

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Feng Shui, an ancient Chinese metaphysics, which is known in Thai as *Huang Chui*, has spread widely throughout the world in recent years. 'It is a science that goes back at least four thousand years, and survives today widely practiced by Chinese businessmen in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, and Malaysia.'<sup>1</sup>

Consequently, in Thailand, and in Bangkok in particular, Feng Shui has spread and is popularly used in the framework of fortune telling, such as astrology (Thai and Western), Physiognomy (face reading, or *ngow-heng*), Palmistry (palm reading) and Tarot reading. Although there are innumerable books on the subject, and on how to apply Feng Shui in everyday life, there is little information on when, how and why Feng Shui became popular in Bangkok in recent years.

Accordingly, this work will introduce the definition of Feng Shui and its origin from ancient China, its spread

---

<sup>1</sup> Lillian Too, *The Complete Illustrated Guide to Feng Shui*. (Shaftesbury, Element Books Limited, 1996), p.14.

into other countries including the Thai society in Bangkok, and more recently its increased prominence in Western countries.

The purpose of this thesis is to explain the phenomenon of the use and the popularity of Feng Shui in Bangkok during the Boom years, from 1988-1996. It was hypothesized that Feng Shui has spread during this period for two reasons:

- People believe that Feng Shui will bring them prosperity.
- People like to have supernatural help whenever they can.

It also investigates the underlying reasons, motivations and the beliefs in the practice of Feng Shui in urban Thai society, through documentary research, to be enriched by interviews.

Furthermore, I chose the new-sprung theory of "memetics" in order to support the hypothesis. The theory will be described and applied in the study of Feng Shui in Thai society.

Finally, the thesis will provide a perspective on Thai society in Bangkok in relationship to Feng Shui during the period of Bubble Economy. Moreover, it will reflect on the significance of this study, which is to help us understand

an aspect of urban Thai society that seems to be both traditional and modern at the same time.

The methods used to test the hypothesis were obtained from the archives of The Bangkok Post and The Nation, which also contain articles on public opinions on Feng Shui. Interviews conducted to obtain the views of people who are involved with Feng Shui is important as they shed light on the actual views of the situation in Thai society. The interviews were conducted to so-called practitioners and masters of Feng Shui, Thai astrologers, and owners of shops that retail Feng Shui related objects. Other interviews were with architects and real-estate agents.

I have found that many of the Practitioners (masters) of Feng Shui were more than cooperative in giving me their precious time and information. Some of the non-experts, however, were uneasy with the in-depth questions. For them Feng Shui is a belief, and in Thai culture it is said that one is not supposed to question what another believes. It is their business and nobody else's.

The wide source of information that I was able to obtain during the time of my research to 'Feng Shui' was from the internet, Websites. Unfortunately, there are till

some doubts about how far some of them are reliable. However, there is no doubt that it is one of the most rapid, inexpensive, and most likely, a powerful source in many ways, which effects the society that has the access to the internet. Therefore, it can be said that the Feng Shui did spread tremendously during the period in which the internet became very accessible to the public.

This thesis consists of six chapters. The first chapter begins with the statement of the purpose and the methodology used.

Chapter Two is an introduction to Feng Shui, with a description of its origin and that of this ancient Chinese metaphysics. Furthermore, it will present the view on Feng Shui in the Asian countries, in the West and in Thai society, in recent years.

Chapter Three is based on the interviews and articles on the perspectives of Feng Shui in Thai society. They are based upon the opinions of Feng Shui Practitioners (masters, experts and professionals), including fortune tellers and astrologers in Bangkok. In addition, opinions on the subject belonging to shop owners retailing Feng Shui

objects as well as those of architects and real estate agents are obtained. There are no full-length interviews with hoteliers, as the majority of them rejected my request for an appointment. Unfortunately, no interviews with bank executives were possible. However, many articles written from the angle of the banking sectors are a useful source of information in which bank executives talk about the use of Feng Shui, which determines the increasing popularity of Feng Shui in Thai society in recent years.

No interview was made of lay people or direct clients of the Feng Shui masters, because, prior to my formal research I spoke to several lay people and I realized that I could not obtain the relevant information, which was necessary for this thesis. The reason was because most of them recognized the word "Feng Shui", but did not know how to elaborate their ideas. Concerning the clients, I obtained various informative indirect information, through Feng Shui masters themselves, and also through articles. Therefore both groups were not included in the segment of my research through interviews.

Chapter Four will analyze the interviews and the media articles offer the reasons given by the interviewees on the popularity of Feng Shui during the Boom Years in Thailand.

Chapter Five depicts the strong influence of Feng Shui during the Bubble Economy in Thai society. To support the hypothesis, the theory of 'memetics' will be presented and applied to explain the Feng Shui phenomenon in Thai society.

The final chapter will reflect on the influence of Feng Shui in Thai society. It will provide information on the culture of contemporary Thai society.