the interest of better understanding, I will be limiting this column to only those texts translated into English that are publicly available and easily purchased, or in many cases accessed for free, via the internet.

For this first foray into the world of classical Chinese texts we can't go past our most well known classical citation in *Fengshui*, on the meaning of the name '风水 *Fēngshuǐ* 'Wind-water'. This is an important point in our history as the first recorded instance of the term and the birth of what we practice today. Prior to this time no unified system existed that resembled anything like our current methods.

The manuscript is the 葬书 *Zàngshū* 'Book of Burial'. Attributed to legendary diviner, astrologer and scholar 郭璞 *Guō Pú* (276-324 CE) and written in the 晋 *Jìn* Dynasty, this is considered the first *Fengshui* text still in existence. The three chapters comprise of information on the burial of ancestors to afford good fortune to descendants, and make up all our foundation knowledge of 形势派 *Xíngshì Pài* 'Form and [Geodetic] Force School'. Although this text primarily concerns 阴宅 *Yīnzhái* 'Tombs' (sometimes called *Yin Fengshui*) its wisdom was, and still is, equally applied to 阳宅 *Yángzhái* 'Residences'. In fact all other texts since could be considered footnotes to this seminal classic. The quote is from the oldest and most pertinent section of the work, the 'Inner Chapters' -

经曰，气乘风散，界水则止。

*Jīng yuē, qì chéng fēng sǎn, jiè shuǐ zé zhǐ.*

**“The Classic Says: When *qi* rides the wind it is dispersed, when it meets a boundary of water it is retained.”**

古人聚之使不散，行之使有止，故谓风水。

*Gǔ rén jù zhī shǐ bù sǎn, xíng zhī shǐ yǒu zhǐ, gù wèi fēng shuǐ.*

**“The Ancients were able to gather [*qi*] to prevent dispersion, to guide it and retain it, hence it was called Wind-water [*Fengshui*].”**

风水之法，得水为上，藏风次之。

*\*Fēngshuǐ zhīfǎ, déshuǐ wéishàng, cángfēng cìzhī.*

**“The law of Wind-water is; getting water is the superior act, hiding from wind is secondary.”**

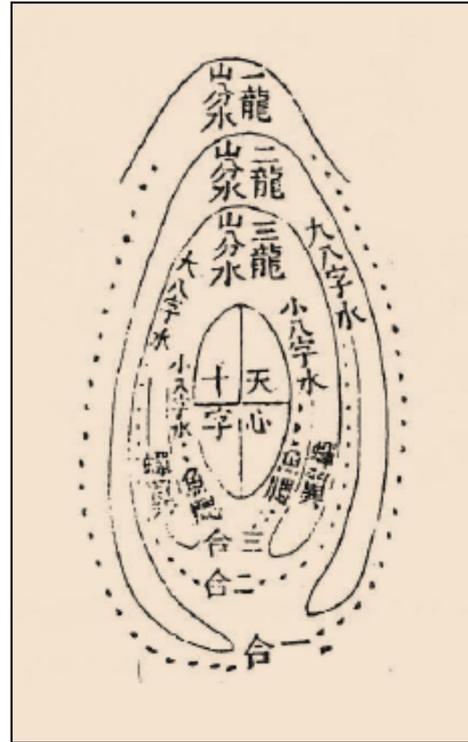
ZANGSHU - Inner Chapter, verses 10-12

## Commentary

Verse 10) 'The Classic' cited is a point of contention. Some modern masters suggest it may be the 青囊经 *Qīngnángjīng* 'Blue-green Satchel Classic'. While it contains this quote in part, it contains only ¼ of the 20 references attributed to this mysterious 'Classic'. It is possible that *Qingnangjing* was one of multiple texts referred to in the work (it is not clear whether 'Classic' or 'Classics' was being used) but also likely that it was quoting a parallel source, or written at a later date and the quoting reversed. It is most probable that the scripture concerned is the 书经 *Zàngjīng* 'Burial Classic'. A much older cannon, mentioned only by name and author (青乌 *Qīngwū*<sup>1</sup>) in certain historical records, that unfortunately has been lost<sup>2</sup>.

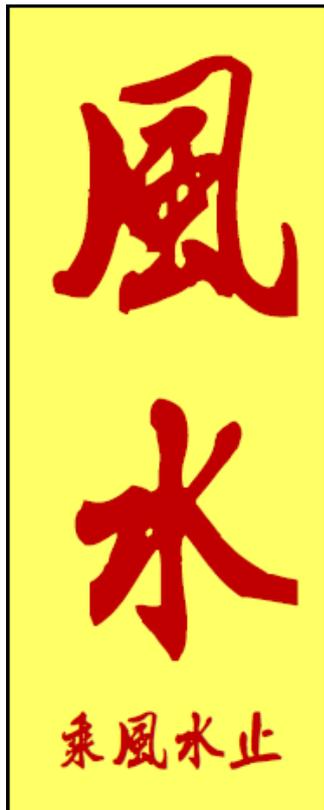
Verse 11) The *Gu ren* 'Ancients' commonly refers to the sages of the 'upper antiquity' in Chinese history. These Shamans of the 夏 *Xià* (2100-1600 B.C.E.) & 商 *Shāng* (1600-1100 B.C.E.) dynasties were considered to have a much closer association to the land and by virtue of that, deeper insights into its secrets. They were likely more primitive and in this sense lived in greater accord with nature.

Verse 12) The character 藏 can have two meanings - *cáng* 'to hide/conceal' or *zàng* 'to store/a depository'. This has led to the implausible interpretation of the final line to be read 'catching wind is secondary' with the thought of then bringing it into the site? As will be illustrated in the interpretation below, this is somewhat illogical. To attempt to 'catch' or 'contain' anything which by nature is 'scattering' is not only extremely difficult, but inherently counterproductive to the entire purpose of the exercise. Annotators of the 元 *Yuán* (1271-1368 C.E.) & 清 *Qīng* (1368-1644 C.E.) dynasties agree the meaning should be 'hidden/sheltered' and 'catching' could only be used in the sense of 'blocking the path' not 'containing'. Indeed the source text goes on in later chapters to discuss that wind should be 'kept outside' and a draft entering will 'disperse generative [生 *Shēng*] *qi*'.



### Interpretation

Wind was considered in the past to be the bringer of illness and ill-will according to Chinese Medicine and Philosophy. In particular it was the carrier of epidemic disease (airborne transmission) and bringer of storms and catastrophes. It was however also acknowledged as the major source of motility in the environment and spreader of fertility (pollen). Its moving nature is said to scatter *qi* it encounters and prevent it from accumulating. Water on the other hand is the border at which *qi*, which has been moving in the earth, is stopped (when the land ends). Water is said to be the son of *qi*, where *qi* moves the water follows, if water stops, *qi* nourishes.



The first practitioners were those with the knowledge of how to condense and disperse *qi*, to move and stop its flow. This they could perform within the microcosm (body) and macrocosm (surroundings) just like wind and water do naturally, therefore they borrowed this name. It is important to understand though, that they would not have only relied on these two forces to complete their tasks. Both are representative of archetypal changes in heaven and earth. One is movement, *yang* the other stillness, *yin*. To take the analogy further, and borrow from the 易经 *Yìjīng* 'Classic of Change' we could have just as easily been called 雷山 *Léishān* 'Thunder & Mountain' people<sup>3</sup>! This primary concept here is of opposing energies that manipulate *qi* in a given place.

In finding an ideal site, condensation is valued and dispersion must be avoided. The formation of *qi* is reliant on cessation, where movement ends, stillness, life can begin. Although the last lines give a hierarchy of priority - 'water' to collect the *qi*, over blocking 'wind' to prevent diffusion, it is only figurative. For example, a site that harbours *qi* (with water, architecture or perhaps a good mountain dragon) but is subject to some of that *qi* breaking up (say from wind, flat land or a fast moving water dragon) would be preferable over a site that shields from *qi* being spread away but fails to generate substantial *qi* in the first place. The second is chiefly redundant without the first. The commentator 吳元音 *Wú yuányīn*<sup>4</sup> cautions though, not to overlook the importance of 'hiding from

wind' (preventing dispersion of *qi*), it is still essential to finding the auspicious point, and should never be ignored.

Based on this explanation, a colloquial rendering of the passage could be –

*There are environmental forces that move energy and scatter it, such as wind, and others that collect energy and nourish life, like water.  
The Masters had skill in harnessing these forces to benefit people. They named their art 'wind and water' after two of these fundamental natural forces,.  
Their practice was always to find ways to generate energy, and then use methods to keep it from draining away.*

Whilst this is a mostly theoretical discussion it hopefully provides some with a better understanding of the term Wind-water, what it is, and what it never was meant to be. Maybe one day a case may present where remembering something as foundational as finding 'water' (condensing) taking precedence over preventing 'wind' (dispersion) will define the form of that building and hopefully bring its occupants much health and prosperity.

### End Notes

1. 'Green Black' Master, which may be just a clever play on the name 'Wind-water' – diagrams 巽 *Xùn* 'Wind' wood/green and 坎 *Kǎn* 'Water' black.
2. A recent translation was made by the Australian scholar Dr Michael Paton of a possible *Zang jing* but was proven, by himself, to be fraudulent in its claim, thought to be written more recently and post dated to fulfil the requirements.
3. To simplify to metaphor even further, masters in the past were known at one time as 阴阳家 *Yīnyángjiā* 'Yin yang experts' and the art as 堪輿 *Kānyū* 'Canopy & Chariot' or alternatively - 'Heaven & Earth'.
4. Interestingly a Chinese Medical Physician who spent many years reading the *Fengshui* classical texts and practically investigating their methods before finally completing his commentary and illustrations of the *Zang shu*, a text he believed was the source of all others and the only true unwatered-down resource.

### References

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- Paton, Michael [translator] (1995) 'Towards a scientific understanding of fengshui : the Burial classic of Qing Wu Esquire, Secretly passed down water dragon classic and Twenty four difficult problems' University of Sydney
- Zhang Juwen [translator] (2004) 'A Translation of the Ancient Chinese *The Book of Burial (Zang Shu)* By Guo Pu (276-324)' Edwin Mellen Press

Yoon p20 *feng* as god's disfavour, *yu* 'rain' as god's favour – oracle bones