

# What Does Feng Shui Really Mean ?



By  
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Feng Shui is an ancient Chinese technique used in order to establish which place may be the best one to raise a building, or to improve an existing one. The name comes from the link between Feng, literally *Wind*, and Shui which means *Water*.



So this word identifies the two primary forces which have influenced and built the Earth. Moreover it represents the two principal elements which guarantee life on our planet. However analysing the two ideograms and looking at the development from the original to the modern symbolism, we can understand the Chinese view of these terms in more depth.

Firstly we should define the word "ideogram": ideogram is the representation of the concept through images. Philologically the ideogram is a sign which expresses an item as seen and/or the word. An ideogram, besides, is always associated with a word and so to a conscious meaning. Furthermore there are a variety of ideograms, in which the sign is not associated, or is not associable, to any conscious meaning, but to an unconscious meaning. *Becoming, transformation, surviving* are examples of unconscious meanings.

According to Emmanuel Anati (an Italian archaeologist) those prehistoric unconscious ideograms – named by Anati "psychograms" – are neither synthetic nor repetitive, as ideographic symbols usually are.

*"Those are symbols, which can trouble mind and blood without any specific association. They are quintessentially not consciously definable, but they deeply belong to us. They are an incredibly alive and reactive part of our sub-conscious".*

The origin of Feng and Shui ideograms can be found in both those formation processes.

*Shui*-Water has a conscious origin and it expresses the water idea as seen and symbolically represented. *Feng*-Wind is a more "magic" sign, which symbolises an idea which is linked with a partially unconscious meaning.

## FENG

Feng means Wind, but its intrinsic meaning is: **THE PHOENIX MOVEMENT. See diagram 1 top right**

This ideogram derives from a pictogram (1), which represents a mythological bird, The Phoenix, which is Feng-Huang in Chinese. The Phoenix may have been a bird similar to a heron. This bird appears in the mythology of many cultures. It is often linked to archetypal themes representing eternity and the original vital energy (of the sun).

In ancient Chinese imagery, in the Phoenix the two original energies Yin and Yang were in harmony. In the Tai Chi unity (the yin/yang symbol) Yin and Yang alternate among themselves forever without stopping, as two opposite poles. The Phoenix is associated with the South (the Sun) and the colour red. The bird shape is stylized (2-3) until it is squared and observed, in a dissociated way, from a distant place (4).

The pictogram simplification takes us to the symbol (5), and so its meaning becomes: *The place from which I can observe the Phoenix flying or more specifically: where there is good luck.*

In this case you can see how an image (the bird) is transposed into a symbol (the vital energy moving harmonically) and then into an abstract concept, which contains an unconscious idea linked to the biological heritage of the search for a place where people can guarantee the survival of their family and species; that is good luck.

According to Anati, this atavistic, biological heritage is deeply rooted inside us and belongs to our sub-conscious. This heritage induced the Chinese people to find in Wind a force which guarantees the vital movement of energy necessary to procreate and guarantee continuity of the species.

The Wind brings health, renewal, good wishes. But you need to defend yourself from Wind when it is too strong. In this way the place from which to watch the Phoenix has another meaning: it becomes the centre (*Xue*) of the ideal place to build a camp, a village, a city.

## SHUI:

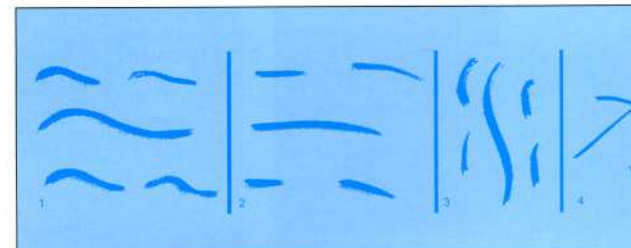
Its literally meaning is *Water* and the origin of the ideogram comes from both observation of natural forms and the conceptualisation of the signs system, established 5.000 years ago by the legendary Fu Xi. He was the first emperor of a mythological gold age in which "people went to sleep calmly and easily and woke in the morning with a joyful and direct view".

He was the first person to observe the natural cycles and to denote them with the binary system (the same system which has led to personal computers!) Fu Xi created the trigram system, through the process of contemplation of the intrinsic design of things. "Fu Xi looked at the sky, and observed the Earth and the animals, and he utilised the Ba Gua to explain the relationship between all things."

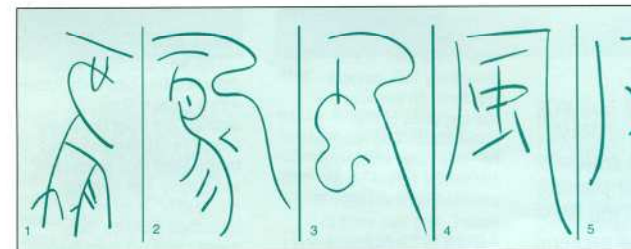
This system is based on the binary theory of the Yang (full sign) and of the Yin (half sign). Yang and Yin are the two primary energy forms, called Qi.

Four bigrams are created from the two signs' interaction, sequentially (*Si xiang*) as mother/daughter and father/son. The four bigrams (symbols composed by two of these lines) interacting and combining between themselves create eight trigrams (*Ba Gua*), composed by three of these lines. Each of those trigrams represents a particular energy state and has a name and a specific meaning.

One of these trigrams is the Kan trigram (2). Kan clearly originates from observation of the nature of the water (1),



**Diagram 1** Sequence of ideograms from Phoenix to Wind. Original signs from Prof. Wang Yude, Huazhong Normal University, Wuhan, China.



**Diagram 2** Sequence of the ideogram from the trigram Kan to Water. Original signs, Prof. Wang Yude, Huazhong Normal University, Wuhan, Cina.

and it is associated with this element. It has as intrinsic meaning the action of falling and is accordingly associated with the rain.

**See diagram 2 above**

The rain falls on the mountains (3) forming streams of water, bringing health and nutrition. This is the origin of the modern symbol (4). Also in this case the water symbol indicates the quality of a place (whether water is present or not), which is vital to survival and to first finding food and later cultivating it.

Hence the symbolic importance of the two joined words identifies the discipline of Feng Shui and is linked to archetypes, i.e. to unconscious contents, to primordial images which bring people back to the satisfaction of their primary needs.

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