



**Left** The exquisite Fuxi Temple is quite different from many Buddhist or Daoist temples  
**Right** The coffered ceiling depicts the 64 divinatory symbols of the Book of Changes



# In the footsteps of FUXI

The sage-king credited with the creation of the Ba Gua

READERS FAMILIAR WITH feng shui will no doubt be familiar with the Eight Trigram symbol known as the Ba Gua. If you ever wondered where or when this symbol came about and its significance, then follow me on a journey to the source of all esoteric wisdom in Chinese culture.

Two months ago, I set off in search of the legendary Fuxi, the sage-king credited with the creation of the Ba Gua and said to be the forefather of all Chinese people.

Because Fuxi was thought to have lived prior to written history, it is uncertain if he was a real person, a chieftain or an ancient tribe. However, ancient texts refer to his reign as the dawn of Chinese civilisation because of his knowledge of heaven and earth, and point to Tianshui as his birthplace. And he has since been revered by many as the ancestor of the legendary five emperors (the Yellow Emperor, Zhuanxu, Ku, Yao and Shun) and the head of three august ones (Fuxi, Nuwa and Shennong).

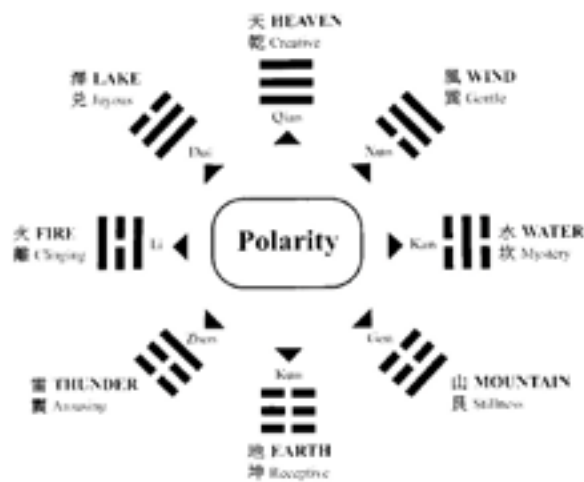
Tianshui has the only temple dedicated to Fuxi that contains his image. First built in 1490, and rebuilt in 1597 during the Ming Dynasty, it is exquisite and quite different from many Buddhist or Daoist temples in its quiet elegance.

The city is a key settlement of early Chinese civilisation, an ancient city with the oldest Chinese archaeological record. The discovery of a sophisticated neolithic culture in nearby Dadiwan spanning 6000-3000 BC, lends credence to Fuxi's legend. The archaeological site shows evidence of agriculture, pottery-making, Chinese character writing, building construction, and drawing as far back as 8,000 years ago, preceding previous finds by 1,000 years. In addition, he was also credited with inventing netting, taught his people the use of fire, musical instrument making, record-keeping and united nine tribes.

Fuxi's acute observation of nature inspired him to develop the Ba Gua that helped him to explain the laws of the universe.

Fuxi's Ba Gua arrangement depicts the dual nature of the universe, and is commonly referred to as Early Heaven Trigram (Xian Tian Ba Gua). Fuxi was also credited with developing the inspirational River Picture (He Tu), a numerical model of ancient cosmology representing the beginnings of the Universe.

From Fuxi's Early Heaven Trigram evolved the Later Heaven Trigram (Hou Tian Ba Gua) and the 64 Hexagrams



Fuxi's Ba Gua arrangement depicts the dual nature of the universe

by King Wen, founder of the Zhou dynasty. Prior to this, Emperor Yu, founder of the Xia dynasty developed another numerical system called the Luo Book (Luo Shu).

Together, these symbols and numbers form the foundation theory for all Chinese esoteric studies referred to as the Five Arts comprising feng shui, traditional Chinese medicine, divination, destiny reading and physiognomy. The symbols and numbers take on properties of Yin and Yang, the five element transformations, body parts and organs, family members, geographical forms, seasonal elements, human characteristics and so forth, interacting together according to set principals.

A master practitioner would then make use of the above fundamental principles and with the aid of the appropriate tools of the trade, the compass and Chinese solar calendar, access whether a situation, for example, one's feng shui, health, prophecy, destiny, or fortune and character, is favourable or unfavourable. And subsequently, manipulate parameters to avoid the unfavourable and harness favourable outcomes.

Among the five arts, I personally find feng shui the most practical and beneficial, because I can improve a person's fortune by changing their physical environment. But I cannot change their destiny, face or palm! Divination is also fascinating in helping us make appropriate choices through consulting the Yi Jing oracle.

The earliest textual reference to feng shui can be found in the Book of Odes, the oldest Chinese anthology of poems written during the Shang dynasty. It describes Duke Liu conducting a geophysical survey in 1798 BC to locate burial sites according to the environment, Yin and Yang forces, and the flow of rivers and springs.

This inferred that the ancients were already using the theory of forms Xing Fa and the knowledge of Li Qi, two

broad feng shui classifications for assessing the best place to locate settlements, residences or tombs. The theory of forms focuses on the physical aspects of the landscape and relates to the visible physical features of nature and their shape, form, contour, appearance, conformation and flow. The science of Qi orientates according to the cosmological forces of the universe and relates to the invisible forces of nature, its quality, direction, influence, flow and the influence of time.

In a modern urban environment, there is not much opportunity to work with such large-scale feng shui as per our forefathers. Imagine my delight on my recent travels to study a vast array properties ranging from royal tombs, palaces, townships, to individual farmers' dwellings.

From Tianshui in southeast Gansu, I headed to the southwest corner of Gansu. As the bus climbed steadily through rich terraced fields of grain towards the Qilian Shan, layers of mountains enfolded like a weyr of dragons. Mountains represent dragons and if the dragons are clearly visible and well-defined, and lush with vegetation, they are well-nourished and carry benevolent Qi. Well-defined ridges represent the dragon's veins and the lushness of the vegetation implies that there is sufficient water coursing through its veins, therefore a benevolent dragon watches over the fields. In ancient times, villages would be strategically located in the protection of these dragons, clear of killing forces from rivers, roadways or harmful mountains and positioned at naturally occurring power sites to harness energy carried by the mountains and rivers to bring a harmonious lifestyle to the villagers.

Horse trekking through the pine forests of Songpan in the Min Shan range of Sichuan, we ascend from 2,900m to



Layers of mountains enfolded like a weyr of dragons



4,000m through villages and monasteries nestled in valleys and resting on sides of ridges. The homes pictured here no doubt enjoy a spectacular view, but they are too precariously perched on the spur and lack support on all three sides.

Langmusi, a monastic town in the mountainous borders between Gansu and Sichuan, is surrounded by rugged rocky mountains devoid of vegetation. Water gushes through the town like runoff after a heavy thunderstorm. It rushes past rows of shophouses and homes, taking away their fortunes. Virtually each range has an image of an old man lying face-up. Wisdom resides with the monks but the energy of the place lies exhausted like the wanton flow of water. If they only knew to control the energies from the gushing streams flowing through the village, perhaps even constructing a water dragon. And to position the village and homes to avoid malevolent forces from the surrounding mountains.

In days gone, feng shui masters were responsible for securing the power and wellbeing of many noble families of the day. The application of Yin feng shui for the selection of burial sites for their masters, these “king-maker” tombs, became responsible for the propitious advance of the clan and continuation of a dynasty. Through the application of Yang feng shui on their masters’ properties, townships, cities, governments and spiritual sites ensured the continuing success of the living.

Previously, feng shui’s far-reaching effects governed generations over a lifetime, but is now evoked within months to suit the immediacy of our modern pace. The largesse focus on the external landscape required of practitioners in the past is reduced to a focus on the internal environment. The use of feng shui for the benefit of the masses lies mostly forgotten. Perhaps it is pertinent that our leaders today consider feng shui once again, to ensure the harmony of their people. ■

**Clockwise from left** The homes enjoy a spectacular view but they are too perched on the spur and lack support on all three sides • The monastic town of Langmusi is surrounded by rugged rocky mountains devoid of vegetation • Water gushes through the town, passing these row of shophouses and homes, taking away their fortunes



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