

The Culture of Fengshui in Korea: An Exploration of East Asian Geomancy, by Hong-key Yoon. Lexington Books, 2006. xvi + 332 pp. ISBN-13: 978-0-7391-1348-6, ISBN-10: 0-7391-1348-8.

Feng Shui: science or superstition? In the 19th century, Western scholars first classified Feng Shui as a mixture of superstition, religious sentiment, and observational science. However, since the 1970s, Western scientists have changed to accept the development of a new complexity paradigm and have begun to recognize that there are similarities between modern science and Eastern philosophy (Capra, 1975). Westerners sought deeper understandings of the relationships between the human and natural environments, and embraced Feng Shui as a broadly ecological and architecturally-connected paradigm.

In the preface of this book, the author outlines his interest in research in Feng Shui (geomancy) study and its influence on the Korean cultural landscape. It is particularly important to point out that the author does not present himself as a believer and is not a practitioner of geomancy. It should be noted that the term "Feng Shui" is termed "Pungsu" in Korean and "Fusui" in Japanese. Because the practice of Feng Shui in China differs from the conventional understanding of geomancy in English, the author agrees with many other researchers of Feng Shui (Lee, 1986; Xu, 1990) that the term geomancy is not an appropriate translation; however, he still uses the term throughout the book rather than the more popular "Feng Shui" as used in the title of this book.

The book is divided into five parts. Part I (Chapters 1–3) describes the historical development of Feng Shui and the current status of research in Feng Shui studies. The author positions a view that Feng Shui first started as house geomancy rather than grave selection and argues that the early settlement in ancient China in the Loess Plateau could hold the key for the understanding of the origin of Feng Shui. In Chapter 3, a very comprehensive investigation has been carried out to detail the development of Feng Shui in Korean history.

Part II (Chapters 4–9) introduces elementary knowledge of Feng Shui, including Yin-Yang theory, the five elements, the eight trigrams, the 24 directions, the four emblems, and the principles and practice of Feng Shui for houses and graves, etc. The author also points out that Feng Shui classic literature (e.g., the Book of Burial) provides the possible first discussion in Eastern tradition about the environmental cycle that is known to Westerners as the concept of the hydrological cycle. It may be difficult for the general public to follow all these basic theories that support the Feng Shui principles and practice without having a framework of Chinese philosophy.

Part III (Chapter 10–11) focuses on the discussion of Feng Shui's interaction with religions, including Buddhism and Confucianism. The author does not mention Taoism, since it plays an integral role in the theoretical development and practice of Feng Shui in Chinese, rather than Korean, history.

Part IV (Chapter 12–14) describes how Feng Shui principles have been applied to ancient cities in China, Japan, and Korea. These cities include Beijing, Changan, Luoyang, and Nanjing in China, and Kyoto in Japan. In Chapters 13 and 14, the history of the selection of the Korean cities of Seoul and Kaesong are described in great detail. There is a typographical error in the last paragraph of page 238: figures referenced as Figures 31 and 32 should read Figures 13.1 and 13.3, respectively.

Part V (Chapter 15–16) broaches an unusual topic about the iconographic warfare coming out of Japan and how it affects the cultural landscape of Feng Shui in Korea, generally, and in Seoul, specifically. It expresses the mindset of Koreans with regards to the iconographical war with Japanese colonialism in Korea. In the conclusion, the author points out that Feng Shui is not bound by superstition, religious, or science. The author concludes that "there is no concept equivalent to geomancy in the West, nor can it be understood in terms of any Western notion". The author concludes the book in his own words, "geomancy is a unique and comprehensive system of conceptualizing the physical environment that regulates human ecology by influencing man to select auspicious environments and to build harmonious structures such as graves, houses and cities on them".

This book attempts to provide a comprehensive view of Feng Shui culture, especially as it has been applied in Korea. It is the most outstanding contribution to current knowledge about the historical development of Feng Shui in Korea and its application to the cities of Seoul and Kaesong. Extensive references to research into the history of Feng Shui in Korea ground the discussion. This book provides valuable resources and should be helpful for other researchers in understanding the cultural development of Feng Shui in Korea. It should also encourage more research in this area.

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