

# *Fengshui*: A Moral Technique-Art (*jiyi* 技藝) for Contemporary Environmental Awareness

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## Abstract

In this article, we will define *fengshui* as a contemporary hybrid way of thinking with a long history that unfolds from ancient Chinese philosophy and the art of ruling, through Song Neo-Confucianism, to modern Western ecologic interpretations. We will particularly highlight the cosmological and moral *ratio* of this art in the philosophical thought of Zhu Xi and Cai Yuanding, which we will propose as the possible source of a renovated moral *fengshui*. After this historical framework, we will present the process of the scientification of *fengshui* as a building technology. Therefore, we will put into question this enframing of *fengshui* as a modern technology through both Heidegger's lens and Li Zehou's definition of "proper measure" (*du* 度). Following this hermeneutical analysis, we will propose *jiyi* 技藝 (technique-art) as the most suitable definition of *fengshui* and we will present the ethical dimension behind it (i.e., filial piety towards nature). In the conclusions, we will argue that *fengshui* is not, properly speaking, an environmental philosophy or an ecologism, since these two concepts are too rooted in Western philosophical culture (i.e., transcendence and the separateness of humans and nature). However, we are convinced that *fengshui* could fruitfully contribute to a deeper ecological awareness with a Chinese character on both the local and global scales.

**Keywords:** *fengshui*, Zhu Xi, Cai Yuanding, Martin Heidegger, deep ecology, environmentalism

## *Fengshui*: Moralna tehnika-umetnost (*jiyi*) za sodobno okoljsko zavest

### Izvilleček

V tem članku bomo podali definicijo tehnike *fengshui* kot sodobnega hibridnega načina razmišljanja z dolgo zgodovino, ki sega vse od starodavne kitajske filozofije in umetnosti vladanja, preko sunškega novokonfucijanstva, vse do modernih zahodnih ekoloških interpretacij. Predvsem pa bomo poudarili tovrstno kozmološko in moralno *racionalo* v filozofski misli Zhu Xija in Cai Yuandinga, ki jo bomo obravnavali kot možni vir prenovljene moralne tehnike *fengshui*. Zatem ko bomo podali ta zgodovinski okvir, bomo predstavili proces poznanstvenjenja tehnike *fengshui* kot gradbene tehnologije. Prav

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zaradi tega bomo pod vprašaj postavili uokvirjenje omenjene tehnike kot moderne tehnologije, tako skozi Heideggerjev pogled kot tudi Li Zehoujevo definicijo »prave mere« (du 度). Za to hermenevitično analizo bomo predlagali *jiyi* 技藝 (tehnika-umetnost) kot najprimernejšo definicijo pojma *fengshui*, predstavili pa bomo tudi etično dimenzijo v njenem ozadju (tj. sinovska pietetnost proti naravi). V zaključkih k tej razpravi pa bomo zagovarjali, da, v svojem pravem pomenu, *fengshui* ni niti vrsta okoljske filozofije niti oblika ekologizma, saj imata ta dva koncepta svoje korenine v filozofski kulturi Zahoda (tj. transcendenca in ločenost človeštva od narave). Kljub temu pa smo še zmeraj prepričani, da lahko *fengshui* bogato prispeva h globlji ekološki zavesti s kitajskimi značilnostmi, tako na lokalni kot tudi globalni ravni.

**Ključne besede:** *fengshui*, Zhu Xi, Cai Yuanding, Martin Heidegger, globoka ekologija, environmentalizem

### *Fengshui* and Its Hybrid Nature

We start our investigation with a balanced definition of *fengshui* 風水, as provided by the Korean scholar Yoon:

Geomancy [*fengshui*]<sup>1</sup> is a rather complicated, quasi-scientific, quasi-religious Chinese art built on the concept that humanity can benefit from nature only when humanity chooses an auspicious environment and uses it appropriately. One environment is more conducive to fortune than others, according to geomancy, and nature provides environments ranging from highly auspicious to highly harmful. (Yoon 2006, 155)

He adds that the environment presents “magical” and vulnerable forces that humans have to detect, protect, and accumulate in order to benefit from them. The relation between humans and the environment is based on responsiveness (*ganying* 感應), since both are manifestations of *yinyang* 陰陽 (or better *qi* 氣). We see in this definition, proposed by Yoon, the limits of the use of Western terminology. Quasi-scientific and quasi-religious are terms that suggest that it is neither of these disciplines, but also not the opposite of them. Yoon is reclaiming the “scientificity” of this knowledge in order to suggest a specific rationality of this art, without the implications of what we label “modern science”. He is suggesting that *fengshui* is religious in so far as it penetrates deeply into the spirituality of

1 In this article we do not make use of the translation of *fengshui* as geomancy, since there is no corresponding term in Western languages for this concept. The term geomancy could correspond at the most to the mere applied face of *fengshui*, the superstitious one, precisely what we are not concerned with in our argument. In the third paragraph, we will discuss the use of terms such as art, technique, and so on.

the community, but does not entail any transcendental God and religious order. These “quasi-definitions” express the impossibility of representing in Western languages an art that is a quintessential expression of Chinese culture. We also need to consider that *fengshui* presents two faces—the divination of sites for the dead and for the living—which creates a unique art that has developed from very practical needs (i.e., the identification of a dry safe and above all liveable site).

*Fengshui* is the specific historical result of the convergence of ancient theories and arts that date back to the origin of Chinese civilization, such as divination, cosmology, astrology, numerology, topography, etc., following the principles of the most relevant Chinese schools of philosophy (i.e., Daoism, *Yinyang* correlative thinking, interpretations of the *Yijing* 易經, Confucian relational ethics, etc.<sup>2</sup>). All the philosophies and arts involved could be gathered under the general blanket term of “the art of ruling”, whereby ruling the cosmos (with its supernatural forces), ruling nature, and ruling humans, are understood as three aspects of the same task. As David J. Nemeth (1991, 215–16) clearly explains, since the origin of Chinese and Korean civilizations, the most fundamental governing rule was the “centrequest”. Chinese rulers re-enforced their authority in placing themselves at the centre of the universe, where the cosmic forces are at their apex and create a harmonic flux. The cultural geography of ancient and imperial China is scattered with places where these forces gather and give access to the power of *qi* 氣. These places are temples, shrines, royal/imperial palaces, and royal/imperial tombs (ibid., 216), but to this we can also add natural elements, such as mountains, large stones, rivers, etc. This quest, at the origin a prerogative of the ruling clans, gradually became popular and spread among the common people.

The term 風水 *fengshui* emerged only in this period of popularization, when the Confucians of the Song inaugurated an intense interest in cosmology and the ethical speculations on the 易經 *Yijing*. This is also when the art of the *fengshui* became a profession for men who were paid for their consultations. Before the Song dynasty, this art was named differently in each epoch and context (占卜 *zhanbu*, 相宅 *xiangzhai*, 堪輿 *kanyu*, 地理 *dili*, etc).

As with any Chinese art or technique (數術 *shushu*), *fengshui* possesses a canon of texts, but several of the most ancient ones are either lost or highly manipulated. One of the pivotal figures of ancient times is Guo Pu 郭璞 (276–324 AD) of the Jin dynasty, the attributed author of *The Inner Chapter of the Book/Classic of Burial Rooted in Antiquity* (*Guben zangjing neipian* 古本葬經內篇), where he

2 Ever since the Song dynasty, Buddhism has also played a relevant role in the shaping of this art, both cosmologically and ethically (e.g., dependent origination, charity for the deaths and the livings, and so on).

refers to a quasi-lost ancient tradition that needs to be restored. Most of the texts of this canon have been written or reworked since the Song dynasty. This makes *fengshui* a very ancient art—due to its cultural roots and early references—and at the same time a recent one, since it possesses a canon that continued to develop from the Song to the end of the Qing dynasty. Meanwhile, the definition of this canon is still a rather open process, where Western and Chinese sociologists, anthropologists, and architects<sup>3</sup> continue to play a relevant role beside the “popular experts” of the discipline (from spiritual leaders to fortune-tellers). This creates what we can acknowledge as a true “transcultural system of thought”, where the origins or the presumed traditional purity are completely undetectable (if not irrelevant). The *fengshui* we know today is thus the product of a long process of adaptation and manipulation, at first within Chinese cultural history, and afterwards on an international scale.

As noted above, *fengshui* is an art with an extremely hybrid nature, since it absorbed elements coming from each of the most relevant philosophical schools. From Daoism, it inherited cosmology and divination (i.e., the theories of 氣 *qi* and 陰陽 *yinyang* which were mostly developed within this school). From the interpretation of the 易經 *Yijing*, it took numerology and symbolism as effective means of interpretation of the cosmos. From Confucianism, it absorbed concepts such as the relevance of the dead for the living (i.e., the cult of one’s ancestors as roots) and the necessity of social hierarchy for cosmic order (with its inextricable rituality 禮 *li*). As Eitel (1984, 51) already suggested in 1873: “the history of the leading ideas and practices of Feng-shui is the history of Chinese philosophy”.<sup>4</sup> This is not because *fengshui* is *stricto sensu* a philosophy, but because it gathers elements from each of the Chinese philosophical thoughts.

The Confucian systematizer Zhu Xi 朱熹 openly endorsed the efficacy of *fengshui*, particularly regarding the correct selection of appropriate locations for imperial tombs. He was a close friend of Cai Yuanding 蔡元定 (1135–1198), a geomancer of the relevant Cai lineage from Fujian. It is reported that when Zhu wrote a memorial to the throne, requesting a more appropriate place for the corpse of the recently deceased emperor, he was deeply influenced by Cai’s explanations of the principles of *fengshui* (Ebrey and Walthall 2014, 142). He shared the idea that a correct burial could bring positive energy to the descendants of the deceased, and he inserted this view within his cosmological understanding (Ebrey 1997, 86–105). He was perfectly aware that many of his colleagues despised *fengshui* as

3 We note here that philosophers are almost absent in the list of scholars who devote attention to *fengshui*.

4 Quoted in Bruun 2008, 14.

a pseudo-science or, as we would say, a superstition, and that this could be used against him. However, he firmly supported both the moral necessity to have one's parents' corpses properly buried, and the possible good fortune that the correct performance of this ritual could entail.

In his *Family Rituals* (*Jiali* 家禮), he quotes the harsh critics of Sima Guang 司馬光 towards the incoherence and inefficacy of geomantic burial, particularly with regard to the large amount of time necessary for divination of the site and for the complex burial rituals (see Ebrey 1997, 92; 1991, 103). He also quotes Cheng Yi 程頤, who, while rejecting the excessive insistence on fortune and misfortune of the “Yin-yang specialists” (i.e., the *fengshui* experts), completely agrees with the need to find a “a land that is excellent” for tombs. Below we present some of Cheng Yi's ideas in order to better situate Zhu Xi's point of view:

When the land is excellent, the spirits will be comfortable and the descendants will flourish; the principle is the same as the branches and leaves of a plant flourishing when dirt is banked around roots. [...] It is land that is bright and moist; a flourishing growth of plants and trees is the evidence. [...] Father and grandfather, son and grandson, all share the same material force (*ch'i*). According to this principle, when the one is at peace the other will be at peace; when the one is endangered the other will be endangered. Adherents of superstitions are deluded into selecting the direction of the land and choosing days for their auspiciousness. Isn't this ignorant! The worst do not think in terms of serving the deceased but worry solely about their own future benefits. This is not what a filial son should be concentrating on in arranging a burial place. (Ebrey 1991, 105)

To these dense arguments by Sima and Cheng, Zhu Xi laconically adds: “the ancients decided on grave sites and burials dates by divining with stalks. People today do not know these methods, so it is all right to follow the customary way of selecting these”. The “customary way” is clearly *fengshui*, as he made explicit in his memorial. He clearly argues: “In recent times the method of divining with stalks has been lost but theories of how to select sites still exist. [...] Although this is the theory of the experts (術家 *shujia*), it is not without a rational basis” (Ebrey 1997, 88–89). He compares the art of *fengshui* (here named *dili* 地理) with medical practices such as acupuncture and moxibustion, because a wrong site is like a wound that has not been correctly cauterized. Ebrey (1997, 92) comments that for Zu Xi, “stripped to its core, geomancy fits within the cosmology of the *I-ching*, which includes the geomancers' favorite classical allusion: ‘Look up to observe the patterns of heaven; look down to examine the principles of earth (仰以觀於天文，俯以察於地理)’”. This line, which became a *fengshui*

motto, comes from the *Xici zhuan* 繫辭轉,<sup>5</sup> the most philosophical of the “Ten Wings Commentaries” to the *Yijing* 易經. We find in this expression *tianwen* 天文 (celestial patterns) and *dili* 地理 (principles of Earth), two terms to which we will return later. We can summarize that Zhu Xi saw divination as both a way to penetrate the organismic model of *li* 理 and *qi* 氣, and as a kind of effective ritual (*li* 禮), one that is able to preserve the energetic and moral forces within a lineage.

Beside Zhu Xi and a few other supporters,<sup>6</sup> *fengshui* was mostly criticized by Confucian scholars because of the complex (and expensive) process of burial and the low (i.e., unconventional) education of the *fengshui* practitioners. However, it was largely used for selecting sites for both tombs and houses, mostly by unlearned people during the Ming and Qing dynasties, though there are investigations which prove that *fengshui* was also used for urbanistic purposes, such as placing temples—particularly Buddhist ones—around cities.<sup>7</sup>

In the 19th century, the fiercest enemies of this Chinese art were no longer the Confucian scholars, but the foreign missionaries or entrepreneurs whose building projects on Chinese soil were met with constant rejection from the imperial authorities on the grounds of going against the principles of *fengshui* (mostly after complaints by ordinary people). As Ole Bruun (2011, 47) reports, *fengshui*, which was officially despised—when not forbidden—by the institutions, served as an “ideological weapon” against foreign expansion.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, it is precisely in this same period that *fengshui* became an emblem of Chinese backwardness. It was acknowledged as pure superstition by foreign missionaries, a view which was endorsed by modernist thinkers and nationalist authorities alike. *Fengshui*, which was most often openly practiced in the countryside, was the symbol of the persistent influence of religion and scientific ignorance in this land. In the 1920s, the rising enthusiasm for science and technology led to an anti-superstition movement, crowned by the 1929 promulgation of the “Procedure for the Abolition of the Occupations of Divinations, Astrology, Physiognomy and Palmistry, Magic and Geomancy” (ibid., 76). In short, the cosmological factors were gradually losing their role in the exercise of power, and thus interest in any cosmological activity also faded among commoners. Since the early 1950s, the same rejection was confirmed by the Communists in their rejection of any folk or uninstitutionalized religious faith. During the Cultural Revolution, geomancers

5 We consulted *Xici shang* 繫辭上, 4 on <https://ctext.org/book-of-changes/xi-ci-shang/zh>.

6 For instance, the Qing scholar Shen Hao supported the Form School against the Compass School, and he reproached his colleagues for not studying *fengshui* but leaving their parents’ tombs in the hands of unlearned and rustic geomancers (see March 1968, 263).

7 Of particular interest are Li Liu (1998) and Freedman (1968, 6).

8 See also March (1968, 253–55).

were forced to confess their backwardness and were beaten in public. Only with the “Open Door Policy” of Deng Xiaoping were old family graves restored, and new ones “geomantically” established. The media was still banned from promoting *fengshui* but, as Bruun (2011, 108) reports, when the first book on the subject was published in 1989–1990, it was perceived as the opening of a new phase for this ancient art. However, we think it is very likely that this new wave of interest was inextricably connected to the Western interpretation of *fengshui* among scholars, and is mostly devoted to the identification of good sites for the living rather than the dead.

In the same decades of when the Maoists banned all talk of *fengshui*, Western scholars such as Maurice Freedman and experts in *fengshui* such as Stephen Skinner devoted their efforts to making the subject better known in the West as an ecological way of thinking that was necessary for the whole of humanity. In his influential address to the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland in 1968, Freedman (1968, 13–14) defines *fengshui* as a “mystical ecology”, and explains that “what men construct is an intrusion, and geomancy is preoccupied with the problem of allowing men to build what they need and want without destroying their natural relationship with the cosmos”. He adds that “Fêng-shui is the ritual of a society not yet overborne by its architectural technology”. Both Freedman and Skinner proposed a re-evaluation of *fengshui* as a global philosophical way of thinking, producing a reflection that aimed to convert it into an effective transcultural phenomenon, deeply influenced by the ecological or environmentalist sensibility, which was already on the rise in the West at the time. For Freedman (1968, 14), *fengshui* was the alternative to the “ferocious dominion” over nature of Western modernity.

Despite the long century of persecution in China, *fengshui* is still vital in both urban<sup>9</sup> and rural<sup>10</sup> contexts. Indeed, *fengshui* has extended its influence to forest preservation,<sup>11</sup> farm organization, home décor, and tourism,<sup>12</sup> as well as in the shaping many important national buildings, such as Terminal 3 the Beijing

9 This article could not include a presentation of the “Shan-Shui city” project that belongs to the architect Wu Liangyong and was endorsed by the famous scientist Qian Xuesen; see Chen Yulin (2010) and Yang Yizhao and Hu Jie (2016, 14).

10 There are around 2,500 protected historical villages in China which respect the principles of *fengshui* and are surrounded by *fengshui* forests (see Madeddu and Zhang 2017).

11 See Chen Jianling et al. (2020); Chen Bixia et al. (2018); Yuan and Liu (2009).

12 We mention the two museums devoted to *fengshui* and classical architecture in the PRC, one in Sichuan (阆中古城风水馆 Ancient City of Langzhong Fengshui Museum) and a smaller one in Jiangsu (泰州中国传统建筑风水文化博物馆 Taizhou Chinese Museum of Classical Architecture and Fengshui Culture).

Airport, the Olympic Pool, and Terminal 2 of the Pudong Airport.<sup>13</sup> The last three examples were influenced by the work of the Chinese *fengshui* experts He Xiaoxin 何曉昕 (who studied philosophy and anthropology) and Luo Jun 羅雋 (an engineer), both of whom are well known in the United Kingdom.<sup>14</sup> We see that *fengshui* is certainly considered, often implicitly and sometimes overtly, in the building process. In fact, in the modern China of the early 2020s, a twofold cultural tension was in action: 1. The claim that after having reached the target of modernity there was a need to reject “superstitions” (迷信 *mixin*), among which *fengshui* is classified; 2. The quest for a specific form of Chinese modernity with both socialist and classical Chinese characteristics.

The reevaluation of this wisdom since the 1980s is inextricably indebted to the previous readings of Western scholars, such as Freedman and his disciple Feuchtwang, who had the wisdom to reject the “superstition” and anti-scientific reading of *fengshui* and understood the deep roots of this art in Chinese society, particularly in Hong Kong, where it was not banned. As Feuchtwang (1974, 14) argues:

If I now say that *feng-shui* cosmology has the status of a model, is a self-defining metaphysical system, those analysts who condemned *feng-shui* as pseudo-science would still not reverse their judgement because they made their analyses from the models in which they believed, religious or Western scientific. But the model which is *feng-shui* was believed to be valid by its Chinese exponents, and it must, therefore, for Western Europeans and all others be recognized as having reality as a model by the mere fact that we believe the Chinese to be real.

He concludes that “*feng-shui* cosmology is eminently more about relationships than fixed entities; the phases of cosmic breaths and the interaction of elements may easily be and are in the manuals themselves personified into social phases and interactions” (Feuchtwang 1974, 255). On the basis of these investigations, the aforementioned He Xiaoxin could reclaim the dimension of *xuewen* 學文 (learning knowledge) for *fengshui* and its “not-scientific nature”.<sup>15</sup> Our investigation is concerned with *fengshui* not as a superstitious folk practice aiming at obtaining good fortune—the one that was denounced by Confucians and the authorities from the Song dynasty on—but instead with this hybrid wisdom with

13 There are a number of projects that, more or less covertly, bend towards *fengshui* principles all around mainland China, particularly to ensure commercial success, see the Conclusions in Madeddu and Zhang (2017).

14 On their activities see Paolillo (2012, 136–38).

15 See Bruun (2011, 108) and Paolillo (2012, 136–38).



a rationale that merits philosophical investigation outside of a scientific evaluation. This is the reason for approaching the question of the “scientification” of *fengshui*.

## The Scientification of *Fengshui*

At the opposite end of our philosophic quest, since the late 1990s, in order to reclaim the relevance of *fengshui* in architecture (both within the Sinosphere and on a global scale), a process of “scientification” of *fengshui* among experts of urbanism, sociology, and economics has taken place, producing a large number of books and articles. The motivation for this activity was the necessity to reject the definition of *fengshui* as superstition (both in China and the West), and instead to suggest the “scientific” nature of this system. This academic activity, which has its main centre at the School of Architecture of the City University in Hongkong, is based on a very old-fashioned comparative approach, with charts showing equivalences or similarities between (Western) science and *fengshui*.

Professors Mak and So are the founders of the International Conference series on “Scientific Feng Shui and the Built Environment”, and authors of several publications on this topic. Their approach, perfectly understandable through one of their most relevant monographs, *Scientific Feng Shui for the Built Environment* (Mak and So 2015), is based on the need to prove that China has a scientific stream of thought comparable with that of the West, and that *fengshui* is a science. They focus their attention on the theories and methods of the two main schools of *fengshui*, the one of Form and the one of Compass,<sup>16</sup> in order to assess the validity of their principles. They have produced pages and pages of charts to provide a very solid and technical presentation of these methods, always looking at comparable Western building rules. And, in addition to their perfectly coherent explanations, they devote chapters to case studies from Hong Kong and around the world, with pictures of sites where *fengshui* principles have been used or can allegedly be detected. For them, this art is “a body of ancient Chinese wisdom encompassing

16 Both schools arose during the Song dynasty. The “School of Forms”—also named the Jiangxi School—is concerned with the divination of the influences of the forms of the natural landscape (e.g., mountains, hills, water courses, large stones, etc.) on buildings and graves. The “School of Compass”—also known as the Fujian School—derives from a combination of the divinations of the hexagrams of the *Yijing* 易經 (*Book of Changes*) and of the magnetic compass (*luopan* 羅盤), and it studies the numerological interactions between directions and time that produce *qi* 氣 (i.e., the flow of energy). Despite the complexity of the numerology behind the magnetic compass, this technique was mostly used by the common people in the countryside as a pure technique, and only marginally concerned with natural forces.

knowledge and experience related to the built environment that has been accumulated for more than three thousand years” (Mak and So 2015, 2). They avoid terms such as geomancy, divination, and art, which are often used to refer to *fengshui*. They prefer “knowledge and practice related to the built environment” or “set of architectural theory and practice”.

Mak and So’s starting point is that *fengshui* needs to be investigated in two directions: “(a) the verification of *Feng Shui* principles scientifically and (b) the study of *Feng Shui* logically in a scientific way” (ibid., 3). It is evident from the beginning of their book that (Western) science is the standard of this analysis. They even devote an entire chapter to the definition of the scientific method as a form of systematic knowledge that is based on observation, experiment, and verification.

They admit that it is hard to experiment and test *fengshui* because its effects can be observed only over decades or even centuries. It is equally futile to use surveys—e.g., interviews or questionnaires—because people’s replies would certainly be influenced by their superstitious beliefs and ignorance about *fengshui*. It is almost case studies alone that can be used as examples of the efficacious application of the principles of this model. Within this chapter, where even (Western) logical principles are presented, the authors insert a paragraph on “correlation”. They specify that correlation is a non-experimental method, and they add that “the strength of correlation can be used when it is impractical or unethical to manipulate the variables” (ibid., 26). At this point they suggest that it is precisely this principle that offers the best way to study *fengshui*. A question arises almost spontaneously here—why is it necessary to investigate *fengshui* through science when it already emerges as a “weak science” on the first pages of the book? Furthermore, the book presents a perhaps contradictory aim that evokes an ambiguous feeling in the reader. On the one hand, the authors present Western science as the criterion of verification, on the other, they try to suggest that Chinese “scientific thought” possesses some original aspects that deserve attention. Science is at the same time the criterion of validity and a negative target. Therefore, after pages of imaginary comparisons, after proving the compatibility between *fengshui* and (Western) science, the authors suggest that Chinese thought proposes more harmonious and balanced principles than its Western counterpart—i.e., the Western built environment—which descends from the scientific method that served as the standard of their argument (ibid., 175).

More precisely, one of the major aims of Mak and So is to prove that *fengshui* is an “ecological sustainable design” science, hence they claim that the whole concept of sustainable design is based on the same principles of this ancient Chinese method. “Constructivism” (in this content the study of the interaction

between humans and the environment) is thus said to be equivalent to “the Unity between Heaven and Human” (the harmony of visible and invisible *qi* 氣), “circular design” (reduce, reuse, recycle) can be compared with “the five elements cycle”, “balance between the natural and built environment” with “Yin and Yang Harmony”, and so on (ibid., 147–52). We see that *fengshui* is reduced to a set of ecological techniques, extremely clear and (presumably) scientifically proven. The authors’ reasoning is thus based on a very questionable use of transitive properties. In other words, Western architecture, and specifically ecological sustainable design, is scientifically based, *fengshui*’s principles are perfectly compatible with this building method, and thus *fengshui* is, to some extent, proved as a science—we could say a very special science with Chinese characteristics. “The Western built environment methods of analysis are based on bioclimatic and sustainable models that emphasize climatic factors and interactions with natural environment. Whereas *Feng Shui* model is based on the balance and harmony between natural and built environment” (ibid., 175). Again, it is evident that *fengshui* is not properly reducible to a scientific method, but the necessity to free it from superstition drives the authors to accept it to be a “weak science” based on cosmological and philosophical principles that are somehow at the heart of the uniqueness of this Chinese building practice. Ironically, *fengshui* is reduced to a set of schematic building and urbanistic rules based on correlative cosmology—not science!—that are labelled as scientific, only to contest two centuries of criticism grounded on scientific and rational principles. Mak and So admit that *fengshui* is mostly a superstitious way of thinking for ordinary people in Asia, but they firmly believe that in creating very precise and well-defined charts of principles we could find the “true” (or scientific!) *fengshui*. Moreover, if their reductionist approach—based on a transitive property, as we noted—almost seems to work for the Form School (based on environmental observations), they fail to find any comparable Western principle for the numerology and flying stars of the Compass School.

In this scientific *fengshui*, the mystery of the forces suggested by Yoon is completely lost. The ethical reflection on the behaviour of humans, and how this can have positive and negative effects on selected sites, is completely absent. Fortune and misfortune are improperly interpreted as equivalent to the character of a built environment, and thus of being suitable or unsuitable for a comfortable life. Furthermore, divination for the dead (i.e., graves) is completely dismissed. We suggest instead that it is necessary to reject this approach and propose an interpretation of *fengshui* following Heidegger’s critique of technology as enframing, and Li Zehou’s analysis of the philosophical context of classical Chinese techniques.

## *Fengshui as a Technique-art of Proper Measure*

Is *fengshui* a scientific technology? We can find a way of answering this question through *The Question Concerning Technology* by Heidegger (1977), where he discusses modern technology as the loss of the Greek concept of *technē*. *Technē* is a poietic act, a bringing-forth or unconcealment of truth (i.e., Being). According to the German philosopher, technology lost its capacity to unveil or reveal truth (*alētheia*) and, instead, now challenges nature to meet the insatiable human demand for energy. This challenging reduces nature to a “standing-reserve” (*Bestand*) of resources. This process is what Heidegger terms enframing (*Ge-stell*),

the unconcealment in accordance with which nature presents itself as a calculable complex of the effects of forces can indeed permit correct determinations; but precisely through these successes the danger can remain that in the midst of all that is correct the true will withdraw. (Heidegger 1977, 26)

In the enframing, natural forces are reduced to coherent, calculable, and exploitable resources. Nature becomes pure order. Therefore, modern technology loses the capacity to reveal, and rather cancels the Truth. The philosopher closes his essay by suggesting the arts as the most effective act of revealing, which the Greeks indeed called *technē*.

Reading the history of *fengshui* through the lens of this argument is quite compelling. *Fengshui* arose as an art of revealing, a *shushu* 數術 or 術數 (i.e., technique) or a *technē* in Heidegger’s lexicon. It is both an art and a technique founded on the observation of the natural order and its laws expressed through numbers. To express *fengshui* we also propose the compound *jiyi* 技藝 (technique-arts), which is used in the *Book of the Later Han* to describe the extraordinary ability of the polymath Zhang Heng 张衡 (78–139) as “his imperturbable loyalty and honesty were his leather belt, a complex of technique-arts his adornments [on the belt]”.<sup>17</sup> This is to say that morality was the bone of his nature, and technique-arts were the visible expressions and beautiful products of it.

It was only with the Song dynasty that *fengshui* became a folk activity aiming at ensuring fortune and exploiting the “supply” of good energy provided by one’s ancestors. The moral act of choosing the right gravesite was perverted into a “market” of recipes for obtaining economic success. *Fengshui* thus underwent an effective process of enframing, from which it emerged as an unlearned superstition

17 “辯貞亮以為鞶兮，雜技藝以為珩。”(Hou Hanshu 後漢書，張衡列傳 17). Retrieved from CTEXT. We note that *jiyi* 技藝 is a written variant of *jiyi* 技藝.

(*mixin* 迷信). However, the philosophical interpretation of a systematic thinker such as Zhu Xi reveals the authentic reason behind *fengshui*—the cosmological resonance that finds its expression in a moral ritualistic application. In our opinion, the contemporary attempt to present *fengshui* as a Chinese science follows the same principles of enframing. For both the believers in “superstitious *fengshui*” (i.e., it is a belief that ensure success)<sup>18</sup> and the supporters of “scientific *fengshui*” (i.e., it is a Chinese building science based on observation and correlation), this technique is merely a means of enframing nature thanks to very rigid and reassuring norms based on a cause-effect chain. The profound penetration of nature in *fengshui* is thus downgraded and reduced to a set of conditions and actions. In this section, we aim to re-evaluate or pose again the question of *fengshui* as *technē*—i.e., as a revealing technique-art—when it is inscribed in a socio-cultural context where human morality and acts respond to natural forces and *vice versa*.

While commenting on Heidegger’s essay on technology, the Chinese philosopher Yuk Hui (2021, 123) argues:

There are truths that cannot be demonstrated, yet that also cannot be judged to be untrue. [...] We have called this the non-rational, which had to be distinguished from both the irrational and the rational. The irrational is antagonistic with the rational. The irrational can be demonstrated as false, but the non-rational is beyond the realm of demonstration. [...] Art as cosmotechnics is founded on an epistemology of the non-rational, which Heidegger sometimes refers to as the Unknown, the incalculable, or the last god. The non-rational is therefore non-dualist since it cannot be identified with either the rational or the irrational. It is a third term that is beyond phenomenal truth.

This comment is extremely compelling for our argument although we do not agree on two points. First, to define what it is beyond “Western rationality”—that of modern science—as non-rational, instead of irrational, does not create room for a new intercultural understanding and maintains a “negative-definition”<sup>19</sup> close to the “quasi-definitions” presented by Yoon. In our view, we should either propose a new label/term, less associated with a Western, negative vision of other civilizations or disciplines outside science, or localize the rationality—e.g., Chinese rationality, Western rationality, Poetic rationality, Artistic rationality,

18 Oh Sang-Hak (2010, 143) speaks harshly of “egoistic vulgar belief” that he distinguishes from the “thoughts of the land” that were appreciated by some Korean intellectuals of the Joseon Period.

19 We understand that Hu likely has in mind the privative alpha of *alētheia*, but this definition does not escape the boundaries of the opposition rational-irrational, and, in our case, West-East.

etc.—in order to create a more neutral field of interaction between diverse instances. This second choice could be more fruitful in contesting the presumed universality of (Western) rationality. Furthermore, what Hu terms the non-rational is not necessarily beyond phenomenal truth, but instead is beyond (Western) modern scientific analytical investigation. *Fengshui* is strictly phenomenal, but it proposes a vision of phenomena—whereby natural and human ones are not separated—that is grounded in correlation. According to Zhu Xi and Cai Yuanding, humans should harmonize with the natural forces that they can detect in the landscape, and through moral acts attract the respect of the ancestors and nature itself. However, humans will never possess them. Therefore, we appreciate Hu’s reclaiming of “other logics”—i.e., Greek tragic logic and Daoist logic—although we do not agree with the term “non-rational.” *Fengshui* is grounded on a logic which works properly if applied into a web of natural and moral relations, something that is eloquently explained by Li Zehou.

One of the most renowned and consistent arguments by Li is about the origin of Chinese thought—and more generally culture—from the “Shamanistic-Historical tradition” (*wushi chuantong* 巫史傳統). According to his understanding, the identity of the ritual (*li* 禮) as a principle of regulation, at the base of the triad religion-ethics-politics, descends from the character of the shamanistic experience (and still maintains most of its character). The philosopher identifies four elements of this tradition that had a dramatic impact on Chinese culture. These are *yinyang* 陰陽 (that he understands as the interrelation of active-inactive in the act of possession), the five processes or *wuxing* 五行 (that descend from the perception and intuition of mutual resonance between humans and things/world), *qi* 氣 (the vital energy of Heaven and Earth as well as the force of humaneness), and, finally, proper measure or *du* 度 in Chinese (Li 2018, 50–53). For our investigation on *fengshui*, this last aspect is particularly fitting. The proper measure represents the correct movements of the shamans necessary to positively welcome and communicate with the spirits. Li explains that “it cannot be communicated or explained in terms of logical thought or analytical cognition, but rather can be acquired only through operation and practice. It is said that ‘the subtlety of operations exists within one’s heart-mind’” (ibid., 52). The proper measure is at the base of any Chinese cultural context, everything is connected to *du*. *Du* is the reasonableness (*helixing* 合理性) of the *jiyi* 技藝 (technique-arts) or *yishu* 藝術 (arts), such as the art of ruling, the governing of ourselves, the art of art (*yishu de yishu* 藝術的藝術), the art of life, the art of cooking, the art of tea, etc. Li Zehou marginally refers to *fengshui* in his writings (mostly in interviews), however, he presents—besides *bushi* 卜筮 (divination)—*tianwen* 天文, *dili* 地理 and *jishu* 技

術 as the core of shaman’s ancient Chinese system of competences (Li 2015).<sup>20</sup> It is indisputable that under the flag-term *dili* (which is certainly not geography in this context), the divinatory art of *fengshui* needs to be included, and, actually, this was one of the names of this technique-art. *Fengshui*, as at least an aspect of the macro-discipline of *dili*, is a technique-art (*jiyi*) of the observation and application of the reasonable principles of *yinyang*, *wuxing*, *qi* and proper measure (*du*).

We believe that Li Zehou’s distinction between rationality and reasonableness is more appropriate than Yuk’s non-rational. As Li explains: “rationality serves as universally applicable public reason and modern social morals, while reasonableness is connected with emotions and therefore has greater flexibility and is closely aligned with my notion of pragmatic reason” (Li 2018, 247). Technique-arts are based on emotions (i.e., the heart-mind), experience, observation, practice, and adaptability.

According to Heidegger, the art of building—as with all activities which belong to *poiesis*—is an act of revealing, of unconcealment of Being, not merely a technique that makes the world orderable, objectifiable, and exploitable (Heidegger 1977). Technologies objectify the world and reduce beings to *not-beings*, concurring to the oblivion of Being. In the Chinese cultural discourse, techniques (*shushu* 數術 or *ji* 技) and technique-arts (*jiyi* 技藝) are the *xingerxia* 形而下 gateway to the *dao* 道 or *li* 理, which is seen as pertaining to the *xingershang* 形而上. *Dao* does not correspond to Heidegger’s Being, *dao* is singular—the cosmic *dao* that precedes the one (i.e., Laozi, 42)—and multiple—*tiandao* 天道, *rendao* 人道, *wangdao* 王道, *daode* 道德, etc.—and does not imply the idea of the primordial or origin, it is devoid of any kind of historical necessity or eschatological perspective (see Ma 2006, 156). Therefore, in Heidegger’s understanding *technē* reveals/unconceals Being, thus it provides room for a never complete revelation or manifestation of Being on the *holzwege* of human life. *Jiyi* 技藝 instead is the *xingerxia* 形而下 aspect of the *dao* 道, which is defined as unfathomable from the *xingershang* 形而上 perspective. Since *xingerxia* and *xingershang* are not the dualistic system immanent-transcendence, but rather two perspectives on reality, technique-arts present an aspect of the *dao* and do not simply unconceal *dao*, they are *dao* and participate to the harmonious living according to *dao*. Humans practice *dao*, they do not practice Being. Technique-arts—simply *ji* 技 in Zhuangzi’s story of the cook Ding—are to be applied not as the aim of action—“What your

20 See particularly Li (2015, 44). In Li (2018) the term *dili* is improperly translated as geography. In several contexts Li uses the term for this modern discipline, but this is not the case in that context.

servant cares for is the *dao*, and ‘goes through/surpass’ (*jin* 進) technique”<sup>21</sup>—but as the practical exercise of nurturing life (*yangsheng* 養生). The cook practices the slaughtering of oxen as a classical dance or ballet (*wu* 舞), therefore, as an “art of self-cultivation”. The spirit (*shen* 神) that perceives the *dao* of things—in that case the flesh of the ox—and express itself in the “dancing activity” of the butcher is described by Graziani (2021, 29) as “the optimal efficiency of the body’s inner activity”, in perfect tune with Li’s argument on *du* (proper measure). Mere technique does not nurture life, while a technique-art that express itself through “artistic actions” grounded on sensibility, emotions and humaneness is able to penetrate and express *dao*.

### The Moral *Fengshui* as a Technique-art for Interpreting the Cosmos

Despite what the understanding of *fengshui* as a scientific technique or a superstition might suggest, this technique-art presents an explicit moral frame. In fact, positive effects descend from the respect of natural forces and the moral behaviour of humans. Hong-Key Yoon (2006, 144–47) particularly insists on the fact that geomancy is strictly connected with conducting a moral life (such as conforming to Buddhist charity, Confucian filial piety, the principle of repayment for beneficial acts one has received, etc.).<sup>22</sup> This concept of morality, as a force among natural forces, descends from the same master Kong who described virtue as *de* 德, a power of positively influencing our environment.

Everything is made of *qi*, namely, living beings, ancestors, sites, and (moral or immoral) actions. In *The Yellow Emperor’s Classic of House Siting* (*Huangdi zhaijing* 皇帝宅經), we can read:

The entity *yin* is the mother which gives birth to and transforms the actuality of things, and the entity *yang* is the father. These are the ancestors of heaven and earth and the parents who nurtured them. If one obeys them there will be smooth passage. If one opposes them there will be adversity. How is this different from a duke, on being loyal, receiving (greater) title of nobility, or, on disobeying orders being put to death? (Paton 2013, 137)

21 “臣之所好者道也，進乎技矣。” (Zhuangzi s.d., chap. 3). In Zhuangzi (2010, 46) it is suggested that the verb *jin* 進 should be interpreted as *chaoguo* 超過, this interpretation should date back to Cheng Xunying 成玄英 (monk Zishi 子實)’s commentary.

22 This analysis is based on a large collection of Korean popular stories taught within families, for generation after generation.



The technique-art of *fengshui* is equivalent to the act of obeying parents and the obedience of the king/emperor towards Heaven (*tian* 天). Humans must respect the configurations of *yin* and *yang*, which they can read within the shapes of natural environment. What *fengshui* proposes is a true *xiao* 孝 or filial piety towards nature (i.e. natural forces and humans). The *Classic* adds: “If man and site are mutually supportive, then there will be communication between heaven and earth” (ibid., 143). As for the parents (or superiors), there is a responsive relation. Humans respect nature and they gain fortune in return. Zhu Xi argues that this moral chain of caring for ancestors and having good fortune in return is a true “law of nature” (自然之理),<sup>23</sup> which we could also translate as “natural principle” (inscribed in his cosmological thought). Usually the Song philosopher uses the definition of “natural principles” to describe “ancient rituals” (*li* 禮), which were not constructed arbitrarily, but with an effective cosmological agent (see Sommer 2020, 537). As we already suggested, *fengshui* is an unavoidable ritual for him and is inscribed in nature. Zhu clearly separates the practices of *fengshui* that could be despised and seen as superstitious from the deep reasons and principles behind this technique-art. Correlation, natural responsiveness, ineffable forces, spiritual world, and a holistic vision are these natural principles.

This is elegantly argued in *Faweilun* 發微論 (About uncovering the secrets [of the landscape]) by the aforementioned friend of Zhu Xi—Cai Yuanding—who, in the closing chapter on *ganying* 感應 (resonance) writes:

Resonance is due to the way of Heaven [*tiandao* 天道]. The way of Heaven does not speak but responds with fortune and misfortune. A proverb says: “a good *yin* place [i.e., gravesite] could not compete with a good place in the heart”. These wise words perfectly express the principle of resonance. It is because of it that [the expert] who divines a good site must rely on the accumulation of virtue [of the deceased]. If his/her virtuous acts are abundant, Heaven will reply with a fortunate site and his/her descendants will obtain good fortune and conform to the luck of the site. If his/her actions are evil, Heaven will reply with a negative site, the evil will take roots in the hearts of his/her descendants and the unfortunate site will produce misfortune.<sup>24</sup>

23 We consulted Zhu Xi 朱熹, *Shanling yizhuang* 山陵議狀 on CTEXT.

24 “夫天道，不言而響應，福善禍淫皆是物也。諺云：陰地好不如心地好。此善言感應之理也。是故，求地者必以積德為本。若其德果厚，天必以吉地應之，是所以福其子孫者必也，而地之吉亦將以符之也。其惡果盈，天必以凶地應之，是所以禍其子孫者亦本於心也，而地之凶亦將以符之也。” (Cai Yuanding 蔡元定, *Faweilun* 發微論). Our translation. For the translation of a few further excerpts from different sections of the text see Ebrey (1997, 94–95) (in the same essay the author offers some intriguing opinions on the relation between Zhu and Cai).

Heaven could but respond to the morality of humans, to their Ruist good/perfected (*shan* 善) behaviour. The shape and quality of sites that are chosen through divination correspond to the morality of the dead. Therefore, *fengshui* is not only about caring and sparing nature but also about human virtue, because these are inextricable factors/forces. A good site is chosen because of the morality of the people who have to dwell in this place. Likewise, the good site will influence the morality of the people who dwell on it.

*Fengshui*, as a divinatory technique-art, supports the “readability” of the mystery of nature. In ancient times it was named *xuanshu* 玄術, which certainly means mysterious art but also the art of the mystery. *Fengshui* is named the “terrestrial astrology”, that is, the art of reading signs of the natural forces on Earth.<sup>25</sup> As David J. Nemeth (1991, 228) writes:

Chinese geomancy is a system of divination because it reveals hidden knowledge about the location of the cosmic breath. [...] This indirect divination of heavenly phenomena through terrestrial indicators characterizes Chinese geomancy as terrestrial astrology, that is, astrology using a terrestrial medium.

In ancient times, where this art was a prerogative of the king or emperor, the energy to rule descended from Heaven through signs on Earth. Therefore, *fengshui* was the art of reading the celestial decree (*tianming* 天命) on the terrestrial surface and trying to benefit from this knowledge. Despite this art gradually losing its nature as an imperial prerogative, its hermeneutical power is not necessarily diminished.

The Chinese *fengshui* suggests a certain “readability” of the mystery. Humans cannot penetrate the mystery of Heaven, but they can read this mystery through its mirror reflection on Earth, as perfectly coherent within a correlative way of thinking. As Mou Zongsan could not accept the unreachability of Kant’s *noumena*, so *fengshui* supposes the penetrability of the essence (*li* 理). *Fengshui* is the technique-art devoted to understanding the *diwen* 地文, the terrestrial patterns, which are images of the *tianwen* 天文 (i.e., celestial patterns). *Fengshui*, as an art of *wen* 文 (i.e., reading patterns), is both an unveiling of the *dao* 道 of things and a good *dao* (i.e., way of life) for humans. Therefore, *fengshui* is an active hermeneutics of nature, which warns of exploitation of the environment and promises good fortune for those who (morally) regulate themselves according to its “reading”.

25 Bennett (1978, 1) speaks of an “astro-biological mode of thought”.

## Conclusions: *Fengshui* and Ecologism

The *fengshui* specialist and anthropologist Ole Bruun grounded his critique of the acknowledgment of *fengshui* as an ecological thought on three pillars: 1. there are many counterfactual historical instances of its role in exploiting nature; 2. it is centred on man's search for personal advantage (i.e., family fortune), and, globally speaking, Chinese thought is intrinsically anthropocentric; 3. *fengshui* holism is very different from the moral and ideological transcendence of ecological thought (Bruun 2014, 176–78). In our view, the first observation is not valid because we could find in any philosophy or religion counterfactual instances of its efficacy, historical perversions of their core values, and so on. In the West, we do not suggest that the Christian faith is somehow more or less a valuable moral and spiritual wisdom because of the Crusades, the persecutions of heretics, the Inquisition, the market for indulgences, the sexual abuses of children perpetrated by priests, etc. When we analyse Western thought, we evaluate the theoretical contribution instead of the historical efficacy.<sup>26</sup> However, when we face non-Western systems of thought, the historical and practical instances often obscure the theoretical value. And we cannot neglect the fact that there are also instances of forest preservation in contemporary China thanks to the *fengshui* characteristics of the environment. Regarding the second point, Bruun clearly anthropologically investigates only what we named the “superstitious *fengshui*”. Meanwhile, he completely disregards the theoretical frame or cosmological *ratio* we tried to isolate through canonical philosophical texts, and which inscribes fortune in the ethical framework of filial piety. Fortune is the natural reward for our active respect in following human and natural *ming* 命 (i.e., destiny). It is undeniable that the popular historical instances of this art created a kind of “exchange market” between humans and nature, although the historical products of *fengshui* do not exhaust the possibility of this discipline. Regarding the third point, this objection is based on a very Western perspective, and is an expression of epistemic injustice. It is obvious that Western ecologism imbued with transcendental values provides a more coherent ethics in Western terms. Firstly, Christian thought is based on the idea of that the world and everything in it is placed at man's disposal (Genesis II. 8–20) and a clear separation between humans (made in the image and likeness of God) and nature. Secondly, the true life is in the next world. Humans are custodians of nature because nature is God's creation, and they are thus responsible for the well-being of all creatures. This is a radically anthropocentric and transcendental perspective.

26 The Enlightenment ended in the White Terror, Hegelianism supported colonial violence, Heidegger served as Rector of the University of Freiburg thanks to his support for the Nazi Party, and so on. Are the related philosophical contributions to be rejected because of their historical products, or should they instead be investigated for their theoretical qualities?

Therefore, we are puzzled when we read that “ecology itself, whether of a scientific or popular kind, combines reductionist science with morality towards nature and thereby sustains an overt or latent double bind to transcendence, whether of Christian, Buddhist or other cognitive origin” (Bruun 2014, 177).<sup>27</sup> The Buddhist perspective is holistic and the care for what is not the self is based on the accumulation of *karma*, and thus it is another anthropocentric and utilitarian perspective. It would be more correct to say that ecology is based on the separation between humans and nature, and that humans are seen as, in Heidegger’s terms, fatherly custodians<sup>28</sup> of a helpless counterpart. This perspective is, on the one hand, very empowering, however, on the other it is based on what Foucault terms the “technology of guilt” inscribed in Christian faith and institutionalized in modern Western societies. The perspective is inversed in the *fengshui* that we have examined in this paper, because humans are children who must respect the fatherly forces around them. Therefore, the Chinese perspective could also be traced back to the same moral principle: guilt. While the Western perspective is based on the idea of guilt in relation to a helpless inferior (i.e., nature), the Chinese view sees humans as respectful or unrespectful children of nature, as agents among agents. Furthermore, it is obviously true that Western ecologism is more pragmatic and effective than *fengshui* in preserving nature, but this is theoretically the wrong reasoning, because Bruun confuses “ecological activities”—i.e., effective measures and actions—with “philosophic ecologism”. The second creates ecological awareness and cannot be evaluated against effective activities. As Tu Weiming (2001, 256) writes: “while these principles, based on geomancy, can supposedly be manipulated to enhance one’s fortune, they align human designs with the environment by enhancing intimacy with nature”. Here, we could even say “family intimacy” with nature.

In our opinion, *fengshui* is not an environmental philosophy because it does not share the vision of nature and environment tacitly implied in this system of philosophy. In classical Chinese culture, there were three terms for nature: 1. *ziran* 自然 (spontaneity or self-so-ness); 2. *wanwu* 萬物 (the whole myriad things, humans included); 3. *tiande* 天德 (the cosmological moral order that consists of the triad *tian ren di* 天人地).<sup>29</sup> None of these terms corresponds to the Western concept of nature. “Nature” from the Chinese perspective is spontaneous and autopoietic,

27 We find ourselves more interested in the intriguing discourse on a renovated conception of “sacred place” connected to *fengshui* that Ole Bruun (2011) raised during the “International Conference on Feng Shui (Kan Yu) and Architecture” held on November 9–10, 2010 (among the organizers were the aforementioned Mak and So).

28 We refer to Heidegger’s (2010) reflection on dwelling.

29 See Nelson 2021, 10–11.

its logic is embedded and not transcendental (or analytical). Nature includes humans, is neither “the other” of humanity nor an object. Nature expresses a web of forces driven by an immanent moral power. Therefore, *fengshui* is neither a naturalism from a Western perspective, nor an environmental philosophy. However, we agree fully with Eric Nelson (2021, 56) when he argues, in his investigation into Daoism from an environmental perspective, that:

contemporary environmental philosophy, policy, and practice could enact a newly reimagined and interculturally renewed new Daoist ecological model by working with the natural tendencies in things toward restoring sustainable, functional, self-reproducing relational systems that constitute the asymmetrically shared body of life.

In the same way, *fengshui* is one of the Chinese contributions to the global discourse on the human-nature relation. As more than forty years ago Bennet (1978, 24) was already advocating, this technique-art “can serve as a vehicle for putting to right human dilemmas, thus generating group cohesion and harmonious interpersonal relations. In this way, siting might be said to have evolved into an all-purpose safety valve for Chinese society.”

In 1995, Bruce V. Folz published a book entitled *Inhabiting the Earth: Heidegger, Environmental Ethics, and the Metaphysics of Nature*, where he undertakes the first analysis of how Heidegger’s philosophy could contribute to environmental ethics. According to Folz, Heidegger’s conception of dwelling is a rare effective environmental ethic, because it is not driven by technology, economic interests, social managing, and so on, but instead by the mystery of living, by a respect for nature which humans are the stewards of, and not the final users. Instead, if we base ecologism on mere techniques, “such efforts would serve only to enhance the reign of technology by increasing its range while obscuring its pervasiveness” (Folz 1995, 166). As George Pattison (2000, 207), commenting on Folz, suggests: “Alongside ecology we need ‘deep ecology’, a spiritual re-orientation that will make us fit custodians of planetary good”. In fact, Heidegger does not provide an applied or practical philosophy of ecology, but rather an orientation towards effective questions concerning the relation between humans and nature as a whole (Pattison 2000, 210). In our opinion, *fengshui* can also provide a “deep ecological” way of thinking. “Deep ecology”, as we already noted, is defined by Pattison—in Heideggerian terms—as “the spiritual re-orientation that will make us fit custodians of planetary good” (Pattison 2000, 207). *Fengshui*, re-established in its cosmological and moral frame, could provide even a deeper perspective: the spiritual re-orientation that will make us good, filial children of the planet.

The influential philosopher Donna Haraway (2016) recently proposed that since we live on a damaged planet we should be inclined to sym-poiesis, or making-with, rather than auto-poiesis. We need to dwell in “Chthulucene”, as opposed to the Anthropocene, where the web of relations between humans and non-human beings is not hierarchical. A renovated *fengshui* could participate in the awakening of humans to being embedded in the cosmos and not owners of it. This is the only way to invert the current system of exploitation that is “ecosystem-destroying, human and animal labor-transforming, multispecies soul-mutilating, epidemic-friendly, corn monocrop-promoting, cross-species heartbreaking, feedlot cattle industries” (Haraway 2016, 109). This is an awareness deeply rooted in Chinese culture.

In conclusion, thanks to our and similar investigations *fengshui* could be re-established as a positive asset in contemporary Chinese culture, one that needs a new process of understanding, not as a mere technical instrument, but as a philosophy of responsiveness (*ganying* 感應) and of environmental respect, able to contribute to the “ecological civilization” (*shengtai wenming* 生態文明) project that still lacks a proper vision of the human-nature relation. For instance, in the Chinese “2021–2025 Five-Year Plan” several ecological and cultural measures are proposed. It is stated, for instance, that “it is mandatory to protect and strengthen the cultural context of the cities, to put an end to mass demolition and mass construction (*dachai dajian* 大拆大建), and to allow the cities to preserve their memories and the citizens to perceive homesickness.”<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, among the main aims of this plan we can find an increase in forest preservation—from 23.2% in 2020 to 24.1% in 2025—and in the prevention of floods in areas near coasts and rivers. These three actions could benefit from the cultural frame of *fengshui*. A specifically Chinese cosmological *ratio* could better motivate the emergence of a local natural sensibility. Miller (2001, 267) correctly observes that:

The problem is that either our worldview is local, and therefore parochial, narrow-minded, and divisive, or it is global, and therefore imperial and totalitarian. For this reason, countries that have experienced Western colonialism are rightly suspicious of being subject to a new form of Western hegemony in the form of global environmentalism.

A differentiation of environmental drivers—i.e., the outputs of different civilizations—could be a good practice for a renewed and effective ecological awareness worldwide.

30 “保护和延续城市文脉，杜绝大拆大建，让城市留下记忆、让居民记住乡愁。” (14<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan 2021–2025, chap. 8, sect. 29).

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