

The Ancient Book of Funsuey Wisdom on Where to Put Stuff

I've been reading *The Ancient Book of Funsuey* by Wúlǎo Míngshì (not her real name), circa 1500 BC, who also invented the now famous dish called chop suey (which has nothing to do with this book). There are some who say chop suey is an Chinese-American dish but not so. This woman, Wúlǎo Míngshì, was a *seer*, as well as a wise person and author, and she dictated her recipe for chop suey just before she died—and in her next to last breath(s) she predicted a great nation yet to be founded would make her recipe very popular, if not famous. (What she said with her last breath is not to be repeated in polite company.)

But I digress.

Funsuey is about the rules for the placement of stuff (I've forgotten the Chinese word for stuff) and what the location of stuff means. For example, Wúlǎo Míngshì says if a toilet paper roll is positioned so it unrolls from the *bottom*, the household is (or will be) dominated by a woman. Conversely, if it unrolls from the *top*, a man is (or will be) in charge of the joint. Personally, I am still unsure about the validity of Funsuey rules but, taking no chances, the TP in *my* house unrolls from the *top*.

It is interesting to note that some of our author's detractors protest that rolled toilet paper was invented by the Scott brothers at the end of the nineteenth century and, so, Wúlǎo Míngshì couldn't have known about it. In fact, they question the authenticity of the *entire* book, if you can imagine. *But they forget a very important factor*: Wúlǎo Míngshì was a *seer*! (Nowadays, she would be called a psychic or a channel.)

Another Funsuey rule has to do with the direction you set the front wheels of your car, or, in Wúlǎo Míngshì's day, your cart, when you park it curbside, especially on an incline. (Technically, there were no curbs in China during Wúlǎo Míngshì's time but remember *the very important factor*. . . well, you know.) If you set the wheels turned *into* the curb, you are considered "blessed and enlightened," since your unattended vehicle (car or cart) is less likely to accidentally roll into the street and cause an accident. Conversely, if you *fail* to set your wheels in the prescribed manner, you are (her words, not mine) "a dirty, rotten communist."

This important Funsuey principle has been codified in a traffic safety law by the City of San Francisco, which (as you may know) has many, many cars per square mile and many, many hills. All of this has nothing to do with the many, many Chinese people who live in San Francisco, although some of the excellent Chinese citizens of that most excellent city *may* have lobbied for the law. And, now that I think about it, I *have* seen tourists in San Francisco's Chinatown wearing Funsuey t-shirts, which, I suppose, is a whole 'nuther topic.

The same naysayers of Funsuey again protest there were no communists, dirty or rotten or otherwise, during Wúlǎo Míngshì's time. Of course, they are refuted by *the very important factor* already cited. Wúlǎo Míngshì does mention a person named Mao in her

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book but he has nothing to do with communism and everything to do with overcooking chicken to avoid food poisoning.

Of course, there were no portable electronic listening devices in Wúlǎo Míngshì's time but it was common for teenagers to sit around or lay around or walk around with a seashell held up to each ear. The kids claimed to hear the sound of the ocean in seashells and said it was very "relaxing." (I've forgotten the Chinese word for "trip.") The Funsuey rule on *that* is to only listen with *one* ear at a time, alternating back and forth between ears to give each ear equal seashell time.

This purpose of this rule was to always make one ear available to hear the nagging of the *parents* of teenagers while at the same time maintaining what Wúlǎo Míngshì called "the divine balance of the inner sea." Pretty enlightened, huh? Some have translated that phrase as "the divine balance of the Inner Sea" but I am dubious—Wúlǎo Míngshì says *nothing* anywhere else in her book to suggest she foresaw the coming of New Age lingo!

Well, by now you probably couldn't care less about Wúlǎo Míngshì and her Funsuey. I don't blame you. I'll probably quit reading the book and go on to something else (for example, I've been shopping for a large seashell). On the other hand, you may want to pick up a copy to help you arrange your stuff (I've forgotten the Chinese word for stuff, or did I tell you that already?).

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On the other hand, you just *may* be wondering about the personal history of the wise person and author called Wúlǎo Míngshì (not her real name). Well, you are in luck because I have some interesting facts about her to pass along to you.

The famous Wúlǎo Míngshì (circa 1500 BC) was rumored to have been the daughter of one of the Emperor's concubines. The Emperor denied this, not wanting to increase the already existing jealousy among the ladies he had gathered to him. Nevertheless, he granted Wúlǎo Míngshì a royal stipend such that she didn't have to work and could devote all her time to teaching about and eventually writing about Funsuey (I refer, of course, to *The Ancient Book of Funsuey*).

You may recall Funsuey is about the rules for the placement of "stuff" (I've forgotten the Chinese word for stuff) and what the location of stuff means. In secret, the Emperor himself employed the rules of Funsuey to arrange the stuff in his various palaces and other hangouts. For example, the old boy liked to have large—make that *very* large—golden dragons guarding the main entrances to his various dwellings. It is a well-known Funsuey principle that male dragons are to be stationed on the *right* side of the entrance as you exit and female dragons are to be placed on the *left* side.

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You may be surprised to learn dragons have genders but dragon genders are necessary for creating baby dragons. The dragon courtship and mating processes are, I have heard, quite pyrotechnic.

But I digress.

Wúlǎo Míngshì herself would occasionally help out the Emperor by personally supervising the application of Funsuey rules in a royal palace here or there and an Emperor-sized mansion there or here. But the old boy always made himself scarce when Wúlǎo Míngshì was around, lest the topic of her paternity come up. Wúlǎo Míngshì was allowed to secretly visit her mother, from time to time, but seldom did because her mom always complained about the palace cooking (everything was *overcooked*, according to mom). These constant complaints eventually inspired Wúlǎo Míngshì to invent her famous dish called chop suey (which has nothing to do with Funsuey).

Being a well-known seer, Wúlǎo Míngshì would give readings (these sessions were called something else in Chinese but I've forgotten the word for them). She once did a reading for the Empress in which she disclosed the Emperor's preference for his concubines over the Empress in certain situations (namely, in bed). The Empress was so displeased with this news she arranged for a palace cook, a fellow named Mao, to serve the old boy some undercooked chicken, thus causing him considerable discomfort for a fortnight. That chicken dish, which came to be called The Empress' Revenge, was served over the years by many Chinese wives to many Chinese husbands who strayed or were otherwise less than ardent.

But I digress.

One Funsuey rule that most of the Chinese of Wúlǎo Míngshì's time followed was the serving of rice with every meal. Now, you make think the ancient Chinese ate a lot of rice because they had cultivated it for a few thousand years and had plenty of it on hand. Actually, Chinese women (circa 1500 BC) constantly worried about getting fat and thought rice was the main culprit for middle-age weight gain. But the Funsuey rule says it is vitally important to have a cheap, plentiful small-grained food on the table for every family meal in order to ward off mating dragons (who are in no mood to tolerate human beings). Eventually, even monks and beggars and others who lived alone ate rice with every meal. Go figure.

The Emperor eventually heard about Wúlǎo Míngshì's reading (or whatever it was called) for the Empress and ended her stipend. By then, Wúlǎo Míngshì was reported to have been eighty years old and tired of constantly fretting about the about the rules for the placement of stuff. So (the story goes), she asked the Empress (who was herself pretty old by now) to send over the palace cook, Mao, to fix her a double dose of undercooked chicken—which the Empress did—which Mao did—which Wúlǎo Míngshì ate. The concoction made her very ill indeed, she was *línsǐ* (at death's door).

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With her next-to-last breath(s), Wúlǎo Míngshì dictated her now famous recipe for chop suey to Mao and just before she died made him swear to never undercook another chicken. (As I've said before, what she said with her *very* last breath is not to be repeated in polite company. But I can imagine what it was, although Anglo-Saxon was not yet invented in 1500 BC.)

I hope this brief history answers the burning questions you have about Wúlǎo Míngshì (not her real name) and her troubled times. . . and about the dangers of undercooking chicken.

The end.