

# *IT GETS EVEN STRANGER FROM HERE ON*

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It can be fun learning about the esoteric practices of an obscure ancient art such as feng shui. Some of those practices *can* powerfully change how our surroundings affect us. Others are worthless accumulations of several thousand years of superstition. Sometimes it's hard to tell the difference. The real significance of feng shui, however, lies far outside the possible effectiveness of any of its specific practices.

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Our culture is on the brink of a quiet, yet fundamental change. Acknowledgment of the existence and importance of *chi*, or life force energy, that has been the foundation of the arts, sciences, healing, and spiritual practices of virtually every other culture in history is beginning to occur in our own.

In November, 1997, the National Institutes of Health released a strong endorsement of the use of acupuncture, noting "very clear-cut evidence" of its successful action and that it is less invasive, and with fewer side effects than conventional treatments. For a major governmental player in the US medical establishment to make such an endorsement of a practice based on *chi* is remarkable - particularly with the panel noting "there is no evidence that confirms this theory". What is perhaps most remarkable is that in endorsing something denied by our conventional scientific concepts, they are challenging the adequacy of those very concepts! The *chi* underlying acupuncture is the same *chi* in the earth which is central to the Chinese art of *feng-shui*, used for aligning ourselves with the energetics of place.

*Nature*, the British equivalent of *Scientific American*, announced in their December, 1997 issue the successful experimental demonstration of "quantum teleportation" by researchers in Austria. Quantum teleportation shows that information even on the subatomic level can be transmitted *instantly* over stellar distances (without being limited by the speed of light). Related work is underway by IBM.

"Energy healing", "laying on of hands", and related practices of healing energy work with bodily *chi* has been effective enough in promoting healing in a variety of situations that it is now covered by many health insurance policies. Millions of people in our own culture have also now *experienced* this *chi* - in martial arts, tai-chi, meditation, hatha yoga, bodywork, acupuncture, dowsing, or other contexts. It is no longer a theoretical philosophical concept of foreign spiritual traditions. Bodywork techniques have been developed which make work with *chi* something that can be easily attained by most people. *Chi* is no longer an esoteric practice requiring years of monastic training! Even the US Marines are now using Akido training based on chi!

Our sciences have been so absorbed in the years since World War II in exploring the material consequences of breakthroughs achieved in a few branches of physics that they have neglected to focus their powerful tools on other areas which unwittingly remain "black box" concepts. Do we really understand something like magnetism? What *is* it? How does it transmit power through space and vacuum?

And what about *gravity*? Look up at the Moon tonight. Its mass is immense. Simple mechanics tells us what incredible forces gravity applies to the Moon to keep that mass in orbit and from shooting off on a tangent into space. But how does it work? How are the moon and sun able through enormous distances to *pull* the entire oceans of our planet six feet into the air twice a day, and pull the Earth itself around in a circle?

Chi is part of these areas still unexplored by our current sciences. Unlike the moon hanging over our heads, it has until recently been one we could brush aside and pretend didn't exist. But experience and success in its use are today forcing its recognition.

It may seem that *chi* is a simple and peripheral thing, but it has been central to the sophisticated philosophies of many cultures. The power inherent in its acknowledgment is likely to be as foreign and initially inconceivable as the atom bomb was as the outcome of theoretical scratchings of a renegade physicist. Fortunately, the power of *chi* is an integrative, rather than a destructive one; a power of giving life, rather than of taking it. Its acknowledgment will bring changes - in far different directions - as great as those achieved by our modern technology:

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What are the implications of a world where noone can lie - where our innermost thoughts and feelings are known to each other?

What is a world like where instant communication occurs - not only between people, but among all forms of life - stars, rocks, the cells in our bodies?

What does it mean to our society to acknowledge that we continue to exist on an energy level after "death"?

What are the implications of a world where we can call on the counsel of ancestors and other beings in the spiritual planes of life?

What is a world where astrology can show what kinds of surroundings are good or bad for us at different times?

What will our world be like when "magic" is practiced and has powerful effect for good or ill?

How does our world change when we are all indelibly aware that the health of *all* Creation is essential to our well-being?

How do we change when we recognize that our minds and hearts are an integral and powerful part of our interaction with the world on both sides of our skin, and that those parts of our existence are inseparable?

What happens when we realize that sacredness is the central basis of meaningful lives and an enduring society?

These are a few glimpses of the world that comes into being when we acknowledge the central role of *chi* in our universe.

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Chi is intimately connected with and inherent in place and our associations with it. Every culture has emphasized and developed certain aspects of place energy, while virtually ignoring others. The particular value of the *feng-shui* tradition of China is that it provides us with a broad and relatively comprehensive philosophical basis for energetics of place. It constitutes the most impressive written record of approaches dealing with *chi* in our surroundings, and a place to begin understanding its effects on our interaction with those surroundings. What's more, it's even fashionable!

Feng shui's myriad traditions and practices also demonstrate various approaches to environmental modification for improving local *chi* patterns. It has made extensive use of

astrological information in siting, and generated culturally-specific practices for aligning our places with *chi* of place. Yet there are major gaps in their approach and dimensions where other traditions have pushed the frontiers of understanding even further.

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The mapping of energy flows and concentrations in the earth has been well developed in the European geomantic tradition, which also has located buildings relative to that energy in the earth. The Australian Aboriginal tradition has developed use of such energy lines in the earth even further, using them for long distance communication.

Relative to the built environment, the Japanese have developed the role of *li* or intention to great refinement and power. *Chi* (*ki* in Japanese) is if anything more central to Japanese culture and design than to Chinese. The Japanese language, for example, has over 600 terms employing the ideogram for *ki*, compared to about 80 in Chinese.

Contemporary work in our own culture by architects and designers working with *chi* has not reached the refinement of the Japanese or Chinese, but is developing a tradition specific to our own conditions and time. The Khmer culture in Cambodia can show us immensely powerful roles that our built environment can play in connecting us with energy from the spirit world. The Yoruba in Africa can show the emotional power that can be developed afresh in our building drawing directly upon intimate connection with that world.

African cultures - from the !Kung to the Yoruba and the Dagara, along with the Wiccan tradition in Europe and many other cultures, have worked powerfully with community raising of energy, and the roles it holds in cultural survival and health. The recent work of dowsers and energy workers such as Joey Korn, Sig Lonegren and others has shown that earth energies are not immutable. They move and change. We can ask the balancing of negative energies, the focusing and relocation of positive ones. We can call upon them, and they respond - it would appear almost consciously - to our requests for aligning with our lives and activities.

Energetics of place also involves information and communication. African cultures have worked strongly with personal interaction with energy of place to access ancestors and other beings in the realms of energy. Native American, Aboriginal, Celtic, Greek, and many other traditions work with direct communication with, and through, the individual elements of nature. The Australian Aboriginal tradition has developed to a high level use of the unique and specific connections to the spiritual realm from different natural sites. The Khmers and Egyptians have demonstrated how buildings can enhance such connections.

For all our talk of need to reconnect with nature, it appears that *chi* or life force communication may be the missing link. Alienation arises from our blocking out the eternal sharing and being part which occurs on that level. As Malidoma Somé has said, literacy may fill a place in the psyche intended for other purposes. But literacy too can be bypassed, and direct linkage on the *chi* level reestablished.

These are only a few examples that stand out, for their special developments, from the almost universal use of *chi* in cultures worldwide. What is exciting is that these are living traditions which can be learned from, shared, melded, and forged into a living tradition for our own culture.

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Design, in a *chi*-based world, is a very different animal.

We've learned that the energy bodies of our communities are damaged by place rape and abuse from greed-based activities such as overlogging, overfishing, extractive agriculture, energy and material mining just as our human energy bodies are damaged by rape and abuse. And we've found that healing of those energy bodies is both possible and essential in both cases if true healing is to occur.

We're learning how the *chi* of place and people interact; how our love or anger remain in a place to affect the next users; how gifts of honor and pilgrimage are bestowed on both a place and its subsequent visitors. We're learning how to generate and direct group energy to sustain the joy and health of our human communities and the natural communities within which they live. The potentialities for people working with earth energies are expanding in scope, depth, and concrete application.

A *chi*-centered world changes how we design and use places. It first of all requires that we give primary importance to designing the *chi* of a place. It means that the functions we design for will be different. It demands integrity of materials, design and uses. It stresses the importance of paying attention to our tummies - how we feel about a place, the psychology of place, the role of our minds and our fears and dreams. It requires we design relative to the needs and aspirations of all Creation, not just us. Our attitudes and values, what we want in a place, change dramatically.

With *chi*, our *intention* in approaching design is critical. An approach that just considers "job functions" delegates people to "back-room" jobs and "back-room" consideration by others, while an intention to provide rewarding jobs changes building configuration and the respect given to each person in their work.

The role of the sacred becomes central. Buildings with soul, gardens for our spirits, cities of passion become the goal rather than rentable square feet. Accommodating and enhancing ritual and its role in both the making and use of places becomes important, as does being a part of the local ecological community. Low-impact ecological design is taken for granted. Growth, greed, and consumption give way to the goals of sustainability and nurture.

Now is a time of gathering in, of opening ourselves to the varieties of wisdom of all traditions and gleaning from each what can be melded together to bear on our unique situations. Feng shui is a cluster of concepts and tools that can help us begin to find ways to walk in this new world.

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