

feng-shui: energy and place

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FENG-SHUI:
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For several thousand years the Chinese have practiced an art of placing and designing their residences and tombs in accordance with the local currents of cosmic energies flowing through their surroundings.¹ Feng-shui, as it is called, means literally "wind and water", and is a practice deeply rooted in the Chinese understanding of the nature and working of our universe. To a foreign culture lacking the kind of insight the Chinese have developed, feng-shui is a puzzling blend of superstition and mythology, and has caused continued frustration to foreigners in their interaction with the Chinese.



A late Ch'ing representation of the selection of a city site; the geomancer is consulting his magnetic compass. 18

Some of the significance and operation of feng-shui is being rediscovered today, and we are finding in it a deep and meaningful cosmology which is giving us powerful new insights into our nature and that of the world about us. It suggests that the Chinese did not consider the meaning and design of their surroundings primarily from an esthetic standpoint, but rather as a sensitive and important tool to join them to the forces in their environment and permit the people to benefit from their action. It appears to have been a significant force in the continued health and prosperity of the Chinese people and their land, and holds promise today of becoming an accurate and practical means for locating and designing our living places and insuring the continued health of our planet.

The application of feng-shui to building location and design is based on a belief that at every place there are special topographical features, either natural or artificial, which indicate or modify the cosmic energies present there. The forms and arrangements of hills, the nature and directions of watercourses, the heights and forms of buildings, the location of forests, roads, and bridges are all important factors. The influence of the sun, the moon, the planets and the stars are also considered important, bringing into play the "pseudo-sciences" of astrology and the I Ching.²

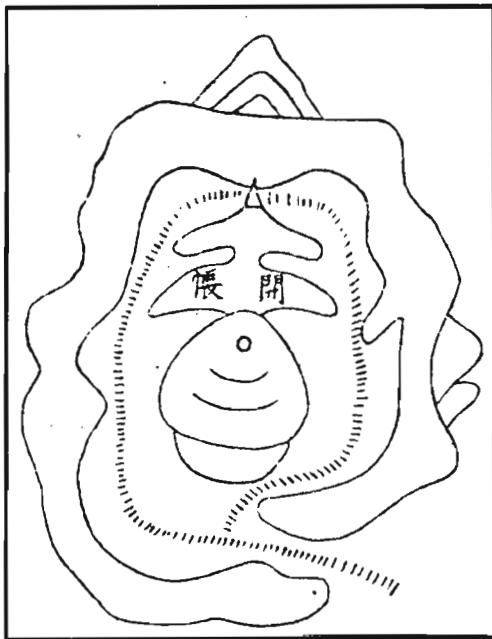
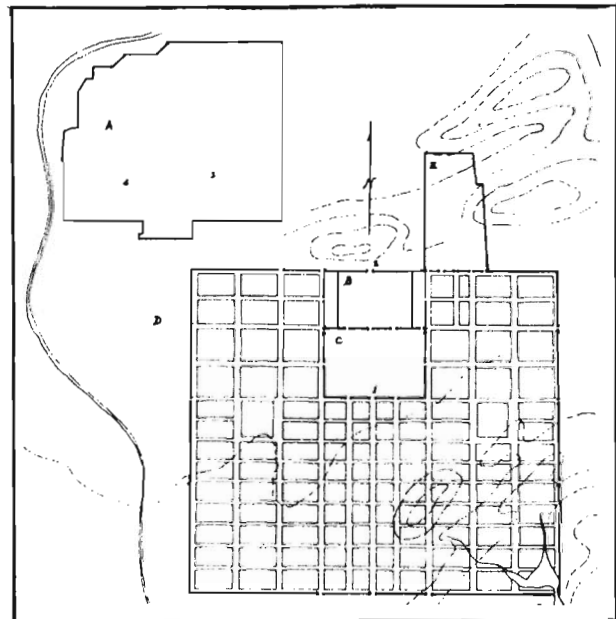


Illustration from a work on geomancy from c.880 a.d. The chart shows a particular site for a tomb, towards the tip of a range of small hills separating two valleys with streams, the whole enclosed by two further ranges of foothills.¹⁸

The principles of location followed in the design of Chinese and Japanese cities and the rituals celebrated in their actual founding had several purposes. They were a means of scientifically selecting a location that was functional and ecologically sound, of ordering the arrangement and placement of the city to the forces and energies of its situation and of the cosmos, and of reinforcing and affirming in the minds of the people the nature of their cosmos and their place within it.

The Taoist view of the cosmos upon which the principles were based spoke symbolically in terms of four Gods - one dwelling in a stream to the east, one in a plain to the south, one in a highway to the west, and the fourth in a mountain to the north. A site with these qualifications was felt suitable. A rectangular plan was made in the symbol of their cosmos, reflecting the rhythms of the sun and stars most strongly affecting the land. The Emperor was placed in the north, as he always faced the holy south - in alignment with the growth-granting forces of the earth. Temples were built in the northeast to a guardian deity, as that direction was felt to be unlucky - devils dwell in the mountains (as well as bandits and enemy forces). Buddhist temples often were placed in the west, as it was felt that Buddhism has a tendency to proceed eastward. The entire geometry and detailed layout of the city reflected symbolically and perhaps mantrically their understanding of the cosmos.

Ch'ang-an of the Han and T'ang dynasties.
 A. Han dynasty Ch'ang-an, end of third century B.C. B. The Imperial Palace of the Sui and the T'ang dynasties. C. The Administrative City. D. The capital of both the Sui dynasty, called Ta-hsing Ch'eng, the City of Great Prosperity, and the T'ang dynasty, called Ch'ang-an, the Capital of Eternal Peace and Security.



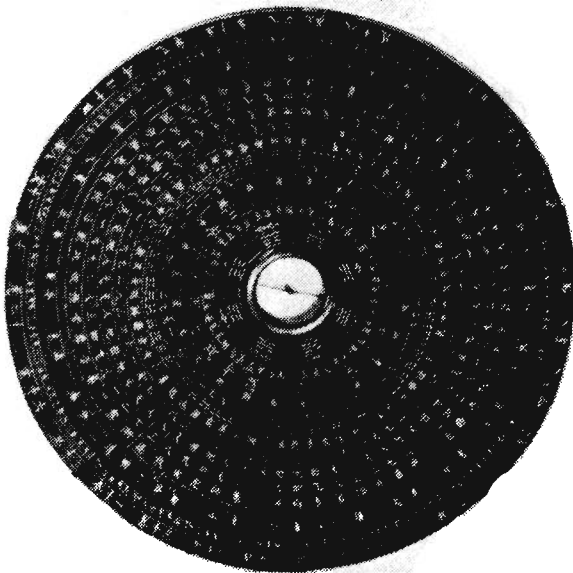
Thus sites were selected with mountains to protect the city from winter winds, and monasteries were placed in the mountains so the city could be warned of attack. The water and air of the city were kept clean and pure, and the commerce and food supply of the city assured. At the same time, every activity in the making of the city and of living within it and participating in its life reminded a person of the forces they felt in their world. At the same time, they aligned him with, and gave him nourishment from those forces.

The cosmology upon which feng-shui is based is very ancient, and central to the philosophy of China and many other Asian cultures. "In the beginning there was one abstract principle or monad, called the "absolute nothing", which evolved out of itself the "great absolute". When this primordial cause of all existence first moved, its breath or vital energy congealing, produced the great male principle. When it had moved to the uttermost, it rested, and in resting produced the female principle. By this outpouring into formal organization and by its

eventual reversion, the heavens and the earth were created and continually remade, and in the course of its constant permutations men and animals, vegetables and minerals, rose into being."² The same vital energy has continued to act ever since, through these male and female powers of nature, mutually forming and subsiding - generating ever more diverse and improbable order, and permeating and giving life to all that exists.

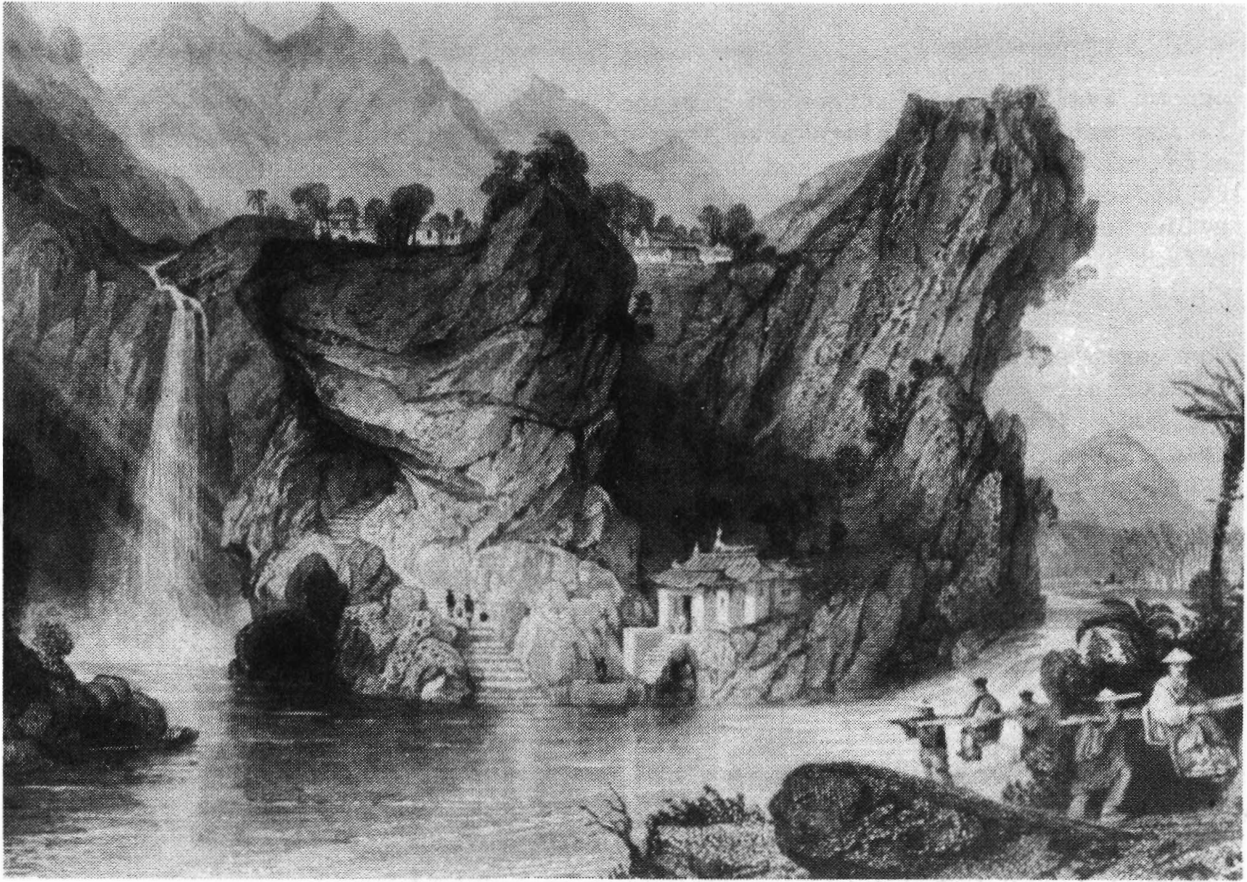
Four different divisions form the system of feng-shui, expressing the different dimensions or levels through which the forces involved can be understood. The energy animating the male and female principles is called in Chinese, *Hi*, or the breath of nature. The fixed, inscrutable, and immutable laws it followed in moving forth and producing the male and female principles and finally the whole universe was called *Li*, or the order of nature. The laws of nature and all the workings of its vital breath are in strict accordance with certain mathematical principles, which may be traced and illustrated by diagrams, exhibiting the numerical proportion of the universe called *So*, or numbers. All these divisions are not directly cognizable to the senses, and only become manifest through forms and outlines of physical nature. These phenomena of nature, her outward forms of appearance, constitute the fourth branch of the system, called *Ying*, or forms of nature.²

The laws of nature on which feng-shui is based comprise three principles, the first two of which we understand somewhat, the third of which we are still patently ignorant. The first is that heaven rules the earth; the second that both heaven and earth influence all living beings and that it is in your hands to turn this influence to the best account for your advantage; the third that the fortunes of the living depend also upon the goodwill and general influence of the dead. Upon these considerations is based the elaborate and now time-encrusted practices of calculating the specific astrological influences on a place through the aid of a graduated astrolabe on which is diagrammed the action of these forces.



Chinese geomantic compass.¹⁸

The numerical proportions of nature are expressed in diagrams equivalent to those of the I Ching, where the combinations of the two kinds of vital energy are minutely worked out in relation to different directions and the alignment of the forces of the heavens. The forms of nature, the shapes of hills and watercourses which act to divert, accumulate, or disperse the cosmic energies are classified according to their effect. The study of these, along with the diagrams, the expression of the laws of nature in astrological charts, and a study of the topography as it affects the flow of vital breath of nature through and around different places are all combined in the elaborate considerations necessary in the traditional practice of feng-shui.

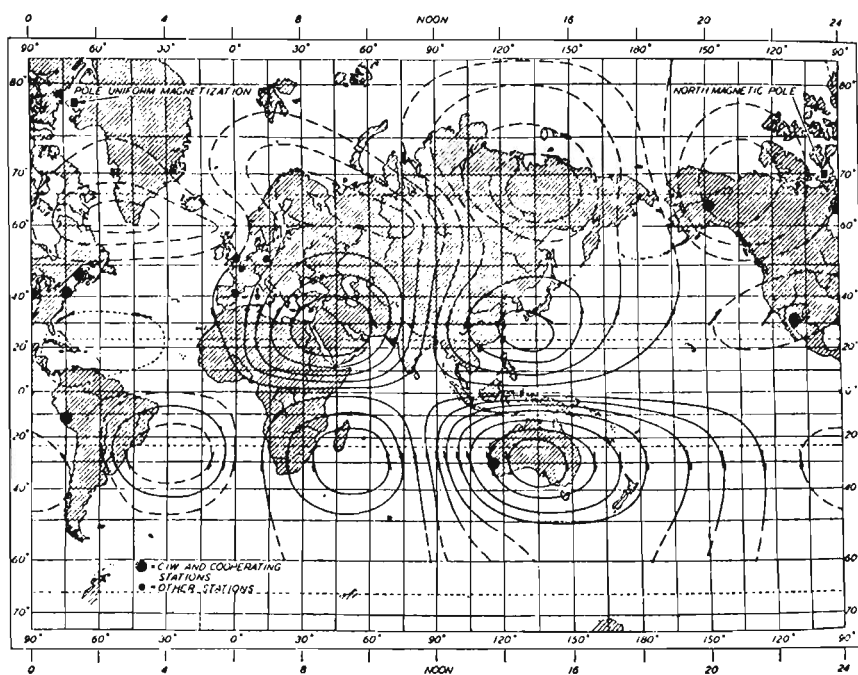


Our puzzlement at the labyrinthian logic and esoteric mythology of feng-shui has continually been heightened both by the reverence paid it by what we would otherwise consider totally sane Chinese, and by our admission of its success in creating a landscape of human settlement of serenity and beauty unsurpassed in any part of the world and incomparably finer than that of which our own culture has been capable. We have tried to define its effect on the Chinese, first as non-existent and pure superstition blocking more "scientific" understanding; then later recognizing its effects on the landscape, attributing it to a "natural affinity and sensitivity to nature on the part of its practitioners". We have had to retrench still further when we could no longer deny its effects on the lives of the people affected by it, attributing that effect to the "moral rightness of peaceful action and respect for other life" gained by belief in and action on the myths of feng-shui. Today we must retrench still further if we wish to still deny its significance, as we are beginning to discover geophysical and medical evidence of its existence and influence upon the life processes of all life forms.

In the 1870's, when Ernest Eitel published the first thorough English language study on feng-shui, we had already become aware of the existence of terrestrial magnetic and electrical currents. Considerable information on their causation and nature was accumulated in the first half of this century, but it has not been until the last 20 years that tools have

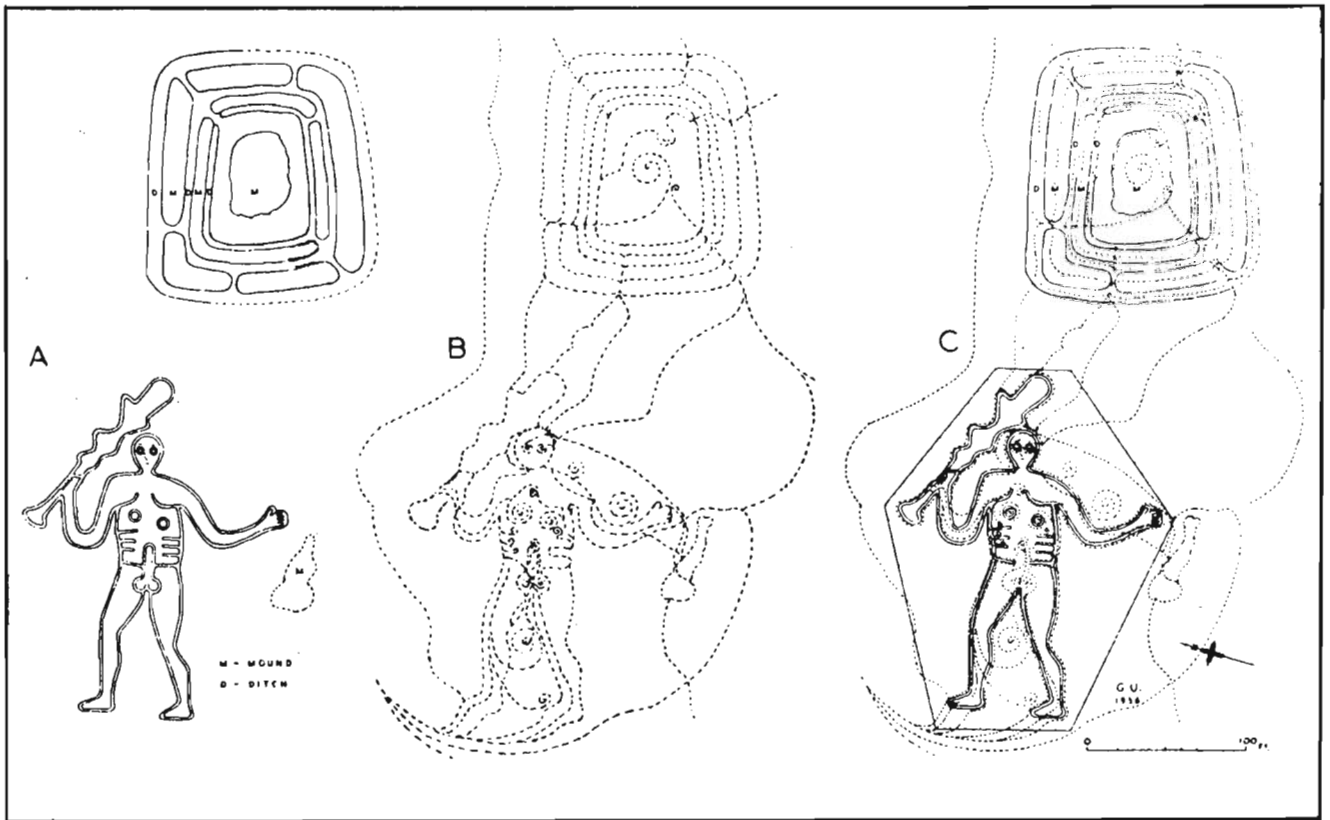
become available and attention directed to study into their effects on living matter. Physicists have long denied the possibility of any such effects, as the frequency and energy involved are less than that necessary to affect living cellular material other than thermally. Mounting evidence that those currents do affect living matter, and that they affect it significantly, is beginning to bring a reconsideration of the whole question of environmental forces and their action.^{9,26,27}

The earth's atmosphere contains varying magnetic and electrical fields and currents, which are induced in it principally from the activity of the sun. The atmospheric fields in turn induce currents into the earth which also fluctuate with changes in the earth's magnetic field and the intensity of solar and stellar activity and are in addition affected by topography, ore deposits, moving water, and other geographical features.^{20,21,22}

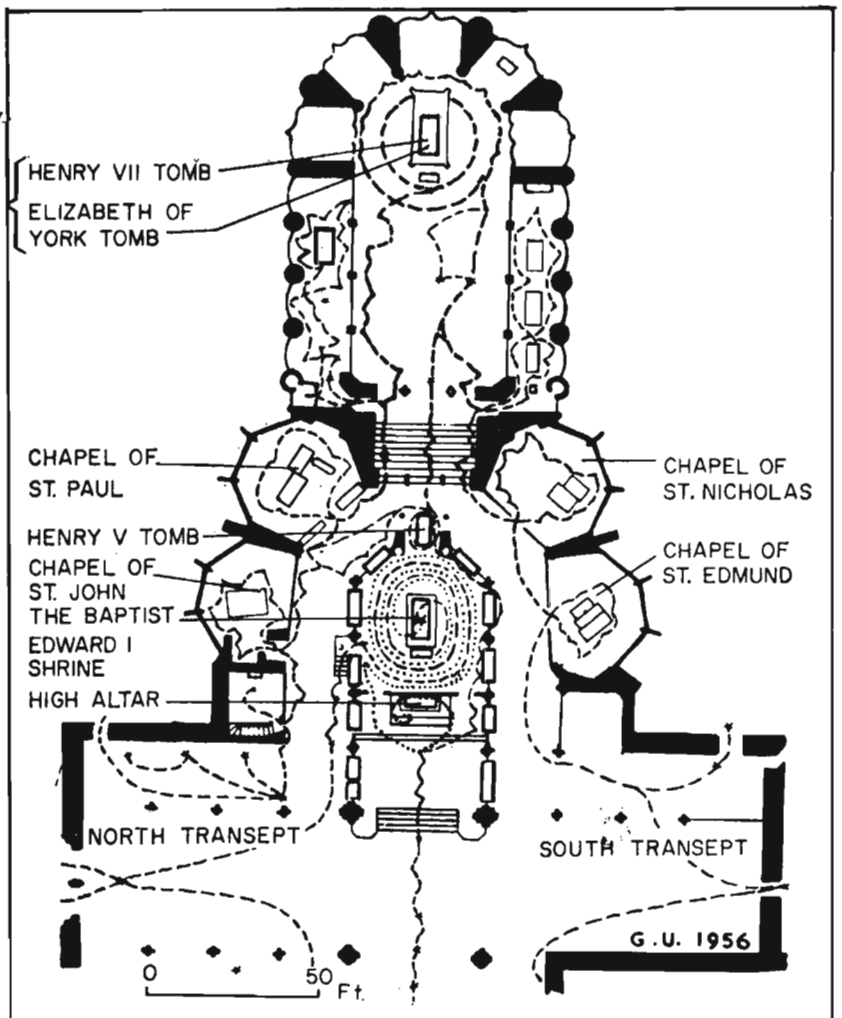


The earth-current system at 6^h G.M.T.²²

The effects of electromagnetic fields of the intensity and frequency occurring naturally in the earth and its atmosphere have recently been shown to have many and complex effects upon all types of living matter.²⁶ It appears in consideration of these forces, that the practices of feng-shui is undoubtedly connected to harmonizing with the terrestrial electrical and magnetic fields^{9,6,7}, and may as well be concerned with other types of energy such as gravitation and time, as well as other forms with which we are yet unfamiliar. The presence of earth currents has long been detectable through dowsing techniques⁹, and more recently airborne and satellite remote sensing devices have made mapping of their presence and changes a relatively simple process.²⁴



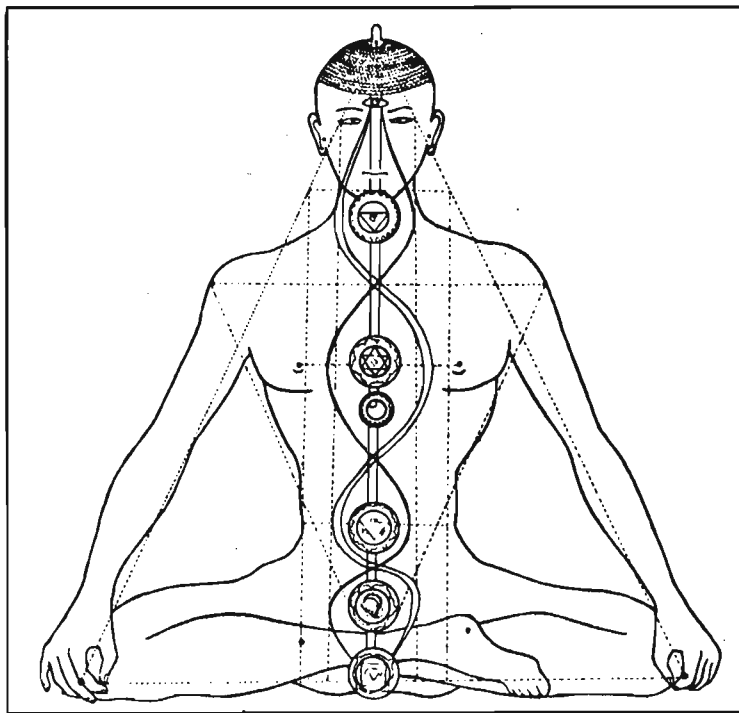
The Cerne Giant, a colossal human shape outlined by trenches cut in the turf on the hillside above Cerne Abbas in Dorset, England. The figure measures 180 feet high, and is dated from 1900 B.C. or earlier. A. Visible pattern of the Giant, with associated mounds and ditches shown diagrammatically. B. Aquastats on site. C. Figure superimposed on aquastats. One of numerous examples of figures aligned upon energy currents in the earth.⁹



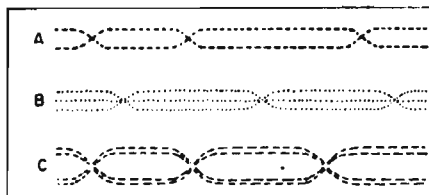
East end of Westminster Abbey, showing alignment on aquastats on the site. As usual in cathedrals, the Abbey is aligned on a central aquastat. The shrine and tomb of Edward the Confessor, Henry V, Henry VI, Henry VII, and Queen Elizabeth I are all located on important blind springs.⁹

It would be premature today to attempt to comprehensively define the action of the forces involved in feng-shui and practices which would effectively harmonize our actions with them, though this should become possible in the near future. Precise research is just beginning into many aspects of the effects of the fields, and experiments to date have more been influenced by the equipment available to the researchers than by anticipated effects. Certain interesting information has been discovered, however.²⁶

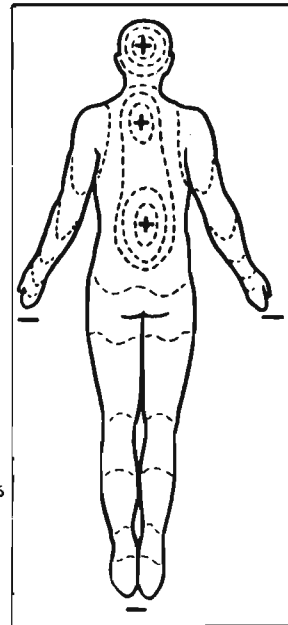
Growth retardation and enhancement has been experienced in many experiments, and has even been applied to a process of electromagnetic gardening with remarkable results. Circadian rhythms and the navigation of migrating birds and fish have been strongly tied to the information the organisms gain from these fields. The role of electromagnetic fields in informational interconnections between organisms, between an organism and its environment, and in controlling the vital processes within the organism are being discovered to be significant and unpredicted. Completely unknown information systems operating on these energies have been found throughout the bodies of both higher and lower organisms. Electromagnetic interconnections have been found in animal communities which are regarded as self-organizing systems in relation to population and activities of the community. A primary perception has been found in all cells which can communicate emotional and other information instantly and unaffected by distance.³¹



Chakras, or energy centers in the human body, and the energy channels linking them, according to Yogic tradition.

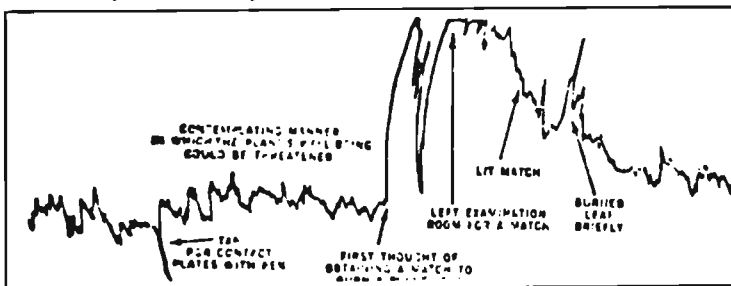


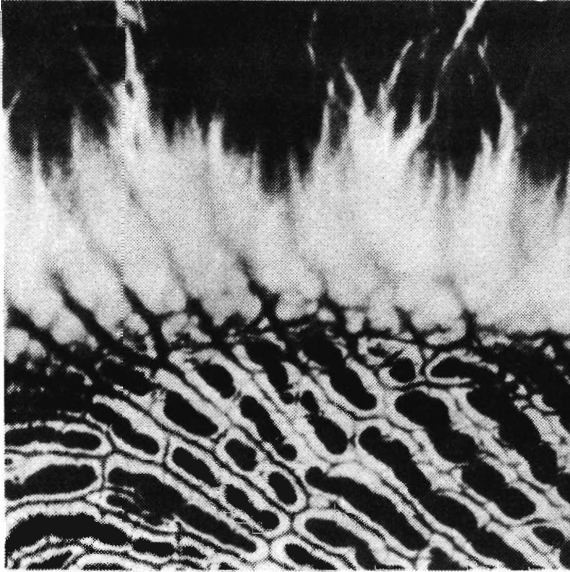
Reticulation of: A. Track Lines, B. Water Lines, and C. Aquastats, as traced by dowsing techniques.⁹



Surface potentials of the human body.²⁶

Recording of plant perception of intentions of investigator deciding to burn a leaf.³⁰





Kirlian photograph of a finger in a high-frequency field, showing energy emissions.²⁹

The diverse manifestations of the biological action of electromagnetic fields indicate that living organisms have formed in the process of evolutionary development specific electromagnetic systems capable of receiving, transmitting, and converting the information carried by e-m fields. They also suggest that we reconsider the theory of electromagnetic fields being a precursor and organizer of all life development proposed by Harold S. Burr as a result of his neurophysiological studies at Yale.²⁸ Independently, Soviet scientists have studied and photographed these "energy bodies" in plants and human beings,^{15,29} and begin to lend credence to the often repeated statements of psychics and yogis concerning separate existence of energy bodies for all material organization.

Investigations in Great Britain, India, Egypt, and South America are revealing the possibility that Neolithic man had considerable understanding of these forces and the means to influence their environmental action.^{6,7,8,38} A world-wide system of energy accumulators, distributors, and special devices to enhance their effect upon man has been proposed by John Michell as existing more than 4000 years ago, embracing the erection of Stonehenge in England, the pyramids in Egypt, and other significant monuments in other parts of the world.⁸ Studies on the Great Pyramid in Egypt³³ and of alchemical documents has instigated research in Eastern Europe on the effect of particular geometries of spatial organization on the accumulation of energies from these fields.¹⁵ Rudolf Steiner, Wilhelm Reich, and other investigators have independently formulated medical, psychological, and spiritual systems based upon what will possibly turn out to be the effects of these forces.³²

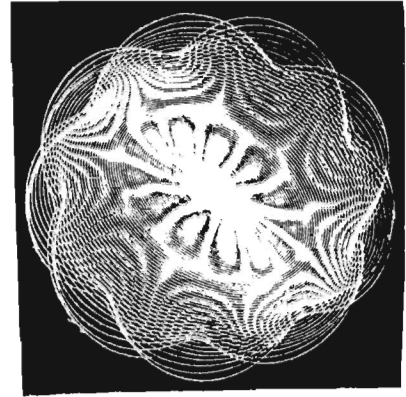
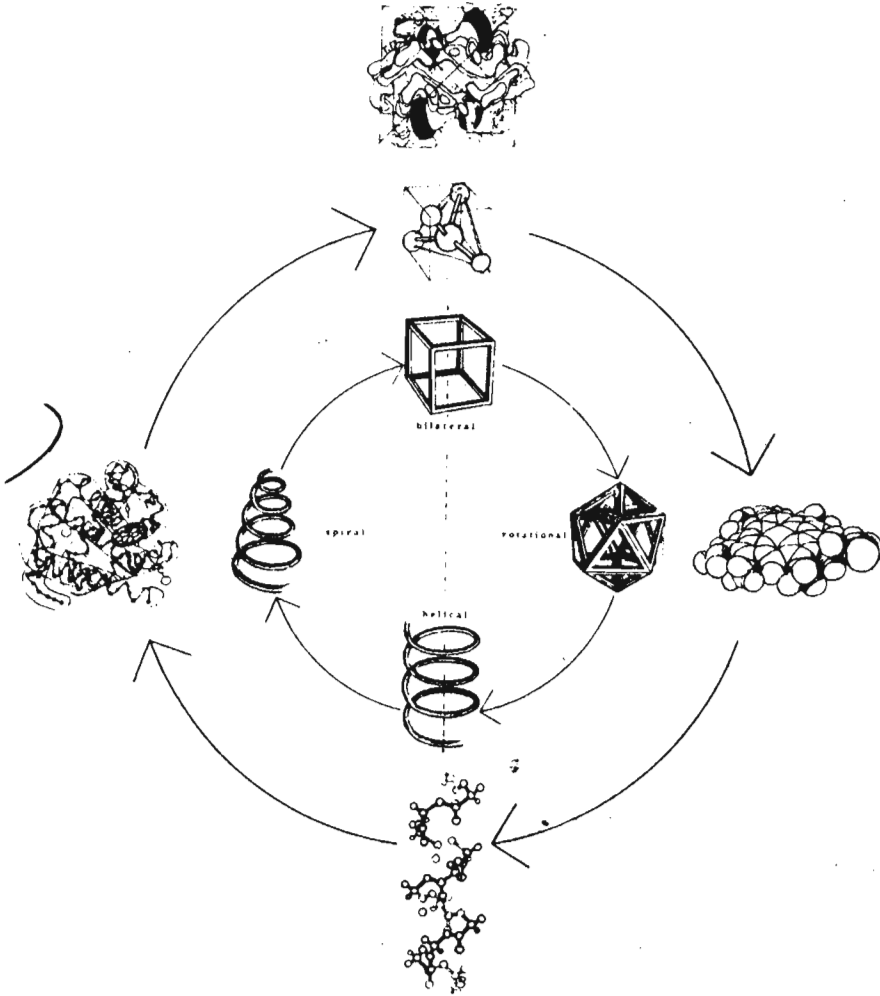
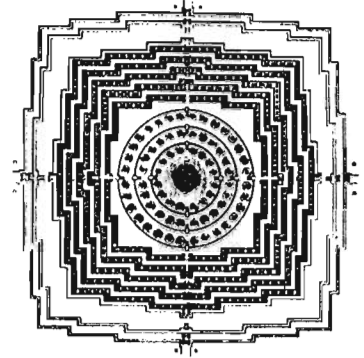


Image of geometrical structure of thought-forms in psychic processes.

The four stages of a complete cycle of transformations of symmetry from bilateral, to rotational, to helical, to spiral.³⁴

Stupa of Barabudur. Plan.



The relationship between energy, geometry, and consciousness is beginning to be more fully hinted at as a result of recent studies. Research by Anne Tyng³⁴ on the relationship between geometry and energy connecting all levels of physical, biological, and psychic organization reinforces the work done many years ago on the geometrical organization of thought images and processes, and the importance placed in most of the Asian religious systems on geometric mandalas as tools for expanding consciousness.³⁵ We may soon understand many important architectural monuments of Asia and other areas (such as the great stupa of Borobudur) to be based upon mantric focusing of energy for human purposes rather than a purely artistic collection of sculpture and architecture.

The possibility of our gaining a measurably enlarged understanding of our nature and our relation to our universe may come with our substantiation of the validity of feng-shui and the role it played in the relation between the Chinese and their surroundings. To discover our entire cosmos and our selves pervaded by and interconnected through energy fields which generate and sustain all life and communicate information on our existence and nature to all reaches of the universe cannot help but change our lives and our interests.³⁷

Maurice Freedman speaks of the difference in the meaning of their surroundings to a European and a Chinaman enjoying a view; the European¹⁶ thinks of the combination of hills and sea producing splendid vistas. His pleasure is aesthetic and objective, the landscape is out there, and he enjoys it. The Chinaman's appreciation is cosmological. For him the viewer and the viewed are interacting, both being part of some greater system. The Cosmos is Heaven, Earth, and Man. Man is in it and of it. So while the European's reaction is to find it beautiful, the Chinese may remark that he feels content or comfortable. Feng-shui is asserting a human response to forces working in the cosmos, and just as landscapes affect man, man may affect them. It is a remarkably sophisticated and meaningful tool, and one which may soon find practical application in the enrichment and elevation of our own lives.

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