A FENG SHUI MODEL AS A LOCATION INDEX*
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ABSTRACT. Oral tradition states that the first Chinese cemetery in Victoria, Canada, was possibly west of Swan Lake, but its precise location and history are unknown. The application of an ideal Feng Shui topographic model and the use of aerial photographs, cadastral and topographic maps, material in Chinese archives, and records of the Land Registry Office, show that the Chinese Association in Victoria purchased a plot of land north of Swan Lake in 1891. The site could not be used as a cemetery because of objection by residents in the vicinity. KEY WORDS: Cemetery, China, Feng Shui, Swan Lake, Victoria.

According to some Chinese old-timers, a Chinese cemetery in Victoria, British Columbia, has been moved at least three times. It was first near Swan Lake, later removed to Ross Bay, and finally to the present site at Harling Point. According to verbal accounts the Swan Lake Chinese Cemetery was between Swan Lake and Douglas Street, and north of the present Saanich Municipal Hall and Buildings (Fig. 1). Some old residents who have lived near Swan Lake for more than fifty years, however, claim that there has never been a cemetery in the area. Was there a Chinese cemetery in the Swan Lake region? If the cemetery did exist, where was it, and why was it removed? This paper suggests a method for obtaining answers to these questions by using the model of an ideal Feng Shui topography.

THE MINUTES OF A MEETING

In the archives of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association in Victoria the minutes of a meeting held in 1902 shed light upon the question of the "Chinese cemetery" near Swan Lake. The minutes are translated as follows:

In 1891 a piece of land known as Swan Lake was bought at a cost of $2,115. It was to be used as a burial ground, but it has been left empty ever since the westerners in the neighborhood arrogantly objected to this use. In this meeting, it was proposed to sell that piece of land and to purchase another plot suitable to be used as a cemetery. The proposal received the assent of the undersigned.

Dated 30th May, 1902.

The indenture between the Association and the vendor made in 1891 has not been found in the Association's archives, nor is there any additional information about the sale of the plot in 1902. Without its subdivision lot and plan numbers, it is impossible to ascertain from the Land Registry Office which plot the Association bought in 1891. The minutes reveal that the Chinese Association did buy a piece of land in the Swan Lake area, but suggest that it was never used as a cemetery. A search of conveyances, indentures, Absolute Fees Books, and other relevant records in the Land Registry Office also failed to establish that the "cemetery" was in the area between Swan Lake and Douglas Street, because no lots in that area had ever been owned by the Association. Where, then, was the plot of land? To answer this question it is necessary to understand the concept of Feng Shui, because no traditional Chinese would choose a site for a tomb without first studying its Feng Shui. The Chinese in Victoria in the 1890s would not have had a different

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1 For brevity, hereafter the Chinese Association or the Association refers to the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada.
Feng Shui is a pseudophysical science of climatology and geomorphology originating in fear of strong desert winds, devastating typhoons, thunderstorms, floods, droughts, and other forces of Nature which the ancient Chinese could not explain or control. It may also have been derived from their admiration of the magnificent work of Nature which, through its agents of erosion, wind and water, has carved out lofty mountains and hills which form the greater proportion of the land of China. The ancient Chinese, mostly agriculturalists, had to rely so much on the monsoonal wind and rain for their crops that they became convinced that they were controlled by Nature, and had to behave according to its laws and orders. They believed that they could not escape from Nature even after death. The Chinese people were ancestor worshippers, believing that the souls of their deceased ancestors hovered over their own tombs as well as over their descendants' dwellings. If the tombs of ancestors had good Feng Shui, i.e., were in harmony with Nature, their spirits would be comfortable and their descendants would be prosperous. On the other hand, if their tombs had poor Feng Shui, i.e., were in discordance with Nature, their restlessness would be reflected by the adversity of their descendants. The Chinese people were very careful in selecting tomb sites, because they were convinced that the fortunes and misfortunes of succeeding generations depended on the Feng Shui of their forefathers' graves.

This study is based on the hypothesis that if the Chinese in Victoria had intended to establish a cemetery in the Swan Lake area they would have chosen a site according to an ideal Feng Shui model, and the site therefore should have had the beneficial influences claimed by Feng Shui. The methodology of this study was first to examine the contour maps and air photos covering the Swan Lake area in an attempt to delimit tracts where ideal Feng Shui sites may have been found. The next step was to study the cadastral maps and subdivision plans of the area in order to trace the history of its land subdivisions. The third step was to compile a record of ownership of individual lots by studying their conveyances and indentures, and

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to examine the past uses of those lots owned by individual Chinese or Chinese organizations.

PARAMETERS OF THE MODEL

The visible factor that controls the Feng Shui of a site is the natural configuration of the earth’s surface. This factor is most comprehensible to nongeomancers; it is comparatively relevant to physical geography and environmental studies, and most evident from aerial photographs. The model of an ideal Feng Shui topography consists of four major parameters. First, the surrounding physical features should be smooth in forms and outlines. Rugged mountains, yawning chasms, steep declivities, and other difficult terrain was deemed to be in discordance with Nature and to exert malevolent influences. Straight lines of watercourses, mountain ranges, roads, railways, and other natural or human features should not point in the direction of a tomb site, because these ill-portending features would disturb the quiet repose of its occupant. Moreover, the ancient belief was that evil spirits would travel in a straight line but would get lost or be deflected in a winding course. Footpaths and trails in many Chinese rural areas curve outward from the villages instead of running straight toward them.

The second parameter for an ideal Feng Shui site model is that tortuous watercourses, the emblem of wealth and affluence, should be open to view from the site, but detached rocks and boulders, which are harbingers of evil, should be covered by a canopy of trees and shrubs. Many Chinese villages situated at foothills have fish ponds along their frontages and small groves of bamboo or shrubs, known as Feng Shui trees, planted at the rear. The trees have a dual purpose. They screen the village from the bad influences of boulders, and trap the wealth that “flows” into the village. The trees are also useful because they check soil erosion and landslides, and help beautify the rural scenery.

The third parameter of the model is related to the concept of Feng Shui, wherein Nature is regarded as a living organism that breathes unceasingly. When it moves its breath produces the Yang or male energy, and when it rests its breath produces the Yin or female energy. Nature’s breath is a twofold element consisting of Yang and Yin energies which interact continuously and produce all forms of existence on earth. Mountain chains are indications of these two life-giving energies. The Yang energy is expressed as a lofty mountain range, symbolically called the “Azure Dragon,” and the Yin energy as a lower ridge called the “White Tiger.” The most auspicious model of Feng Shui topography is a secluded spot where these two energies converge, interact vigorously, and are kept together in abundance and in harmony by surrounding mountains and streams. Topographically such a spot is a mountainous node from which a higher range of mountains (the masculine dragon) runs out to the left, a lower range (the female tiger) runs out to the right in graceful curves, and both ranges turn inwards at their extremities in a horseshoe formation whose open end is bounded by a wide meandering stream (Fig. 2).

The last parameter is a well-drained slope where the transposition of male and female energies is supposed to take place, expressing themselves respectively as the higher and lower regions. When used as a tomb site such a locality will have a commanding view of the surroundings at the foot of the deceased, and

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3 The system of Feng Shui is composed of Chi (the breaths of Nature), Li (the laws of Nature), Shu (the mathematical principles and order of Nature), and Hsing (the forms and outlines of Nature). The first three factors are philosophical and determined by a complicated and mystical arrangement of hexagrams and astrologic symbols. They become manifest through the last factor—the forms and outlines of Nature, or the natural configuration of the earth’s surface. A site which exerts the beneficial influences of Feng Shui upon one person may not be favorable to another one, because it has to be selected in accordance with the horoscope of the individual. Therefore, the Feng Shui of a site can be interpreted in different ways by different geomancers who are by no means always scrupulous. Two important Chinese references to Feng Shui are: Ping-chieh Chiang, ed., Pi Ch’uan Shui Lung Ching (The Canon of Watery Dragon) (Changsha: Commercial Press, 1939); and Pu Kuo and Yuan-yin Wu, eds., Tsang Ching Chien Chu (The Canon of Interment) (Shanghai: Ch’en family’s Collections, 1823). An excellent English reference is Joseph Needham, Science and Civilisation in China, Volume 2 (Cambridge: University Press, 1956) and Volume 3 (Cambridge: University Press, 1959).

4 According to The Canon of Interment, op. cit., footnote 3, “The breaths of Nature will be dispersed by wind, but its dispersal will be stopped at the boundary of water.” A winding stream was claimed to prevent the breaths of Nature from dispersal.
Fig. 2. Conceptual and topographic models of an ideal Feng Shui site.
give the body a sense of authority and superiority. The south-facing slope is usually preferable to the north-facing one because the north is viewed as the realm of death and decomposition, but the south, of life and vigor. The head of the deceased should point northward, and the descendants who go to worship him at his grave should stand south of it. For the same reason the northern entrances of many walled cities in China have heavy locked gates, but the southern entrances are kept wide open.

An ideal Feng Shui site is never on the summit of a hill or mountain, where its peace would be disturbed by the violence of Nature, strong wind and heavy downpours, nor will a good site be on a flat plain which has no indication of the existence of the "Azure Dragon" and the "White Tiger," the two life-giving breaths of Nature. Featureless and unproductive plains were regarded as ill-portending sites, and were given to Westerners when they demanded territorial concessions in the nineteenth century after the Opium War. Foreign settlements in Shanghai, Tientsin, Hankow, Canton, and other treaty ports were in low-lying areas which had formerly been mud flats or sandbars. At Hong Kong in 1841 the British began to develop the city's business quarter in the low-lying plain called Happy Valley which, to Chinese geomancers, was a site of malicious Feng Shui. 

6 Personal communication with old residents in Hong Kong, where I lived for nearly thirty years.
When some of the engineers contracted malaria and the houses already built had to be abandoned, the geomancers put the blame on the British nonobservance of *Feng Shui*.

**Locating the Site**

These parameters were used as guiding principles. Contour maps and aerial photographs of the Swan Lake area were examined to pinpoint a locality having a geomantic affinity with the model of an ideal *Feng Shui* topography. The presumed site of the Chinese cemetery was and still is a low-lying swamp. Such a place would not be the abode of the "Azure Dragon" and the "White Tiger," nor would it be selected by the Chinese who believed in *Feng Shui*. After all, nobody will locate a tomb in a swampy area. This narrowed the search area to the north side of the lake. The southern slope of Christmas Hill above the 75-foot contour between Douglas Street and Saanich Road had some likeness to the model, and the plot of land bought by the Association in 1891 might possibly have been there (Fig. 3). The slope is flanked on the east by Lake Hill, and on the west by a lower ridge. In geomantic terminology the site is guarded by the "Azure Dragon" on its left and by the "White Tiger" on its right. It is a propitious spot where the two converging life-giving breaths of Nature are kept together by surrounding hills. In addition, the site is skirted on the east by the Blenkinsop Creek and on the west by Swan Lake Creek, with graceful curves. The south face has an oval-shaped lake which can be taken as a symbol of a luminous pearl (Fig. 4). The smooth postglacial topography is not marred by "evil" physical features, such as rugged hills and steep declivities. In short, the site exhibits the four required parameters of the model.

The search was therefore concentrated in the area north of Swan Lake. It was ultimately ascertained that in 1891 the Chinese Association purchased Lot 22 of Section 64 in Plan 180 of the Lake Hill Estate (Fig. 5). This lot covered an area of 8.75 acres on the southern

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When Hong Kong was ceded to the British in 1841 it was an undeveloped subtropical island, and many low-lying swampy areas such as Happy Valley were poorly drained and malarious.

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7 The six subdivision plans, which are numbered 6427, 8162, 1442, 13017, 17996, and 6054, are derived from Subdivision Plan 1442, which is derived from the subdivision plan of Lots 22 and 23, Section 64, L.R.O. map 180, Lake Hill Estate, Victoria District (now called Saanich). The Estate consisted of Sections 49, 50, and 64 in Victoria District and part of Section 82 in Victoria and Lake Districts. It was divided into 128 lots. *Victoria District Assessment Roll for 1902*, Vol. 2, pp. 45–50.
association. If they were not among the "westerners in the neighborhood" who objected to the cemetery plan, they would probably have been those who were said to "show much concern" about it. George Hick, a Cornish farmer from England, whose property adjoined that of the Association, was probably the most worried neighbor. At first he was a gardener working for $1.50 a day, but later he found it difficult to compete with Chinese gardeners who worked for fifty cents a day, and he became a Saanich Municipal road worker. Hick might have had a grudge against the Chinese, both living and dead. When the Association decided to sell the lot, he immediately bought it.

CONCLUSION

The reminiscences of old-timers are a source of information, but they have to be verified or supplemented with additional data. There is no doubt that the Chinese Association in Victoria bought a piece of land north of Swan Lake with the intention of using it as a cemetery, but the land was never put to that use. It was not sited back of the Saanich Municipal Hall and Buildings, as has been commonly assumed, but was about half a mile north of Swan Lake. Lake View Avenue runs through the middle of the lot today.

This study has two major implications. The first is that in traditional China, Feng Shui was a powerful determinant in the location of tomb sites for royal families, officials, and commoners. It also played a role in the location and layout of individual houses, temples, palaces, hamlets, villages, and cities. If an ancient tomb, for example, is purported to exist in a certain area and to contain artifacts it may be possible to ascertain its precise location by applying the model of an ideal Feng Shui topography.

The second implication is that aerial photography has been widely used in geography,

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9 Lot 23 containing 5.6 acres was bought by George Hick from R. E. Jackson in 1889, D. D. Pocket 25482, Victoria District.

10 Personal communication with an old resident in the Swan Lake area who did not wish to be identified.

11 Register of Absolute Fees, Vol. 20, p. 467, No. 7823c. Conveyance to George Hick was signed on 4 June 1902 by W. G. Tim (alias Tim Kee or Wong Gim-Fung) and Dung Sul Ming, the Association's president and secretary.
but as far as it is known no attempt has been made to use it in relation to the Chinese Feng Shui concept. The model set out is a useful guide for archaeological work and aerial photographs are a very useful tool for detecting a site having a geomantic affinity with the model.