

Furnace Mountain

Continued from previous page

was processed. The iron was used to make cannonballs, which were shipped down the Ohio River and used in the Battle of New Orleans, the mountain's "sarira" (*see glossary page 27*) in the service of war.

Many people have visited the mountain since its purchase. The well-known Cambodian monk Maha Ghosananda was here, and we were looking for a site to build a hermitage for Cambodian monks. He seemed to like a place on the cliff overlooking the main road. When it was pointed out that this was close to the road and one could hear the cars, he looked out over the ridge and said, "Yes, standing in nirvana, we look out into samsara."

Recently a neighbor's 85-year-old grandmother visited. While standing on the power spot on New Year's Day, without knowing anything about Buddhism or geomancy she said, with a twinkle in her eye, "Oh, this place is magical."

What is it about this particular piece of land that provides support for spiritual practice? The dynamic energy of the power spot demands attention. And yet not everyone who comes to the land to work or practice has a good feeling. It has been our experience that when one holds anything while practicing and working on the land, one comes face to face with that holding. While this is true in our daily lives, it seems to be intensified by the strong energy of the land. "Transcendent Wisdom is like a great mass of fire. Approach it, and it burns off your face."

The practice of geomancy, like any practice, can be one of delusion or one of realization. When practiced from the mind of fear and hope it can become superstition and obsession. On the other hand, it can be a practice of attention, to the earth and to the earth's energy. Perhaps in this attention there can be the realization that we are not separate from the world. The earth is our body, and heaven our breath. □

Powell County

*Six warriors painted gold and red
Smile at Buddha, killing her dead.
As the morning sun melts their crystal spears
A backfiring pick-up shatters all fears.*

*Kwang Myong Sunim
Furnace Mountain
22 January 1991*

The Furnace

*A burning Bodhisattva
Illumines heaven and hell blackening
Her feet, she dances
Through the transparent wall crumbling
The cool evening breeze.*

*Kwang Myong Sunim
Furnace Mountain
12 March 1991*

GEOMANCY

Through Many Dynasties

Geomancy and Korean Buddhism

Mu Soeng Sunim

When did geomancy first set foot in Korea? The science of feng-shui was brought from China by Zen Master Toson (827-898). Toson had gone to China to further his Buddhist studies, and while there happened to become acquainted with geomantic principles and practices. The impact of geomancy was such that it soon transcended the confines of the Buddhist world in Korea and became an integral part of Korean society and ways of thinking.

According to geomantic tradition, a military commander named Sejo was building a new house for his family when Toson, recently returned from China, walked through the area. When he saw the house under construction, he remarked "flax is being planted in a place where sweet rice should be planted." Sejo's wife heard the remark and persuaded her husband to go and talk to Toson. Together Sejo and Toson walked in the area and Toson picked a more auspicious site for the house. The monk also told Sejo that he would have a son and advised him to name the child Wang Kon. Toson left a sealed letter for the future child and addressed it "To the master of unification of the three Hans (*kingdoms*) of the future."

Sejo built a new house at the site suggested by Toson and moved in with his family. His wife became pregnant in the first month and gave birth to Wang Kon, the future founder of the Koryo dynasty. After Wang Kon had conquered large parts of the dying Silla kingdom, Toson helped him select a site for the capital of the new dynasty. This site became the future city of Kaesong.

Wang Kong, now ruling as King Taejo, was a devout Buddhist and personally friendly with many Zen monks of the time. He appointed many of them to high official positions at his court. During his reign, Taejo ordered the building of some 3,800 temples, and just before his death he promulgated ten admonitions to guide his successors, based on his belief that the prosperity of the kingdom was derived from the protective powers of the Buddhas. One of the admonitions says, "We must build temples for both Son (*Zen*) and Kyo (*sutra*) schools and appoint abbots to them, so that they may perform the proper ceremonies and themselves cultivate the Way."

Geomancer-monks have been a prominent feature of Korean Buddhism since its earliest days. Rather than pursue the

rigorous discipline of Zen training, many monks chose to learn the science of geomancy and pursue status and wealth, especially in the new capital of Kaesong, a thriving Buddhist metropolis. Even as geomancer-monks made Buddhism all-powerful at the Koryo court, the religious establishment became internally weak and corrupt. Eventually, neo-Confucian bureaucrats staged their own rebellion against a corrupt Buddhist clergy. However, the new capital of the Choson dynasty (1392-1910), which became the bulwark of Confucian ascendancy in Korea, was chosen by a Buddhist monk, Zen Master Muhak (1317-1405). Muhak converted the future founder of the Choson dynasty to Buddhism, and helped him select the present city of Seoul as the capital of his new kingdom.

Most Korean geomancers are of the opinion that the most auspicious places in the mountains are occupied by Buddhist temples. A history of the temples certainly supports this opinion, since most temples have stood on the same site in some form or another for twelve or thirteen centuries. The majority of the temples were built or renovated during the Koryo period and have geomantic legends telling how the site was chosen. This would show why some temples are located in very difficult, inaccessible locations. The temples tend to be found on mountain slopes encircled by mountain ranges, and have watercourses nearby. Some of the famous temples such as Haein-sa, Tongdo-sa, and Bulguk-sa are located in such places. Even today many Buddhist monks in Korea are quite knowledgeable about geomancy and are consulted by members of their sangha for advice in this matter.

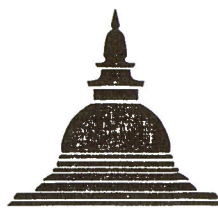
A symbiotic relationship between geomancy and Buddhism in Korea may be seen in the use of grey color. According to geomantic principles, grey color is soothing to the nerves. Korean monks have their robes made of grey color, and lay Buddhists in Korea also wear grey clothes, especially when visiting a temple.

Geomantic folk narratives in Korea are closely tied to Buddhist ethics such as charity. In many cases, a Buddhist monk pointed out an auspicious site to a person who was generous and devout. In some cases, an evil person was even misled by the monks to ruin the auspiciousness of the location which they owned.

Many Korean rulers during the Koryo and Choson (1392-1910) dynasties made journeys to mountainous or wilderness areas to find and evaluate the geomantic harmony of auspicious places for building new capitals, Buddhist temples, pagodas and secondary palaces for the royal family. Historically speaking, most important Buddhist temples and pagodas of the Koryo period were built in order to reinforce the harmony of the geomantic landscape.

The selection of a grave-site has been an occupation of uncommon interest in the Korean mind. Geomancers do not claim to know the mechanism by which the spirit of a dead person buried in an auspicious grave-site affects the fortunes of the surviving family. But faith in the power of such an

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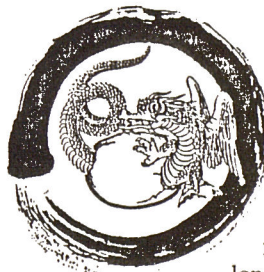
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Through Many Dynasties

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auspicious grave-site has been of paramount concern to Koreans. Many people selected sites for their graves even while they were still alive. Grave-sites have been the cause of many bloody conflicts in Korean history, among both the nobility and the common people. Overall, finding a proper grave-site came to be more important and popular in Korean geomancy than finding a suitable dwelling-place. This no doubt has to do with the Confucian world-view that the existence of "I" does not terminate with the death of a person but continues living through the descendants.

Ever since the introduction of geomancy into Korea, there

has been an intimate relationship between the geomantic world-view and the social ethic of Buddhism. The connection between making harmony with a geographic location and making harmony with people around you is a logical and organic one. Even in the worst years of Buddhism's persecution by Korean Confucianists, the idea of making harmony with your surroundings retained a strong hold on the Korean mind.

Overall, geomancy has encouraged a world-view in which human beings and nature can both be passive and active at the same time. Once the harmony is established in a site, humans should keep an unchanging relationship by avoiding significant interferences with nature. Thus geomancy encourages a stable (but not static) rather than a radically changing way of life. □

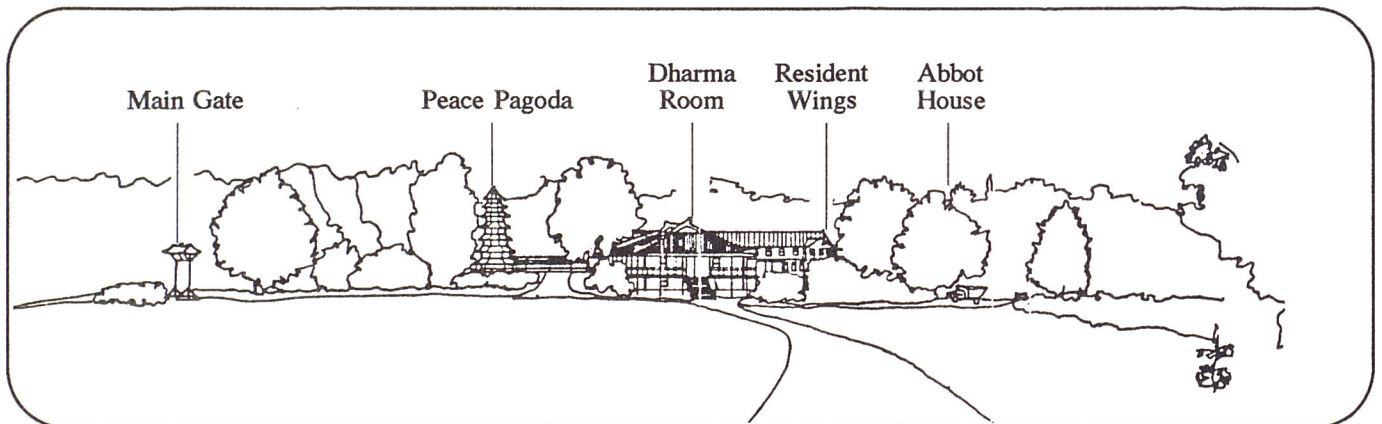
GEOMANCY

Balancing the Energy at Providence Zen Center

Do An Sunim, Ji Do Poep Sa Nim

The location and design of the buildings at Providence Zen Center have been strongly influenced by geomantic principles. Ideally a temple site would be encircled by a "Blue Dragon" and a "White Tiger" much like a mother's arms surround and protect a young child. The location of the Diamond Hill Zen Monastery demonstrates these characteristics and thereby provides an environment for meditation practice which is sheltered from the concerns of the outside world and whose energy is nurturing and supportive. The monastery is fronted by a large pond fed by a meandering stream, both of which encourage the accumulation of vital ch'i. The curvilinear design of the Monastery's traditional Korean roof is also intended to retain beneficial ch'i.

The newest projects at Providence Zen Center, the Peace Pagoda and a pond in front of the main Dharma Hall, are both being planned in accordance with geomantic principles. The Peace Pagoda symbolizes our great vow and direction — to relieve the



The Peace Pagoda under construction at Providence Zen Center will balance the geomancy of the complex.

suffering of this world. The design and location of the Pagoda has taken into account geomantic principles of geographic harmony and a balanced relationship with existing structures. Its location is intended to accumulate and enhance the energy flowing from the surrounding hills. Its location and size will also correct a present asymmetry within our existing buildings, creating a more harmonious energy relationship.

Geomancy is a very interesting body of ancient wisdom, leading to some very useful and helpful insights into how to live in a harmonious way. However, Zen means not being dependent on anything. Most important is keeping a mind which is clear and helping others; this is our practice. If we become attached to good geomancy, energy, or anything, then we have already created a hindrance. In many ways a situation which is not so good can also be helpful to our practice since it allows us to see ourselves more clearly. As an Ancient Worthy once noted, the most beautiful lotus flowers emerge from the most murky swamps. □