



Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences  
Faculty of Landscape Planning, Horticulture and Agricultural Sciences  
Department of Landscape Architecture

# **A Comprehension of Feng-shui and Its Relevance to Landscape Architecture**

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# **A Comprehension of Feng-shui and Its Relevance to Landscape Architecture**

En förståelse av Feng-Shui och dess relevans till landskapsarkitektur

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## **Abstract**

The Feng-shui theory, although hotly debated since Communism took power in China, currently serves as instrument for landscape evaluation and improvement in the pursuit of an ideal landscape mode for livelihood and eventually for harmony between nature and human being. It has arguably, as guidance, contributed a lot to shaping the ideal landscape, the mode of which, as modeled on Feng-shui, might thus be seen to provide a basic model for the traditional elements of the Chinese built environment, such as city structure, architecture and garden. This thesis attempts to draw attention to issues with regard to the Feng-shui theory from multiple perspectives, including human geography, environmental psychology and Chinese philosophy. Feng-shui stems from the Chinese cosmology and is closely related to the Ying-Yang dualism. It articulates the Chinese space-place relationship and the dread of nature that profoundly affects the pattern of Chinese landscape and architecture. The thesis also conducts a cross-cultural comparison to differentiate the Eastern and the Western landscape styles, especially since the Enlightenment, during which Chinese architectural elements were initially brought to Europe, although the authenticity of these elements has been questioned. The thesis comes to the conclusion that Feng-shui is in essence a kind of genius loci and the understanding of Feng-shui contributes to landscape architectural theory, particularly from an ecological perspective for sustainability.

**Key words:** Feng-shui, ideal landscape, space and place, nature, harmony

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **1.1 Objective**

The objective of this thesis is neither to promote superstition nor to compile a how-to manual for Feng-shui application, but to explore the profound cultural values embodied in the Feng-shui theory as it has been practiced for over 3000 years. I chose Feng-shui as the topic for discussion because of its indispensable cultural status, typical of China, which contributes to the comprehension and interpretation of Taoist doctrines. I will endeavor to explain Feng-shui's relevance to landscape architecture. My ambition is to alleviate the curiosity or even misunderstanding of the Western readers (especially those from Christian world), who have regarded Chinese-like landscapes as ordinary, exotic or even pagan ornaments, but seldom have an awareness of the underlying cultural values and philosophical thoughts. The thesis attempts to present an intelligible description of Feng-shui and to propose its fundamental contribution to landscape architecture, especially the heuristic suggestions that propel the work of landscape architects, in the context of landscape urbanism.

### **1.2 Method**

At the very moment I decided to write a thesis concerned with Feng-shui, I realized that I had been studying in Sweden for 2 years as an overseas student majoring in landscape architecture and meanwhile I was perplexed by a thorny problem that how a young Chinese student like me without much knowledge of Western cultural background can convey logically, comprehensibly and coherently the idea of Feng-shui to both Chinese and Western readers without making it too ethnocentrically Chinese. In order to achieve this goal, I note that Feng-shui correlates with the Western landscape theories which to a large extent are also applicable to interpret Feng-shui, and by which the Western readers could deepen their understanding of Feng-shui.

The main method is textual analysis. I endeavor to find some convergence or overlaps between Feng-shui and geography (Teather & Chow, 2010), that enables me to simplify my task and to push my work forward. Fortunately I have been drawn to the

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work of the geographer Yi-Fu Tuan who has an unusually broad insight both in the East and the West, probably because of his dual or hybrid cultural background, even though he left China 70 years ago. Tuan's work has provided the inspiration and the theoretical framework on which my work is based. I also invoke other theories from scholars such as Olwig, Relph and Casey. I am not interested in carrying out the comparison by means of conducting parallel step-by-step historical landscape/garden analysis going all the way through the time line. Rather, I will discuss how the typical Chinese landscape was shaped from an evolutionary perspective, arguing for the possible relevance of insights from this approach to the development of landscape architecture both in China and the West. Besides this, I will make use of mathematics (calculus) and semiotics (as applied to the Chinese characters) to support my arguments. The last focal point falls on the divergent attitudes toward nature that determine the different landscape/architectural styles between China and the West, the formal French garden and English landscape garden being chosen as the antithesis of the classical Chinese garden. At the end of the thesis, I will give some constructive ideas inspired from Feng-shui that deserve greater attention in the context of its implications for landscape architecture.

### **1.3 The Chinese cosmology**

Feng-shui has been playing a crucial role both in ancient and contemporary times, which serves as a criterion for landscape quality evaluation, for place transformation and most importantly for the maintenance and intensification of the unique qualities (identity) of places. There has been a revival of Feng-shui in its native territories, including Mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao. The increasing interest in Feng-shui has been experiencing a great deal of development in the Western world during the past two decades and prevailing world wide. However, it is a major challenge to give an explicit definition to Feng-shui from a single perspective, because it involves extensive hypotheses with regard to theology, religion and folk legend, and with a specialization in nature. It has been severely suppressed during the Cultural Revolution in mainland China (1966-1976) probably due to its elusiveness, ambiguity and even mysteriousness that go against the ethos of communist materialism. Although Feng-shui is not totally accepted, it affects the features of the built environments.



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Feng-shui should be comprehended from a theological perspective since those mysterious origins and explanations of Feng-shui in old China appear to be exaggerated and untenable. The understanding of Feng-shui that can be gained from a human geographical approach, I would argue, is both more interesting and reliable as a means of interpreting its culturally rooted connotations and demonstrating its prevalence. It can be argued that Feng-shui is in fact a form of customary law drawing upon a model of the ideal landscape shaped in ancient China. The ancient objects excavated from a Yangshao grave show the very basic physical features of Feng-shui (Bramble, 2003, p. 27; Ding, 2008, p. 16), representing the motif of protection by two sacred animals (figure 1). This coincides with traditional cosmology (figure 2) which has greatly influenced vernacular architectural characteristics.

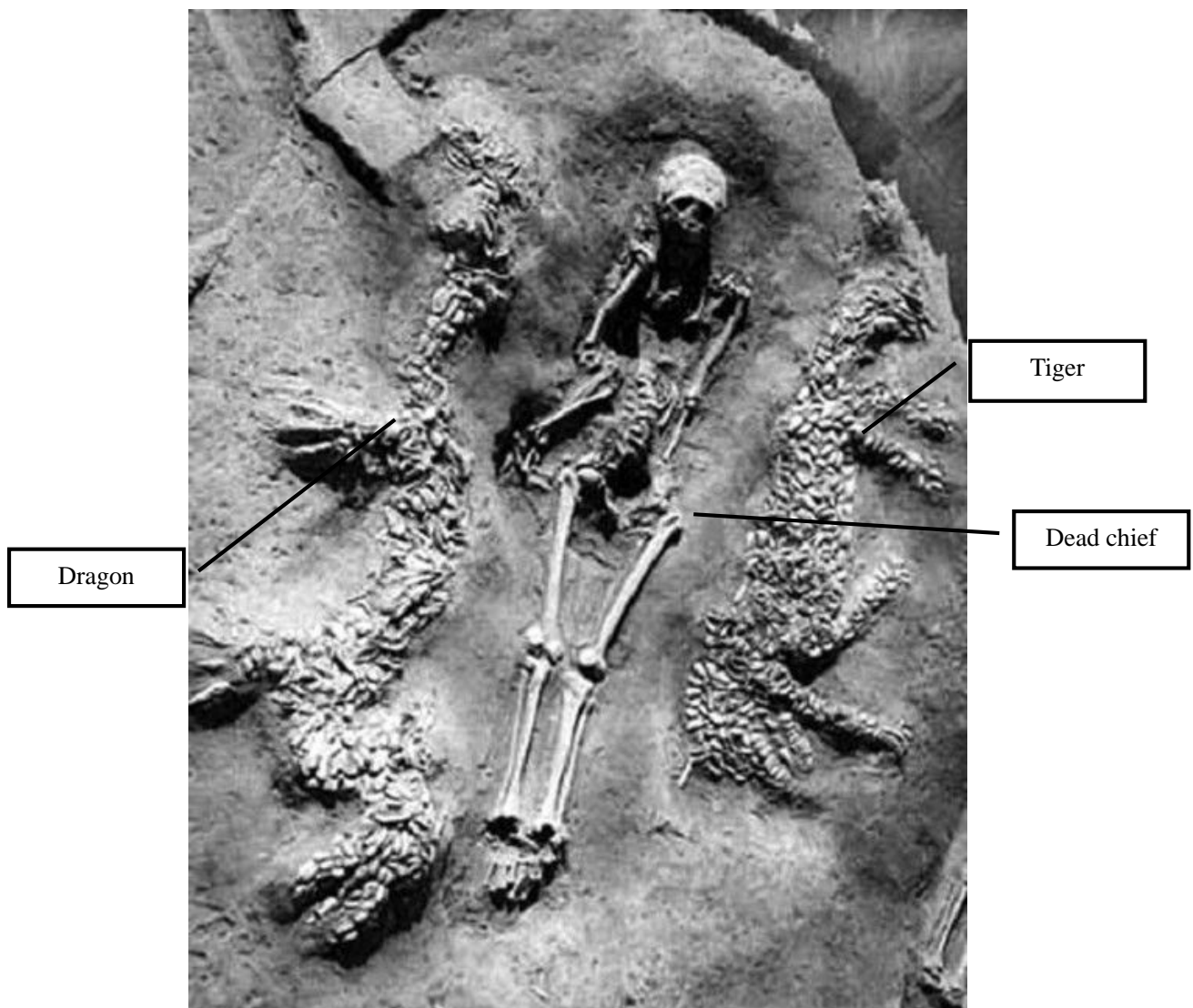


Figure 1: The Yangshao grave excavation

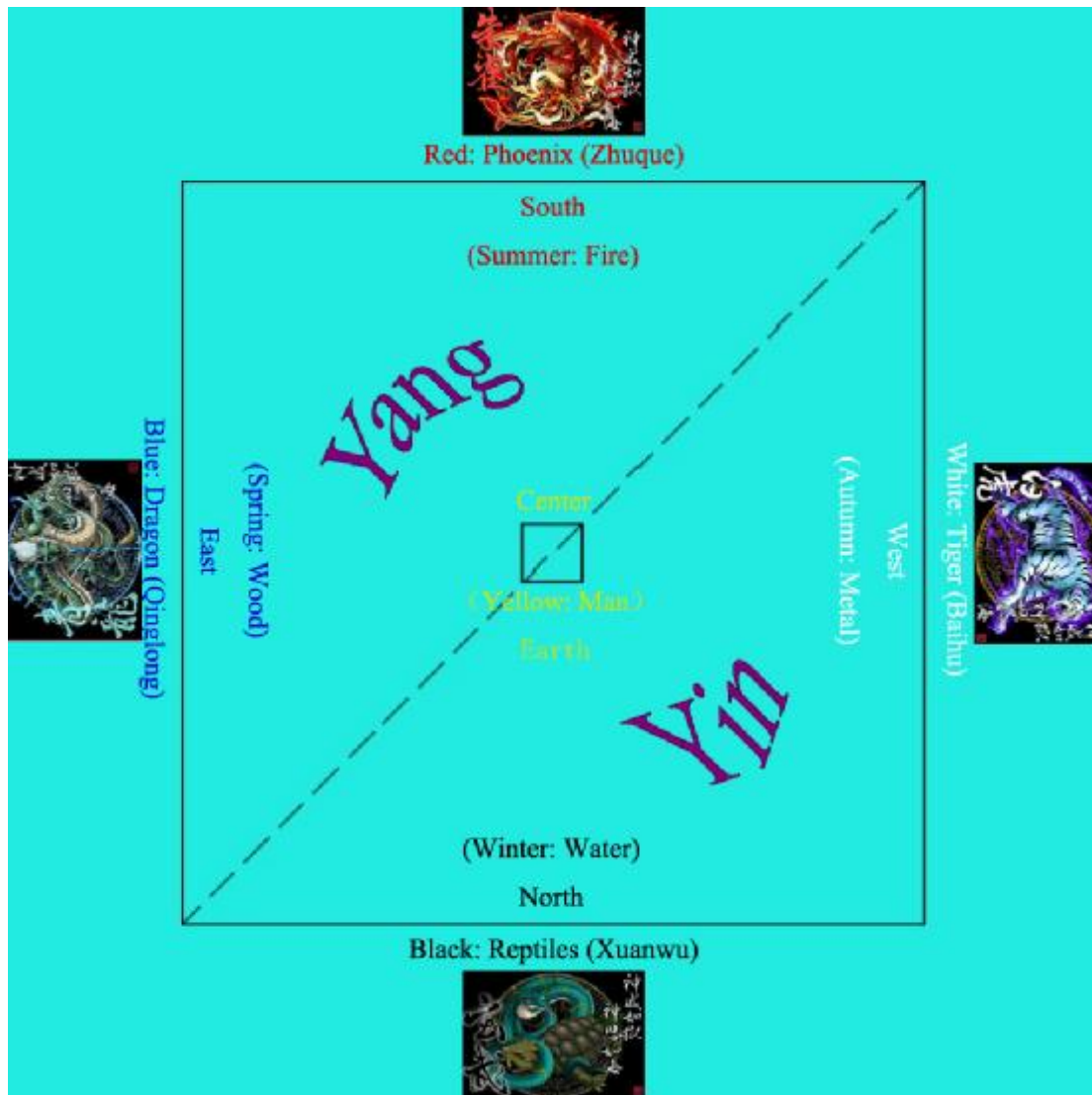


Figure 2: The Chinese cosmology

The diagram of Chinese cosmology shown above was originally drawn or carved on a piece of tile dating back to Han Dynasty (202 BC-9 AD). According to Tuan's description (2008, p. 93), this highly anthropocentric world view, consistent with Yangshao excavation, and based on a foundation in Taoist philosophy (Ying-Yang), implies the human sense of environment in ancient China. It shows animal symbols lying at the four cardinal points with a man standing at the center. Close to the east edge is the Blue Dragon, which stands for the color or vegetation and the element wood. Occupying the direction of the rising sun is also a symbol of spring. To the south is the Red Phoenix of summer and of fire with the sun at its zenith. To the west is "the White Tiger of the metallic autumn, symbolic of weapons, war, executions, and memory and regret, and unalterable past mistakes" (Wu, 1963, p. 12, as referenced in

Tuan, 2008, p. 93). To the north is winter's darkness, out of which all new beginnings must come. The north is associated with reptiles, black color, and water. At the center of cosmos is man on the yellow earth. Man is not pictured on the Han tile, but his very human desires are made known in the written characters for "long life" and "happiness". Each animal in accordance with its color corresponds to the geographical condition within its own region, i.e. physiognomy and climate. This worldview to a large extent was derived from primitive environmental experience and intuitive perception in ancient China. It is a kind of mythical space and could represent an approach in which people seek a sense of order and fitness (Tuan, p. 88, p. 93).

### **1.4 The dualism of Yin-Yang**

Feng-shui is something of a symbolic art that has been prevalent in China for over 3500 years, whose evolution is intimately related to Taoism (Yin-Yang) (figure 3), in pursuit of harmonious relationship between the human and nature.

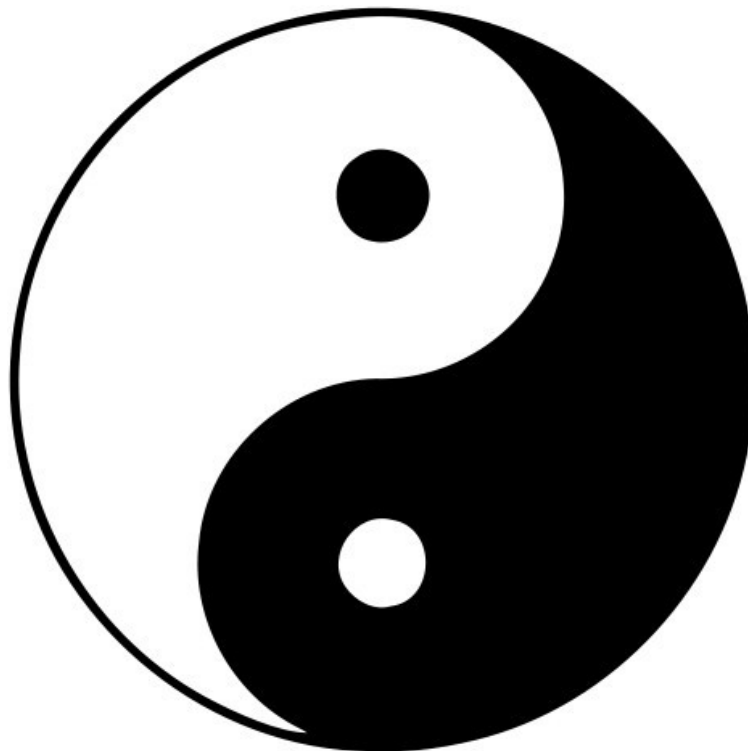


Figure 3: The symbol of Yin-Yang

The main idea of Taoism is that everything in the world could be divided into Yin and Yang. Yin conveys negative meaning, which suggests something bad and cold. Yin

also communicates the ideas of death and female; night and winter; moon and earth etc; Yang implies the opposite, which suggests the positive, good and hot; male, life, day, summer, sun and sky etc. By gazing at the Yin-yang symbol, readers could be enlightened that Yin (black) and Yang (white) are of a pair of opposites. No one is however independent of the other. Each swirl contains a dot from the opposite at its center. Yin and Yang coexist and are always in conflict and tension. Only by handling the conflict and tension can balance be maintained and thereby harmony achieved (Palmer, 1997, pp. vii-ix). In other words, there is something of each in the other. Yin cannot thrive or even survive without Yang, and vice versa. In a narrow sense, the Chinese people endeavor to maintain the Yin-Yang balance in that according to Taoism, balance equals harmony. Once this kind of balance or harmony is established, what becomes important is to keep this harmony from being disturbed. The disturbance of harmony implies inauspiciousness which may lead to misfortune. This is the reason why people respond violently to those who intend to destroy their geomantic landscape. For example, João Maria Ferreira do Amaral, the Governor of Macao, was killed on August 22<sup>nd</sup> 1849 because he attempted to construct new roads at the cost of destroying the directional aspect of some old Chinese tombs, with indifference to the Feng-shui power. He was thus attacked and beheaded by the Chinese residents. The Chinese called this dastardly deed the revenge of Feng-shui (Eitel, 1993, p. 2). Another similar case occurred during the Qin Dynasty (221 BC-206 BC), when a well known general was given a death penalty because the construction of Qin Great Wall under his supervision for military defense against Mongolian in the north was considered as a disastrous violation of Feng-shui (Rossbach & Lin, 1998, p. 58).

### **1.5 A rudimentary description of Feng-shui**

The holy power of Feng-shui has been defined as ‘a unique and comprehensive system of conceptualizing the physical environment which regulates human ecology by influencing man to select auspicious environments and to build harmonious structure (i.e. graves, houses and cities) on them’ (Yoon, 1980). The key word here is “auspicious”, reflecting the traditional Chinese worship or awe of nature, in which hopes are pinned on a mythical power. People believe that one could be auspiciously or adversely affected by nature. If a person selects an auspicious site and occupies it properly, he will enjoy good fortune. If he selects an extremely inauspicious place and

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occupies it, he will suffer misfortune (Yoon, 1980). Moreover, they also believe that their descendents can benefit from the site as long as they select it properly, following the Feng-shui principles. In this sense, Feng-shui is simply a system of superstition, supposed to teach people where and when to build a tomb or to erect a house so as to insure those concerned with everlasting prosperity and happiness (Eitel, 1993, p. 3). Feng-shui thus exerts a powerful dominance in the location of tomb sites and the layout of architectures such as houses, villages and cities (Lai, 1974). Early Feng-shui experts and practitioners could thus be described as “architects” and “landscape architects” as they can be said to have done a decent job of creating esthetically pleasing environments.

## Chapter Two: Space and place, the ideal landscape model

### 2.1 The geographical explanation of Feng-shui

In this section, I intend to carry out an analysis relying on the connection, or more exact, the convergence between Feng-shui (geomancy) and geography. In the case of geography, the suffix *-graphy* means “writing or representation” (Olwig, 2008b). So geography could be deemed a spatial science that deals with earth/land representation. A branch of geography is chorography, the root of which is *choros*, meaning place (Olwig, 2008b). In this sense, chorography is an art of place representation. Geomancy is basically defined as the discipline of siting (choosing and representing proper place) (Tuan, 1968; Freedman, 1968; March, 1968; Lai, 1974; Eitel, 1993, p. 1). Feng-shui therefore could be classified as a form of spiritual geography. Feng-shui practitioners could thereby not only be called “architects” and “landscape architects,” but also “geographers” (Yoon, 1980; Teather & Chow, 2010).

### 2.2 Space and place

Feng-shui is a form of environmental understanding by which people redefine environment by transforming space (undefined landscape) into an ideal of place (an ideal landscape). From a geographical perspective, place could be conceptualized as a specific location imbued with meanings and attachments (Cresswell, 2009). In this sense, place is not those visible or physical objects but rather an entity of meanings (Entrikin, 1976, as referenced in Bailly, 1993). Space is abstract and vague, but place is objectified and generalized by people’s redefinition (figure 4).

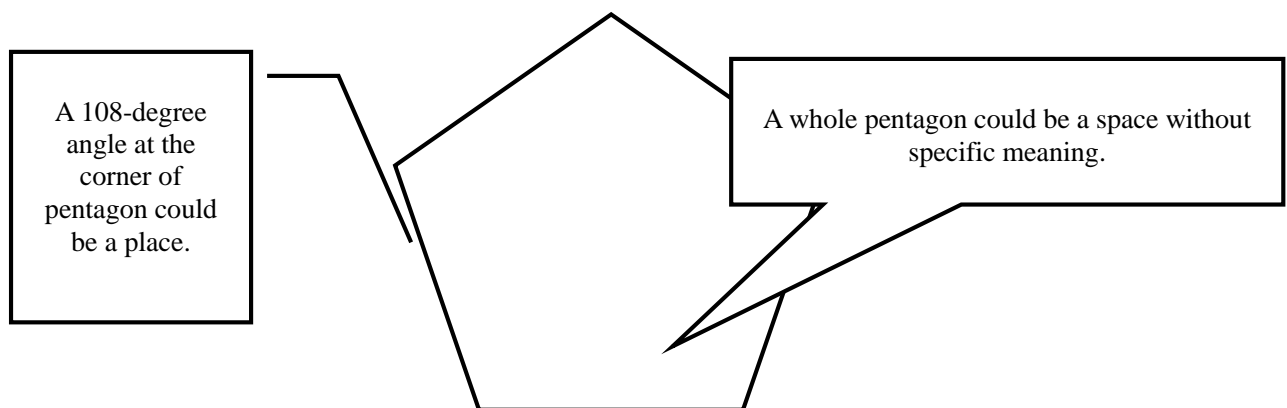


Figure 4: The metaphor of space and place

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“Place is a type of object. Place and objects define space, giving it a geometric personality (Tuan, 2008, p. 17).” The geometric personality is not a locale that consists of materiality such as borders, nodes and functional objects included, but rather a receptacle of particular meanings that evoke people’s emotions to make place fully place-like. To generalize this concept briefly, space comes into existence ahead of place that somehow needs to be redefined by means of giving specific meanings without which place could never be differentiated from space. The process of redefinition and differentiation is also that of environmental perception depending on experience based on which people explore and perceive nature and afterward establish a sense of place (order and fitness) in their environment (figure 5). Anyway each place has to embrace at least one specific meaning, the function of which is to build a bond to place.

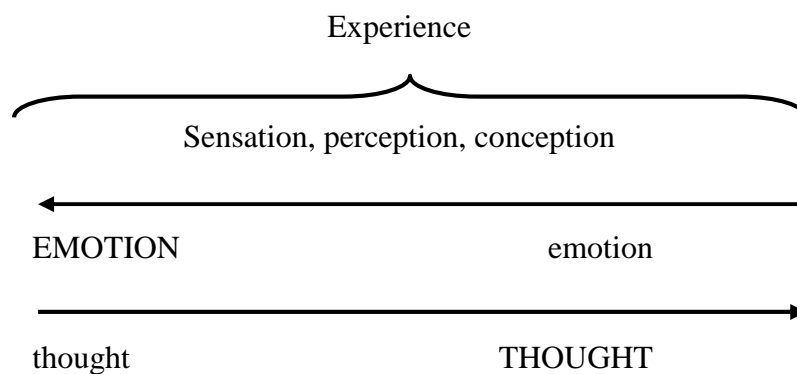


Figure 5: Environmental experience

Lukermann believed that a place is not the where of something; it is the location plus everything that occupies that location seen as an integrated and meaningful phenomenon (Lukermann, 1964, as referenced in Relph, 1976, p. 3). In a word, place is an indispensable link in the chain of knowledge (Prince, 1961, as referenced in Relph, 1976, p. 1). Experience plays a dominant role as the foundation of geographical reality. Geography is initially a profound and immediate experience of the world that is filled with meaning, and as such is the very basis of human existence (Dardel, 1952, as referenced in Relph, 1976, p. 5). Tuan also indicated that formal geography is a mirror for man, reflecting and revealing human nature and seeking order and meaning in the experiences that we have of the world (Tuan, 1971, as referenced in Relph, 1976, p. 4). Thus only by experiencing environment can man evolve a sort of geographical theory, no matter whether it is tenable or not, to

transform space to place, i.e. from the undefined landscape to the ideal landscape. Landscape, in which the spirit of place resides (Relph, 1976, p. 30), could be the most influential medium between space and place.

### **2.3 Landscape and place**

Feng-shui, I would like to argue, is an effective approach to correlate landscape to/with place, enabling people to be in a place-world. In the case of a defined landscape, it is definitely place; in that of an undefined landscape, it is space. Plato regarded space as “forerunner to primal regions, from which particular places arise, resulting in a rather geometric portrait of place” (Kenzer, 1999). “Landscape and place do have something to say to each other” (Setten, 2006). Landscape could actually be transformed into place, by particular groups or individuals, preferred and deemed as creation which only takes place in place, and only from which place proceeds (Sack, 2000). Feng-shui functions as the indicator that evaluates if a landscape is qualified to be ideal (home) (figure 6), to be exact, to be place, revealing the one-to-one relationship only by means of establishing which human identity within the place could be shaped.

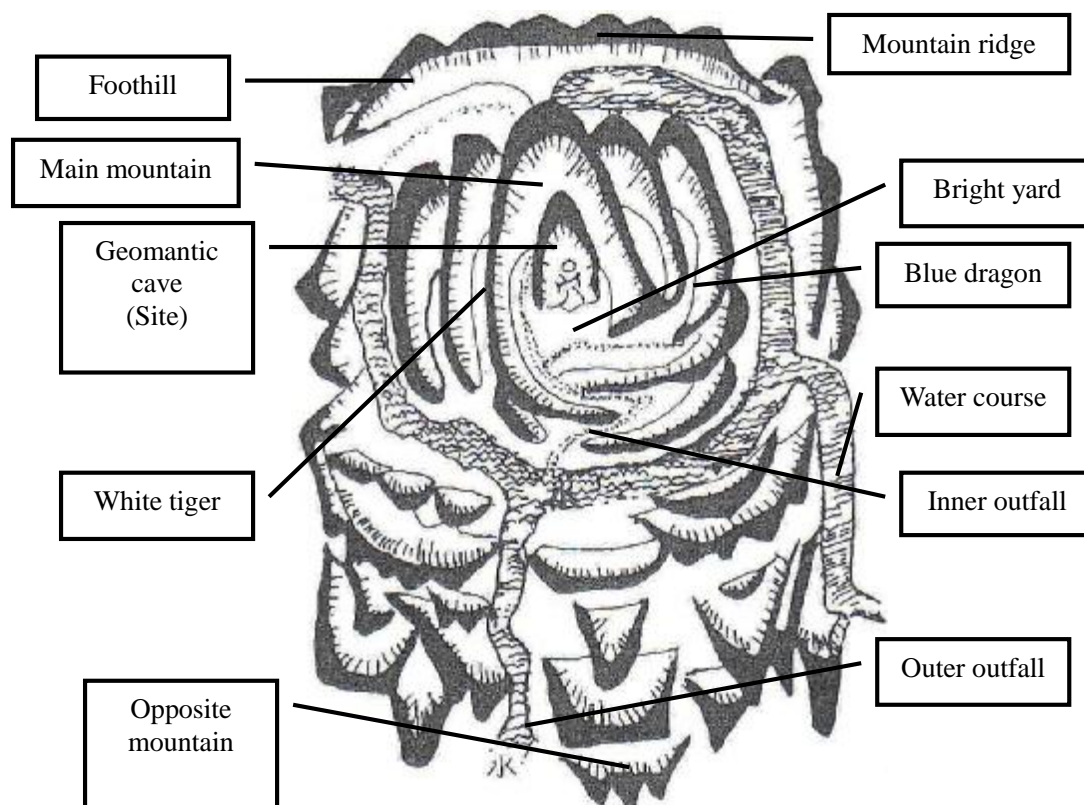


Figure 6: The ideal landscape model



### 2.4 Ideal landscape

When it comes to the Chinese ideal landscape (geomantic landscape), the Feng-shui theory proposes its model as place, although this sort of ideal landscape ever served as site selection. It describes the Chinese ideal landscape as below: The site should be located in a basin surrounded by mountains; at the back of the site lies the main mountain; there should also be piedmonts to the left and right respectively (blue dragon and white tiger); in the front there should be a vast plain opposite which there should be a facing mountain; and indispensably there should be water courses going sinuously around the site (Yu, 2000, p. 20). To be more visualized, the model is followed by a series of analogical ones (figure 7, 8 and 9).

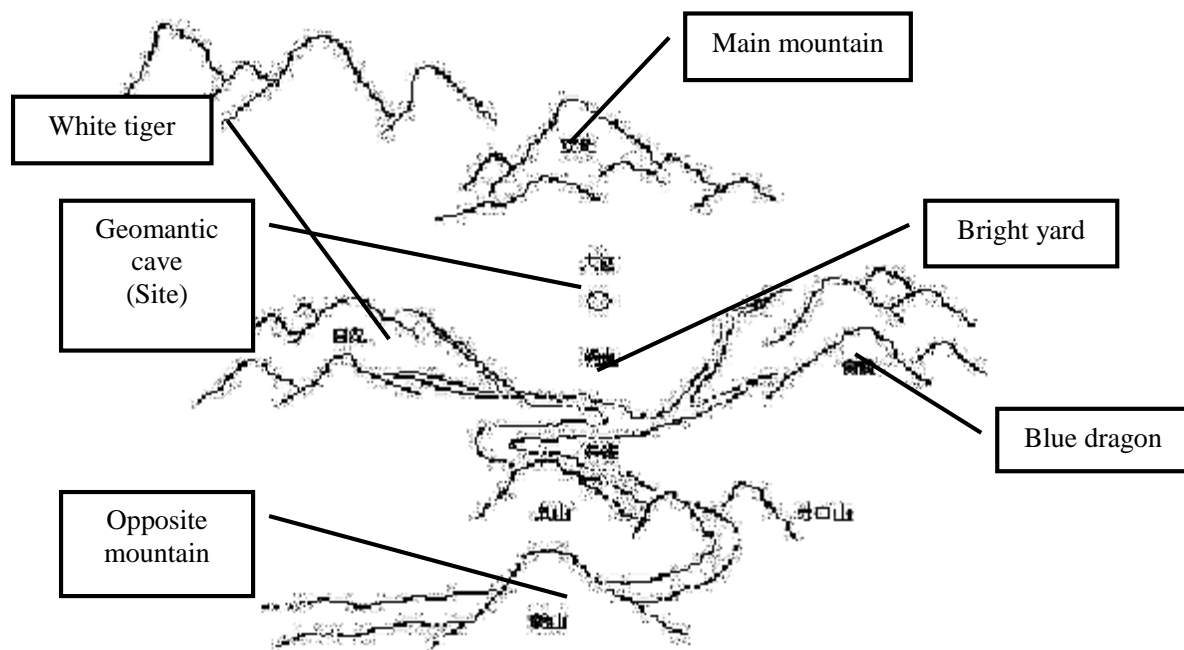


Figure 7: The visualized sketch

The ideal landscape is depicted in accordance with traditional Chinese cosmology, representing Chinese utopia vividly. The Chinese people are very critical when selecting a site for tomb (Yin) or abode (Yang). In order to appropriately select a site for dwelling, multiple needs have to be met. Indeed site selection with reference to Feng-shui is an almost instinctive behavior typical of Chinese and it reflects an attitude of worship toward nature due to the origin of the Chinese civilization. Basically the Chinese civilization could be described as a kind of basin civilization because it rose from the basin areas. According to archaeological excavation in China,

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the habitats of hominids were built in the basin areas, almost without exception, ranging from 1700000 to 10000 years ago (Yu, p. 79).



Figure 8: The conceptual model

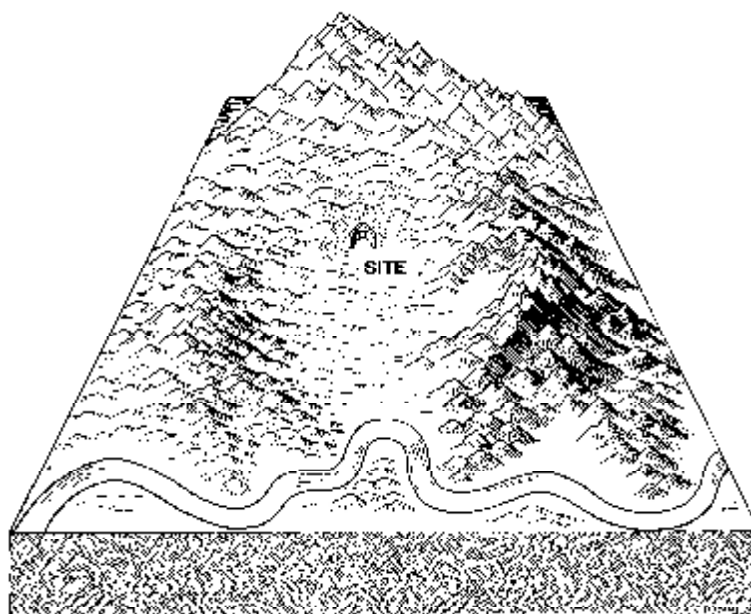


Figure 9: The topographical model

### **2.5 Dwelling, sense of being and identity**

The fact is that site is for dwelling, no matter whom it is for, the dead (Yin) or the living (Yang). Dwelling is a way of being in the world (Cresswell, 2009). In this sense to dwell means to be in the proper place where one is supposed to belong. Dwelling could be regarded as the unique approach to shape the bond between humans to place. Heidegger argued that “place places man in such a way that it reveals the external bonds of his existence and at the same time the depths of his freedom and reality” (Heidegger, 1958, as referenced in Relph, 1976, pp. 319-339). To Heidegger, place and self are overwhelmingly inseparable because neither self nor place could exist without each other (Casey, 2001). In a word, place thoroughly becomes the place by people’s dwelling. In turn, place provides people with a sense of being (Sack, 2000). In summary, once identified as an ideal landscape, the landscape becomes place. It contains the essential meaning of landscape, “a place of human habitation and environmental interaction” (Olwig, 1996).

### **2.6 Feng-shui and the origin of the Chinese civilization**

To fully comprehend Feng-shui, we have to combine what has been mentioned from geographic perspective with the origin of the Chinese civilization. As mentioned in the previous sections, the Chinese civilization is a type of basin civilization (Figure 10). The Chinese word for China literally means the ‘*middle kingdom*’ that reflects both the geographical location in which the Chinese civilization initially developed, and most importantly has profound implications for the conceptualization of the Chinese ideal landscape. In the eyes of the Chinese people, the ideal landscape is in essence a shelter that protects them from outer threats and helps them survive. From an evolutionary perspective, hominids had no choice but to find a shelter-like place for survival. To interpret this shelter-seeking behavior, it is reasonable to bring in a concept of biophobia. It is defined as “a partly genetic predisposition to readily associate, on a basis of negative information or exposure, and then persistently retain fear or strong negative/avoidance responses to certain natural stimuli that presumably have constituted risks during evolution.” “Humans are biologically prepared to acquire and especially to not forget adaptive biophobic (fear/avoidance) responses to certain natural stimuli and situations that presumably have presented survival-related risks throughout evolution (Ulrich, 1993, pp. 76-85).”

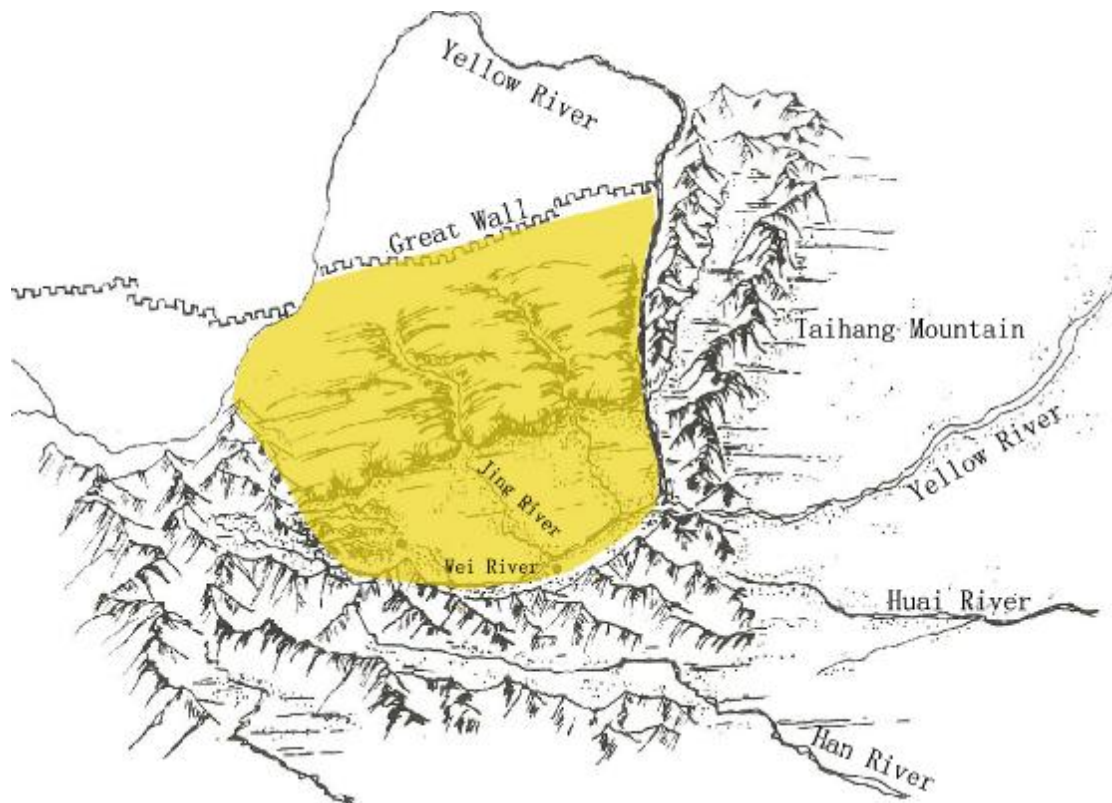


Figure 10: The origin of the Chinese civilization

It appears that an important adaptive feature of biophobia is that comparatively unforgettable responses to certain fear-relevant rather than fear-irrelevant natural stimuli can be acquired through vicarious conditioning or leaning experiences. In this sense, fear-relevant stimuli motivate humans to narrow down their territory to achieve a sense of security. On the one hand, they can hide themselves from the reach of their enemies'; on the other hand, they can hunt as long as preys are within their reach, relying on shelter-like topography. In one word, the sense of biophobia came into existence at the very beginning of human evolution. Shelter-seeking is in fact an inevitable behavior, aiming at acquiring a sense of security. Biophobic response, although in most cases negative, does contribute to creating the ideal landscape, i.e. place (figure 11). The meaning of place is thus tied to that of survival. The Chinese ideal landscape provides a sedentary habitat that considerably contributes to both creating a self-sustained system within which food supply is limited and to conducting defense against outer invasions, relying on the enclosed structure with barriers (Gadgil, 1985). The advantages of Feng-shui landscape are summarized as follows:

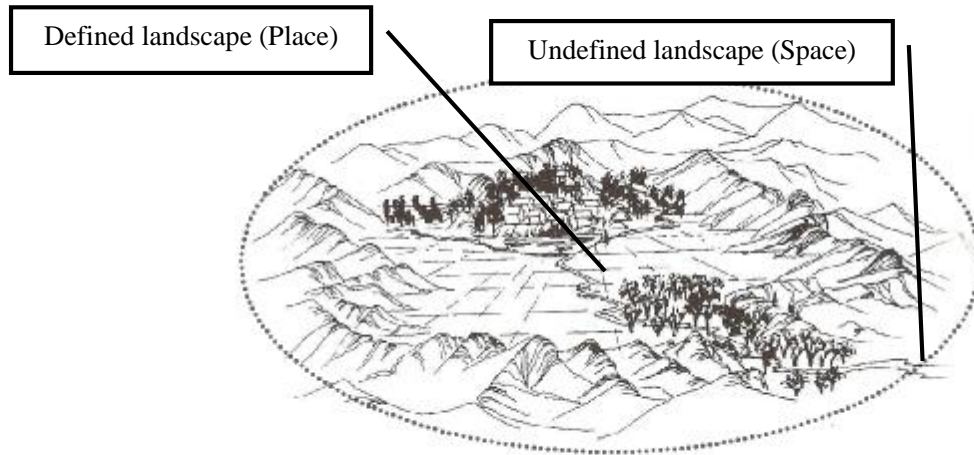


Figure 11: Landscape transformation

There is only one path going across the entrance of the site enclosed in the mountains by three sides. The semi-enclosed structure makes the site somewhat isolated from outer environment, becoming a self-sustained unit within which humans are allowed to hunt and labor safely. Furthermore, biological resources including fauna and flora on the fringe of the system and the outer environment seem to be sufficient for livelihood because on the fringe there is supposed to be more heterogeneous landscape. Another factor is the unique entrance, through which, both the locals and visitors can go in or out freely. This kind of entrance makes possible defense against aggression because invaders can be easily recognized at the moment they enter the narrow entrance. What is also important is that people could be well oriented by the unique path (gallery). To intensify the ownership of the unit, primitive markers may be erected for cautions to outsiders, and probably also for signs of direction. Those primitive markers could be regarded as the rudiments of modern landscape ornaments such as towers, arches and pavilions (Yu, 2000, pp. 83-92). In addition, the semi-enclosed unit is protected by mountains so that natural disasters such as tornados and floods can hardly affect it. Therefore this kind of disaster-proof unit could be a crucial criterion to evaluate if a landscape is qualified to be ideal or auspicious.

It is apparent that the defined and transformed landscape in figure 11 corresponds to its prototype in figure 10. This model could be the most influential in terms of the Chinese landscape and architectural styles.

### **2.7 The boundness**

I disagree with Casey (2001) on the point that landscape should be expansive. I note that landscape is supposed to be conditionally expansive. *Landschaft*, the root of landscape, means a territorial unit and also speaks of political and cultural identity (Olwig, 1996; Cosgrove, 2004). *Landschaft* is thus relative and it needs borders to maintain and intensify the identity thereby to shape place. Place deserves a delimited horizon or boundary that encompasses a certain range. “If space allows movements, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place (Tuan, 2008, p. 6).” The pause needs a place to take place within a given range determined by corresponding perimeter. Take for example the typical Feng-shui grave built in horseshoe shape (Rossback & Lin, 1998; Eitel, 1993, p. 45; March, 1968), this sort of grave imitates the Feng-shui model extremely well and could be a Feng-shui paradigm, reflecting the motif of shelter-seeking (figure 12).



Figure 12: The typical Feng-shui grave

The gravestone is embraced on three sides by concrete or brick walls, facing a big piece of open land. The horseshoe wall is likened to the main mountain and the two piedmonts (dragon and tiger), and the open land to bright yard (figure 7, 8, 9). The overall structure of the grave is precisely consistent with the Chinese ideal landscape model (figure 11), and with the pattern of Yangshao grave excavation (figure 1), and after all with the anthropological cosmology carved on the Han tile (figure 2).

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A graphemic analysis could deepen the understanding of Feng-shui. The Chinese character for nation or country is “国” (Guó) which could be split into two parts, including “口” (Kǒu) and “玉” (Yù), which respectively symbolize “enclosure” and “treasure” or “property”. The extended sense of this character is that to found a state people have to preserve their property from outer threats. This character runs in the identical groove with the Chinese cosmology (figure 2) and the origin of Chinese civilization (figure 10). Given the yellow color both at the center of the Chinese cosmology and in the location from which Chinese civilization rises, the yellow earth is therefore, although sometime taken for granted, a symbol of the whole state and people’s identity. The mountains embrace the yellow earth on which people take root for agriculture year by year. And importantly the yellow earth imperceptibly shapes people’s identity. That is to say that China used to be a nation nurtured within an enclosed place. That is the very reason why China is called the ‘*middle kingdom*’. In this context, to be in the middle means to be protected and secure, and eventually to be in the place-world to gain a sense of being. The concept favors the idea that “place is security, space is freedom” (Tuan, 2008, p.3).

## **Chapter Three: Nature**

So far I have discussed the physical features of the Feng-shui landscape. In this part, I am going to focus on the spiritual aspects.

### **3.1 The meaning of nature in the Chinese context**

Feng-shui is actually an obscure term that can neither be comprehended nor interpreted as easily as those of ‘*wind and water*’. The foundation of Feng-shui is an emotional concept of nature (Eitel, 1993, pp. 2-4). A further discussion on spiritual aspects of Feng-shui is therefore needed to deepen the understanding of nature. I do not think this seemingly intelligible term is easy to comprehend. Rather, it is sometimes complex or even elusive. One may ask: What is nature? The Oxford Dictionary gives a meaning that nature refers to *all the plants, animals and things that exist in the universe that are not made by people*. And the Chinese dictionary gives a substantially the same one, saying that nature is *the sum total of objective beings both in biosphere and non-biosphere in the universe*. Both explanations stress the key point that nature is an entity within which everything takes place spontaneously. In a broader sense nature includes both the things in it and the hidden power behind, i.e. the creative and irresistibly dominant force that generates those things. I will draw upon two quotations about nature from Tuan (2002, pp. 2-3): 1) “If you love nature, you must love gravity”. 2) “There is no such thing as bad weather. All weather is good because it is God’s”. Both statements reflect nature’s irresistibility that to a high degree accords with the Chinese perception. The Chinese attitude toward nature, in fact, is more distinct in comparisons with other civilizations. The Chinese people, especially in pre-historical time, hold a respectful and reverent attitude when perceiving nature, reflecting a supreme worshipping attitude. This worshipful sentiment stems from the belief that nature is an animate being that dominates everything in the universe, including the movements of planets, the rotation of seasons, the diurnal fluctuation, the climate change, the weather variations, etc. The term nature derives from the Latin word, *nascere* that means to be born or to come into being (Olwig, 1996; 2008a). The Chinese word for nature is “自然” (Zì Rán) which consists of two characters. The character “自” (Zì) means to be oneself or to be spontaneous. The second character “然” (Rán) means to be what it is supposed to be



or to be as it is. So the meaning of “自然” (Zì Rán) is that everything takes place spontaneously and will forever follow the spontaneity. Properly speaking, this spontaneity does not imply that everything really takes place spontaneously, but that it is the invisible dynamic and dominant force of the nature that makes everything happen. In this sense, nature in the Chinese culture means giving birth, creating or engendering. That is why people deem nature “not as a dead inanimate fabric, but as a living organism” (Eitel, 1993, p. 4).

### 3.2 An in-depth apprehension of Yin-Yang

Yin-Yang is the pervasive and universal form of being with the five elements revealing the content or expression of Yin-Yang. According to the Chinese belief, the existence in the universe is based upon the five elements, including metal, wood, water, fire and earth. Wood and fire belong to Yang and metal and water to Yin; earth is neutral. The five elements coordinate to constitute the universe. Moreover, in a particular sequence, each element gives rise or destroys another (Palmer, 1997, p. 16; Eitel, 1993, p. 14) (Figure 13). In general each element has a symbolic meaning. Metal refers to toughness, firmness or solidness; water to fluidness, fire to heat or thermal power, but wood implicates growth and earth equals soil that nurtures plants.

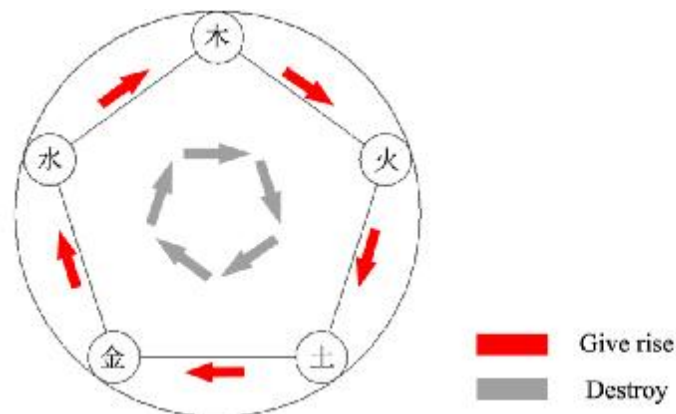


Figure 13: The relationship of five elements

“木” (Mù)=wood; “火” (Huǒ)=fire; “土” (Tǔ)=earth; “金” (Jīn)=metal; “水” (Shuǐ)=water

To classify something as Yin or as Yang is nevertheless problematic because of the abstract character of Yin-Yang. In general Yang is active, mutable and inconstant, but

## A Comprehension of Feng-shui and Its Relevance to Landscape Architecture

Yin is inactive, steady and changeless. The hemispherical dome world view in China originated from the belief that heaven is circular and earth is rectangular, but ultimately from Yin-Yang (figure 14).



Figure 14: The hemispherical dome world view

In pre-historical time, people drew a conclusion based on intuitive observation, believing that the heaven is the overturning cauldron-like celestial screen, inlaid in which the sun, the moon and stars move periodically, presenting various phases. That is why they thought heaven is unsteady. Compared with heaven, people took root on earth and held a belief that the earth is constant. To interpret this, I would like once more to use the Chinese hieroglyph, “田” (Tián) which shows how the earth looks in the eyes of the Chinese people, particularly in pre-historical time, in the sense of arable land or farm land. I believe that the chessboard-like character to a degree reflects how people demarcated land for agriculture, and that it reinforces the intuitive impression that the earth is rectangular. In this sense, heaven is Yang and earth is Yin because heaven is changing and moving but earth is not.

Another key point is that there are the above-mentioned five elements, or Yin-Yang, in each human being. One's physical and spiritual features, or to be more exact, one's state of mind, depends on his or her inner relationship between Yin and Yang. In other words, if one's Yin and Yang are in balance, he or she is in a state of ease or harmony, but if out of balance, he or she would be departing from the normal development as a

human being. This is also the point of departure of traditional Chinese medical science which asserts that the job of a doctor is not to cure one's illness but to reorganize one's Yin-Yang in order to keep Yin and Yang in balance. That is to say, human being is created by nature and is a part of nature. If the Yin-Yang of nature is balanced, nature is normal and thus it brings to human beings the state of harmony; but if imbalanced, the consequence is that human beings would suffer. Human beings have to, in turn, reconcile their own Yin-Yang with that of nature to follow the course of nature and achieve harmony with nature. For instance, people should take some *hot* (Yang) food such as chili in winter (Yin) to warm up and *cold* (Yin) food such as cucumber in summer (Yang). From a perspective of medical science, proper food intake in accord with nature's Yin-Yang facilitates one's health.

Yin-Yang is definitely the invisible but creative and controlling power that dominates the universe, and also the bond between human and nature. Taoist philosophers hold the idea that Yin-Yang pervades the universe, binding human and nature as one. Human beings exist in the constantly changing world and blend into nature. "We are the universe and the universe is us" (Palmer, 1997, p. 18).

### **3.3 *Chi***

As mentioned in the previous discussion, nature is not taken as an inanimate being, but as a living and breathing organism. To deepen the understanding of the breathing organism, *chi* has to be brought in as an abstract existence. "While the human body is a conglomerate of the two forces of Yin and Yang and the five elements, it is animated by *chi*" (Palmer, 1997, p. 57). *Chi* animates both human beings and nature. The proper definition of *chi* could be regarded as the vital energy or breath of nature. *Chi* is actually the Anglophonic pronunciation of Chinese character "气" (Qì) which literally means the generic term for gaseous substance but mainly refers to air or oxygen for breathing, and sometimes mist from nature. It is a common sense that if a man does not breathe, he would die. *Chi* is indeed an emblem of vitality or vigor without which everything is dying. Yin and Yang create *chi* that gives birth to beings. In other words, *chi* is generated if and only if Yin meets Yang. It is also rational to comprehend it in an analogical approach that male has to multiply his descendents together with female and vice versa. If male and female are thoroughly separated human beings are going

to become extinct.

### 3.4 The human-nature relationship

This notion is also applicable to nature that a place rich in *chi* is appropriate for dwelling. To dwell where *chi* gathers signifies breathing together with nature, to follow the course in pursuit of harmony with nature. In order to achieve this goal, people endeavor to find a place where Yin and Yang meet to generate vital *chi* that make human beings reintegrated into nature and come together as one. This human-nature relationship is the core of the Feng-shui theory in which the “human is viewed as a being at union with nature, rather than a being contraposed to nature (Yoon, 1982).” This proves that there is no boundary between human and nature (figure 15).

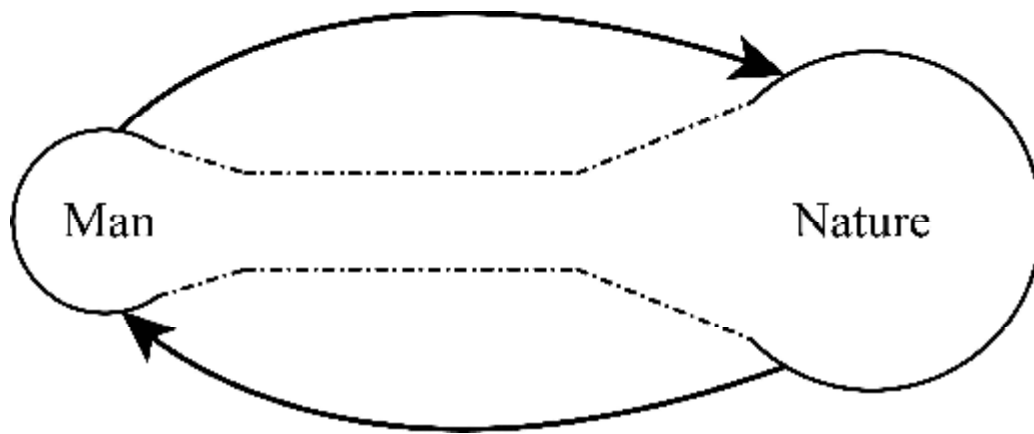


Figure 15: The relationship between human and nature

The dash line and black arrows show that the boundary between the human and nature is blurred and the two parts interact with each other simultaneously, coming together as one; the energy between the two is interchangeable and is always in a dynamic circulation. If people succeed in selecting a place where *chi* is generated, the site is definitely auspicious. In brief the responsive environmental influence of nature is somewhat determined by how people behave to achieve harmony in association with nature (Yoon, 1976).

The Chinese people believe that *chi* goes in human-nature circulation inscrutably and immutably and affects the whole universe. Man is mortal but nature is not. There is an old saying in China: “burial brings peace to the deceased.” If the dead (Yin) is buried,

## **A Comprehension of Feng-shui and Its Relevance to Landscape Architecture**

he has returned to nature, becoming *chi* and influencing those alive (Yang). However, if he is not buried, he will be rootless. That is why people treat the deceased (Yin) equally as those living (Yang). Feng-shui proposes that if a man is buried at a proper grave site (auspicious), his descendents will be possible to have a prosperous future and so will the circumambient region within which cities, gardens, houses are situated (March, 1968), because the auspicious site is rich in *chi*.

“A classical Taoist meditation is to work your way up from the bottom. Start with *chi*. Sense it in yourself. Focus on it. Now follow it through your body-Yin and Yang. Next, you need the Three. This means Heaven, Earth and you. So you feel your rootedness to the ground then reach up through your head to Heaven. Feet-Earth; Head-Heaven. Next go to the Two—Yin and Yang. Feel Yin in your bowels and Yang in your blood. Then go to the One-unity—you and the cosmos; you and all deities are One. Finally release yourself into Tao—the way of Nature. There is no distinct ‘you’ now. ‘You’ are part of everything (Palmer, 1997, p. 60).”

### **3.5 The Chinese topophilia**

Considering the sentiment of nature worship, I would restate Feng-shui and the ideal landscape model from a topophilia perspective. Mountains, especially those with high altitude, were sacred or even awful for the Chinese people long ago because the extremely limited mobility did not allow people to conquer them. According to Tuan (1990, p. 70), mountain used to be regarded as the very point where earth (Yin) and heaven (Yang) meet. Nothing could be comparable with the mountain as the source of *chi*. In order to gain an everlasting prosperity or auspiciousness, people have to preserve the vital *chi* and make it flow continuously. Mountains in the Chinese ideal landscape model thereby serve not only as the source of *chi* but also as enclosure for *chi* preservation and maintenance. Feng-shui, according to Guo (276-324 AD, the author of the ‘Burial Book’), is in essence the conveyer of *chi* that is carried by water (shui) and moved by wind (feng) (Guo, 276-324, as referenced in Xu, 1998). Water runs down the mountain slope, bringing *chi* all the way to the site, with the wind making *chi* flow.

### **3.6 Landscape painting**

## **A Comprehension of Feng-shui and Its Relevance to Landscape Architecture**

Feng-shui, together with people's attitude toward nature, could be represented by landscape painting. I believe that landscape painting in China may be distinguished from other counterparts in the world due to its non-perspectiveness. As Tuan puts it, "landscape painting is an arrangement of natural and man-made features in rough perspective; it organizes natural elements so that they provide an appropriate setting for human activity (Tuan, 1990, p. 122)." Tuan's definition is applicable in Europe only. In Europe, landscape painting was unprecedentedly developed since the Renaissance based on Euclidian geometry and linear perspective. Since the fifteenth century the technique of perspective contributed a great deal to landscape painting as an attempt to represent nature as landscape involving land surface scenery, but mainly the hidden controlling power of nature (Olwig, 1993). Landscape used to be a way of expressing the external world. Initially developed by Alberti, linear perspective directs the external world towards the individual located outside that space. Space is measured and calculated from a centric ray, and the rest of what is seen constructed around the vanishing point and within the frame fixed by external rays (Cosgrove, 1985). New techniques promoted the accuracy so that landscape painting could also be an attempt to copy nature. Hence Western landscape painting is a way of presenting reality (figure 16).



Figure 16: La Tempesta (Giorgione, 1508)

Giorgione's painting depicts an imminent storm, showing black clouds and thunder in

## A Comprehension of Feng-shui and Its Relevance to Landscape Architecture

great distance, representing the landscape vividly in various layers.

In contrast to landscape painting in Europe, the Chinese landscape painting pays less attention to accuracy but emphasizes the atmosphere of nature, expressing the strong desire of living in seclusion to take root in nature. To properly describe landscape painting in China, in general, terms such as *habitable* and *concealed* are fairly appropriate. The non-perspectiveness does not weaken the paintings' stereovision but on the contrary greatly contributes to intensifying the human-nature relationship described in Feng-shui. Chinese landscape painting does not depict the real world but the imaginary utopia for hermits. It attempts to show the harmony between human and nature, as Feng-shui describes it, by focusing on mountain and water (figure 17).

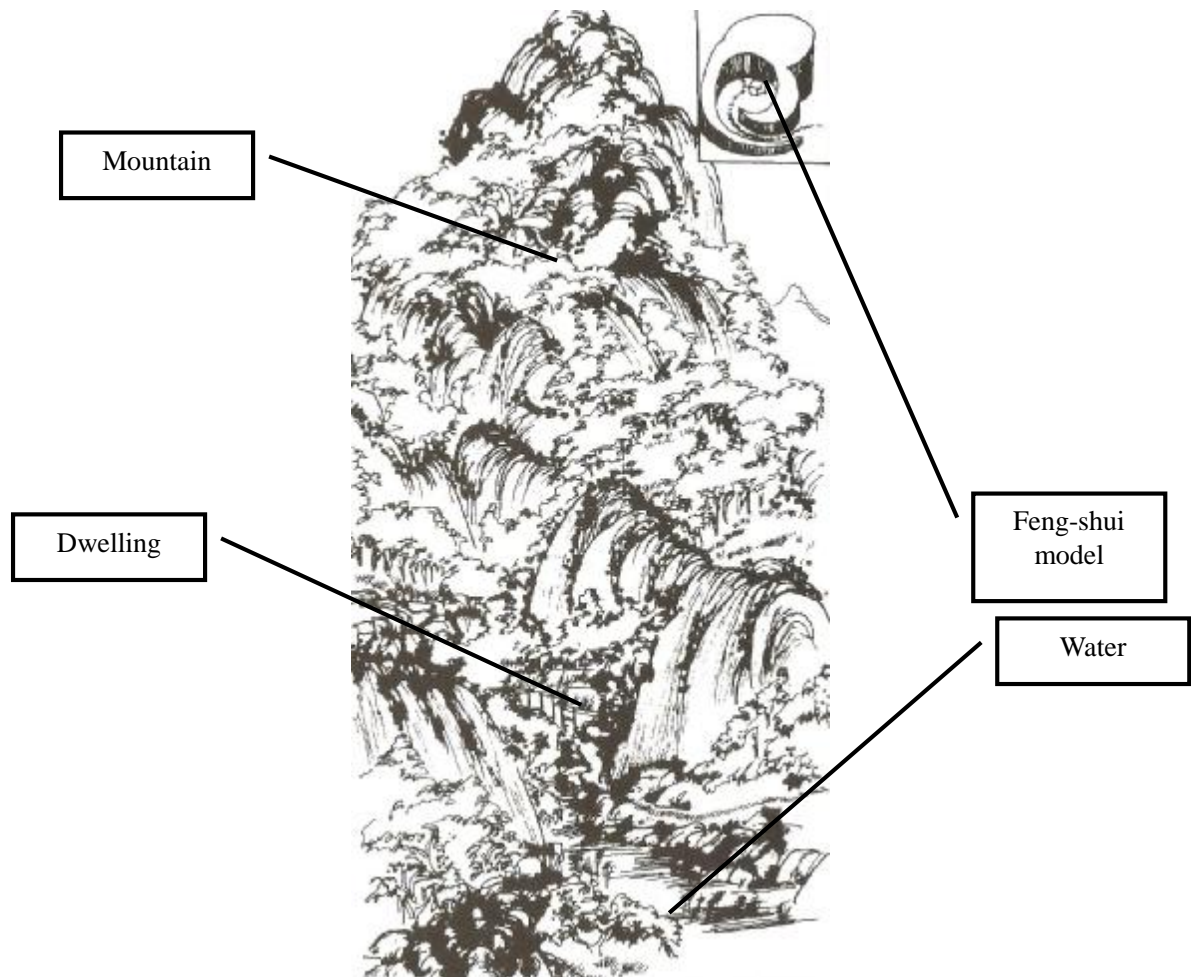


Figure 17: The typical Chinese painting

The Chinese term for landscape is always *shan-shui* (mountain-water), probably due to the mountainous and steamy topography. The underlying significance is that

## **A Comprehension of Feng-shui and Its Relevance to Landscape Architecture**

mountain and water (river/stream) could be the typical essence of China (Tuan, 1990, p. 127; Roszbach & Lin, 1998, p. 56). For example, during World War II patriotic students frequently participated in demonstrations against the Japanese troops of aggressors, reclaiming “return of our mountain (Yang) and river (Yin)” as an anti-Japanese slogan, in which the expressions *mountain* and *river* symbolize the territory of the whole nation. Human beings can be hardly seen in the typical Chinese landscape paintings, probably because they aim at creating an everlasting mood in which man has completely blended into nature. Compared with the modern European landscape paintings, the Chinese counterparts are echoing people’s yearning for nature.



## **Chapter Four: Architecture**

In this section I approach some traditional architecture styles in depth, revealing the underlying cultural values based upon the Feng-shui concept from multiple perspectives.

### **4.1 A synoptic description of the Chinese city, garden and architecture**

The classical Chinese garden is the most important topic because of its distinctiveness compared with any other garden in the world, no matter what styles they represent, in terms of layout or architectural details. Deriving from the Feng-shui prototype, the classical Chinese garden and traditional architecture considerably embody the philosophical doctrines and typical human nature of the Chinese people, which have proved to be attractive to Western landscape gardeners especially since the Enlightenment.

When the French Jesuit missionary Louis-Daniel Lecomte arrived in China in 17<sup>th</sup> century, he was greatly astonished by the distinctive characteristics of the Chinese cities and gardens, saying that the Chinese cities are rectangular and consist of countless grids. However, the gardens are irregular and tortuous. Both are at opposite poles of those in France. He was absolutely correct. It is evident that both the Chinese cities and gardens, imbued with philosophical thought, speak of the Chinese view and could be a microcosmos within which people attain a sense of being and of course a sense of belonging, putting themselves in the place-world.

Before discussing the city, garden and architectural details, I would like to say that the Chinese city, especially the ancient capital city, reflects feudal politics and imperial dignity; the traditional architecture shows the substance of human nature (Confucianism) with classical garden presenting the ideal of spiritual pursuit (Taoism) in contrast to what the city itself does. In general, both the Chinese imperial city and the classical garden follow the principles of Feng-shui, but there nevertheless exist some irreconcilable differences.

### **4.2 The imperial city**

### 4.2.1 The feudal hierarchy in ancient China

A planned city could be a symbol of the cosmos (Tuan, 1990, p. 153&164; Tuan, 2008, p. 102), and it shows the corresponding social hierarchy. It is important to argue that the layout of the Chinese capital cities expresses the hemispherical dome world view. During Chinese antiquity it was taken for granted that each feudal ruler (emperor) was the son of the heaven who has the supreme power over the world. The emperor called himself *royal* because no one is qualified to treat oneself as emperor's equal. *He sits not sure that sits too high*. In this sense a feudal ruler was spiritually living in a three-dimensional cosmos, on the top out of ordinary people's reach. That is why China, even in modern times, is always called “天下” (Tiān Xià) (under heaven) (Tuan, 1990, p. 37). The emperor was the one who sits most closely to the heaven and rules the earth (under heaven). The earth was entirely under the emperor's domination. Given the hemispherical dome view, in most cases architectural spaces strictly abode by the belief that heaven (Yang) is circular and earth (Yin) is rectangular. The rectangular shape pervades in China in architectural field. Consistent with the Han tile (figure 2), rectangular earth was conceived as a succession of concentration of feudal power, from robust to imperial (Tuan, 1990, p. 37) (figure 18).

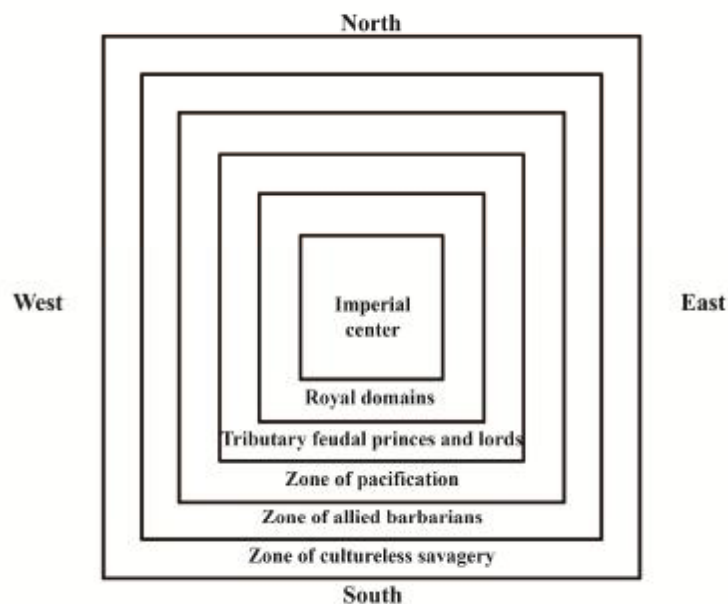


Figure 18: The rectangular earth as a hierarchical succession

Tuan's diagram only illustrates the two-dimensional social hierarchy of ancient China. Personally this hierarchy is supposed to be pyramid-like, showing the emperor at the



## **A Comprehension of Feng-shui and Its Relevance to Landscape Architecture**

precisely north and south, leading from the south gate of the royal palace all the way to the central gate of south city wall. The imperial and administrative palaces are located at core, symbolizing domination over the whole country and even the world (Wright, 1965, as referenced in Tuan, 1990, p. 165; Tuan, 2007, p. 26). Compared with Chang'an, Beijing has the same structure in terms of urban layout. Take the Forbidden City for example, the whole structure consists of numerous walled courts, each of which could be a smaller version of the whole palace.



Figure 20: The Forbidden City

Beijing, although not so historically splendid as Chang'an, displays the representativeness of the imperial city. A visible principal axis runs north and south, standing for the Polar Star and the celestial meridian. As Ayscough (1921), Heidenreich (1957) and Peng (1961) (as referenced in Tuan, 1990, pp. 166-167) describe it, each side of the square structure corresponds to traditional cosmology (figure 2). To the east the blue dragon stands for spring and the rising sun ; the red phoenix in the south for summer and the sun at zenith; the white tiger in the west for autumn; the black reptiles lies at the north side, symbolizing water and cold (Tuan, 2007, p. 28). “The forbidden City, perhaps the quintessential Feng-shui structure, was built on a flat plain and so required the erection-at enormous effort-of an artificial mountain (now called Coal Hill) at its northern boundary to shelter the future abode



of the Ming and Qing emperors (Chin, 1998, p. 6).”

If we extract a sub-court from the whole palace, we get a typical Beijing courtyard which could be a mini palace but is commonly used as dwelling by ordinary citizens (figure 21). “The courtyard house was the basic unit of the city; formal city planning arranged courtyard dwellings on a grid system (Xu, 1998).” It strictly accords with the Feng-shui model as the imperial cities do. The building-girdled spatial form is definitely a physical embodiment of the Feng-shui landscape (Xu, 1998). The main structure consists of buildings in the south, the east (dragon) and the west (tiger) sides respectively, in horseshoe shape. The yard indicates the vast plain (bright yard) and the opposite screen-like wall symbolizes the opposite mountain (Xu, 1998).

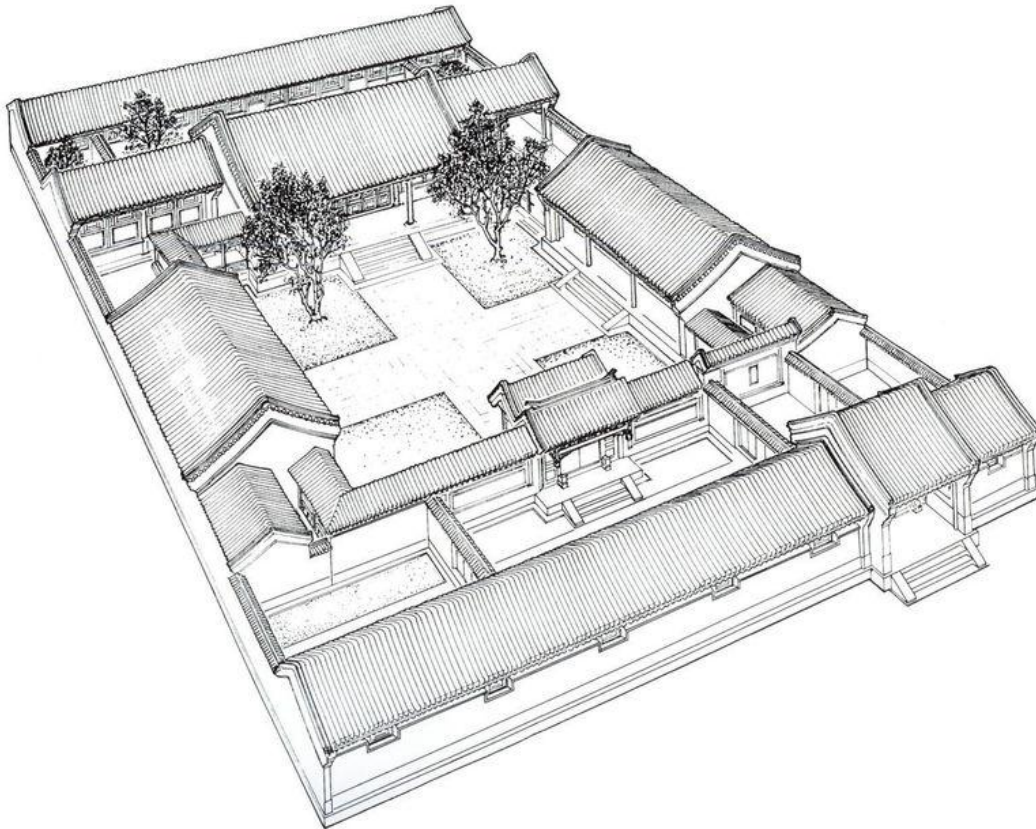


Figure 21: The Beijing courtyard

There is only one winding path leading from the unique entrance to the inside. It is obvious that the wandering path could be likened to the meandering river in the Feng-shui model, and the exit to the outfall (figure 6). The overall enclosed structure, together with the winding path, precisely imitates the Feng-shui landscape for *chi*

collection and moreover for everlasting family harmony, prosperity and happiness.

### 4.2.3 The symmetry and Confucianism

The most important and noteworthy characteristic of the Chinese architecture, such as urban layout and building structure, is in the symmetry that implies balance and harmony (figure 22). The highly symmetric structure pervades in China, from the sacred royal palace and cities down to profane residential houses or buildings. The symmetry shows the sentiment of ethnocentrism and Confucian Doctrine of the Golden Mean. Human beings, almost everywhere, regard their homeland as the world center (Tuan, 2008, p. 149). This worldwide ubiquitous ethnocentrism is expressed vividly both by the appellation of the country (*Middle Kingdom*) (Tuan, 1990, 32) and more significantly by how *Middle Kingdom* is written, i.e. Chinese calligraphy (Lin, 2008, p. 452).

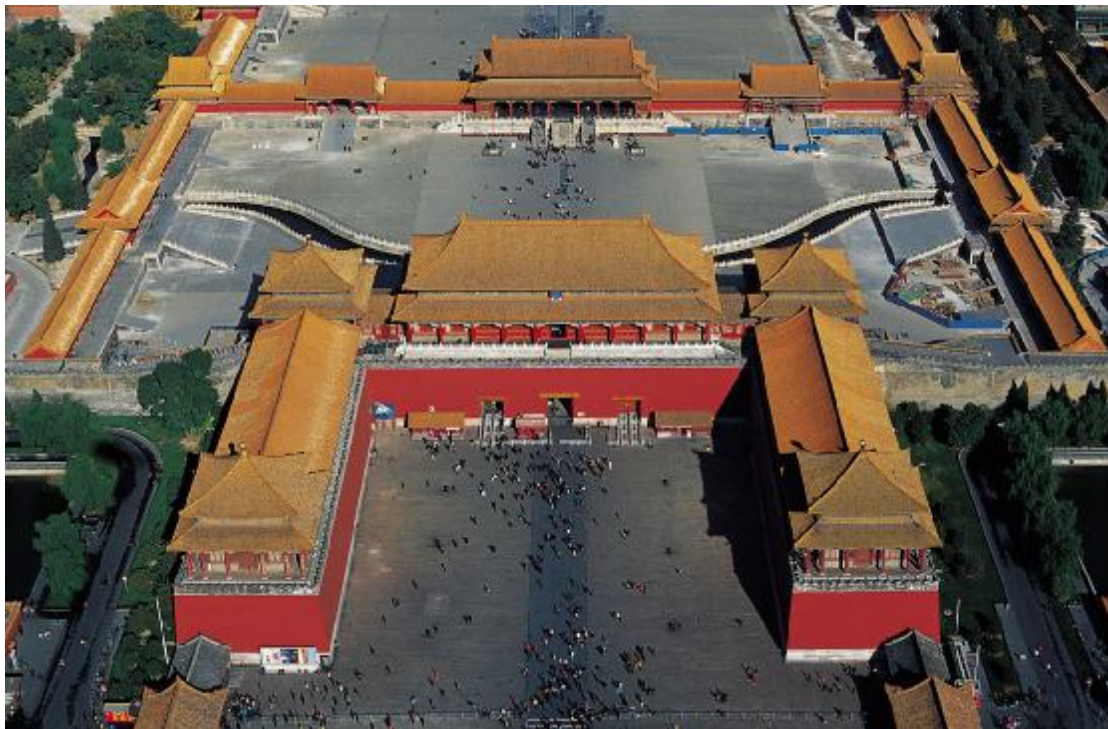


Figure 22: The highly symmetric structure

By a glance at the precisely symmetric style, one could imagine how the character *middle* is written in Chinese. “中” (Zhōng), which is the equivalent of the English word middle, is prone to be imagined as a principal axis around which a series of buildings symmetrically cluster. The stroke “ | ” is the framework that gives support

to or partly pre-decides the meaning or connotation of the character. The subordinate part “口” obtains support from the main stroke “丨” by which “口” is symmetrically split. In the design of a group of buildings, there is a principle of axis, as there is an axis in this Chinese character (Lin, 2008, p. 451). As the only royal cities in China, Beijing and Xi'an strictly follow the architecture structure of “中”. On the one hand, “中” expresses the decency and dignity of feudalism that the emperor always officially sits precisely on the principal axis (meridian), back to the north (Yin) and facing the south (Yang). On the other hand, it reveals the Golden Mean which could be the central doctrine of Confucianism, stressing that it is not enough for a thing to be logically correct; it is much more important to be correct in accordance with human nature, i.e. reasonableness. “A is right and B is not wrong either” is a typical Chinese judgment (Lin, 2008, p. 167). The Golden Mean is not geometrically symmetric, giving attention to both A and B. Broadly speaking, the Golden Mean is actually a way of life in which people behave moderately without going to either extreme. In another word, neither A nor B is completely correct. That is why people in China frequently say “*it could be*” but not “*it has to be*”. Moderation is the key word that means “not extreme and harmonious” or “control to a proper degree” (Lin, 2008, p. 168). The term *Middle Kingdom* derives not only from the geographical notion I have discussed in previous paragraphs, but also from the Golden Mean. It to some extent could be called “*the Kingdom of Moderation*” within which people pursue a non-extreme life style. I would argue that the symmetric architectural style or “中” articulates both confidence and sanctity, and modesty and homeliness. The term *Middle Kingdom* itself in reality represents dualistic meanings, to be exact, a sentiment of being reasonable, appropriate and moderately ethnocentric.

### **4.3 The edifice inspired by the hemispheric dome world view**

In-so-far as man created the environment, Chinese architecture also harmonizes human beings with nature and it seems to have developed along a line different from that of the West (Lin, 2008, p. 451). It is the art of symbolism. Take sacred altar for example, a place for religious activities imitates both heaven and earth in symbolic shape (figure 23, 24).

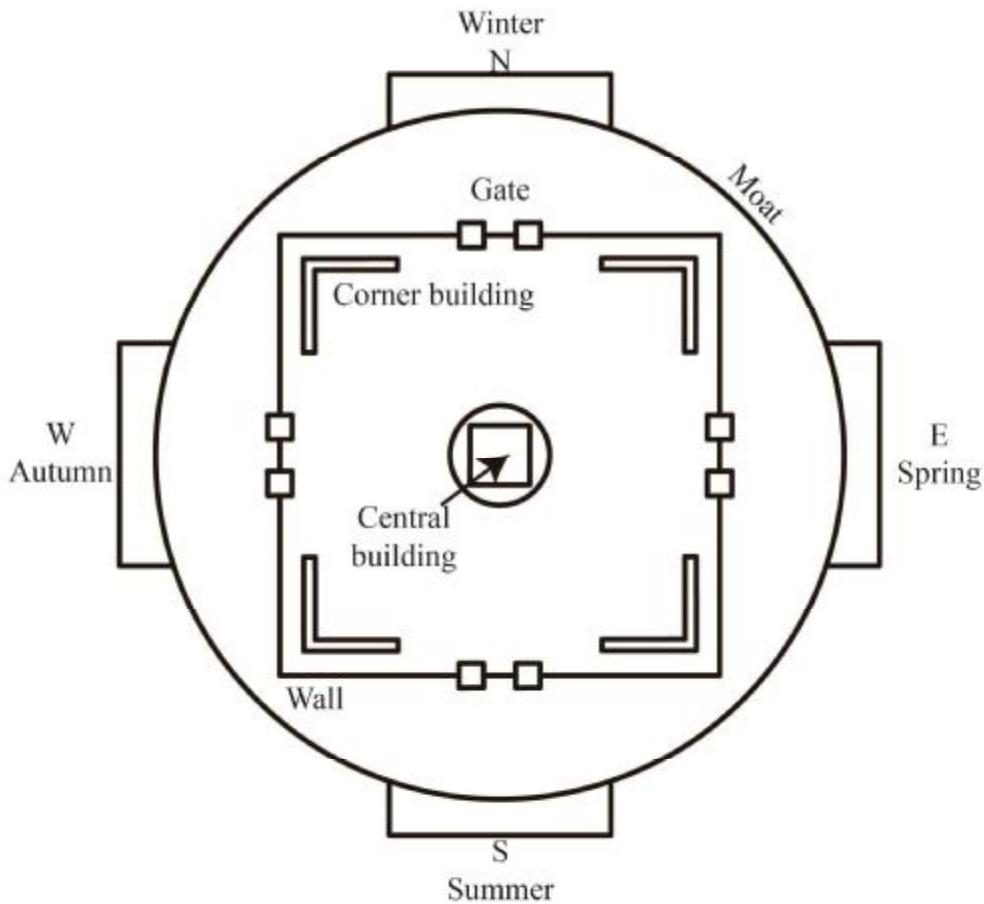


Figure 23: Ming Tang, early first century AD

The altar was used for sacrificial ceremony. The emperor comes to *Ming Tang* regularly on equinoxes and solstices to pray for the nation's prosperity and for people's good harvest. *Ming Tang* is in essence a place where man and heaven communicate, showing the unifying relationship between man and nature, and heaven and earth (Rossbach & Lin, 1998, p. 49). The combination of roundness and squareness articulates the architectural motif of circular heaven and square earth. Feng-shui holds the idea that heaven rules earth (Eitel, 1993, p. 10). Earth is profane and simple. The square shape accords with four cardinal points and four seasons. Heaven is sacred and complex. From a mathematical perspective, the earth is a sort of simplified heaven because a circle is actually an equilateral polygon with an infinite number of sides (figure 25). In this sense, compared with the square earth, the circular heaven could be regarded as natural because it has not been abstracted or transformed as any regular polygon with a finite number of sides such as square (earth). "The circle represents heaven or nature, the square the earth or the artificial world of man (Tuan, 1990, p. 153)." The circle and the square come together as one, representing



the Chinese architectural complexity and the worshipful attitude toward nature.

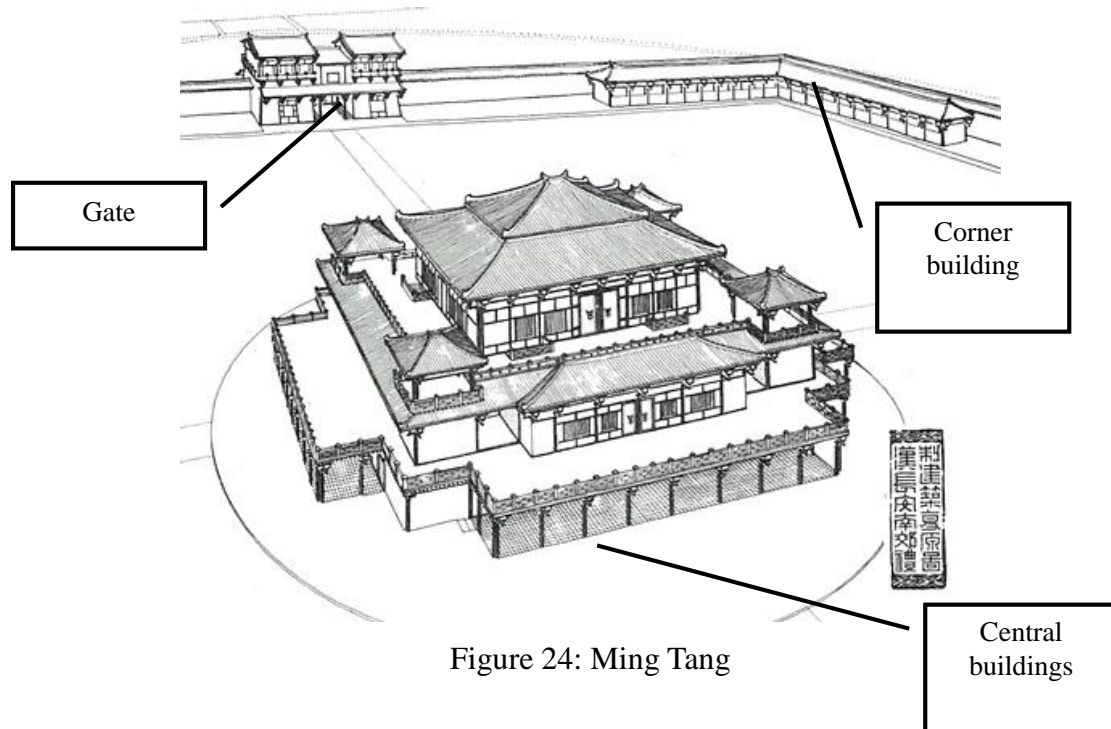


Figure 24: Ming Tang

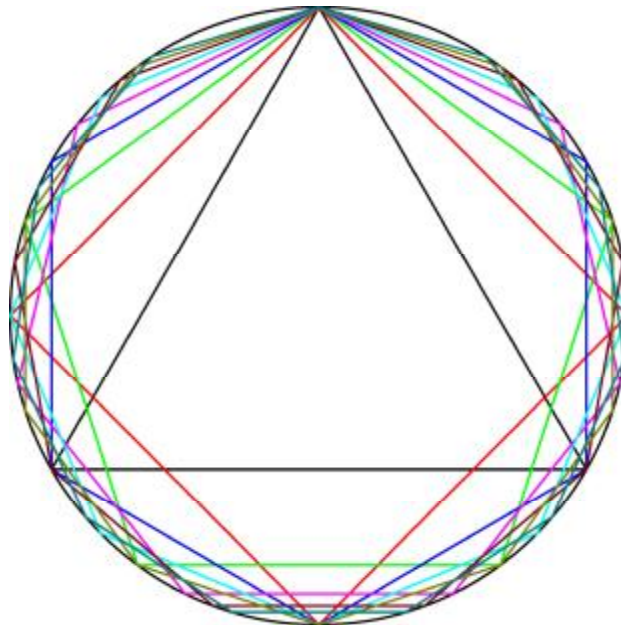


Figure 25: Circle and equilateral polygons

One can figure out the perimeter of any polygon by ruler but can hardly succeed if his measuring object is a circle. To illustrate this point, I would like to use a mathematical method. As shown in figure 25, the perimeter of an inscribed polygon  $l = 2nR \cdot \sin \frac{\pi}{n}$  ( $R$  is the radius of the circle;  $n$  is the number of the sides). So as long as  $n$  is

determined, the corresponding perimeter of the inscribed polygon could be easily figured out. The larger  $n$  becomes, the more the polygon approaches to circular. If and only if  $n$  approaches infinite, could a polygon be a circle. The perimeter of the circle in figure 25  $l = \lim_{n \rightarrow +\infty} 2nR \cdot \sin \frac{\pi}{n} = 2\pi R \lim_{n \rightarrow +\infty} \sin \frac{\pi}{n} = 2\pi R$ . From this point, the circle is anyway much more complicated than the square and any other regular polygon. I would like to say that the regular is a special case of the irregular. Circular is relatively natural and square is cultural. Analogically, heaven is natural and earth is cultural. Of course this notion is relatively correct. But it somewhat speaks of Taoist attitude toward nature. “Man takes earth as his model; earth takes heaven as its model; heaven takes Tao as its model; Tao takes what is natural as its model” (Lao Tzu, 2006, p. 71).

### 4.4 The Classical Chinese garden and Taoism

When it comes to a classical Chinese garden, in general, it has its own style which is absolutely different both from the formal Le Nôtre style garden in France and so-called “Anglo-Chinese” landscape garden in England. Its richness in poetic and pictorial splendor, in combination with its structural complexity, makes it attractive as a place seemingly created by nature but actually by human beings by means of the Feng-shui landscape transplantation. In a word, the classical Chinese garden is substantially a form of man-made environment. It is however preferred and appreciated not only due to its aesthetic values but to its naturalness. It is anyway a utopia that derives from the Feng-shui landscape to which people have become strongly attached.

#### 4.4.1 The evolution and the fundamental meaning of the classical Chinese garden

The Chinese garden was originally a part of the dwelling adjacent to or even within a private yard. In agrarian and feudal China, there was not a very explicit concept of garden. Nevertheless, the prototype of the garden as an enclosed yard, basically for small-scale monoculture and grazing, prevailed, especially among those families with a comparatively decent social status. “囿” (Yòu) is the literary Chinese word for garden, meaning ① a place for growing vegetables and plants or for breeding livestock; ② limit or constrain (Chen & Wu, 2009). The inner part “有” (Yǒu) means to have, to own or to possess with reference to property; the outer part “口” means

fence or wall. Considering the meaning or extended meaning of each part of this character, if we combine them together as one to make “囿”, it means an enclosed place for routine activities for livelihood and for private property protection (figure 26, 27).



Figure 26: 囿 written in carapace-bone-script

Figure 26 shows how “囿” is written in two ways probably in different times in carapace-bone-script. Given what has been mentioned in the previous sections, “囿” (former) looks like something inscribed in arable land “田”, forming an enclosed structure (latter) called garden.

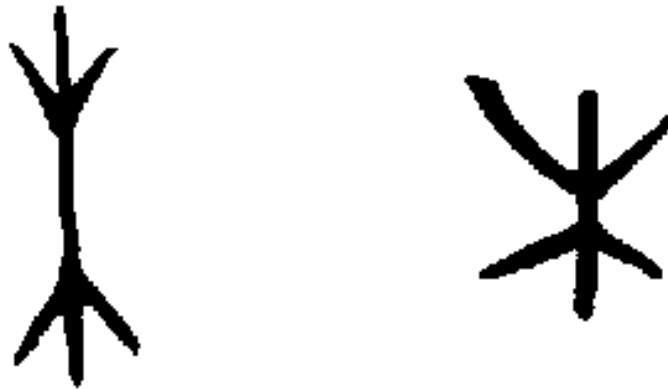


Figure 27: 木 written in carapace-bone-script

“木” (Mù) is the character for tree or wood that could be deemed as crop or plant. Its carapace-bone-script seems like a real tree comprised of a trunk and several branches, in accordance with the inscribed part in “囿”. Insofar as the etymologies concerned in “囿” (garden), “木” (wood) and “田” (arable land), a garden, or to be exact, the prototype of a garden is definitely a fenced or walled place for agriculture. In this

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context, we could involuntarily affirm that garden (囿) does correlate with country (国) because of the identical outer structure “口” and the property-relevant inner part. I would argue that the prototype of the Chinese garden is the epitome of the agrarian nation in pre-historical time. In addition, the basic feature of the regularly irregular classical Chinese garden is that almost every garden could be divided into interdependent sub-gardens, and each unit could be roughly rectangular like “囿” and “国”.

Before going into a deeper discussion of the classical Chinese garden, I would like to note that, given the etymological analysis conducted above, the prototype of garden could be the pastoral model of the nation and its fenced style coincides with the Feng-shui landscape. Moreover, the garden prototype was the ideal landscape for dwelling for hermits and idyllists (Taoists) who had been tired of official career (Confucians), which could be the solid foundation of the classical garden imbued with Taoist philosophical doctrines, in pursuit of harmony with nature. In my opinion, “囿” (garden prototype) is the original state of “国” (country), and it articulates the primitiveness of the Feng-shui (basin-like) landscape based on agriculture. In this sense, “囿” come into existence long before “国” that actually derives from “囿” in the process of evolution. “囿” is comparatively natural and “国” is cultural; “囿” expresses aboriginality and nature and “国” to a degree embodies civilization and culture; “囿” is primordial and “国” is pre-historical. Taoist philosophers dramatically prefer “囿” to “国” because “囿” is natural and it is the ideal state of village, town and country. The relationship between “囿” and “国” could be the core spirit of the classical Chinese garden which originates from a sort of quasi enclosed agricultural tribe or primitive state of country, and which imitates the Chinese landscape painting (the Feng-shui model) (figure 17) as a constant motif that has been regarded as the representative of nature worship or yearning of scholars and bureaucrats. In summary, the classical Chinese garden is a cultural product that speaks of not only aesthetic values but also the ubiquitous sentiment of nature yearning among the Chinese people. It is actually a Taoist microcosm (Tuan, 1990, p. 145), and it expresses the emotional bond between human and nature.

### **4.4.2 The imperial city VS the classical garden-----Confucianism VS Taoism**

By comparing an imperial city and a classical garden, we can in principle distinguish Confucianism and Taoism. In short, the former is urban and realistic but the latter is rural and romantic, each is antipathetic to the other. Taoism sees Confucianism as a disaster which is too aristocratic, too realistic, or too reasonable, too correct, and which provides little room for fantasy and imagination, emphasizing human culture and social hierarchy or status and dealing with the relationship among different groups of people. In contrast with Confucianism that has no concept of heaven and hell and of hierarchy of gods and has no interest in illusion and immortality, Taoism involves the constant motif of going back to nature and of escaping from the real world (Palmer, 1997, p. 7; Lin, 2008, p. 177). Confucianism links to realism but Taoism with an idealism which, however, can never be attained. This hermeticism is the key to the spirit of Taoism, which only by seeking can people actually generate a sense of blending into nature. So to speak the garden prototype or “園” is the idealized life style and is far superior to “國”. Here is a paragraph concerned with the ideal of a nation quoted in *Tao Teh Ching* (The Book of Tao and Teh):

“The state should be small; the population should be sparse. Tools, though of many kinds, should not be used. Teach the people to fear death and not to migrate to remote places. Although they have ships and carts, they will have no need to use them. Although they are well armed with weapons, they will have no place to make them effective. Encourage the people to return to the condition under which the knotted rope was used to record things. The world best ruled is a place where the people will have delicious food, beautiful clothes, comfortable living quarters, and cheerful customs. Though within easy reach of neighboring states, the dog’s barking and the cock’s crowing in one state are heard in another. The People of one state will never have dealing with those of another, even if they get old and die (Lao Tzu, 2006, pp. 225-227).”

A classical Chinese garden is actually a place-world for those who yearn for becoming intimate with nature. And garden design is an art of place creating, although the place only exists in imagination and illusion. “To an extent perhaps unique among civilizations, Chinese cities and landscapes have been spoken and written into existence (Tuan, 1991).” Indeed landscape painting and poetry do contribute greatly to classical Chinese garden design, but the latter does so much more because it captures some details of pastoral life, especially emotional expressions that the former fails to provide (Tuan, 1990, p. 126). Tao Yuanming (365-427 AD) is one of the most

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influential idyllists who created the well known narrative poem '*The Peach Colony*', depicting his utopic landscape as below:

“During the reign of Taiyuan of Chin, there was a fisherman of Wuling. One day he was walking along a bank. After having gone a certain distance, he suddenly came upon a peach grove which extended along the bank for about a hundred yards. He noticed with surprise that the grove had a magic effect, so singularly free from the usual mingling of brushwood, while the beautifully grassy ground was covered with its rose petals. He went further to explore, and when he came to the end of the grove, he saw a spring which came from a cave in the hill. Having noticed that there seemed to be a weak light in the cave, he tied up his boat and decided to go in and explore. At first the opening was very narrow, barely wide enough for one person to go in. After a dozen steps, it opened into a flood of light. He saw before his eyes a wide, level valley, with houses and fields and farms. There were bamboos and mulberries; farmers were working and dogs and chickens were running about. The dresses of the men and women were like those of the outside world, and the old men and children appeared very happy and contented. They were greatly astonished to see the fisherman and asked him where he had come from. The fisherman told them and was invited to their homes, where wine was served and chicken was killed for dinner to entertain him. The villagers hearing of his coming all came to see him and to talk. They said that their ancestors had come here as refugees to escape from the tyranny of Tsin Shih-huang (builder of Great Wall) some six hundred years ago, and they had never left it. They were thus completely cut off from the world, and asked what was the ruling dynasty now. They had not even heard of the Han Dynasty (two centuries before to two centuries after Christ), not to speak of the Wei (third century A.D.) and the Chin (third and fourth centuries). The fisherman told them, which they heard with great amazement. Many of the other villagers then began to invite him to their homes by turn and feed him dinner and wine. After a few days, he took leave of them and left. The villagers begged him not to tell the people outside about their colony. The man found his boat and came back, marking with signs the route he had followed. He went to the magistrate's office and told the magistrate about it. The latter sent someone to go with him and find the place. They looked for the signs but got lost and could never find it again. Liu Tsechi of Nanyang was a great idealist. He heard of this story, and planned to go and find it, but was taken ill and died before he could fulfill his wish. Since then, no one has gone in search of this place (Lin, 2002, pp. 30-35).”

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It is obvious that poetic utopia is nothing more than a carrier of the ideal landscape that is vague and indistinct. The utopia is anyway an idealized landscape secluded from the world, blending with nature. Accordingly, the secluded landscape is a place-world devoid of social hierarchy and inequity that the prevailing Confucianism failed to eliminate. Instead, it could be the perfect representation of Taoist paradise because its structure, by and large, coincides with the Feng-shui model (figure 6, 7), or with “囿” which is constantly deemed the Taoist ideal (figure 28). The main physical features of the Taoist paradise resemble a ‘world-in-a-pot’ (Chen & Wu, 2009), including a sinuous stream, a piece of open land, a winding path leading to quiet seclusion, a unique narrow entrance to hidden heavenly abode and of course the enclosure mountain.



Figure 28: Tao Yuanming's utopia as Taoist paradise

Those features of Taoist paradise summarized above could be the rudiments of the classical Chinese garden within which the elements are somewhat transplanted or transformed from this model. In brief, a classical garden captures the essence of the Feng-shui landscape (Rossbach & Lin, 1998, p. 76), and is an attempt to copy Taoist paradise.

### **4.4.3 The fractal spatial structure of the classical Chinese garden**

The Chinese garden attains a highly intricate structure by arranging curve lines that constitute its complicated and anfractuous layout. The most representative feature of Chinese garden is the use of meandering paths and walkways that evoke an illusion as being in a labyrinth that deserves particular discussion and attention. I would like to argue that the seemingly irregular and indistinct structure actually presents the formlessness that embodies the key Taoist doctrine, i.e. inaction or non-interference.

Consistent with the Taoist ideal, the Chinese garden expresses the sentiment of going back to nature as a kind of spiritual inner feeling rather than a physical function or social culture (Lu, 2009). No matter what, walkways or waterways within a Chinese garden, without exception, are arranged in a curved line, probably because of the variability that the straight line fails to provide. The Chinese taste for garden walkways and waterways -- with its hatred of the straight line, regularity and inflexibility -- reveals the Taoist notion of change, which is the essence of life (Cooper, 1977). The meandering paths in the Chinese garden usually extend to somewhere uncertain for visitors, thus generating a sense of mystery when walking in the garden, leading them to afterward through the winding paths further to gratify their curiosity. Walkways do not exist individually; instead they twist and shape a tree-like network that provides visitors with a wide range of choices to determine which direction to go. Walkways do not only function as the route connecting various fractions of a garden, but in many cases mingle with halls, chambers, pavilions, corridors and yards, or sometimes suddenly become narrow or even disappear (Lu, 2010). The overall pathway system “provides for the real in unreal and for the unreal in real” (Lin, 2008, p. 473). Take Yuyuan Garden for example, the walkways, together with inner walls, divide the whole garden into several interconnected sub-gardens, each of which is subdivided into more subunits, forming a fractal or iterative pattern (figure 29).

As a typical Chinese garden, Yuyuan shows a structure of infinite iteration or circulation, and represents the blurred or ambiguous relationship between the part and the whole. The infinite fractal feature plays an important role as a ‘box in box’, ‘nest in nest’ or ‘infinity in a bottle gourd’ form (Yu, 1993), which “shows the small in the large and the large in the small” (Lin, 2008, p. 473). This irregularly interconnected,



interpenetrative and twisted spatial structure can be illustrated by Sierpinski triangle (figure 30).

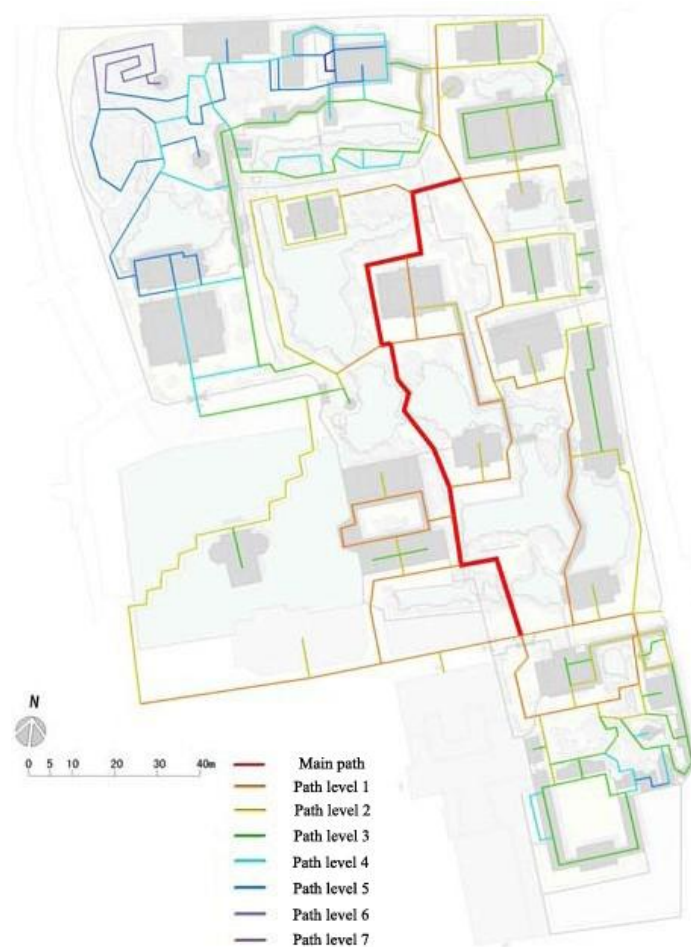


Figure 29: Master plan of Yuyuan Garden (Ming Dynasty)



Figure 30: Sierpinski triangle as an interpretive metaphor of Chinese garden

I use the mathematical method to articulate the fractal form of the Chinese garden by adopting the Sierpinski triangle. In figure 30, the black triangles stand for sub-gardens, halls, chambers or yards that are enclosed by walls and are occupied by buildings, corridors, waterscapes etc, while the white ones for void areas. If we assume the length of one side of the overall triangle to be 1, then the total area of the progressively increasing black triangles tends to be

$$S_{black} = \frac{\sqrt{3}}{4} \cdot \sum_{i=1}^n \frac{3^{n-1}}{4^n} = \frac{\sqrt{3}}{4} \lim_{n \rightarrow +\infty} \frac{\frac{1}{4} \cdot \left(1 - \frac{3^n}{4^n}\right)}{\frac{1}{4}} = \frac{\sqrt{3}}{4}; \text{ the area of white triangles tends to}$$

be infinitely close to  $S_{white} = \lim_{n \rightarrow +\infty} \frac{\sqrt{3}}{4} \cdot \frac{3^n}{4^n} = 0$ ; and the length of the perimeter of the

overall figure is approaching to  $l = \lim_{n \rightarrow +\infty} \frac{3^{n+1}}{2^n} \rightarrow +\infty$ . It is contradictory that the area

of this figure tends to be 0 but the perimeter to be infinite. This contradiction reveals the hidden order of the Chinese garden that could be regarded as interconnected space cells (Keswick, 1978, as referenced in Lu, 2010). In general, the main principle of spatial form of the Chinese garden could be a random transformation of space cells divided or subdivided by meandering pathways and walls. The self-similarity and spatial complexity contribute a lot to increasing the gardens' attractiveness. Moreover, if we rearrange Sierpinski triangle in irregular shapes, we can work out the commonly used lattice window in a Chinese garden (figure 31).

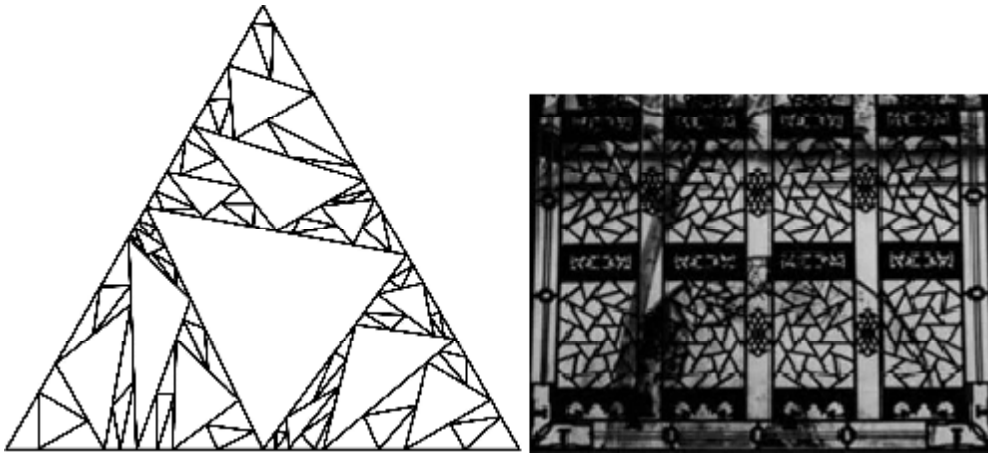


Figure 31: Irregular Sierpinski triangle and lattice window

#### **4.4.4 The constantly changing scene**

William Chambers, the British gardener who visited China and later brought the Chinese garden elements to Europe and built an Anglo-Chinese garden in Kew, described that visitors tend to be enchanted as soon as entering a classical Chinese garden, and this might be ascribed to their fractal structure (Bald, 1950). Apart from the winding walkways and space cells, the moon gate that connects two enclosed

sub-garden is another ubiquitous component in the Chinese garden (figure 32).



Figure 32: Moon gate as both passageway and obstacle

We see the moon gate as a sudden obstacle when walking in a garden, rather than as an ordinary passageway, because it functions not only as an entrance but more importantly as a hole on a wall that separates a sub-garden from another and shuts out the visitors' view. A moon gate is actually a barrier which makes the visitors choose either to pass or not because in most cases there is only one moon gate in a sub-garden, which serves the only access to the scene in the adjacent garden. A Taoist term for the scene on the other side of a moon gate is *cave heaven* that generally ushers the visitors to an exceptionally charming scenery of (a sudden change). The underlying meaning of the Taoist terminology is that by passing through the barrier one can have a panoramic view of the landscape beyond one's imagination. This concept leads to the idea that the *cave heaven* (moon gate) considerably arouse the visitors' curiosity that they are always outsiders who show greater interest in if there is going to be a better scene.

#### 4.4.5 Mountain and water as the constant motif

When Chambers came to China to observe Chinese gardens in detail, he was confused about the decoration of rockery and waterscape (Bald, 1950). According to Feng-shui, a Chinese garden is a proper, aesthetic and philosophical arrangement and organization of mountain and water, like a landscape painting, showing Yin-Yang balance or harmony. "Water, flowing and shimmering in a fish pool, represents what

is moving, changing and nourishing. Rocks rising at various points like condensed form of mountains suggest that which is enduring, solid and permanent (Rossbach & Lin, 1998).” The classical Chinese garden attempts to imitate mountain and water for imaginary ideal landscape (the Feng-shui landscape) transplantation and aesthetic transformation on a small scale. To demonstrate the naturalness of rocks and water in the garden, I should bring in Chinese etymology, whose pictography reflects both shape and indigenous property (figure 33).

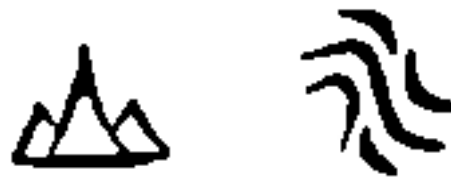


Figure 33: Mountain and water

Figure 33 shows how mountain and water are written in carapace-bone-script. “山” reflects rigidity, rockiness and stability; “水” shows tenderness, sinuousness and fluidity. To simulate the naturalness of mountain and water is to represent the controlling force of nature. Rocks have to be formless with weathered holes; water always goes sinuously both vertically and horizontally, depending on the topography, and sometimes is transformed into a cascade that makes a bickering sound. The tenderness of water (Yin) balances the rigidity of the mountain (Yang), expressing the main theme of harmony. To walk in a classical Chinese garden is to perceive or to deepen the understanding of the symbolic language embedded in the idealized landscape whose overall meaning is peace and harmony (Tuan, 1990, p. 146).

### **4.4.6 The art of control represented in the classical Chinese garden**

The classical Chinese garden is a Taoist seclusion devoid of social interference. As what has been mentioned previously, the garden is an imaginary and idealized country within which the ruler is supposed to dominate by following Taoist principles (inaction or inactiveness). Lao Tzu’s view is comparatively negative, proposing that to do nothing equals to do everything as long as the thing we do is what nature allows us to do. The best art of domination is to leave things untouched, waiting for what is going to happen. “The best ruler is vaguely known to his subjects; next comes the

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ruler loved and praised; next comes the ruler being feared; next comes the ruler disdained. The lack of faith on the part of the ruler leads to the lack of the people's confidence in him. The best ruler is leisurely and carefree, seldom issuing orders. When the state affairs are properly dealt with, the people all say, 'it should have happened to us like this' (Lao Tzu, 2006, p. 45)." That is to say, the more the ruler interferes with state affairs, the worse the consequence is likely to be. Taoist philosophers believe that when a thing reaches its extreme, it reverses its course. If the ruler imposes excessive control on citizens as Confucians do, they will produce exactly the opposite results. "The more prohibitions there are in the world, the poorer the people are; the more weapons the people own, the more chaotic the state is; the more skills the people have, the more strange things occur; the more laws and orders are issued, the more thieves and robbers there are (Lao Tzu, 2006, p. 165)." Any form of human domination or restraint is unnatural and probably leads to ruins. This is why Taoists believe that a highly developed civilization, or human culture, is the beginning of decline and collapse. To a degree, activeness destroys but inactiveness on the contrary helps. "Thus the sage never ruins anything because of his inaction; he never loses anything because he holds nothing. In doing things, people often fail on the verge of success. If they are as prudent at the end as at the beginning, they will never fail (Lao Tzu, 2006, p. 189)." In this regard, the classical Chinese garden is precisely built as a Taoist model in miniature, expressing the unique approach by which one achieves harmony with nature. Nevertheless, the disorderliness of the Chinese garden stands aloof from the mortal world, and reflects an atmosphere of detachment and reclusion. Order signifies power by which to achieve control over the country and people. Taoists strongly criticize centralization of state power and regard it as nothing more than a stupid political hierarchy whose unnaturalness directly leads to rebelliousness and self-collapse. The ideal art of control is to achieve control without trying to control.

### **Chapter Five: Discussion**

The philosophical thought in relation to social control, represented in the classical Chinese garden, has potentially wide ranging implications, particularly in the context of modernity, and deserves in-depth exploration. In this section I will make a comparison between China and the West, for a better understanding of Feng-shui by examining differences in landscape perception.

#### **5.1 The Versailles VS the classical Chinese garden**

In sharp contrast to the classical Chinese garden, the formal French garden seems fairly alien to nature because of its regularity which symbolizes and implies power, conquest and governance, rather than harmony. Considering its openness, magnificence, symmetry, and importantly, the arrangement of pathway in straight lines, I would argue that compared with the classical Chinese garden, the formal French garden is less natural or even unnatural (figure 34).



Figure 34: The Versailles

Versailles is one of the formal French gardens which typifies the prevailing art of control in the French Enlightenment. To underpin my argument, I will once again draw upon mathematical analogies to make a short analysis on the relationship between curve and straight line and their implications in terms of domination.

The most remarkable distinction between the classical Chinese garden and that of the Versailles is the pathway arrangement. The former, as I have mentioned, displays an irregular curving pattern; the latter shows a rectilinear geometry, in most cases involving a straight line and a symmetrical structure. From a mathematical perspective, the straight line is monotonous, spiritless and not as beautiful because nature actually creates nothing in a straight line, which could be defined as an idealized model produced by a human hand and viz as a sort of handicraft. The curve is thus natural, but the straight line is not. The straight line is a special case of a curve. Curve's superiority to straight line could be interpreted by calculus as the main principle of which goes in an approach to transforming a given curve into countless and infinitely short straight lines that could completely replace the curve (figure 35).

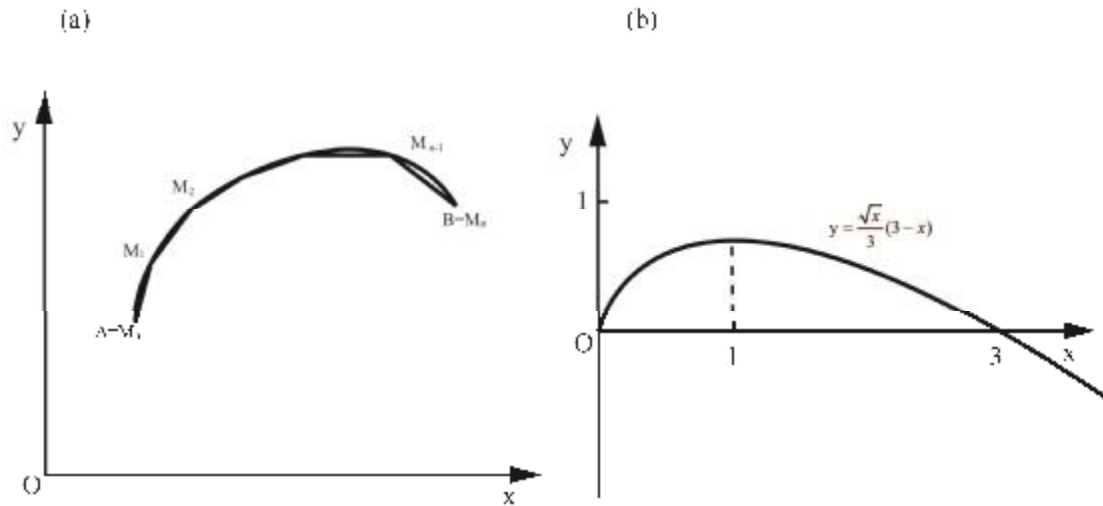


Figure 35: The relationship between straight line and curve  
(The principle of calculus)

In figure 35 (a) the length of the curve  $AB = \sum_{i=1}^n M_{i-1}M_i$ . In figure 35 (b)

$$l = \int_1^3 \sqrt{1+y'} dx = \int_1^3 \left( \frac{\sqrt{x}}{2} + \frac{1}{2\sqrt{x}} \right) dx = \left[ \frac{1}{3} x^{\frac{3}{2}} + x^{\frac{1}{2}} \right]_1^3 = 2\sqrt{3} - \frac{4}{3}, \quad x \in [1,3].$$

The relationship between straight line and curve can be interpreted by the diagrams in figure 35. In this context, the straight line is definitely tedious because of its non-curvature; in contrast, a curve is much more flexible and complex due to its constantly changing curvature that actually expresses the beauty of nature. By arranging winding paths in the classical Chinese garden, visitors could always enjoy



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the shifting scenes while walking. A winding path inspires the visitor's imagination because the changing curvature never offers a panoramic view (Cooper, 1977).

The preference for straight line commonly adopted at Versailles gives an arbitrary and domineering personality to the place which is contrary to the classical Chinese garden, showing the supreme power of the ruler who could “gaze down a long central vista, which was made to seem even longer by the flat sheets of water and the sentinel of trees” (Tuan, 1990, p. 140). The Chinese garden however resists such rectilinearity because the Chinese gardeners design gardens with Feng-shui as the guideline, which encourages the preference for curves due to its fitting into the surrounding landscape (Tuan, 1968). Both straight line and symmetry in the formal French garden display the regularity that signifies unnaturalness, as is also the case with the Chinese capital city. The process of creating regularity is somewhat that of conquest and domination.

### **5.2 The Acropolis VS the Chinese city/village**

Although the Chinese city represents the art of control by arranging the rigid and spiritless regular forms, compared with its counterparts in the Western world, it is far less ambitious, both in terms of site selection and architectural form. Western cities or architecture, especially those in ancient time such as the Acropolis (figure 36) in most cases occupied a commanding height, standing at which one can have a bird view of the whole city and thereby acquire a sense of conquest or achievement.



Figure 36: The Acropolis



I would like to properly describe this site selection by using a Chinese character “凸”. “凸” (Tū) means protruding and convex. From my point of view, “凸” reflects not only the architectural site but also a form of edifice in the Western world. The upper part of the character resembles the edifice built at a commanding height and the huge spire of a Gothic cathedral, both of which could be the representation of the arbitrary conquest and domination. By a glance at “凸”, one can definitely imagine how those Western architectures look like and where they are built. And it also holds an extended meaning that it is alien to nature because it seems too rigid, soaring and domineering and thus not harmonious with nature. The edifice does not belong to the landscape but rather could be the aggressive conqueror controlling it. The traditional Chinese architecture, on the other hand, does the reverse, as much as with the character “凹” (Wā), which means concave, perfectly manifesting the Feng-shui personality. Both the capital cities and ordinary villages were always built in a basin-like landscape as a part of it without any ambition to conquer and control. Even if some magnificent edifices symbolize the feudal nobility, we can hardly find any mansion or monument structured in merely rigid, sharp and peaked forms like an obelisk since those weapon-like forms are inharmonious and harmful and are incompatible with nature (Teather & Chow, 2010). In fact architecture in China appropriately arranges straight line together with curve, whose beauty effectively balances and compensates for the tastelessness and ugliness of straight line (as I perceive it from a Chinese perspective), just as with the Chinese calligraphy that uses straight strokes in combination with curved ones to imitate nature's irregularity (Lin, 2008, p. 453). Both the site and form of the Chinese architecture thus reveal the spirit of Feng-shui, i.e. inactiveness and concealment.

### **5.3 The discrepant attitude toward nature**

The divergent styles of landscape and architecture between Europe and China appear to be determined by discrepant attitudes toward nature.

As Tuan stated, “The European sees nature as subordinated to him whereas the Chinese sees himself as a part of nature (Tuan, 1968).” Christianity, which embraces the idea of modernity, separates human beings from nature which is regarded as an object or even a virgin waiting to be conquered, because of the perceived existence of

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God who created all things, including nature and human beings. This creation therefore behaves and performs as the incarnation of God who has the unique supreme privilege to impose control over everything. The Christian environmental attitude arguably leads to the style of a garden, such as that of Versailles, which acts as an extension of the noble and rigid edifices, and within which the landscape is exploited and tamed by human hands on a large scale to represent the aesthetic values of a dominating power (Tuan, 1968). Nature, in Western eyes lies on the bottom of the triangle-like hierarchy as the medium by which human beings in the middle achieve the aspirations of God at the summit.

The Chinese God is nature that nurtures everything. Properly speaking, nature is “the womb of life, eternal renewal, with her rhythms and moods” (Cooper, 1977). The Feng-shui landscape intensifies and underpins the Taoist doctrine of the “unity of man with nature” (Chen & Wu, 2009). The notion of nature as a womb that gives birth to everything holds the same view as the Feng-shui theory that seeks an appropriate container (basin) to hide or conceal and thus to unite human beings with nature. Therefore the spirit and personality of the Chinese landscape and architecture has to be topophilically “ $\square$ ”, compared with which the Western spirit “ $\square$ ” is the Chinese topophobia that actually leads to topophilia (Tuan, 2007, p. 25).

The English (Anglo-Chinese) landscape garden has become popular in Europe since the eighteenth century. It is clear that it absorbed some inspiration from China. It is much more “natural” than the formal French garden, it is however not “ $\square$ ” enough to imitate the naturalness of the classical Chinese garden. As the Feng-shui theory proposes, landscape is supposed to be conditionally expansive but the English landscape garden is apparently not. It is too ambitious to spread the landscape over the whole country without limits or boundary. In general, the English landscape garden fails to provide the naturalness as conceived by the Chinese even though its openness and vastness do stimulate people’s imagination such as the idyllic life style, it can hardly enable the visitors to enjoy the home feeling with a sense of peace and tranquility. The classical Chinese garden is home, at least the ideal home, but the English landscape garden is not.

### **Chapter Six: Conclusion**

Feng-shui is a cultural phenomenon that prevails not only in China or East Asia, but also in the West because Feng-shui/ geomancy functions as a kind of genius loci that pervades globally and varies from culture to culture. “Culture is the agent. The natural area is the medium, and the cultural landscape is the result (Sauer, 1925, as referenced in Setten, 2006).” Landscape diversity is therefore very common because of the diverse genius loci, i.e. spirit of place. People can really dwell in the phenomenal world only by means of grasping the spirit of place (Norberg-Schulz, 1980, pp. 10-11).

Feng-shui is the Chinese spirit of place imbued with both the dread and esteem of nature. The philosophical thought represented by Feng-shui potentially contributes to the sustainable development of landscape architecture, I would argue, because it aspires the ideas of harmony with nature. In the era of economic determinism, human beings are working for economic benefits at the cost of torturing nature, as never happened before. Ian McHarg, the leading landscape architect, criticized people’s indifference to the environmental crisis caused by industrialization in his book *Design with Nature* (2006). “The landscape architects, in fact, work within a profession historically concerned with the relation of man to nature and of the natural science to the making of the urban environment (McHarg, 1968, pp. 44-45, as referenced in Schnadelbach, 2003, p. 228).” It is noteworthy that McHarg also asserted that the Eastern garden expresses the rational symbolism of the relationship between human beings and nature (McHarg, 2006, p. 35). Even though he did not touch anything of Feng-shui, what he has stated somewhat correspond to the Chinese Taoist creed of the unity of man with nature as the major inspiration for sustainable landscape planning and design incorporating ecological processes. What follows is that the Feng-shui theory affects the shaping of built environment and helps to achieve sustainability since it resists the brutal exploitation of nature and advocates natural developmental process. Literally the suffix *-scape* in landscape could be translated as shape (Sauer, 1925, p. 25, as referenced in Olwig, 2008b). The etymological interpretation of the term makes people associate it with the idea that the landscape is a piece of well-organized land shaped by genius loci. Feng-shui as the Chinese genius loci

## **A Comprehension of Feng-shui and Its Relevance to Landscape Architecture**

shapes the landscape in a proper form as home for ecological benefit and thereby for sustainability. This comprehension converges at the point of departure of McHarg's notion that ecology is a science concerned with the construction of home since the term ecology initially derives from the Greek word *oikos* meaning home (McHarg, 2006, p. 37).

In the context of the ongoing development of landscape urbanism, McHarg's concept is however being debated and challenged as being not entirely applicable because it goes to the extreme in the argument that nature is constantly dominant but human activities engender destruction, and thereby tends to separate landscape from social context. The prominent landscape architect James Corner does not wholly agree with McHarg, proposing that McHarg considered landscape to be the "other" of the city, excluding all kinds of infrastructure (Corner, 2006). What the most landscape architects were doing, Corner feels, was nothing more than imitating wilderness as nature. In contrast, the currently prevalent planning and design strategies more and more focus on the integration of nature and culture, regarding landscape as a sort of medium (Waldheim, 2006) and infrastructure (Mossop, 2006) accessible to dwellers. Even though the Feng-shui theory has seldom been clearly mentioned in the Western planning and design strategies, the essence of which has actually penetrated into the main stream. South Korea, a neighboring country of China, has inherited the Feng-shui theory, using it extensively and systematically, especially in landscape and urban planning from an ecological and sustainable perspective (Hong, Song, Wu, 2007). The essence of Feng-shui is the unity of man with nature, rather than the opposition and separation. And it deserves special attention globally in terms of sustainable landscape architecture that nowadays plays a key role in landscape planning, design and management. An idea of how to combine the Feng-shui theory with the current landscape practice is thus needed.

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### Illustrations

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