

CLASSICAL CORNER

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



Hello and welcome to the Classical Corner. In this issue a shocking revelation that should change the minds of the most die-hard southern hemispherists, but probably won't. For anyone who missed this debacle (and good luck to you, but where have you been?) there has been an unfortunate theory floating around, with very little real support but plenty of controversy, that certain theories in *Fengshui* should be inverted / reversed / flipped for use in the Southern Hemisphere. At the risk of giving more life to something which deserves far less debate than it has already been given, the key arguments are that south of the equator certain natural forces are the 'opposite' of the north. They include - the path of the sun (which is only a matter of perspective), various weather patterns or tidal currents (which are not universal) and the way water goes down a sink (a myth, dependant on the shape of the sink, not the coriolis effect which is not influential in the built environment). Without needing to explore why these systems inherently and inevitably fail on both a theoretical and practical level, an answer of sorts can be drawn from the earliest foundation classics of Chinese Philosophy and *Fengshui*...

The quote below comes from the 汉 *Hàn* dynasty philosophical text, the 淮南子 *Huáinánzǐ* 'Masters South of the River'. Compiled by Prince 刘安 *Líu Ān*, in the year 139 B.C.E. the text is a collection of scholarly works on daoist philosophy, astronomy, geography, ritual, health, ethics and other topics intended as a kind of curriculum for monarchs. Somewhat of a 'Emperor's encyclopaedia'. The geographical chapter on 地形 *Dìxíng* 'Earthly Forms' yields the following lines -

九州之大，纯方千里，九州之外，乃有八演，亦方千里。
八演之外，而有八宏，亦方千里。南方曰都广，曰反户。

*Jiǔzhōu zhīdà, chúnfāng qiānlǐ, Jiǔzhōu zhīwài, nǎiyǒu bāyǎn, yīfāngqiānlǐ.
Bāyǎn zhīwài, éryǒu bāhóng, yīfāng qiānlǐ. Nánfāngyuē dūguǎng, yuē fǎnhù.*

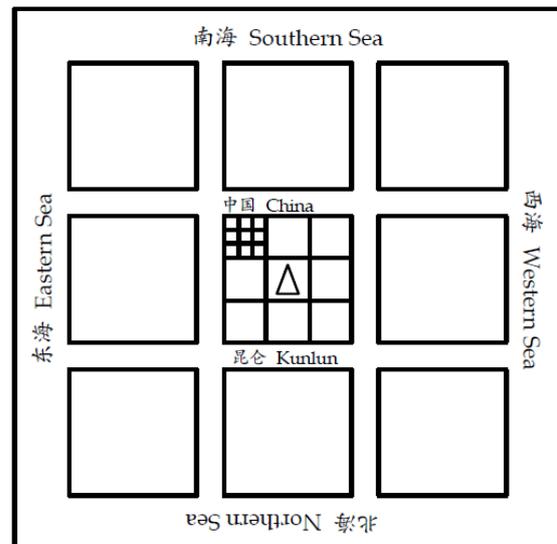
"The nine land divisions are big, one thousand square li¹ large, outside of the nine land divisions, there are eight distant regions, they are also one thousand li square. Outside of the eight distant regions, there are the eight expanses, they too are one thousand li square. The Southern is called 'Vast Capital', also called 'Reversed Doors'."

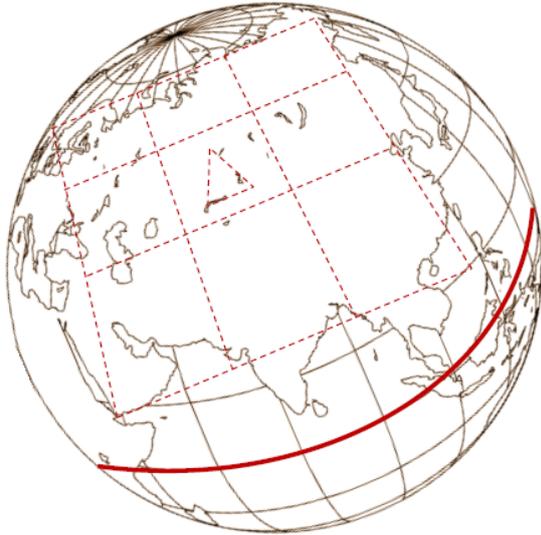
- *Huainanzi*, Chapter 4, part 6

Commentary

This description of the kingdom of China and its surrounding regions is likely derived from an even earlier geographical source that contains similar passages - the 山海经 *Shānhǎijīng* 'Pathways of the Mountains and Seas' dating from around the 4th century B.C.E. The lines describe a classic nine square grid system that maps the lands. Together with the accompanying lines the verse could be pictorially represented as shown here².

The 'Middle Kingdom' is located in the south-eastern division of the central region (itself divided into nine smaller provinces), the grandfather of all mountains and the mythical centre of the earth, 昆仑 *Kūnlún* mountain, is therefore to the north-west. A possible modern interpretation of this is also diagrammatically represented below.





Interpretation

Beyond the central divisions, the distant regions and the surrounding seas, lie the expanses. The south of which is particularly interesting in that it is called *Duguang* but also referred to as the land of 'Reversed Doors'. The suggestion here is that *Duguang* the Southern Expanse is below the equator, therefore the people face their doors in a northerly direction (the opposite of the traditional Chinese south facing dwelling) to catch the sun.

It is important to note here that while at face value this may appear to be support of the 'Southern Hemisphere Considerations' school of thought, deeper analysis proves otherwise. This is so for a number of reasons -

Firstly this clearly show the Chinese had knowledge of 'differences' south of the equator at a very early stage in the cultural development -

the *Han* dynasty, also known as their 'golden age' of philosophical thought. It is not known if they had already journeyed so far at this stage in history, but likely, considering the detail of their descriptions of the populations, topography, flora and fauna (no matter how fantastical in interpretation at times) in these ancient guidebooks. With this knowledge in place, there are no records of any attempts made throughout China's long history to reconcile any changes to the compass, calendar or elements, trigrams, stems and branches.

Secondly, without doubt they had travelled well below the 0° parallel by the time of the 14th Century C.E. The voyages of the great explorer 郑和 *Zhèng Hé* took Chinese in vast numbers throughout South Asia, Middle East and even the eastern coast of Africa. Still there is no evidence that theories too account for supposed 'opposite phenomena' were proposed, nor buildings erected there in such a manner to support this.

Finally this information about the changes of the southern regions was unquestionably in the hands of the *Fengshui* masters. The most famous commentator and editor of the most popular edition of the aforementioned *Shanhaijing* 'Pathways of the Mountains and Seas' was none other than the grandfather of *Fengshui* himself 郭璞 *Guō Pú*. The author of the original *Fengshui* classic the 葬书 *Zàngshū* 'Book of Burial', himself made no suggestion of any alterations needed for the practice of *Fengshui* in the Southern Expanses.

With all this evidence of prior knowledge it is hard to believe the *Fengshui* masters of antiquity, who much like the masters of today, prided themselves on exploring new theories and promoting greater understanding of the art, didn't have the wisdom to make corrections for the Southern Hemisphere. Are we to believe it took not the combined minds of thousands of years but some self proclaimed experts from the last decade or two to work this out? This does lead to one last point though, and that is of orienting to the sun. It surely does make sense to face north in the southern hemisphere to attract the most warmth of the sun, as much as it does to face south in the northern hemisphere. On this point many modern practitioners agree, not all southerly directions are automatically auspicious according to the compass school. It is therefore a requirement of form to face the sun and need not have us alter the compass or calendar in any way to match.

End Notes

1. A 里 *li* is a Chinese unit of distance approximately equivalent to 0.5km
2. With south at the top according to classical Chinese mapping convention

References

- Liu An* [translation: Major, J.S.] (1993) 'Heaven and Earth in Early Han Thought' State University of New York Press
Liu An [translation: Major, J., Queen, S., Meyer, A. & Roth, H] (2010) 'The *Huainanzi*' Columbia University Press
 Strassberg, R.E. (2002) 'A Chinese Bestiary - Strange Creatures from Guideways through Mountains and Seas' University of California Press