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The Role of the Twenty-eight *Xiu* [宿] in *Feng Shui*

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Derek is being one of the first people to introduce *Feng Shui* to Europe, popularizing the subject in a number of television interviews. His book *Chinese Astrology* has been re-issued and revised four times; his handbook on *practical Feng Shui* has had universal appeal as a teaching manual. He is a member of the British Astronomical Association.



Derek WALTERS

1 Introduction

Towards the end of 1988, I was interviewed by a Hong Kong television company who asked me if I had any advice concerning the coming year. I said that anyone living in the San Andreas area should move. Shortly afterwards, there was a devastating earthquake in that region. In 1999, I was frequently asked what was the implication of the forthcoming total solar eclipse. I said, according to Chinese astrology, it meant the destruction of bridges. Later that year, because of the unrest in former Yugoslavia, bridges across the Danube, which lay in the path of the eclipse, were bombed by NATO forces, and a few days after the eclipse there was a mighty earthquake in Istanbul, which, astride the Bosphorus, is traditionally regarded as the bridge between Europe and Asia.

I should like to explain the logic, the scientific background, and reasoning which led to these conclusions. Let us begin with that most familiar of *Feng Shui* instruments, the *Luopan* 羅盤. There is scarcely a book about *Feng Shui* which does not have a picture of the *Luopan* on the cover. But what is less well known is that the *Luopan* is actually the descendant of an ancient astronomical instrument which had a precise scientific function, the purpose of which directly influenced Chinese political decision until the middle of the last century, and has continued to do so significantly in commercial and social life to the present.

Yet the most curious aspect of this phenomenon is that the essential function of the *Luopan*'s ancestor has been altogether eclipsed—such an apt word—by an increasing number of supplementary layers of additional functions, to the point where some modern *luopans* no longer acknowledge its original outer ring: that of the Twenty-eight Lunar Mansions, *Xiu* 宿.

2 Definition and List of the Twenty-eight Lunar Mansions

The 28 *Xiu* 宿 or “Mansions of the Moon” (as the 14th century English poet Chaucer called them) are a belt of constellations roving irregularly across the sky, along which the moon and planets are seen, and the sun inferred, to progress.

Table 1.1
List of the Twenty-eight Lunar Mansions

| | | | | | |
|----|-------------|---|----|--------------|---|
| 1 | <i>Jue</i> | 角 | 15 | <i>kui</i> | 奎 |
| 2 | <i>kang</i> | 亢 | 16 | <i>lou</i> | 婁 |
| 3 | <i>di</i> | 氐 | 17 | <i>wei</i> | 胃 |
| 4 | <i>fang</i> | 房 | 18 | <i>mao</i> | 昴 |
| 5 | <i>xin</i> | 心 | 19 | <i>bi</i> | 畢 |
| 6 | <i>wei</i> | 尾 | 20 | <i>zui</i> | 觜 |
| 7 | <i>ji</i> | 箕 | 21 | <i>shen</i> | 參 |
| 8 | <i>dou</i> | 斗 | 22 | <i>jing</i> | 井 |
| 9 | <i>niu</i> | 牛 | 23 | <i>gui</i> | 鬼 |
| 10 | <i>nü</i> | 女 | 24 | <i>liu</i> | 柳 |
| 11 | <i>xu</i> | 虛 | 25 | <i>niao</i> | 鳥 |
| 12 | <i>wei</i> | 危 | 26 | <i>zhang</i> | 張 |
| 13 | <i>shi</i> | 室 | 27 | <i>yí</i> | 翼 |
| 14 | <i>bi</i> | 壁 | 28 | <i>zhen</i> | 軫 |

3 History

The assembly of various groups of stars into the complete band of 28 happened sometime in the late Zhou or early Han period. Many single stars and star groups now known as a Lunar Mansions are referred to in early texts such as *The Book of Poetry*, *Shi Jing* 詩經 particularly in the poem “Da Dong” 大東, but they were not at that time gathered into a homogenous collection.

Indeed, at least two of the Lunar Mansions, those of the Oxherd or Cowboy *Niu* 牛 (LM 9) and the Weaving Maid *Nü* 女 (LM11), the bright stars Altair and Vega, which lie each side of the Milky Way, must have received their familiar names before the invention of writing, since these two stars no longer align with their respective implements, but have done, owing to the precession of the equinoxes, some 6,000 years ago. Regarding the stars Altair and Vega, I think it is significant that in *The Book of Change*, *Zhou Yi* 周易, when the text refers to a cow 牛 there follows shortly afterwards a reference to a woman 女. The number of such pairings it too great for this to be mere coincidence.

Table 1.2
**Appearances of the Words *Niu* 牛 and *Nü* 女 in the *Zhou Yi* and
 the Sequence of the *Gua* 卦 in which They Appear**

| | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| 牛 | | | 26 | 30 | 33 | | 49 | | 56 |
| 女 | 4 | 20 | 28 | 31 | 37 | 44 | | 53 | 54 |

Each Lunar Mansion belongs to one of the four great seasonal quarters of the sky—the Dragon, Bird, Tiger and Tortoise—each being divided, wildly unequally, into seven sections. The seven constellations of the Dragon are visible during Spring nights; those of the Bird in Summer, the Tiger's in Autumn, and the mansions of the Tortoise in Wintertime. Thus, we read in the *Zhou Yi* 周易 Hexagram 1 *Qian* 乾 that in Winter the Dragon is hidden in the Deep; in Spring it appears on the horizon, in Summer it flies through the sky, and in Autumn, as it begins to set below the horizon, it loses its head. The Dragon constellation begins with the Star Spica, the Dragon's Horn

龍角, invisible in the night sky at the moment (October) because that is where the Sun is at present. Early texts also refer to the Dragon's neck *Kang*亢 (LM2), its heart *Xin*心 (LM5, the bright red star Antares), its tail *Wei*尾 (LM6), and even to the conveniently placed basket underneath its tail *Ji*基 (LM7) in order to collect its precious dung! Two other star groups, the floor *Di*氐 (LM3) and the room *Fang*房 (LM4), were introduced later when each of the four quarters of the sky was divided into seven.

By the time of the early Han, the 28 lunar mansions were inscribed round the outer edge of the *Shi*式, the *Luopan*'s ancestor. Very simply, the *Shi* was a calculating device used in regulating the calendar. Contrary to popular belief, calendars were not invented so that farmers knew when to plough, sow, or reap (farmers knew this through experience and merely followed the course of natural events) The calendar had a much more sophisticated purpose: it was needed to determine the dates for events of national importance: for fairs, parliaments, and coronations, to gather together dignitaries from far and wide at the right moment, or for buyers and sellers of produce, livestock and manpower to meet when mutually convenient.

There is nothing remarkable about the traditional Chinese lunarsolar calendar, which is a concept common to virtually all early civilizations. For example, the Jewish calendar on which the Christian dates of Easter and other festivals are based, adds the occasional intercalary month to bring the year in line with the seasons. The Chinese calendar's special quality lay in the use of the 28 *Xiu* to determine the starts of the lunar months with greater precision, and to be able to determine in advance, and not with hindsight, when a thirteenth month needed to be added.

4 The Astronomical Function of the *Shi* (式)

There are two key points: how to determine the position of the Sun in the sky when the stars are not visible, and how to determine the start

of the month, which begin with the New Moon, since the New Moon is not visible either.

Of course, once the Full Moon is observed, it is a simple matter to count forward 14 or 15 days to find the next New Moon; it is a rough estimate, but becomes wildly inaccurate for forecasts of more than a few years.

These problems are solved by combining a simple astronomical fact with the *Shi*. When the Moon is on the opposite side of the Earth to the Sun, it is Full. Therefore, if the Full Moon is observed to be in one part of the Sky, then the Sun must be directly opposite. This simple phenomenon can be observed from a suitable vantage point at sunset or sunrise at the time of the Full Moon, which happily, occurs from Friday night to Saturday morning (October 6–7, 2006). However, at that time the brightness of the sky prevents the background stars from being seen; a few hours later, when the Moon has risen sufficiently high for the constellations to be observed the Sun's background stars will have fallen below the horizon.

If, however, we prepare a map of the Heavens showing the constellations (and this, in essence, is what the *Shi* is) we only need to note the constellation wherein the Full Moon was observed, and look at the opposite side of the chart to see where the Sun is in the Heavens. For example, on the October 6 the Full Moon will be seen to the left of the Square of Pegasus, in the constellation *Bi* 壁 (LM 14). The Sun will therefore be in the vicinity of the constellation opposite, *Zhen* 轸 (LM28) corresponding to the first week of October, as can be seen in Table 1.1 above.

5 Using Eclipses to Refine the Calendar

Armed with this knowledge, every few years early astronomers would be able to refine their computation of the months; for whenever the Full Moon was observed to be in specific locations which corresponded to the solstices and equinoxes (冬至, 春分, 夏至, 秋

分) the Sun would be directly opposite. Before the 28 mansions were established, the sky had merely been divided into 12 equal segments representing the solar months. These divisions are still retained in *Feng Shui* reckoning when the true astronomical year is divided into the 12 *Jie* 節. The division of the sky into 28 enabled astronomers to be more precise in their calculations to find the start of the month, but even so, this could only be inferred. However, occasional errors could always be corrected whenever there was an eclipse of the sun. These can only take place at the time of the New Moon, when the Moon and the Sun are on the same side of the Earth, and if the eclipse is total, and the skies clear, it is possible to see the brightest stars in the background, and thus, the astronomical position of the Sun. This was the case in March 29, 2006 when not only stars but the planet Venus (火星) could be seen clearly.

Such an event is described in the *Zhou Yi* 周易 Hexagram 55 *Feng* 豐 where we read “At Noon the (southern) Ladle is seen” *Ri Zhong Jian Dou* 日中見斗 which tells us that the eclipse must have occurred when the Sun, as well as the New Moon, was in the Constellation *Nan Dou* 南斗(LM8). The ladle, used to dole out wine, oil, or broth, is symbolic of abundance, hence the name of this hexagram. An ironic reference to this symbolism is also found in *The Book of Poetry*, *Shi Jing* 詩經 in the poem “*Da Dong*” 大東 where the Ladle fails to provide the promised reward:

Wei bei you dou; bu ke yi yi jiu jiang
維北有斗；不可以挹酒漿

Note that *Dou* 斗 is often misinterpreted by commentators as *Bei Dou* 北斗. In the poem, the constellation *Nan Dou* appears in the north, perhaps suggesting a reversal of fortune. In Hexagram 55, *Nan Dou* and not *Bei Dou* is implied because it is astronomically impossible for an eclipse to occur in *Bei Dou*. As the Eighth Lunar Mansion, *Nan Dou* 南斗 equates to January 6 at present, but because of equinoctial precession, in the Zhou Dynasty would be late December or early November.

We might look again at the *Zhou Yi*, Hexagram 1, *Qian* 乾 at the puzzling statement *Kang Long You Hui* 亢龍有悔。

Kang (Long) 亢龍 the Dragon’s Neck, is the second Lunar Mansion; then if for *Hui* 悔 we read *Hui* 晦 the meaning becomes

clear as crystal: 亢龍有晦 (日食)。Because the Dragon loses its head, the symbolism is ominous, suggesting the execution or assassination of a head of state.

The constellation *Kang* (LM2), corresponding to the last week of October, is revealed by the bright star Arcturus, not visible at the moment but nevertheless up there in the sky above us now (early October) about a hand's breadth away from the Sun. In *Zhou* times the eclipse would have happened about six weeks earlier.

6 The Significance of Eclipses in Making Predictions

Inevitably, the calculations of eclipses became an integral part of calendar calculation, and the dates of eclipses were recorded meticulously. The *Chun Qiu* 春秋 lists 37 solar eclipses seen from China; but although three of them have no date, and another three are unlikely, the actual dates of the remaining examples can be identified with some precision.

Very often the record of an eclipse is followed by an account of significant events which followed. It is significant that the first total eclipse to be recorded in the *Chun Qiu* was not taken as an omen of disaster; the *Chun Qiu* specifically remarks that it was a good year. Nevertheless. There is generally an impression that eclipses are unfavorable signs; for example, the eclipse which the *Chun Qiu* records as having occurred in the twelfth month of the 22nd year of Duke *Zhao* 昭公 (November 18, 520 BC) was followed by a year of disasters, including an earthquake.

In fact, it was this, coupled with the tradition that snakes are able to foretell earthquakes because they leave their holes in the ground, which led me to predict the serious earthquake in California in

1989, since it was not only an Earth-Snake year, but also because on March 7. Corresponding to *Wei* 危 (LM12) Danger, a solar eclipse would be manifest over North America. In the case of the 1999 total eclipse, I calculated that the eclipse would take place in the region of *Niao* 鳥 the bird (LM 25) which anciently corresponded with the Summer solstice 夏至, and because it marked the bridge between the rising and setting divisions of the year, was said to rule over bridges. This was the reasoning behind my forecast that locations which fell under the path of the eclipse were apt to suffer the consequences of damaged bridges. But the consequent earthquake in Istanbul may have a scientific explanation. When I was in Turkey to see the March eclipse, I frequently encountered media warnings that an earthquake might follow the eclipse, because the Moon and Sun in alignment could create tidal currents in the Earth's molten core, thus causing disruptions to its fragile crust.

In the *Zuo Chuan* 左傳 there are many allusions to the significance of eclipses. And whether they are of good or bad omen. From the *Commentary to the Seven the Year of Duke Zhao* 昭公 comes this significant passage:

The Marquis of Chin asked Si Wan Bi that the eclipse portended and was told that the states of Lu and Wei would both feel its evil effect, Wei greater and Lu lesser, the reason being that the path of the eclipse passed from Wei to Lu. This would suggest that the effects of the eclipse would be in proportion to its magnitude or duration.

From *Duke Zhao's Twenty-seventh Year* comes the following precept:

At the solstices and equinoxes eclipses do not indicate calamity. The Sun and Moon, in their travels, are in the same path at the equinoxes, and pass each other at the solstices. At other times, there is disaster; the Yang cannot overcome the Yin, and hence there is always disaster from water.

7 Conclusion

The presence of the Twenty-eight Lunar Mansions on the *Luopan* reveals that the techniques of *Feng Shui* are rooted firmly in methodical observation and interpretation of celestial and terrestrial events. While many fulfilled predictions have been construed through the analysis of symbolism, others, such as the forecasting of earthquakes, appear to have a scientific rational explanation.