

Only Half-Way to Godhead: The Chinese Geomancer As Alchemist and Cosmic Pivot

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OVERVIEW OF CHINESE GEOMANCY: THEORY AND PRACTICE

Geomancy, the conventional English translation of the Chinese terms *Kanyu* 堪輿, *Dili* 地理 and *Fengshui* 風水, can be taken very broadly as a system of environmentalist thinking, which sees the earth as the conduit of forces whose analogues are found in other parts of the cosmos. Traditional conceptions of the cosmos in China have distinguished three separate, though interlinked, spheres of existence: namely, heaven, earth, and man. Events in each of these spheres are interrelated and one might think of them as strings on a piano, vibrating in sympathetic harmony when they are struck. Phenomena which occur in space and time, which we can also call "events" or "fate," are the result of qualitatively different forces called *Qi* 氣 which circulate in and between these spheres of existence. *Qi* is a fundamental concept in traditional Chinese thinking about causality: it expresses the link between time and space:

The idea of pneumatic *Qi* as the origin of the universe was expressed in the . . . *Huai Nan Tzu* 淮南子 (ca., 120 B.C.). In the beginning, nothing had physical shape, and the first spontaneous formations were the continua of space and time (*Yu-shou* 宇宙). Out of these were produced the original *Qi*. This *Qi* was heavy and stable, but its lighter part rose and became the sky. The gathering of the heavy substance took time, and hence the earth was formed earlier. Then the *Qi* of the sky and earth met and became yin and yang. The active *Qi* of yin and yang became the four seasons, and as this *Qi* of the seasons scattered, it formed

the various phenomenal things on earth (Yosida 1973: 77).

In traditional Chinese thinking about the structure of the universe, there was an assumption that phenomena in the three spheres of existence were *always* connected by the interactive force, *Qi*, which in turn was in some way channeled through particular points in space, including human beings:

The recognition that man's key role in the universal order made him superior to other phenomenal beings was due to Tung Chung-shu 董仲舒 (179–104 B.C.). As he put it, "The Qi of Heaven is above, the Qi of Earth is below, and the Qi of man is in between" (*Ch'un-ch'iu Fan Lu* 春秋繁露 56). Human beings are not only located between Heaven and Earth, but are in correspondence with the natural order. To exemplify this principle, Tung likened the 360 joints in the human body with the 360 degrees by which celestial positions were marked. The flesh and bones of the human body corresponded to the texture of the earth. The ears and eyes corresponded to the Sun and Moon, and the five internal organs to the Five Elements. The four limbs were the Four Seasons. Man was a microcosm in which all the contents of the macrocosm were reflected (Yosida 1973: 79).

In this cosmology, the forces of heaven and earth are related to one another through men. Particular men, therefore, may exercise control over the forces of the heaven and the earth by exercising control over self. The emperor, for instance, assured the continued primacy of his political role if his throne were located in the precise spot where Heaven and Earth were interconnected:

The emperor, as cosmic pivot, saw to the harmonious operation of these natural forces, and he did so from the great main palace called *Tai-ji-dian* 太極殿, whose name symbolized the astral center of the universal order (Wright 1977: 56).

The nature of the phenomena produced by the forces of *Qi* coursing through the cosmos was evaluated by various "systems of correspondences," the simplest of which was the yin/yang dipolar system. Probably the most popularly employed in technical discussions was the so-called five elements system, but many other systems, such as the eight trigrams, the ten stems, the twelve branches, etc. were also employed (Porkert 1974; Feuchtwang 1974). Analysis of the patterns

in which the forces of *Qi* move through the cosmos was based on direct analogy with the functions of the human body. It was thought that energy flows through the heavens, through the earth and through the body of man in ascertainable patterns which are analogous to the passage of fluids through the body. In both the human body and in the earth, these conduits were called *Jing-muo* 經脈. They should not be confused, however, with physical organs, such as nerves or arteries. Instead they represent a kind of reification of the theory of the interconnectedness of all parts of the cosmos. Such conduits can be mapped, but the accuracy of the map can only be judged on the basis of effects observed elsewhere in the cosmos. On the human body, these are the conduits which are deflected when acupuncture needles are inserted or when moxibustion is employed. In the earth, these conduits bring *Qi* energy to the surface in places called *Xue* 穴 ('aperture' or 'lair,' cf., Bennett 1977). In tapping into these sites, one proceeds in much the same fashion as in acupuncture, thus the mapping of the flow of forces through the landscape has become a major part of the geomantical tradition (Porkert 1974).

Chinese astronomy has also contributed much to the terminology and methodology of geomancy. The principles of traditional Chinese astronomy were largely drawn from a focus on the observation of the circumpolar constellations. These constellations divided the skies into twenty-eight divisions of longitude surrounding the unmoving pole star as a fixed point of reference. The movements of the sun, the moon and other irregular asterisms, such as the planets, comets, etc., were plotted on circular projections of the stellar constellations. By means of the geomancer's magnetic compass, the circumpolar divisions of the heavens can be made to correspond with the earthly directions (Feuchtwang 1974). What is hidden beneath the earth may then be inferred by observation of the heavens and the assumption of analogous patterns of structure and movement within the earth.

Professional geomancers are usually described as belonging to one or the other of two "schools" or traditions. One school emphasizes the analogy of observable forms of the earth's surface with the shapes of living creatures. This school has been called the "shapes school." The other school emphasizes the use of the compass and consequently makes much of the various systems of correspondences to link the directions with human fate. These practitioners have conventionally been given the name of the "directions school" (March 1968: 261-263), but it appears that most geomancers incorporate some of the theories and practices of both schools (Bennett 1978).

All geomancers begin their work by defining the site, the specific

place within a particular landscape where cosmic forces can be tapped into. The geomancer is guided in this process by the location of high points and low points in the surrounding landscape, that is, by the location of mountain peaks and water courses. The most important features that have to be evaluated include the direction which the site faces and the elevation of the terrain behind, the manner in which ridges or elevations encircle the site to the left and right, and the features which appear in the landscape giving access to the site in front. Geomancers of the shapes school will give relative emphasis to features of the site which are analogous to functional organs of the forms perceived in the landscape. For example, if the landscape is perceived as taking the shape of a sleeping buffalo, then a site between its horns may be viewed as a very good one, whereas a site at its anus may be viewed as a very poor one. Geomancers of the directions school will orient their compasses to various high and low points around the site and make their evaluations on the basis of the correspondences with the five elements, eight trigrams, etc., which they can read off their compasses and then look up in the many reference manuals which exist for the purpose.

ANALYSIS OF A CHINESE GEOMANCY TALE

Eberhard (1937) has already given us a survey of the themes in Chinese geomancy tales, and Yoon (1975) has completed a similar analysis of Korean ones. In the present paper, I analyze the main themes in a single Chinese geomancy tale: *A Strange Tale of the Geomancy Master, Lin Demigod*. The original text of this story, which I have translated into English as the final part of this paper, appeared in a book entitled *Strange Folk Tales of Taiwan, Tai-wan Min-jian Zhuan-gi* (Anonymous 1970). Another version of this same tale, very similar in content, is to be found in the collection edited by Li Xian-zhang (1975), where the provenance of the tale is given as Feng-shan 鳳山.

The story begins with the exhumation and reburial of a corpse. The practice of secondary burial is widespread throughout the world and it is especially well documented among the Chinese of the southeastern coastal regions (Freedman 1966). Our text explicitly links the practice of secondary burial with "filial piety" (*Xiao* 孝), that is, the duties, love and respect owed to one's parents. In addition, one's own personal well-being depends on how comfortably (or uncomfortably) one's parents are resting in their graves (Ahern 1973). We can conveniently subsume this complex of practices and beliefs under the name of "geomancy," although good reasons have been advanced for using some other term (Bennett 1978 suggests 'siting').

In the story of Geomancer Lin Demigod, the most important geomantical constructs are clearly based on the functional analogies of the sites. That is, there is no mention made of the use of the geomancer's compass, and discussion concentrates on the kind of physiological analogies that have been described as characteristic of the "shapes school" of Chinese geomancy. If we look at the story in terms of time, space and process, we can also see much that is informed by traditional Chinese concepts of alchemy and human physiology. The theories of Chinese external alchemy (*Wai Dan* 外丹) held that physical transformations of the substances found in the earth reflected cyclical rhythms of time:

This pattern held for minerals as well as for flora and fauna. The Chinese shared what seems to have been a traditional belief among miners everywhere that earths matured within the terrestrial womb. The metallurgist was merely accelerating a natural progress of metals toward perfection—a perfection that, except in the cases of silver and gold, nature's corrosion would eventually undo (Sivin 1977: 110).

Gold is, of course, the most stable as well as the most noble of metals. The whole art of the Chinese alchemist was directed toward the acceleration, within the crucible in his workshop, of the processes which created this metal within the womb of the earth. Among the Chinese of Taiwan, the process of secondary burial in general is referred to in the colloquial as "picking up the gold" (*khioh kim* 拾金), thus it is implied that the processes of decay which occur within the coffin are in some way analogous to the processes within the alchemist's crucible. One may therefore assert that one of the purposes of secondary burial is to examine the effectiveness of a burial site in accelerating the production of "gold." Since gold is the most unchanging, in a sense the most 'immortal' of the metals, it is instructive to note that a very similar purpose is to be found in the practice of the physiological alchemists (*Nei Dan* 内丹):

They dared to believe that by their efforts the normal course of events could be arrested and set moving backwards; this was called *Dian Dao* 顛倒, "turning nature upside down"; thus to become as "little children" was the *Nei Dan* ideal . . . (Lu 1977: 74).

Given the Chinese concept of man as a microcosmos, it is attractive

to view the story of Geomancer Lin as a parable which gives a concrete example of how the processes of both *Nei Dan* and *Wai Dan* operate: the geomancer himself is the medium through which living humans gain access to the fruits of these alchemical transformations. That is, Geomancer Lin's body is the conduit through which the *Qi* connecting heaven and earth passes as it effects the changes which humans perceive as "events." For example, when Lin selects a grave site for the Liao family, it causes internal transformations within his own body and he is reduced to a state of helpless dependence on the Liaos: in short, he becomes as a child and needs the same kind of care. As long as the Geomancer Lin maintains his internal feelings in a stable equilibrium, the effects which flow from the grave site are benign and positive. But when Lin is insulted or his knowledge denigrated (for example, when the general's uncle rejects his analysis), then negative events take place. Just as emotional equilibrium is important, so is physiological equilibrium. When Lin eats vegetable food (for example, sweet potato soup), his powers are exercised for good. When he eats impure food, especially when it is the meat of a goat drowned in the privy, negative, destructive events occur.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the story is the perceived physical form of the grave site which the geomancer finds for the Liao family: a woman in position for "offering a flower" 美女獻花 (intercourse). Since sexuality and reproduction are events that occur within the framework of the family system, it is not surprising that we can interpret many aspects of the story by reference to Chinese concepts of kinship, marriage, and social structure.

In the kinship ideology of traditional Chinese society, agnatic relationships, that is, relationships traced through males, are the enduring social group (Freedman 1966). Agnatic relationships define individual membership in common descent groups and the access which individuals have to resources ("the gold") is mediated by membership in these agnatically defined family groups. In the Taiwan dialect of Chinese, the term *kang-kut* 仝骨 ("same bone") means "to be related patrilineally." When a man marries, he brings a woman of another patrilineage to live with him. All women, on the basis of folk belief and religious texts such as the *Mu-lian Pao-xie-pan Jing*, have within their bodies worms which attack the joints of their bones, that is, their agnatic substance, and break down both their bones and their blood into the fluids of menstruation and childbirth which nurture the fetus (Ahern 1975; Seaman 1981). These processes of decay and transformation within a woman's body are what create an infant, the new member of an agnatic lineage different from that of its mother. In short, the

bone of one lineage is broken down and transformed into a new member of another lineage (cf., Seaman 1981).

Women, then, are thought of as beings whose nature is destructive of the bone received from their parents in order to create new individuals. Since we have already noted that the earth is considered to nurture and transform minerals in a manner analogous to the development of a child within a woman's womb, we can draw a direct analogy between the physiological processes of human birth and the transformations which take place within the grave, as the bones buried there are transformed into "gold" or resources of the family.

In the final events described in the story, the links between foods, emotions, bodily functions and social categories are brought to full expression. The vendor of a food substance which looks like congealed semen simulates intercourse where the bones of another family are buried. This alters the emotive state of the Liao women so that they are stimulated to engage in promiscuous activity. This in turn results in pregnancy, marriage and the transformation of the Liao agnatic substance (gold/bone) into the children of the beancurd seller. What appears to be merely a narrative of "strange happenings" can be seen as an allegory of alchemical transformations in nature, being channeled by the internal states of the geomancer.

In the story of geomancer Lin, we find that the geomancer is like the practitioner of alchemy. He must be knowledgeable of the places where cosmic transformations (*Wai Dan*) take place, so that he can select a proper site for these transformations to operate. But he must also be aware of and able to master his own internal states (*Nei Dan*), because his own body is the "crucible" which ultimately exerts control over the process operating in the grave site. It is perhaps in this metaphor of the geomancer as alchemist that we find a clue as to why Geomancer Lin is called "Demigod" 半仙 rather than "Immortal" 仙 Lin. Geomancer Lin is ultimately a failure in controlling his inner feelings of resentment and anger toward the Liao family. This failure of control of inner self leads inevitably to the collapse of the good fortunes of the whole social group. Geomancer Lin is the "cosmic pivot" upon whose character the Liao family's destinies depend, just as a state depends upon the character of its ruler.

Thus the body of a man is the image of a state. The thorax and abdomen correspond to the palaces and offices. The four limbs correspond to the frontiers and boundaries. The division of the bones and sinews correspond to the functional distinctions of the hundred officials. The pores of the flesh correspond to the four

thoroughfares. The spirit corresponds to the prince. The blood corresponds to the ministers, and the *Qi* to the people. Thus we see that he who can govern his body can control a kingdom. Loving his people, he will bring peace to the country; nourishing his *Qi*, he will preserve his body. If the people are alienated, the country is lost; if the *Qi* is exhausted the body dies (Ko Hung, *Pao P'u Tzu*, ch. 18, p. 30a, quoted in Needham 1956, vol. 2: 300-301).

Geomancer Lin could only get halfway to immortality. Unable to control the functioning of his own body, unable to love his people, the Liabs, he is condemned to the same fate as the rulers described by Ko Hung: eventually his body must die. Thus we may conclude that the Geomancer Lin, though possessed of knowledge and insight which potentially offer him immortality, in the last analysis is incapable of reaching that goal because he fails to control the alchemical transformations of his internal *Qi*.

TRANSLATION

A STRANGE TALE OF THE GEOMANCY MASTER, LIN DEMIGOD

In the early years of the Qian-long era (1736-1795), there lived in the Quan-zhou 泉州 region of Fukien province a master of geomancy named Lin. His geomantical skill was extraordinarily brilliant, so that everyone called him "Demigod" (半仙 *ban xian*).

The Commander-in-chief of the Imperial Army in Quan-chou, one Hu Wen-hai 胡文海, heard of Lin's great reputation and that made him think of his own father who had died on Taiwan. His father was buried at Feng-bi-tou 鳳鼻頭 near Kaohsiung 高雄, but there was no proper tomb, so that he was really a neglected ghost in a foreign land.

"Now that I myself have become a high official," thought Hu, "it is only proper that I bring my father's bones back home, in order to fulfill my duties as a filial son."

Thereupon he hired Geomancer Lin to travel with his material uncle to Taiwan and bring back his father's bones.

When the two had arrived at Feng-bi-tou where Hu's father was buried, Lin sat on the top of the grave mound and carefully studied the lay of the land. After a while he stood up and looked out to the left, then over to the right. He gazed far off in the distance to the front and surveyed carefully to the rear. Then he once again sat down on the grave mound and looked over the aspect in front. Nodding his head repeatedly he said, "Oh! This burial is just right for the lay of

the land! This site is the 'Right Den for a True Dragon' 真龍正穴, and we cannot disturb it! General Hu's high official rank is protected by this site."

When General Hu's uncle heard this, he laughed to himself. "If this grave site is the 'Right Den for a True Dragon,' he said with great sarcasm, "then the spot we're standing on is the 'Mouth of the Living Dragon' 生龍口." When he had said this, he shrugged his shoulders and cackled with sarcastic laughter.

"Of course this is the Mouth of the Living Dragon! If I am wrong, then I'll hang my name upside down!" answered Lin, his face getting red and shaking his head angrily.

"Master Lin," said the uncle, "I'll tell you the truth. My elder sister's husband came from his old home in Shansi to Taiwan to work the nets on the fishing boats. He was as poor as a boiled egg and when he died it was not possible to buy even the thinnest of boards to make a coffin. My sister and I wrapped him in a grass mat and carried him here. We just scooped out a hole in the ground and buried him. We did not even choose the proper day nor hire a geomancy master. If you say now that he was buried right in the Mouth of the Living Dragon, doesn't that make me as full of insight as a living, breathing god? I think you ought to turn your name upside down just as soon as possible, don't you? So that you won't have to suffer loss of face!"

When Lin heard this, he knew that he was not wrong at all. In a high choler he answered: "I don't have to do that at all! This grave site necessitates a 'soft burial' 軟葬. If you had used a coffin to enclose the corpse, that would have been a 'hard burial' 硬葬, and this Living Dragon would have been choked to death by it. In that case, how could a Military Mandarin have been produced by it?"

The uncle observed how Lin waited until the story had come out before he said that a 'soft burial' was correct. Thus the uncle thought that Lin was just trying to confuse the issue and took him for a con artist. How could the uncle believe him? "Don't use your oily tongue on me," said the uncle unpleasantly. "Even if this spot is the 'Dragon's Mouth' 生龍口, today it is going to be reamed out!"

"If that's the way things are," said Lin, "I thank you kindly with no regrets. Goodbye!"

The uncle watched Lin depart and did not say a word to make him stay. The next day the uncle hired men to dig up the bones so that he could take them back to Fukien with him. Not long afterwards, the news came that the ship had gone down in the Taiwan Straits and the uncle and the bones had both sunk to the bottom of the sea. At the same time General Hu was removed from office. Because of this

he fell ill and within a month was dead.

Lin Demigod was penniless and could not return to Fukien. So he wandered around the villages of Fengshan 鳳山 near Kaohsiung. For two whole days he hadn't a bite to eat, and the fires of hunger were raging in his stomach. One day, as he passed by the gate of a house, he saw that the family was just about to sit down to eat and Lin couldn't keep from gazing greedily at the food.

"Sir!" called out the man of the house, who saw the hungry look on Lin's face. "Come in and eat a bite!"

"Thank you! Thank you! But I am afraid that we are not at all acquainted, so how can I accept your offer?"

"Don't be so polite! Just sit down and eat!" answered the farmer. "Even though there is nothing good to eat, just sweet potato soup, I hope you, reverend sir, will deign to honor us with your presence. If so, I will be blessed with great joy." While the farmer spoke these respectful words, he filled a bowl with sweet potato soup and handed it to Lin.

Since Lin was cast adrift in this place, wherever he looked he saw no friendly faces, so that he was almost starving to death. In such circumstances, the sincere invitation of the farmer was enough to move him to tears.

When Lin had finished eating the sweet potato soup, he saw that the family was drawing water from the well. They pulled on a long, long rope and it seemed to take half a day to draw up a bucketful. "It must be very difficult for you all to get water here?" asked Lin with concern.

"That ain't the half of it!" came the reply. "In these highlands, whenever there is a drought, we have to work ourselves to death hauling water, otherwise there is no way to plant our crops." The farmer said this mildly, showing that he accepted without rancor the fate the Heaven meted out to him.

"Your hearts are really too good," said Lin. "How would it be if I were to seek for water on your behalf, so that you would have a never-ending supply of spring water to use for irrigation?"

"Oh, that would be fantastic! But how will you get this water?" asked the farmer, who was almost mad with joy.

"You must set up an altar on the middle of yonder mountain opposite from here," replied Lin. "Prepare a plate of sacrificial food, make a sword out of peach wood 桃木劍 and take a rice measure bucket and use it to represent the dipper constellation 甕斗. I must also have a bowl of salt, a bowl of rice and a bowl of water. Then just watch my magic methods! But beware: when the water comes out, you must

all run toward the plain as fast and as far as you can.”

The farmers half believed and half disbelieved what Lin said. But still they prepared each and every thing he needed.

The next day, Lin let down his hair and girded on the peachwood sword. Standing before the altar loaded with sacrificial meats, he first knelt down and offered incense. Then he stepped out the dance of the constellations 步斗踏罡.²

Muttering incantations, he took a pinch of the salt, rice, and water and scattered it to the east and to the west. Grasping the edge of the bowl of water in his left hand, he took the sword in his right and drew charm characters 畫符 with the sword over the water. When he had finished writing over the water, he also wrote out some charms up toward the sky. He filled his mouth with this magic water and blew out several sprays toward the sky, then he took the sword and stuck it into the side of the mountain. At once a spring of water rushed out of the ground.

“Oh, look at the water!”

“Wow! It worked after all!”

The farmers roared out these exclamations and at once took off in a dead run for the plain down by the sea. They ran till the sweat covered their bodies and they could not breathe but could only pant. When they had reached the end of their strength, they had run as far as the neighborhood of Kangga-po 港仔埔, Tamma 潭仔 and Nalai 林內.³ The water also followed them there, whereupon it stopped flowing.

After this event, Lin's fame was on everyone's lips and countless people came from near and far to hire him to search out burial sites. Every day they came in a continuous stream. Lin himself was carried here and there in a palanquin and had so much business that he had no time to take care of it all.

One day a poor man named Liao came to ask Lin to find a grave site which would produce wealth for the family. Lin was very sympathetic with the man's poverty, so he agreed to go into the mountains with him to look for possible grave sites. The two men struggled on like jungle explorers, pushing aside creepers, grappling with vines. They traversed the slopes and crossed the peaks, searching for a good grave site. Whenever they came to a high point, Geomancer Lin always stopped for a while carefully to observe the surrounding land forms. At last they came upon a small and not very high hill.

“Hey! We've found it!” exclaimed Lin after having surveyed the surrounding peaks and general lay of the land.

“Is it a good site, sir?” Liao asked happily.

Geomancer Lin absentmindedly nodded his head as he paced back and forth, lost in thought. "Right! This is a 'Mistress Offering a Flower' 美花獻花 combined with a 'Golden Wash Basin' 金面盆."

"What do you mean a 'Mistress Offering a Flower?'" said Liao uncomprehendingly.

"That's the term for this kind of burial site. Look, see how the slope comes down from over there: doesn't the outline resemble a woman lying on her back in bed?" answered Lin as he pointed up at the ridge line.

"Oh! Really, it does! And those two little mounds poking up are just like two breasts," Liao said, fancying that he also had found a clue to the site and adding his own praise of its beauty.

"Well now," said Lin, "we are standing right at the 'True Opening' 正穴 that is, on the 'Flower' 花. At this point the ridge divides into two legs, one opening off to the left and the other to the right. They wind downwards, then curve back in, and these lines form the thighs. That concavity at the curve of the buttock is the Golden Wash Basin. If you bury your ancestors here, your family will not only become wealthy, but will produce high officials and scholars." Lin punctuated his explanation with gesticulations of both his hands and feet.

"Oh!" said Liao. "May I ask you, sir, to help me in this matter? I hasten to thank you in advance."

"Sorry. I don't dare to help you trap the power of this site," Lin replied flatly.

When Liao heard that the geomancer would not help him, he was greatly agitated and at once bowed down on the ground, where he wailed as though at a funeral. "Sir," he cried, "you have taken me on this expedition for half a day and it was no easy matter to find this site. Why don't you want to help me to take advantage of it?"

"It is not that I don't *want* to, but truly this grave site is not a simple matter. If things aren't done correctly, then no wealth will come of it; if things are done correctly, then the supervising geomancer must go blind," Lin explained.

"Sir, don't worry about that small matter," Liao begged earnestly. "If you will supervise this burial for me, you will be the Grand Benefactor of the Liao family. When you go blind, I and my whole family will serve and support you as though you were my own father! I sincerely beg you to help me in this matter!" And Liao wept bitterly, sobbing and begging.

"All Right!" I will sacrifice these two eyes of mine and help you to take advantage of this grave site," Geomancer Lin said, feeling that

he had no other alternative.

“Oh! Thank you, sir! Thank you, sir!” And Liao fell on his hands and knees, kowtowing like an insect, knocking his head wildly against the ground.

After Liao buried his ancestors' bones in that grave site, his family began to prosper more every day. Not even two years had passed before his family was already being pointed out as a wealthy household. After three years had passed, Liao's eighteen-year-old son, contrary to all expectations, became the first to attain a scholarly degree at the Fengshan examinations. Truly, the Liao family had achieved both wealth and status. As a result, Geomancer Lin was treated like a god; the family deferred to him with more respect than they granted their own parents. At every meal there was both fish and meat for him. Every day he wore thick brocades and gauzy silks. Geomancer Lin also held himself in great esteem as the family's benefactor. He no sooner asked for one thing than he demanded another. He first wanted this and then called for that. If the slightest little thing wasn't just the way he wanted it, he would yell and curse, carrying on about the debt of honor the Liao family owed him. Even though the Liaos heard him talking like this, at first they didn't hold it against him. But all forbearance has its limits. As the days passed, how could the Liaos be content to let him insult them with impunity just because of his previous service to them? Although they said nothing, they harbored great resentment within their breasts. Because of this, their attitude toward Lin became somewhat cooler and they began to skimp on his food and drink and other conveniences.

Geomancer Lin was very sensitive to this change in attitude and he was certainly no fool. He knew that since he had gone blind that he was completely dependent on these people. If he were once to quarrel with them, it might happen that they would quit taking care of him and perhaps even drive him out of the house—so the only loser would be himself. As a result, Geomancer Lin changed his demeanor. He became very thoughtful and took every slight with the greatest patience. One would have thought that the man whose anger had burned so brightly and so often was a different person altogether. This was a lesson he had learned from experience and it was also the means whereby he meant to change the way the wind was blowing.

One day for supper there was a dish of goat meat.⁴ This was Geomancer Lin's favorite food and it had already been quite a while since it had been served to him. Maybe it was because he was possessed that day by a gluttonous ghost 饑蟲作怪,⁵ but that evening it seemed to him that the goat meat was especially tasty. When he had

finished eating, he leaned back in a lounge chair and picked his teeth, rubbing his full stomach all the while.

“I haven’t quarrelled with the Liaos lately,” Lin thought to himself, “and so they are beginning to treat me better. Truly, good will brings happiness! From now on I’ll continue to behave the same way. I’ll eat a lot and say very little: that’s the way I can get to enjoy the beautiful taste of goat meat more often!”

After a little while, a maid came in to pick up the dishes. “Who cooked the goat meat I had this evening?” Lin asked. “It was really excellent,” he continued. “It was braised just long enough to bring out the flavor fully. And the seasoning: neither too salty nor too uninteresting! In fact the gourmet artistry of the legendary cook Qi Yi-ya 齊易牙 could not have surpassed it.”

The maid was used to seeing Lin forever in a foul temper and as a result she was not well-disposed towards him. Now when she heard him running off at the mouth like this, it just increased her irritation with him.

“Probably it was the taste of that extra ingredient, stinky shit!” she said coolly.

“What?!” Geomancer Lin asked in astonishment, doubting that his ears could have heard correctly.

“Stinking shit! This goat drowned in the privy. No one else thought that it was worth eating, but here you are with your mouth watering over it.”

“Huh?!” Geomancer Lin looked like he had really suffered an unendurable insult, an insult that turned his previous self-satisfaction into flaming, violent anger. “That piece of dog shit!” Lin thought to himself. “How dare he forget what I have done for him? How could I allow myself to be blinded on behalf of such a low bastard?!” Geomancer Lin was so mad that flames shot out of his nose and his breast seemed to be on fire. All at once, the realization of how to get out of this situation came to him and he hit himself a hard blow on top of his head.

“Ai-yo! What a fool I am! Why don’t I just take care of it in this way?”

Turning to the maid servant, he said, “Call your master to me; I have a matter to discuss with him.”

When the maid heard this, she was scared to death. “His calling the master is all bad for me!” she thought to herself. “If he tells the master about this, then I will be suspected of trying to stir up trouble. If I don’t get a good beating, at the very least I will have to suffer through a scolding. Who knows what they’ll do to me?”

"Sir," she said out loud. "I told you what I did because I had your interest at heart. You won't tell my master what I said, will you?"

"No," replied Lin. "I have another matter to discuss. Now hurry and fetch him!"

Still afraid and hesitant, the maid went off. In a short while Mr. Liao came in.

"What is it you want?" he asked Geomancer Lin.

"The grave site has gone bad," announced Lin. "It must be repaired. Otherwise the wealth and status of your family cannot be maintained."

"How do you know this?" asked Liao suspiciously.

"The site is closely connected with the functioning of my own body—how can I not know about it? Every day at noon, there is an echoing sound within the tomb chamber. If you don't believe me, tell someone to go and listen and then you will soon have proof."

Liao still didn't believe him, yet he didn't want to trust anyone else, so he went in person to investigate. He went several days in a row and he could definitely hear a 'drip-drip' sound inside the tomb. He therefore asked Geomancer Lin to select a lucky day to repair the tomb. When the time had come, the sacrifices were prepared and Geomancer Lin was carried to the grave site.

When Geomancer Lin arrived before the tomb, he followed the usual practice and first bowed down and worshipped heaven and earth. Then he grasped the sword and muttered incantations while he scattered the salt and rice about. All at once he jumped in the air and stabbed his sword right into the middle of the Golden Wash Basin. A spring of water immediately welled up out of the stab hole. Geomancer Lin scooped up some of the water and washed his face with it. At once his sight was restored in both eyes.

When Liao saw what was happening, he knew that the efficacy of the grave site had been destroyed. Then he gave a little cry, "Ai-yo, it's all over!" And he fainted dead away.

Afterwards the Liao's family fortunes declined like the receding flood, while his son, the official, was removed from office. Everything was back to the way it was before Geomancer Lin came along; the family was again sunk in dire poverty.

Even after Geomancer Lin had destroyed the efficacy of the Golden Wash Basin, he still held a grudge, so he thought he would also destroy the geomantical power of the Mistress Presenting a Flower. One day he noticed a young man selling beancurd flower soup 豆腐花,⁶ so he called him over. Putting down his load, the young man turned to

Geomancer Lin. "How much do you want to buy?" he asked.

"None!" Lin answered as he gestured negatively with his hands. "Instead I have a matter to discuss with you."

"What matter is that?"

"Have you thought about taking a wife?" Lin asked.

"What use would that be? I don't have any money," said the young man with a bitter laugh.

"If you would like to marry, then I'll act as your match-maker for free."

"Don't joke with me! Who would agree to marry their daughter to a poor devil like me?"

"I'm not joking. Let me tell you the plan," said Lin soberly. "Tomorrow you must go to Mistress Mountain, and there, before the Liao family tomb, you must mime having intercourse. Afterwards, take some of your beancurd 'flowers' 豆腐花 and strew them over the grave. Before long I guarantee that a woman will come hunting for you. If you are still suspicious, know that I am the Geomancer Lin!"

The young man realized that Geomancer Lin was quite in earnest, and moreover he had heard of the geomancer's fame. So he trusted implicitly in what he had been told and did exactly as instructed.

After this the women of the Liao family all turned into licentious women. Even very young girls of the family wanted to "offer their flower" to men. Among them was an especially pretty girl who began to cohabit with the beancurd seller, and after she got pregnant by him, her family married her to him.

NOTES TO TRANSLATION

1. Only someone who is so ignorant that he cannot read characters would hang his shop sign upside down.

2. The dance of the constellations is a set of positions which, when paced by the adept, is capable of altering events (Saso 1972; Seaman 1976).

3. Names of localities in south Taiwan.

4. Goat meat is considered to be an extremely "strong" meat, so strong that its consumption is only appropriate during cold weather if one's internal constitutional balance is to remain undisturbed. There is also the implication that eating goat meat will arouse passion, on the basis of the observation that goats are very randy animals.

5. A hungry ghost is the spirit of an individual who has died without descendants of his own to offer sacrificial food for him to eat. The implication is that Lin's own internal balance is poor, otherwise the ghost would not have been able to possess him.

6. Beancurd, probably because of its consistency and visual appearance, is frequently used as a term indirectly indicating sexual activity (cf. Mandarin Chinese *Chi Dou-fu*, 吃豆腐 "to flirt").

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