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# The art of science and geomancy

By MAJORIE CHIEW

GROWING up in **grandmaster of feng shui Yap Cheng Hai's** household, you couldn't help but be involved in the art of geomancy. Or so says **Yap's only daughter Boon.**

Yap Hwee Boon, now in her 40s, remembers that her father's habitual "moving things around" was something that the family had to get used to. As a young child, she remembers hearing a lot of stories about the miracles of feng shui from friends of her father who would seek him out to assist them in their problems. There would be stories of difficult times and what happened after feng shui was applied – stories of improved health and wealth.

"Feng shui was very much part of our lives," says Boon of her growing-up years.

Boon made use of her acquired **feng shui knowledge for clarity of mind** when studying during her school days, and this has served her well as she has gone on to excel in her studies and have a successful career in the world of science.



Yap sparring with her father, Yap Cheng Hai, in a qi gong session. Yap is trained in martial arts with her father from the age of four.

When she first had to move to Australia, Boon put her feng shui to use whenever she had to choose a place to rent, and subsequently to find her own home.

She says: "My knowledge was nowhere near as much as I know now of course, but with **even basic authentic feng shui principles, one can enjoy a comfortable living.**"

At 18, when she was living in a university residential college in Melbourne, she repositioned her bed and desk as soon as she moved in. When her friends noticed the "movements" in her room and enquired about it, she only offered that she was trying to "feel at home".

She kept her feng shui practice secret for a reason. "There were not many Asians about and I did not know whether my Australian friends would accept or understand feng shui. I was concerned that college mates would think I was into hocus-pocus," she says.

About five years ago, Boon started to formally learn feng shui from her father, who was a general manager of a wholesale hardware distribution business while his children were growing up and never really had to teach them the art of geomancy properly then.

When Boon finally committed time to pursue her feng shui heritage, she was in luck as her dad had just started teaching as well.

For Boon, feng shui is a life-long learning process. In the end, she feels "the knowledge one gains is an individual thing. It's how much time one puts into it, one's ability to internalise the information and one's ability to apply it."

Having said that, she also admits that the knowledge acquired from Yap's lineage is very in-depth. According to her, "the knowledge of the senior students of five years is like that of a disciple from the old school following their master over a period of 35 years!"

In recent years, a lot of Westerners have heard of feng shui and many have asked her for advice. As a result, Boon started *Feng Shui for Enriching Lives*, a feng shui consultancy firm in Melbourne.

Feng shui consulting for Boon began very much how it did for her father.

"Friends who realised that I was seriously following in my father's footsteps approached me for feng shui consultancy. As their lives improved, I probably got mentioned in their 'dinner circles', and progressively received more requests on feng shui consultancy. That was a feng shui consultancy project involving a block of 200 luxury apartments that landed on my desk last May."

She began teaching feng shui this year as an accredited instructor in her father's Center of Excellence in Kuala Lumpur.

Her course is held over one and a half days, as she likes to give her students more opportunities to practise. After all, feng shui is as much about having the knowledge as it is about the ability to apply it.

"The way I approach my feng shui interest is fairly relaxed. I am not enticing people off the streets because I do not need to depend on feng shui consultancy for a living. I do it because I wish to make authentic classical feng shui available to all. My vision is for feng shui to be a part of our everyday lives. Not wait until something bad happens and then find a need to fix it," says Boon who is developing a website, *Feng Shui For Enriching Lives* ([www.yhbfengshui.com](http://www.yhbfengshui.com)), primarily to provide information about geomancy.

### Early training

Apart from feng shui, Boon also learned martial arts when she was just four years old. Her father cemented the backyard to give lessons to some 20 to 30 students in Shaolin martial arts.

A vivid memory was "sitting" in a particular pose for a half hour. "Me and my brothers, we had to strike this pose of bent knees and raised arms, like riding a horse. We did this in the hall in front of the altar and would watch the clock ever so eagerly," Boon says, almost gleefully.

Those stance exercises to train inner stamina were a daily regimen before going to bed. When Boon and her siblings were old enough to join in the *kung fu* practices, it was twice a week at home and thrice a week at a clubhouse where they would train with other children. She is very grateful for those days as the exercises have given her inner stamina.

In reflection, she says: "Kung fu played an prominent part in our lives. We were mischievous kids. So it was a way of getting our energy under control, but we enjoyed it. In the beginning, our muscles ached and it was boring especially for us little kids, but we did as father commanded!"

Boon continued her kung fu practice while studying in Melbourne with the Chee Kim Thong Pugilistic Society. She helped her guardian train his students and started a martial arts club at her University and became founding president.

One of the students was a police sergeant of 193cm, who would get rather frustrated whenever Boon "checked" his moves during sparing sessions as he would get "tossed about".



Because her father was a grandmaster of feng shui, Yap couldn't help but be involved in geomancy.

“Well, at least he knew whenever he was out of step,” she says cheekily.

An outdoors lover, Boon has tried most things including kayaking, rock and mountain climbing, scuba-diving, caving and hiking. She still hikes and scuba-dives these days when time permits.

“I don't go to the gym or exercise for the sake of it as I find it far too boring. I need to be outside. I feel alive walking through the mountains,” says Boon, who has hiked through the Rockies in Canada, climbed the Dolomites in northern Italy, backpacked on the Great Walks in South Island New Zealand, explored the Mulu Caves in Malaysia and hiked through most of the alpine areas in South-Eastern Australia. She has also dived in most of the Victorian coast, parts of the Great Barrier Reef, the Philippines, Thailand and the Solomon Islands.

### **On the scientific trail**

Career wise, Boon is a scientist and is known in the West for her research work in blood plasma fractionation and technology implementation in the stem cell transplantation field. She persisted in studying biology in Australia even though most of her peers in Malaysia realised it would be difficult to make a living in this field. Her secret desire was to be a naturalist.

“When my schoolmates were running around with pop idols on their file covers, I had images of chimpanzees and poison arrow tree frogs,” recalls Boon.

Though her father didn't quite understand her need to “sit in the jungle looking at monkeys”, Boon's mother believed in her, saying “if you follow your interest, you could do well.”

Boon went to Methodist Primary School and then to **Assunta Secondary School**, both in Petaling Jaya. She credits her teachers and schoolmates very much for influencing who she has become today. She stays in touch with her schoolmates and two have become her employees in Australia.

Boon majored in the base sciences of biochemistry, genetics and microbiology, and for her Honours thesis gained skills in protein purification science that was eventually to gain her recognition in the blood-related field. She won a PhD scholarship (Fletcher Research Award) for medical research at the University of Melbourne (from 1984 to 1988). Her thesis was on cell regulation in bone and breast cancers, but she opted out and completed with a Masters degree when she realised fundamental research in a university environment was not for her.

Says Boon: “I have to see the end results of my efforts. Applied research gave me that satisfaction, where my findings could be immediately beneficial.”

Upon graduation, she joined CSL Limited (1989), which is one of the foremost world companies in the plasma fractionation industry. Boon was brought in as a research scientist and co-leader of the Albumin Project. Her team developed a method for purifying human serum albumin, a protein solution derived from plasma as a blood substitute in numerous medical conditions where red blood cells are not required. It was a breakthrough method enabling full automation removing the need for hazardous handling of blood by plant personnel, as well as producing the most pure form of human albumin in the world.

In fact, the company built a world renowned green-field facility costing A\$230mil, based on the work Boon and her colleagues were engaged in.

“The project was immensely satisfying. Very few scientists would have the breath of work experience that involved research, pilot plant scale-up, production for clinical trials, transfer to production and experience with regulatory authorities, let alone seeing ones' work gain acceptance internationally in the medical field,” she says.

She was later seconded into a business development role to obtain contractual agreements for processing other nations' plasma collections. In her position as regional product manager of Asia,

Malaysia's National Blood Services became a customer. Boon also had to liaise with the national transfusion services, government bodies and key opinion leaders in haematology in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Australia and New Zealand.

Boon was later headhunted to join CellPro Incorporated in 1995, a Seattle-based company, to establish and head their Asia-Pacific Regional office. Cellpro was the leader in stem cell transplantation. They were the first to obtain FDA approval for enabling human stem cells to be used as a drug in the treatment of blood related cancers such as leukaemia and lymphoma. Boon was responsible for developing the Asia-Pacific market for their stem cell purification device, which included setting up a distribution channel, developing and implementing marketing strategies, as well as technical training.

While working and travelling extensively, Boon embarked on a Masters in Business Administration at the prestigious Australian Graduate School of Management. Upon completion of her MBA, Boon joined her partner's business as director of C.M. Whittington & Associates Pty Ltd and started a separate arm of the business in biomedical consultancy called APac BioMed Solutions. Her clients are high-tech biotechnology companies primarily from the United States, ranging from venture capital backed firms to multinationals. Boon says the joys of her job are meeting and working with people from different cultures. She has now among her good friends, the local distributors she has to work with, and prominent medical leaders from Johns Hopkins University Hospital, Boston, United States.

Australia, Boon feels, is as a great place to operate from.

She says: "Its time zone is conducive to trading at the global level. Furthermore, it still has the attractiveness of a 'big-small town' without the typical congestion and chaos of cities in Asia. Although, I prefer the pace in Asia, I go back to Australia to gather my energy again!"

How do people react when they know she is a scientist?

Boon admits that most people she comes across in her professional life don't think of her as a scientist. "Some, especially older Westerners tend to perceive Asian women in a submissive role. Asian men of my age may feel intimidated by independent women, and perhaps women with degrees," she says.

Her philosophy in life is rather simple. Values are very important to her. She has a set of values that she holds dear and lives her life and chooses her friends by them.

She says: "I have a high regard for people who are driven to make a contribution to the world, whatever that may be. I tend to back causes that do not have much support and are often associated with nature, like conservation of natural resources. So perhaps it is not surprising that Captain James Cook, Sir David Attenborough, Stephen Hawking, Jane Goodall, Fritjof Capra and Sir Howard Florey are some of my heroes.

"When it comes to work, an essential philosophy of mine is enjoyment. The instant I stop enjoying it is time to quit."

#### Fact File

**Name:** Yap Hwee Boon

**Age:** 40s

**Profession:** Scientist

**Hometown:** Petaling Jaya

**Years abroad:** 25 years

**Current Base:** Melbourne, Australia

**Early Education:** Methodist Primary School and Assunta Secondary School in Petaling Jaya

**Tertiary Qualifications:** B Sc, La Trobe University, Australia; M Sc, University of Melbourne; Executive Masters in Business Administration, University of New South Wales.

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