

„What is Excellence, Mr. Yap Cheng Hai?”



«Discipline with a good heart and a good mind are the key to excellence ».

Yap Cheng Hai, 80, Feng Shui Grandmaster

Singapore – Yap Cheng Hai’s Feng Shui advice is sought after internationally. Some of his clients, business tycoons and influential politicians, wouldn’t be where they are today without him. Despite his success Yap Cheng Hai remains modest. Everybody can become a master, he says, it’s all about discipline.

You’ve been providing Feng Shui advice since 1940. How did you learn the art of Feng Shui?

During my school time I read all books about Feng Shui and Chinese martial arts that I could get my hands on. I was fascinated. When I graduated from school at the age of twenty, I thought about Feng Shui and how it changes a person’s life. I wanted to be rich; I wanted to improve my whole personal life. So, every time there was a teaching from a Feng Shui master, I attended. In Taiwan I met Master Tang who taught me. He had an old Feng Shui book and showed me some very interesting things. I asked him to lend me the book so that I could write everything down. He said, that’s much too complicated and gave me the book as a present. Which Feng Shui master would give away such a valuable book as a present? I felt deeply honoured. So, I learned Feng Shui by reading all books and by attending teachings of masters and by practicing.

What is Feng-Shui?

Feng Shui, the way of wind (Feng) and water (Shui), is the Chinese art of arranging buildings, objects, and space in the environment in order to achieve energy, harmony, and balance.

Feng shui grew from observations that an individual's surroundings elicit positive and negative effects. Everything that exists contains Qi, the energy or life force. This Qi possesses two properties, Yin (receptive) and Yang (active) - they are opposites and cannot exist without the other. Within the Qi, eight constituents compose the universe (the Lake, the Mountain, Fire, Water, Heaven, Thunder, Wind, and Earth). Each combination of three Yin/Yang elements, represents a particular quality and pattern of energy. In turn, the proper arrangement of these energetic qualities would affect not only the Qi of the environment, but that of the individual within the environment as well.

"Good" Feng Shui is believed to promote health, prosperity, creativity, positive social relationships, self-confidence, contemplation, and respect for others.

How can Feng Shui change the life of people?

It can bring increased wealth, a good relationship, and a happier life. Feng Shui is a very old Chinese art, it has been practised for over 2500 years. In ancient times only the king was allowed to use Feng Shui in the palace. A civilian caught using Feng Shui would be beheaded. One day, towards the end of the Song Dynasty, the king's palace was invaded and caught fire. The Royal Astronomer, Yan Jun-Song, was able to save some Feng Shui books from the burning library, the only books at that time, and hid them in a faraway place. So the knowledge was not lost. Later Feng Shui became very popular and was used all over China to improve cities and individual houses.

You're working with a combination of the teachings of Ba Zhai, San Yuan, San He and Water Dragon. Could you explain what these teachings are about?

Ba Zhai is based on the eight directions, southeast, southwest, and so on. Depending on the year somebody is born, a certain direction is best. For example, I was born in 1927, so I belong to the number one Gua, one of the eight mansions. Ba Zhai says that southeast is the best direction for me. San Yuan is based on timing. A place, a house loses Qi energy over time and gains new Qi energy. The qualities of this energy are different.

San He is about landscapes, mountains, water and their influence on cities and house directions. Water Dragon is the water Feng Shui for enhancement of wealth. It tells us what effect water is having and what to do to improve it. Every teaching has good things. By working with a combination of all of those teachings and applying the best points of each, you can reach the effect that is best.

Is Feng Shui different for every individual?

It works differently for every individual. It depends on the person and where they live. If a family lives in a house, the father is very important. I want him to become rich. I don't want the son to beat the father. So, the most important is the father's bedroom, the direction of the door, and the direction of his bed. Then we move on to improve the room of all others living in the house. If the house is small, we choose the best rooms for each member of the family. We choose the room for the wife, the daughter and so on. We try to bring out the best in everything. A common house takes me about two hours.

You once said: "A good Feng Shui master is one who is able to apply his Feng Shui theories to fit into different cultures of the world". Could you give me some examples?

I've given advice in 35 countries. Feng Shui is very practical. Even in Saudi Arabia, which as you know is a Muslim country. I went to see factories, after that they doubled their income within two years. I went to Turkey to a hotel, to do Feng Shui for the opening ceremony. It worked; the hotel is always fully booked. Another hotel in Turkey facing the river wanted me to do a blessing. I asked them if this would not be a problem. They said, no, never. So I did a Buddhist blessing in a Muslim country.

Which cultures is the most "difficult" to apply Feng Shui theories?

It's not a matter of culture, it's personal. There are Chinese for example who don't believe in Feng Shui, they say it's the devils work. On the other hand, as I mentioned before, Muslims did believe in Feng Shui. Feng Shui is not a religion, it's an art. Muslims, Christians, Jews, in every religion, in every culture

there are people who seek Feng Shui advice and others who don't believe in it. As I said, it's a matter of personal choice.

You're a master of the teachings of Water Dragon. What does it take to become a master?

People call me master and treat me as one of the five masters in the world. But, look - some of my students are masters. I've been in over 15000 houses with bad Feng Shui and was able to clean them up. 15000 houses, what more do you want? The secret is that I've been learning until today. I'm constantly learning. I forget a formula then I learn a new one. I have all the new information combined with experience. I teach myself because I like to fight, I like to win. And I'm a very practical person. Whatever I don't need anymore, I forget. There is so much time wasted with nonsense.

You once said that the title "master" was given to you, so you had to accept the full responsibility. Were you always able to live up to the expectations?

When people call you grandmaster, you cannot say, oh no, I'm not a grandmaster. I'm very proud to accept this title, very proud. If people give you this title you have to live up to the expectations otherwise you loose face. I'm happy that I can say that I am and always was proud of my work.

Your teaching is described as "different". How do you teach your scholars?

Unlike other teachers who keep their knowledge for the people closest to them, I teach my students my 55 years of experience in 18 days. After 18 days I tell them, go now and practice. If you cannot solve the problem, come back again. It's hard work, I'm a hard teacher, but I'm very humanitarian too. Look, I have students from all over the world. They have to know some Chinese, for example the names of the 24 mountains in Feng Shui. I composed them a song, similar to the ABC, and sing them the names of the 24 mountains. So students will know 24 words in Chinese: the 24 mountains of Feng Shui. There are all these funny Chinese sounds; my students have to learn them in two days. If they don't, I tell them, you'll have to work all night and know it the next day. Some students cry. I tell them don't cry. Cry if you don't know it in three days. Many of those crying students became the most famous teachers of today.

How do you achieve excellence in Feng Shui?

If you learn properly, learn hard, do the homework properly, practice, with time you'll achieve excellence.

Ghosts play a role in the teachings of Feng Shui. The western culture doesn't believe in ghosts. How do you explain ghosts to western people seeking your advice?

I don't mention ghosts in teaching. I'm the Ghost buster. Ghosts exist just like human beings. It can be the Yin of the water, the Yin of the trees. With every house you have to consider the souls of the soil, the owners of earth. We have a lot of spirits, persons who died. They don't go to heaven or to hell; they stay in this world so that one day they can become a higher spirit, a Buddha or something like that.

Talking about fighting, you're a master in different styles of Asian martial art. Could you tell me more?

I learnt about ten different styles of Chinese martial arts. Shaolin, Kung Fu, Tai Chi, Bagua, almost everything. I had seven teachers. I wanted to learn to fight to protect my family, my friends and myself. Today I'm the only person not living in China, who has a 8th Dan in Wu Shu, that's very high. I still train today. Learning martial arts is very good for the internal organs. Doing my exercise is good for the lungs, liver, and kidneys. I'm 80 years old, giving speeches all over the world. I feel great. That's also because I'm exercising daily for 1-2 hours. I used to train 4-5 hours every day.

What does it take to achieve excellence in Asian fighting?

Many men practising martial arts think it's about fighting. It's not. If you want to have a high standard in martial arts, you have to have a good discipline; you must have a good heart and a good mind. Otherwise you'd better not go into martial arts.

Did your children follow your steps and teach Feng Shui?

Not all of them. One of my sons is working with computers, one in marketing, one son teaches Feng Shui at Yap Cheng Hai Academy, as is my daughter.

You're also into charity, for the spiritual development of Buddhist and Taoists faith and for the underprivileged. How important is this for your personal life?

Very important. There are a lot of poor people, they come and ask: master can you help me. So I do my best to help them. I give to temples, to schools. It is very important because we shouldn't just create the money for ourselves. We all don't have a perfect karma. To achieve success, to have a good life, it's important to give.

Overall, what is excellence?

If a person was poor and today he's got a good job, earns good money, has a good marriage, a good heart; that comes quite close to excellence, don't you think? If a person manages to be respected by almost everybody, does the right thing; that comes close to excellence. It's about discipline, working hard, and doing everything with a good heart and mind to realising the plans one has.

What do you expect from an excellent bank?

An excellent bank should help their clients to make profit. If a bank knows how to do business and increases your wealth substantially in a short period of time, then the bank is excellent.