

CLASSICAL CORNER

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



“Will it be eight pieces of pie, or nine squares of river turtle?”

Hello and welcome to the Classical Corner. In this issue I am hoping to clear up one of the old conundrums of the 理气派 *Lìqì pài* ‘Patterns of qi [Compass] school’ of *Fengshui* – on the menu is a hearty meal of building portions. Should we use the eight sectors or nine squares to divide a structure for analysis? For the answer, as always, we turn to the classics.

By the Chinese literary definition, to be a true classic a text needs to have been written during or before the 汉 *Hàn* dynasty (206 B.C.E. – 220 C.E.). Just having the word 经 *jīng* ‘classic, cannon or scripture’ on the end of a title doesn’t necessarily make it so (though it must have been as good for marketing as attributing to a legendary mythical figure, both common practices in Chinese scholarly history). There are few remaining *Fengshui* manuals that meet the criteria. The 葬书 *Zàngshū* ‘Burial Book’ mentioned in last issue’s column could be considered a likely commentary of an earlier lost classic, the 书经 *Zàngjīng* ‘Burial Classic’, as it preserves many of its lines and elaborates upon them - but itself is not truly a classic. One text that can hold this title though, is the 青囊经 *Qīngnángjīng* ‘Blue-green Satchel Classic’.

The exact date the *Qingnangjing* ‘Blue-Green Satchel Classic’ was written is unknown, but it is usually considered to be during the former *Han* dynasty. The title actually means ‘Classic of the Universe’ - 青囊 *Qīngnáng* ‘Blue-green Satchel or Bag’ being an old Daoist vernacular for the heavens¹. Authorship is commonly attributed to 黄石公 *Huángshí Gōng* ‘Master Yellow-stone’, a famous diviner, strategist and alchemist². Some of the contents of the of the three scrolls appear to have been taken from other classic texts, it contains passages also found in the *Zangjing* and 易经 *Yìjīng* ‘Classic of Changes’. Majority of its verses pertain to 方位 *Fāngwèi* ‘Directions & positions’ and early 三元 *Sān yuán* ‘Three cycles’ theory.

Our lines today come from the (3rd) lower scroll, and are amongst its most well known and regularly quoted -

地有四势，气从八方。

Dì yǒu sì shì, qì cóng bāfāng.

“Earth has four configurational-forces, qi [comes] from the eight directions.”

- *Qingnangjing* Lower Scroll, lines 86-87

Commentary

Line 86) The character 势 *Shì* has many applications in Chinese. It has been used to describe military formations, martial arts postures, finger patterns on stringed instruments and even sexual positions. All have a common meaning of ‘force’ - inherent potential energy stored in a physical configuration, like a coiled spring. In *Fengshui* it is part of the name for the older 形势派 *Xíngshì Pài* ‘Form and **Force** School’ method, and usually describes the ‘geodetic³ forces’ found hidden in the terrain of an auspicious 穴 *xué* ‘site’.

Line 87) The characters 八方 *bāfāng* are independently interpreted as ‘eight’ and ‘directions’ but together they commonly refer to the eight points of the compass (4 cardinal and 4 inter-cardinal) or ‘all directions’.

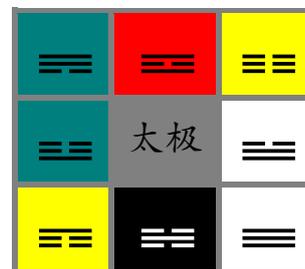
Interpretation

The square and its four sides relate to earth in Chinese cosmology. These also correspond with the seasons, the four cardinal directions and their celestial animals - 青龙 *Qīnglóng* ‘Blue-Green Dragon’ of the east, 白虎 *Báihǔ* ‘White Tiger’ of the west, 玄武 *Xuánwǔ* ‘Dark Warrior [Black Tortoise]’ of the north and 朱雀 *Zhūquè* ‘Vermillion Sparrow [Red Bird]’ of the south. In this instance I have translated 势 *Shì* as ‘Configurational-force’. The implication is of the energies present in the land formations of the aforementioned quartet of guardian beasts.

The eight points of the compass / eight directions are of course the 八卦 *Bāguà* ‘Eight trigrams’⁴. The passage informs us that they enter the site from the outside. This is significant for two reasons. Firstly the energies that as *Fengshui* practitioners we analyse within a building, are not radiating outward from the centre

as some would believe, but instead converge from exterior to interior. The 太极 *Tàijí* [Taichi]⁵ 'Supreme polarity' at the midpoint is the result, not the source. As the name suggests - 极 *jí* originally meant the 'ridgepole' at the axis of a home, the highest central beam where all the timbers ends met, and not the foundation or beginning of any building structure. At is useful to remember then that the *Taiji* is a finishing point, not the source.

Secondly, this verse explains to us the distribution of energy at a site. The only way that multiple aspects can meet at one point is to form narrowing wedge shapes toward the core. In the case of the eight *gua qi* 'trigram energies' they form the characteristic eight sectors used by many in the field. There has been some argument in modern times for use of the 九宫 *Jiǔgōng* 'Nine palaces' to divide a dwelling. Whilst this grid is the primary form of the 洛书 *Luò Shū* 'River diagram', and therefore an appropriate construct for the arithmetic of calculating 飞星 *Fēixīng* 'Flying stars' numbers, its application to residences is specific to a type of planning or mapping convention. The method has its origins in geography, as the earliest Chinese divisions of province, region, surrounding countries and continent. The same format was later applied to the distribution of family farming plots, the floor plan of the 明堂 *Míngtáng* 'Bright hall' temple-observatory complex at the Imperial Palace and eventually, the traditional square, central courtyard houses. It is however a man-made design and not representative of any natural distribution of energy. *Qi* simply does not course through the environment in small box-shaped patterns, so it should never be used to represent any organic flow.



This presents no problem for practitioners of the 八宅 *Bāzhái* 'Eight Houses' technique, but does create an often overlooked inconsistency within the 玄空 *Xuánkōng* methods. If eight energies are meeting at a centre point, should the hub of the structure be considered an independent sector with unique portents of its own, or merely the culmination of all others entering? In the authors opinion this is perhaps why beneficial auspices at the heart are often considered 'trapped' or 'unusable' - because there is no middle square in the first place!



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

There are two major influences on the destiny of any site - the power of the landscape features in front, behind and to the sides, along with the flow of energy from all the surrounding compass directions.

These two short lines come together to form a fairly accurate statement about *Fengshui* methods of 'time and space'. The physical strength (*shi* 'force') of the landform component is spatial, while the immaterial energy (*qi*) of magnetic resonances, possess the corresponding temporal factors. The substantial and the insubstantial co-exist, and in doing so define fate and "our field" of *Fengshui*.

End Notes

1. Some say the *Qīngnángjīng* 'Blue-green Satchel Classic' is named because the *Fengshui* masters of antiquity carried their most sacred books in a blue-green bag and there is even an ancient tale to illustrate thus, but it is likely just that, a fable.
2. Often referred to as a 'kingmaker' *Huangshigong* was said to have helped the *Han* overthrow the previous dynasty and establish their own, using the secrets of auspicious grave siting.
3. An appropriate scientific term for energy field phenomena (gravity, magnetic, tidal etc.) produced by the earth's size and shape
4. This is confirmed by a second instance of this same quote found in the *Zangshu* 'Burial classic' miscellaneous chapter, that continues on to list the eight *gua* in the following lines.
5. 太极 *Taiji* in the old system is written as 'Taichi', confusing and misleading as the 'chi' here has nothing to do with 气 *qi* also written as 'chi' in the outdated Wade-Giles transliteration.

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