

# **Interaction between the Gentry of Ch'ing Dynasty Taiwan and the Culture of "Feng Shui": The Example of the Pioneering Taiwanese *Chin Shih* Cheng Yung-hsi**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper explores the interaction between the traditional gentry and popular belief. In doing so, it focuses on the successful career of the pioneering Taiwanese *Chin Shih* Cheng Yung-hsi (1788-1858) and his association with Feng-shui (geomancy) in the Chu-ch'ien area (modern day Hsinchu) since the late Ch'ing Dynasty and on Cheng's attitude towards the Feng-shui method of determining residences of deaths and living persons as well as his attitude towards practicing geomancers. Ever since 1825, when word spread that Cheng Yung-hsi's success in the imperial examination was allegedly due to the fact of protection by the favourable Feng-shui of the official Confucian school in Tamsui T'ing that he had attended, Cheng Yung-hsi's life became inexorably intertwined with the culture of "Feng-shui". The stories passed on within the populace regarding his merits in geomancy gradually evolved to a generally shared historical memory among the people of Chu-ch'ien. By contrast, Cheng Yung-hsi himself proved to be doubtful and critical of the theory of Feng-shui, which stood in discrepancy with the social climate that attributed his success to the favourable effects of Feng-shui. From the results of this case study, we can gain an understanding of how the gentry class established links with local society through the traditional culture of Feng-shui and thus shaped a collective identity of a certain community of interest. Furthermore, it also allows us to gain a deeper insight into the relationship between the traditional gentry and popular culture and to understand that there exists a complex though indeed traceable relation of divergence and convergence between the two.

**Keywords:** Feng-shui (Geomancy), Popular Belief, Collective Identity, Cheng Family of Hsinchu, Gentry Class