

Feng Shui Cosmology and Philosophy in Native Americans' Worldview

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In studying the characteristics of cultures, literature and philosophies of different civilisations, scholars inevitably wish to search for similar and different features inherent in particular societies. When this desire is completely justified, then certain questions remain that require additional reflection. For instance, studying the cosmological and natural-philosophical ideas inherent in Ancient China and among Native Americans, scholars face the difficult task of logically substantiating the possibility of studying these two diametrically opposed cultures together. This article is based on a general overview of cosmological and philosophical views in Ancient China and among Native Americans. The authors reveal an important principle that significantly distinguishes "non-Western" cultures and manifests itself in ethnocentrism and harmonization of the relationship between humans and nature (Feng shui).

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The article gives a logical basis for research and attempts to answer the question of whether Feng shui practice is a science or a religion. To this end, the legacy of Yang Yunsong, one of the founders of the teachings of Feng shui, a Chinese sage of the Tang era from Guangdong province, was studied. The authors suggest that Yang Yunsong's cosmology, geomancy, and Feng shui practice have much in common with the worldview of indigenous peoples around the world, particularly the Native Americans.

Keywords: Feng shui, cosmology, Chinese philosophy, Native American philosophy, Yang Yunsong

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Introduction

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Chinese art, writing, architecture and philosophy began to be admired in the West. Around this time, Chinese luxury goods, namely tea, porcelain and silk, were in great demand. These goods changed the Western lifestyle, and today it seems that tea in porcelain cups has always been drunk in the West. However, after a wave of enthusiasm for the high culture of the East came a period of equally accelerated economic and political decline in China, in the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries. This was mainly due to foreign encroachments on the country's sovereignty after it became acquainted with the industrial West. Chinese schools everywhere invited Western scientists, mathematicians, physicists and philosophers (John Dewey, Bertrand Russell and others), but overall, cultural appeal declined.

For a long time, China's culture and traditions remained unknown and exotic to Americans, but after the rise of Asia, Westerners, especially Americans, began to turn to Chinese culture to enrich their lives. It is worth noting that a similar trend, although gaining momentum, is not homogeneous. The history of the United States consists of ambiguous events and is full of contradictions. On the one hand, a colonial policy towards the indigenous people of America involved the seizure and extermination of local residents to plunder wealth and the imposition of the Christian religion and racial discrimination. On the other hand, in the history of America, many examples exist of friendly politics, peaceful neighbours, respect (Roger Williams, William Penn) and ideas of kinship between all peoples, regardless of skin colour or religion.

Chinese civilisation, which is about 5,000 years old, and the ancient civilisations and nomadic cultures of America are located geographically in opposite hemispheres and are seemingly not related to each other, but modern scientists have proved their relationship. Genetic examinations of the remains of people of the Palaeolithic era confirm a genetic relationship between the inhabitants of Asia and the Native Americans.

Scholars examined genome-wide data for 19 people from the Upper Palaeolithic-Early Bronze Age from the Siberian region of Lake Baikal. "An Upper Palaeolithic genome shows a direct link with the First Americans by sharing the admixed ancestry that gave rise to all non-Arctic Native Americans. Moreover, we detect genetic interactions with Western Eurasian steppe populations and reconstruct *Yersinia pestis* genomes from two Early Bronze Age individuals without Western Eurasian ancestry. Overall, our study demonstrates the most deeply divergent connection between Upper Palaeolithic Siberians and the First Americans and reveals human and pathogen mobility across Eurasia during the Bronze Age" (Yu et al., 2020).

This genetic relationship explains many similarities that could only have been acquired in prehistoric times. These are, for example, the archetypes of thinking and folk wisdom,

cosmology and cosmogony, common motives of myths, and proto-philosophical ideas. Taken together, this provides material for historical and philosophical research. Professor Vadym Tytarenko states, “The science of history of philosophy is generally focused on the ‘historical-philosophical process’.” By this, we mean the multi-dimensional historical development of philosophy (personalities, concepts, ideas, theories, etc.) (Tytarenko, 2019: 122). These geographically distant cultures have common roots, making it possible to analyse them for common features and significant differences. The mutual interest of these two cultures is visible today. In addition to the love of Chinese food, Americans are now turning to Chinese martial arts, acupuncture, herbal medicine, fashion and art. Interest manifests itself in the worldview, the search for the hidden in the open and the search for meaning and goals and principles. Contemporary interest in China has led to a rapid increase in the number of Western tourists coming to the country to observe and learn more about its 5,000-year-old civilisation.

The general image of Feng shui philosophy and Native American wisdom

Geomancy or Feng shui has been gaining popularity in the United States in recent years. It is an ancient Chinese art based on orientation in space, the position of objects and buildings, interior and exterior design and much more. All these practices are aimed at achieving harmony between man and nature. Today, virtually every public library or bookstore in the United States contains publications on this esoteric topic. Interest in Feng shui exists among scientists, anthropologists, philosophers, designers, architects, intellectuals, politicians and famous personalities. This interest intensified after President Nixon’s famous trip to China in 1972. Feng shui owes its modern success in the United States to the efforts of a group of Chinese experts in the practice, who in the second half of the twentieth century opened numerous schools throughout America (San Francisco, Chicago, New York, Boston and Houston).

Feng shui did not become popular in the United States immediately, and it did not happen in a short period. Although the Chinese have been living in America for a long time, their relationship with other people has been ambiguous. In *Horizontal Inter-Ethnic Relations: Chinese and American Indians in the Nineteenth-Century American West* (1999), Daniel Liestman says, “Chinese and American Indians, moreover, each held fast to their own particular cultural identities – which evoked strong feelings of solidarity among themselves and equally powerful attitudes of bigotry among Euro-Americans. However, Chinese and American Indians interacted in a variety of ways within their unique circumstances. Historians, though, have given little consideration of such interethnic relations at a horizontal rather than a vertical level (...) Much attention is then given to the four types of interface that occurred between these people: contact, competition, conflict and commensalism” (Liestman, 1999: 328).

Due to the reallocation of economic centres, the Chinese language and Chinese medicine (for example, acupuncture) are now taught in many universities and medical schools in the United States and some European countries. According to scientists, Chinese acupuncture and medicinal herbs have become an important component of so-called alternative medicine. The team’s article *A Comparison of Chinese and American Indian (Chumash) Medicine* (2010) provides interesting insights into the similarities in the medical traditions of the two cultures. “Both Chinese and American Indian medical practices depend on many medicines, including plant medicines. The doctors who use these plants require training in how to identify the

plants, prepare the medicines and use the medicines appropriately. Chinese and American Indian therapy can depend on a healing touch that is used to ease pain and cure diseases. Both approaches to medicine are very practical, depend on the plants that are at hand and share some of the same elements of philosophy” (Adams et al., 2010).

Traditional Chinese medicine is a collection of ideas and practices developed over the past 5,000 years. Just because the oldest medical records date from this period, it does not mean that such ideas did not exist orally long before. As with the American Indians, dating some medical traditions is extremely difficult due to the predominantly unwritten nature of medicine. Chinese sailors may have visited America (California) as early as 1423 and influenced the Californian Indians before the arrival of the Europeans. However, such a visit is unlikely (Finlay, 2004) and the fact that both traditions used herbs for medicinal purposes is irrelevant. If the herbs did not have a medicinal effect, they would not be used around the world, so this fact should be ignored.

According to James D. Adams, Jr. and others, Chinese medical practice is based on the principle of dualism. Everything is a combination of two schemes for categorizing key patterns: a combinatorial inhibition-activation model (Yin-Yang) and an associative five-parameter network. The Yin-Yang dualistic model is based on ancient Chinese metaphysics. The genesis of everything is seen as a product of the interaction of opposing forces called Yin and Yang. According to ancient Chinese philosophers, binarity reigns in the world, manifesting itself everywhere, in the opposition of Heaven and Earth, man and woman, cold and hot. Like all principles of dialectics, it can be applied to any field of knowledge, in art, politics and modern science. In modern medicine, illness is understood as an imbalance; in ancient Chinese medicine, it is understood as a loss of inner harmony. Qi is the vital energy that flows like a river in the body, and its flows can affect the flow of lymph or blood. The basis of any treatment is the restoration of the lost inner harmony or balance. Chinese philosophy provides many definitions of what Qi is: in general, it is the source of life, the vital energy that flows throughout space, harmonizing Yin and Yang.

The Chumash (Ughuigh, Oxoix) were once numerous Native American people living in Southern California on both banks of the Santa Barbara Canal. They primarily hunted, fished, gathered fruits of plants and traded with neighbouring tribes. According to the Chumash, life and death are in the will of the Sun and the Heavenly Coyote (Snilemun) (Jones & Klar, 2005). “This is a combinatorial and dualistic philosophy, similar to the Chinese medical philosophy” (Adams et al., 2010). It is a combinatorial and dualistic philosophy similar to Chinese medical philosophy. According to the cosmological ideas of the Indians, the Sun and the Heavenly Coyote are playing a game for whether the year will be rainy or dry. The interesting detail is that ultimately everything depends not on the will of the Sun or the Heavenly Coyote but random chance.

Therefore, if the year is hot, drought will result, which means less food and medicine, and many people will die. If the Sun loses and the Coyote wins, the year will be cool and humid, and people will survive. The Sun is hot, dry, and unforgiving for humans. Therefore, the Heavenly Coyote is more worthy of veneration because it is useful. In the sky, it is associated with the North Star. This knowledge is based on empirical observation, and together with rational reflection, it gives rise to a curious dualistic metaphysics and cosmology. In this situation, balance is important. A lot of Sun means drought, but if Coyote deceives, a flood will come. For harmony, the Chumash developed and used special practices, namely, ceremonies and prayers. All of this was vital to maintain the balance that is associated with the concept of health. To maintain health, it was necessary to follow water procedures such

as swimming in cold water at dawn, but to heal, one should use heat, swim in hot springs, and steam in “sweat lodges.” The goal of treatment is to restore balance to the patient, as the balance is health (Blackburn, 1975).

Native Americans recognize that every person has a spirit. The metaphysics of this spirit is that it is eternal and is not associated with the body, a property that allows it to travel to heaven after death. A spiritual feeling is associated with this spirit; it allows a person to communicate with the Higher Forces. The essence of the spirit lies in the fact that it gives people strength, balance and the will to do good. That is why it is responsible for human health. In the view of the Indians, the spirit can forget to be healthy, and then it needs treatment. Only a restored balance can restore normal health. Some Chinese recognize the eternal spirit in people as the opposite of the body. Spirit provides thinking, it is the centre of morality and humanity, and some Chinese doctors can heal the spirit to help a person restore purpose, will, compassion, creativity, and other virtues.

Belief in spirits implies the doctrine of ghosts. For example, the Indians believe in the underground world, where spirits that come out at night live. Their goal is to create troubles and problems for people and bring disease. To avoid this, Indian healers dress like an owl that sees perfectly at night, to ward off diseases with sharp eyes. The Chinese believe in ghosts, who do not appear or disappear and who go out at night with evil intentions, to bring disease and problems. Feng shui techniques worked out over millennia are designed to prevent the penetration of ghosts into houses, protecting both the home and the people. The doctrine of the duality of the world cannot be ignored, and in attempting to describe the world in this regard, the Chinese and Indian sages have been very successful.

Unfortunately, due to the lack of writing in Native American cultures, anthropologists have little material to analyse. Thanks to a few enthusiasts of the past, it was possible to preserve the culture, traditions and worldview of the ancient cultures. A good example of this positive attitude is Cadwallader Colden, an American educator who was professionally interested in Aboriginal history and culture: “Thanks to his diplomatic talents and political activities, now we can better understand the worldview of the indigenous people of North America. For example, his book, *A History of the Five Indian Peoples* (1727) was the first history of the Iroquois in English” (Sobolievskiy & Sobolievskaya, 2021: 170). In *Philosophical ideas in the spiritual culture of the indigenous peoples of North America* (2020), Professor Sergii Rudenko observes a similar phenomenon in which non-professional ethnographers of colonial America tried to preserve the heritage of the Native Americans. “With the advent of European writing and science, American Indians gained additional opportunities to preserve cultural heritage, so archaeologists, anthropologists, philologists, and other researchers gained new scope of work” (Rudenko & Sobolievskiy, 2020: 171).

Feng Shui, Native American cosmology and natural philosophy

Although Feng shui is considered a pseudoscience, many important ideas for philosophical analysis can be found in its teachings. This traditional ancient Chinese teaching is based on the idea of existing energies that harmonize the relationship of the single with the general. Everyone philosophizes in one way or another. People constantly ask about the meaning of being, its structure and the forces they observe and feel in this world. It is the nature of man: this is his essence. Professor Oleg Bazaluk spoke well about this: “Man (...) is to inquire about being. And as the very “questioning” has already had some knowledge about

the subject of questioning. Therefore, questioning the meaning of life, a person has a certain way of its understanding" (Bazaluk, 2020).

Ancient Chinese sages were interested in cosmology and found correlations of celestial events with earthly activity; the history of their observations dates back to the origins of Chinese civilisation. According to David W. Pankenier, important cosmological and astrological concepts were formed much earlier than previously thought. The existence of such thinking is confirmed by archaeological discoveries of the Neolithic and the Early Bronze Age (Pankenier, 1995).

Traditional theories say ancient hunters crossed the Bering Strait from North Asia to America along the Beringia, a crumbling sea. This route existed from approximately 47,000 to 12,000 BC. Predominantly small groups of hunters and gatherers crossed to another continent while travelling for animals. However, the exact dates and routes of the settlement of America remain to this day a subject of scientific controversy (Ward & Davis, 1999: 2).

Thus, although they have common roots with the peoples of Asia, the indigenous peoples of America developed independently. In this case, researchers have a unique opportunity to compare related but completely different cultures to find not common features, but different ones. Modern anthropology makes it possible to study the archetypal thinking of different cultures that developed in parallel. Given that the first reflections on cosmological problems date back to the Neolithic Period, it is safe to say that some ideas have survived millennia in a rudimentary way in various cultures. For example, the constellation Ursa Major has been known to people since prehistoric times. In different civilisations, it is called by similar names. In China, the constellation is known as the Big Dipper or North Dipper. In Native American traditions, the Iroquois, the Lakota, the Wampanoag people (Algonquian), and others call this constellation the Great Bear.

Similar examples exist in astronomy, but we will focus on other cosmological concepts in this study. The cultures of China and Native Americans have common ancestors in prehistoric times; while they are diametrically opposed both literally and figuratively, geographically they personify East and West. These multi-cultural cultures are characterized by a specific attitude towards space, the surrounding world and its structure. It is not surprising that scholars compare similar philosophical teachings. For example, in the doctoral thesis *Dialogue with Feng shui: An Awareness of Chinese Traditions in Domestic Architecture* (2002), Su-Ju Lu systematically investigates Feng shui's ideology, revealing its fundamental spirit, the idea of harmony between human beings and the universe, seeking the essence of Feng shui and discussing its application in domestic architecture. "Feng shui is the way the ancient Chinese revealed their understanding of the world and applied this understanding to their dwellings. What Feng shui explores is a way to establish an ideal dwelling environment that will allow human beings to live in harmony with the natural environment of the world" (Lu, 2003: 178).

Attempts to develop a practical cosmology were not made only by the ancient Chinese; similar attempts were made by many other cultures. All kinds of buildings and structures were built considering ideas about the relationship between people and the surrounding nature. It is especially noticeable in the example of traditional architecture.

If at first glance it seems that the concepts of nature in the cultures of China and Native Americans have nothing in common, then it is worth paying attention to a special paradigm. In 1997, Kluwer Academic Publishers published the *Encyclopaedia of the History of Science, Technology, and Medicine in Non-Western Cultures* (1997), a collection of more than 500 articles by almost 300 contributors, covered a range of topics from Chinese medicine to Indian ethnobotany. The authors combined information about key figures from different cultures,

from Black Elk, the Native American sage, to the founder of the Feng shui movement, Yang Yunsong, a sage from China. However, before talking about non-Western science, the authors define “non-Western” as not a geographical designation but a cultural one. According to the authors of the encyclopaedia, the term describes cultures and people outside the Euro-American realm, including the indigenous cultures of the Americas. When defining science, the authors take several intellectual steps: “First, we must accept that every culture has a science, that is, a way of defining, controlling, and predicting events in the natural world. Then we must accept that every science is legitimate in terms of the culture from which it grew. The transformation of the word science as distinct rationality valued above magic is uniquely European. It is not common to most non-Western societies, where magic and science and religion can easily co-exist. The empirical, scientific realm of understanding and inquiry is not readily separable from a more abstract, religious realm” (Selin & Kalland, 2003: V-VI).

Yang Yunsong (834–900 CE) was a renowned Feng shui master and author of the *Qingnang aoyu* (Aylward, 2007). He developed applied teaching on the harmonious relationship between man and nature, but he was not the only sage in the world who was interested in such a topic. In his book *Science and Civilisation in China* (1962), Joseph Needham identified Yang Yunsong as the founder of the form school of Feng shui, whose writings were based on surveillance of landforms with a component of cosmology and astrology but with no attention paid to the Feng shui compass, which makes those ideas more practical than theoretical (Needham & Ling, 1962).

Other cultures, both Western and “non-Western,” hold similar views, for example, the culture of Native Americans with its prominent representative Black Elk (1863–1950 CE), who was a spiritual interpreter to the tribe of Oglala Sioux. In 1932, John G. Neihardt wrote *Black Elk Speaks* (1932), a book describing spiritual ways of life and visions of the world structure (Neihardt et al., 2014). This text has become very popular, a must-read for cultural students and philosophers. The author of the article *What Black Elk Left Unsaid: On the Illusory Images of Green Primitivism* (1986), Roy F. Ellen, highly appreciated the contributions of the sage, or rather the contributions described by the anthropologist John Neihardt. Thanks to these records, a book was published containing an interesting description of the spiritual forces of nature. “In all this, the words of the American Indian sage Black Elk have become a canonical text, and Native American culture the epitome of ecological good sense. Neihardt’s Black Elk speaks became something of a cult book during the early days of the environmentalist counter culture in the sixties. It stands for, if you like, that vision of Amerindians which holds them to be entirely fraternal in their relations with nature. What Black Elk left unsaid, of course, was that such views are not necessarily incompatible with purposeful activities which appear to run against prevailing folk wisdom” (Ellen, 1986: 8).

An important component of Native American teachings is the Great Vision, which, as interpreted by Black Elk, shows Native Americans expressing their reverence for the world and their unique perspective on the meanings of the four cardinal directions. For the Indians the cardinal directions are not just directions; they are a spiritual orientation. “Each direction is presented as a sacred Grandfather corresponding to one Power of the World and linked to various natural phenomena. According to the text *Black Elk Speaks*, Black Elk had received a Great Vision and sacred gifts of power at the age of nine when he was very ill almost to the point of death. This Great Vision revealed six sacred Grandfathers, each representing one specific Power of the World and standing for one direction” (Lu, 2003: 181).

The first Grandfather (Black Horse) represents the Power of the West, where the Sun goes down. He gave a wooden cup (a symbol of power to make life) of water and a sacred bow (a symbol of power to destroy). The second Grandfather (White Goose) represents the Power of the North, where the giant lives. He gave a powerful herb (a symbol of power to make beings live). The third Grandfather (Bison) represents the Power of the East, where the Sun shines continually. He gave the good, red day and a peace pipe with a spotted eagle outstretched upon the stem (a symbol of power to make sick beings well). The fourth Grandfather (Elk) represents the Power of the South, where a person should always face. He gave the yellow day and a sacred stick (a symbol of the power to grow). The fifth Grandfather (Spotted Eagle Hovering) represents the Spirit of the Sky. This image stands for all the wings of the air and the winds and the stars, which are like relatives (a symbol of the power of nature). The sixth Grandfather (Black Elk) represents the Power of the Earth. He obtained the idea that the primary meaning of his vision was not his being called to the spirit world but instead being given the powers of the Earth. The last two represent the unity of man and nature, their harmonious unity (Lu, 2003).

Researcher Su-Ju Lu says in her dissertation that “For instance, the link between orientation and colour is not the same for Native Americans and Chinese. However, there are strong similarities in the way they seek to structure phenomena... Both cultures find correlations between colours and animals and orientations. However, based on the different lifestyles and cultural backgrounds, their results are different. For instance, the East corresponds to the animal Bison for the Native Americans and the animal Dragon for the Chinese. The use of different animals perhaps reflects that the Native Americans were hunting people, while the Chinese were rooted in agriculture. Thus the Native Americans, with Bison, Horse, Elk and Goose, took physical animals which they could find in the natural world” (Lu, 2003: 183-184).

Curiously, the two cultures associate the colours black and white with the directions of West and North, which is true, in a diametrically opposite sense. According to Black Elk, West is associated with the Black Horse, and among the Chinese with the White Tiger. At the same time, North is associated with the White Goose among the Native Americans and with the Black Turtle among the Chinese.

At an international scientific conference in Berlin in 2001, Michael Paton, an expert in the history and philosophy of science in China, reported on *The cosmology of Yang Yunsong and science* (2011). In this report, he argued the importance of studying the heritage of Yang Yunsong, identified his place among other famous founders of the teachings of Feng shui and gave a short description of the works of the thinker that have come down to us through the centuries. He talked about the interesting views of the ancient Chinese thinker on cosmology and the doctrine of the cardinal points. In his report, he suggests the words of a thinker. “The Kunlun Mountains are the bones of Heaven and Earth, and amidst everything it they the chief entity within Heaven and Earth as is the human spine. They give birth to the loftiness of the four limbs of a dragon. The four limbs separate into the four worlds. South, North, East and West are the four tributaries. In the Northwest, the Kongtong Mountains have several tens of thousands of entities. The East enters the Three Han and is blocked by dark obscurity. Only the Southern dragon enters the Middle Kingdom” (Paton, 2011).

The concept of the dragon used by the Chinese sage is a metaphor because the dragon is considered one of the most complex symbols in Chinese cosmology. It has several different meanings, not only of a cosmological nature but also of a mythological, artistic and cultural nature. Therefore this polysemantic symbol is extremely complex. The dragon is one of

the four creatures symbolizing direction. The Blue-green or Azure Dragon symbolizes the East, the region of sunrise, rain, and fertility, while the White Tiger personifies the West, symbolizing autumn and death.

Discussion and conclusions

As a result of the study of the common and distinctive features in the worldview of the ancient Chinese sages (Yang Yunsong) and sages among the Native Americans, it was found that, although these two cultures are located on opposite sides of the world, they have common roots. These roots date back to the Palaeolithic when *Homo sapiens* were actively developing their worldview and consciousness of self in prehistoric times. As a result of questioning the meaning of life, its structure and the forces that rule this world, people had limited sources of information and unique mythological pictures, archetypal thinking, folklore, beliefs and practices were born. The world order was analysed in the Chinese practice of Feng shui and among the indigenous people of America, in particular in the teachings of the sages (Black Elk). Common features were the use of zoomorphic images and colours to indicate the cardinal points. In traditional medicine in both cultures, the main task is to restore the internal balance of power, be it Qi or spirit. In these practices, the causes of the diseases themselves are analysed.

The contacts between the two cultures have a long history, with legends of more ancient contacts from the fifteenth century, but the first scientific analyses of this contact date back to the nineteenth century. Scholars argue that the Chinese, like the Indians, were perceived by Euro-Americans on the periphery. Despite a mutual exchange between cultures, trade, marriages and unions concluded, in general, their contacts were unproductive. Today, organizations are dedicated to broadening the two clubs' views of each other, such as the programme funded by the U.S. Embassy-Beijing, featuring tours with distinguished Native American artists conducting workshops and performances across China.

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