

Foetal Fengshui

Taichanshu 'The Book of the Birth of the Foetus'

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In our practice we often hear talk of the 玄空飞星 *Xuánkōng Fēixīng* 'Mysterious Void Flying Star' method being the only technique that takes into account time, as well as space, when calculating the portents for the interior of a building. This is not entirely true. Indeed while it may be the most popular method that does so, there are in fact a number of other systems within 理气派 *Lǐqì Pài* 'Compass School' (literally 'patterns of time and space school') that also contain a chronographic, as well a geographic, component.

An imminent new direction in my life bought attention back to a description I had previously discovered of one such classical technique with regard to **time, orientation** and the **wellbeing newborn infants**. The method is in itself likely more than one thousand years older than flying star and perhaps the first recorded application of its kind.

In the early 1970's a collection of silk scrolls were found at the 馬王堆 *Mǎwángduī* 'King Ma's Tomb' archaeological site in 湖南 *Húnán* province, China. This staggering haul of manuscripts, dated before 168 BCE, remains the largest and most ancient collection ever found. It included the earliest editions of the 易经 *Yìjīng* 'Classic of Change', the 道德经 *Dàodéjīng* 'Classic of the Virtuous Way' as well as medical manuals, nutrition guides, 气功 *Qìgōng* 'Meditation' texts, talismans, astrological and hemerological (study of calendars) works, and the subject of this paper, the 胎产书 *Tāi chǎn shū* 'The Book of the Birth of the Foetus'.

The contents of the short treatise *Taichanshu* are chiefly concerned with childbirth. Topics include - child conception, gestation, pregnancy care, gender fixing, easing birth, ensuring a child's vigour, and two particularly interesting drawings accompanied by commentaries.

The first represents a (perhaps overly) simplistic technique for predicting the fortune of a child at birth by consulting two diagrams of human figures surrounded by the twelve 地支 *dì zhī* 'earthly branches'¹.

The second is a chart to determine the most auspicious burial site for the afterbirth. While this may sound obscure, a brief look at the theory behind

this will explain the significance and allude to the possible modern applications.

Early Chinese thought paid much attention to the concept of 感应 *gǎn yìng* 'mutual resonance'. The 139 BCE cannon the 淮南子 *Huáinánzǐ* 'Masters of the South River' chapter six 览冥 *Lǎn míng* 'Surveying Obscurities' devoted to this idea, explains an example so -

*A person who tunes a zither
plays the 'earth note', another 'earth' string
responds;
when he plucks a 'wood' string, another 'wood
note' responds.
This is the harmony of notes that are the same.*

This illustrates the idea that sympathetic vibrations pervading the *qi* field of the cosmos create a persistent affinity of attraction between similar things - ie. 'if it walks like a duck and talks like a duck etc.' This is how *fengshui* cures and remedies are said to work, by application of systematic correspondence and use of symbolic representation.

This was also the reasoning behind the first forms of *Fengshui* the 阴宅 *Yīnzhái* 'Grave-sites'. The burial of ancestor's bones was not 'ancestor worship', which would have been patriarchal (leaving no room for grandma's bones - that did receive attention in the existing methodology). It was recognition that the remains were linked to the living descendants (think DNA) and if they were buried in a suitable fortuitous location, the offspring may reap proportional benefits of health and prosperity in life (bad news for adoptive parents hoping for a fine burial!). It makes obvious sense then that the final resting place of the baby's placenta, itself given particular importance in Chinese culture², would be equally significant.

The calculation chart (see figures 1-2) is entitled 南方禹臧 *Nānfāng Yǔzāng* 'Entombment according to Yu³, with South Orientation'. Starting the bottom left corner, each square represents a month. This is indicated by the numerical month names, indicating that the lunar calendar is used⁴. The squares are marked with twelve points corresponding with the *dizhi* 'Earthly Branches' and following the standard Chinese convention of placing 午 *wǔ*, south at the top (hence '...with South Orientation').

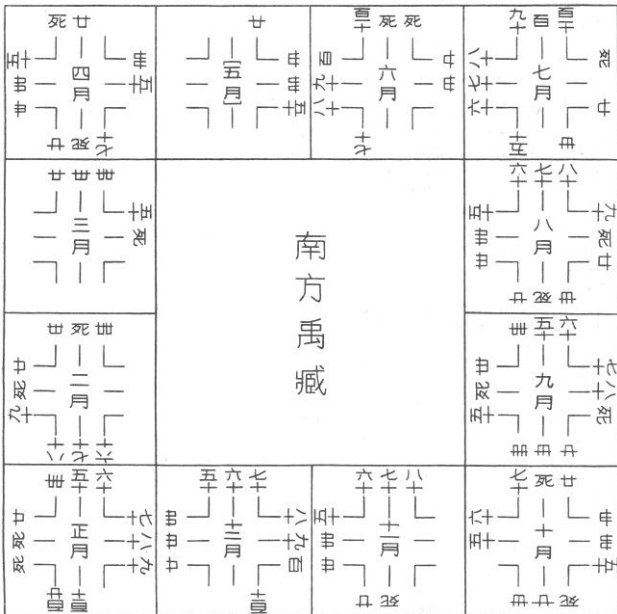


Fig 1. Nanfang Yuzang chart (reconstruction - Harper, 1998)

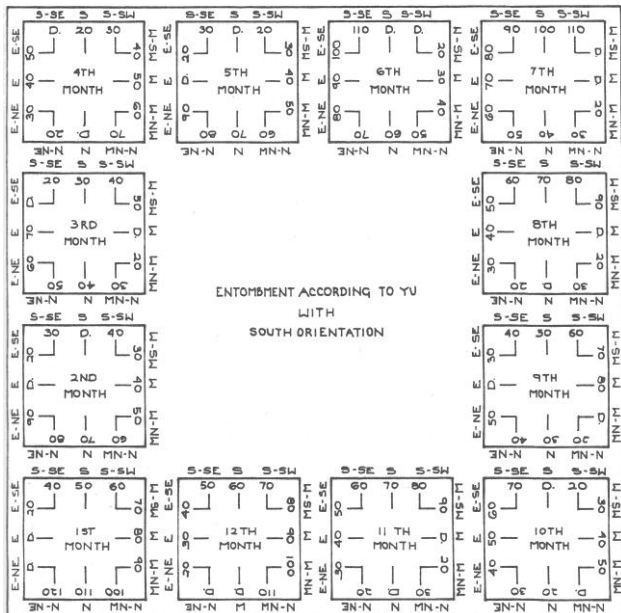


Fig 2. 'Entombment According to Yu, with South Orientation' chart (completed translation - Harper, 1998)

According to this method, directions corresponding with the 小時 *xiǎoshí* 'small period' (indicating the direction of the handle of 北斗 *Běi dòu* 'The Northern Dipper') and the 大時 *dàshí* 'great period' (indicating the direction of the 太岁 *Tài suì* 'Counter Jupiter' or 'Grand Duke') must be avoided. They are marked by the character 死 *sǐ* 'death' (D). All other directions are associated with a numbers. These decimal numbers range from 20 - 120 and increase in a clockwise fashion before terminating at *si* 'death' locations. One suggestion is that these may indicate the predicted lifespan of the child who's placenta is buried in this direction. This is an unlikely supposition, but what can be agreed upon

is that the higher the number, the more auspicious the location. The result implies that some entire months are generally more auspicious than others, due to their reaching higher indicators.

To employ this method, one simply consults the appropriate month map according to the lunar calendar, and the 罗盘 *Luópán* 'Compass' to determine the best and worst directions (taking into account time **and** space). As only the branches are used the traditional 24 mountains ring (likely not invented at this point in time) cannot be engaged for this formula, instead refer to the simplified degrees for branches only below. The technique does not give any other dimension of measurement such as distance from the home, so 'landscape form' and other features can naturally be taken into account.

巳 <i>Sì</i> S-SE 135-165°	午 <i>Wǔ</i> S 165-195°	未 <i>Wèi</i> S-SW 195-225°
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辰 <i>Chén</i> E-SE 105-135°		申 <i>Shēn</i> W-SW 225-255°
卯 <i>Mǎo</i> E 75-105°		酉 <i>Yǒu</i> W 255-285°
寅 <i>Yīn</i> E-NE 45-75°		戌 <i>Xū</i> W-NW 285-315°
丑 <i>Chǒu</i> N-NE 15-45°	子 <i>Zǐ</i> N 345-15°	亥 <i>Hài</i> N-NW 315-345°

The next logical step in *Fengshui* after auspicious grave-site locations were established was to then apply the same methods of site selection to homes for the living - 阳宅 *yáng zhái*. (If it's good enough for the dead...) It would therefore take no great leap of deductive reasoning to apply the same idea to the formula detailed above. (if it's good enough for the placenta...) The question is, in what format? If the location given is the auspicious *yinzhai* direction for the foetus, what could be the equivalent *yangzhai* 'living house' for a newborn? I believe most likely the cot or bassinet. Babies live even more of their early years 'in bed' than we do as adults so their sleeping positioning is of utmost importance. Of course other applications could no doubt be derived, or its total exclusion from *Fengshui* argued, but based upon these facts, I would propose that perhaps this formula could be revived and reinvented for 'Orientation of the Cradle'. That research though, I will take privately and leave to the reader to decide where their own journey sends their progeny. ☺

Endnotes

1. The simple astrology chart shows the partial outlines of two human figures with the characters for the *dizhi* 'earthly branches' around them at specific points of the anatomy (see figure 3-4). The accompanying text indicates that the right corresponds to the *yang* seasons; spring and summer and the left, the *yin* seasons; winter and autumn. It goes on to say the child's fortune is determined by locating the earthly branch of the day of birth on the appropriate chart and following this simple guide -

Location	Fortune
head	extreme wealth
neck	noble
crotch	wealthy
armpit	loved
hand	thief
foot	ignoble
shoulder	Vagabond

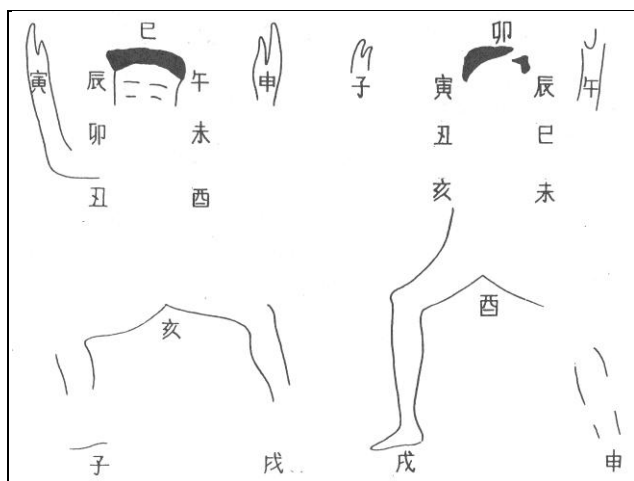


Fig 3-4. Line drawing of simple astrology chart (Harper, 1998)

These basic associations can be logically made (in order) - on top of the head is where a crown would sit, holding the head high requires a straight neck, the crotch is the home of fertility and offspring, under the arms is where one hugs, idle hands can steal, underfoot is where the poor dwell and perhaps broad shoulders makes for a thug or ruffian?

From this one can determine that children born on 辰 *Chén* 'Dragon' days will always be noble regardless of the season, whereas all those born on 戌 *Xū* 'Dog' days are destined to become thieves and peasants. It is clear that this system, like many similar fortune telling methods found printed yearly in the 通书 *tōngshū* 'Chinese Almanac', was never meant to be taken too seriously and merely included for interest's sake.

2. Placenta has a special use in Chinese Medicine in treatment of severe or potentially fatal infant

diseases (an idea perhaps not far removed from the modern and controversial use of umbilical cord stem cells). It is known as 紫河车 *Zǐhéchē* 'Purple River Vehicle'. One of the most famous Chinese Herbalists of all time 李时珍 *Lǐ Shízhēn* describes it as thus -

The beginning of heaven and earth, the ancestor of yin and yang, the bellows of qian and kun, the rectified expansion of minium and cinnabar, and the portent of the embryonic foetus: at the fulfilment of the nine nines, I mount it and ride - thus it is known as the River Vehicle.

The references to trigrams, coloured minerals (black lead and red mercury respectively) as well as numerology demonstrate that in Daoist alchemy it was considered one of the most sacred substances, the ultimate human embodiment of *yin* and *yang*. Likely based on this theory, the first herbal medicine text, the 神农本草经 *Shénnóng Běncǎo Jīng* 'Divine Farmer's Materia Medica Classic' describes its medical applications -

A substance that tonifies the dual deficiency of yin and yang, with the ability to restore the root and return the primal.

Traditionally cleaned, dried and then made into small pills, it is said to warm the Kidney yang, tonify the Lung and Kidney *qi* as well as augment the blood and essence. Very few medicinals have the ability to do all these things so it is highly prized, in particular the placenta of the baby to be treated was considered best.

3. 大禹 *Dà Yǔ* 'Yu the Great' was the legendary founder of the first Chinese dynasty the 夏 *Xià* (2100 - 1600 BCE). He was said to have saved China from a great flood by use of dykes and irrigation channels and possessed unrivaled knowledge of the land. This use of his name here reflects a popular classical Chinese practice of associating texts and techniques with famous people by name, thus suggesting some perceived importance more so than actual authorship. Emperor *Yu* is often depicted holding a water divining stick and is also attributed with the invention of the art of dowsing.

4. Chinese Lunar Months are denoted by the numbers 1-12 in sequence (the character 正 *zhèng* 'principle' is used in place of '1') with some numbers twice to account for the intermittent 闰月 *rùnyuè* 'intercalary (leap) months'. Each column in the modern *Tongshu* 'Chinese Almanac' is one lunar month with the numbers usually indicated at the very top of the page next to the character 月 *yuè* 'moon' or 'month'. They roughly correspond with

February through to January of the following year, similar to solar months. Lunar calendar months (and days) however, are only numbered, they are not represented by 干支 *gānzhī* 'stems & branches' of their own. Stems and branches only apply to the solar calendar – their calculation is based on the position of the sun. The rise and fall of the sun determines days, however the rise and fall of moon does not determine nights. This incidentally, is why the lunar calendar cannot be used in calculating 四柱八字 *Sìzhù Bāzì* 'Four pillars, Eight character' astrology.

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