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And to My Loyal Feng Shui Adviser, I Leave \$3 Billion

By [KEITH BRADSHER](#)

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HONG KONG, May 1 — Just as the [Anna Nicole Smith](#) saga was finally fading from the tabloids, a much larger inheritance battle has transfixed Hong Kong residents: a will purporting to have been written by one of the world's wealthiest women, Nina Wang, leaving her feng shui adviser an estate estimated at more than \$3 billion.

The case has highlighted the city's obsession with feng shui, the ancient Chinese practice of positioning objects to create a harmonious environment. While it is becoming less fashionable among the city's most cosmopolitan elite to talk about feng shui, academic specialists say the practice still has deep roots in Hong Kong culture, with local bookstores devoting ever more shelf space to the subject.

The first will to surface after Mrs. Wang's death on April 3 had nothing to do with feng shui. Instead, it was philanthropic and ambitious. A childless widow, she left her fortune to a charitable foundation and an unspecified sum for the care of her mother-in-law and father-in-law.

The will directed the foundation to spend part of the fortune setting up a Chinese version of the [Nobel Prize](#). Written in Chinese in 2002, the will included the hope that China's prime minister, the chief executive of Hong Kong and the secretary general of the [United Nations](#) would jointly "supervise" the foundation and the prize.

But what has captivated the city for the past two weeks has been a second will, written in English, dated last October and with unclear origins. It entrusts the entire fortune to Chan Chun-chuen, Mrs. Wang's feng shui adviser. He is also a successful local real estate investor, although not as successful as Mrs. Wang was in construction. Mr. Chan had been photographed periodically at Mrs. Wang's side, most notably in the early 1990s, after her husband was kidnapped. Mr. Chan and Mrs. Wang went many times to a Hong Kong temple to pray for her husband's safe return; he was never found, and Mrs. Wang ended up winning control of his business after a lengthy legal struggle that also involved two wills.

Mr. Chan's lawyer is Jonathan Midgley, already famous here as the criminal lawyer who successfully defended Mrs. Wang when she was accused of forging the will that left her the business.

Brian Gilchrist, Mrs. Wang's lawyer in civil litigation during that struggle, is now representing the charitable foundation, which asked a probate court on April 25 to block Mr. Chan from claiming the estate, in what could become another long legal fight like the never ending wrangling over the estate of an earlier Hong Kong tycoon, Sir Robert Ho Tung, who died in 1956.

Mr. Gilchrist said he was not aware of any other sizable estates that had been left to feng shui advisers. Forbes magazine estimated Mrs. Wang's fortune last month at \$3.1 billion; she died of cancer at 69.

Mr. Midgley released a photograph showing Mrs. Wang looking radiant and seated as Mr. Chan stood cheerfully beside her — a pose commonly used in Chinese wedding photos.

The photo has fueled considerable speculation about the nature of Mrs. Wang's relationship with Mr. Chan. Mr. Midgley said that Mr. Chan was married with three children, and asserted that the photo simply "looks like a photo of a happy lady and a happy man."

Mr. Midgley also objected to the media's focus on Mr. Chan's position as a feng shui adviser.

"The press has picked up on this feng shui thing as though it's magical," he said. "If he had been the milkman, would it have

been important, or her accountant?”

But Mr. Chan’s role as feng shui adviser has nonetheless become a subject of public fascination here. As Hong Kong has become a leading international financial center with more tall buildings than New York City, public attitudes toward feng shui have diverged widely.

Some are dismissive. David Tang, the founder of the Shanghai Tang clothing chain and a leading arbiter of style among Hong Kong’s elite, said that feng shui advisers were losing their influence, especially among the young.

“They just don’t seek them out the way they used to,” he said.

That view is disputed by academic experts like Ho Pui-yin, the deputy director of the Comparative and Public History Center at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. She discerns feng shui influences in the colors that her students wear and the charms that many carry on book bags and handbags.

But with feng shui viewed by some as superstition rooted in an unscientific past, residents are often reluctant to describe their views, a problem that has stymied researchers seeking to estimate the percentage of the population that still follows feng shui precepts.

“To an academic, they will never admit it,” Professor Ho said.

Even so, the Walt Disney Company adjusted the orientation of Hong Kong [Disneyland](#) after consulting a feng shui master. Investment bankers invite advisers into their offices to discuss how to arrange desks, goldfish tanks and other objects to best channel what some contend is the energy of nearby mountains flowing into the sea.

Local feng shui masters insist that, unlike people who attend church in many Western societies, their adherents are not skewed toward the old. Warren Lee, who has been studying feng shui for 40 years, said more than half his current clients were in their 30s or 40s; Cheung Yat-yiu, a feng shui master who travels twice a year to the United States and Canada, estimated that 70 percent of his clients were under 50.

But one of the trickiest issues involves the personal relationship between a feng shui master and his or her clients.

Without commenting on Mr. Chan and Mrs. Wang, Mr. Lee said that, “Unlike the medical profession, where there is a code of ethics among doctors, there is no code of ethics that would prevent feng shui masters from engaging in romantic relationships with their clients.”

Hilda Wang contributed reporting.

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