

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS ON THE INTERVIEWS AND THE MEDIA

The Structure of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire was first prepared to accommodate the public in all sectors. However, after some of the interviews were conducted, I realized that the general public might give very little input into what I want to obtain for this thesis. The public may well recognize the word "Feng Shui" but do not really understand the function behind the words. Therefore the research was narrowed down to interviews with subjects who actually could contribute to realizing of the objective of this thesis, which is to explain the phenomenon of the utilization and the popularity of Feng Shui in Thai society in Bangkok during the Boom Years.

The analysis of the interviews with Feng Shui Masters and Professionals, Thai fortune tellers, retail shop owners, architects, and real estate agents', as well as hotels, as detailed in the previous chapter, have shown

some common patterns about the belief and the practice of Feng Shui in Thailand.

The first part of the questionnaire is aimed at obtaining personal data of the interviewees. In Part 2, the questions are modified slightly taking into consideration the interviewee's experience with Feng Shui. Only question Number 1 is adapted for the interviewees who are related to Feng Shui as a profession. Questions 2 through 5 are for basic information. Question 6 is the most significant, informative question. The balance of the information gathered from this questionnaire will help to support the hypothesis of this thesis.

The last question is aimed at drawing a parallel to support the analysis of how Feng Shui has spread within Thai society, be it through belief or ornaments.

I choose five groups of people for the interviews because of their connections with Feng Shui and the depth of the information they give to support the investigation for this thesis.

The consensus, which emerges, is that the interviewees saw the increased popularity of the practice of Feng Shui in the time of rapid economic growth. The first and the second groups of interviewees, who are Feng Shui

Professionals, and Thai fortune tellers, provide information on the brief, history, and development of Feng Shui in Thai society. The third group, who are the shop owners retailing Feng Shui items, provide information on the rise of consumer interest in Feng Shui. The fourth and the fifth groups, consisting of the architects, real estate agents and hoteliers, whose businesses are related to the economic growth, tell of the impact that Feng Shui might have had upon their careers during the Boom Years.

Analysis of the Interviews

The Professional Feng Shui Practitioners

The four Feng Shui practitioners in Thailand, I interviewed may be divided into two different groups. Practitioner#2 was a student or an apprentice of Practitioner#1, and Practitioner#4 was a former student of Practitioner#3. These two groups seem to have distinct ideas and ways of practicing Feng Shui. However, their opinions on the popularity of Feng Shui in recent years and its rise beginning from the Boom Years are consistent.

Here are some details of the distinctions and similarities of the opinions of these two well-known Feng Shui Masters in Thailand.

The details of the methods, and especially how they apply Feng Shui to solve and harmonize the locations, may differ in some manners, however; the clear distinction between the two Masters mainly concerns whom they reveal their knowledge to.

Practitioner#1, the founder of the club "I-Ching and Geo-Astrology, was eager to teach anyone willing to learn about his methods of practicing Feng Shui. However Practitioner#3 had another approach to choose to whom to disclose his knowledge. As he himself was chosen by a Taiwanese Feng Shui Master to be an apprentice, Practitioner#3 accordingly follows the tradition and will choose only the ones with the talent, or the 'gifted one' to partake the secrets of the knowledge he has learnt from his Master.

The detailed methods which they both use to determine the 'good' Feng Shui for a location will not be discussed here in this thesis. In particular, Practitioner#3 specified that the knowledge cannot be revealed to the public. However, Practitioner#1 was enthusiastic to teach

his methods of practicing Feng Shui to everyone who was interested.

Therefore, according to my research, the methods of calculating and the applications differ from one practitioner to another, and it is constantly modified to adapt with the changes and needs of time. Consequently, it cannot be determined which and whose methods are the most efficient to combat the "bad chi or sha chi" and to harmonize the environment in order to bring happiness to the people.

Of the four Feng Shui practitioners, three had solid reasons and strong motivations to master and practice the knowledge of Feng Shui. In the case of Practitioner#1, it was his reaction to a serious illness, which led to Feng Shui, and motivated him to spread his Feng Shui knowledge to as many individuals as he could.

As for Practitioner#2, he encountered many obstacles in his work, and found Feng Shui as the best solution to his problems.

Practitioner#3 on the other hand was experiencing far too many mysterious deaths in his family. He began to question the events and from them encountered the

relationship between these deaths and Feng Shui. He discovered how Feng Shui should not be neglected. Since that time he was eager to master this knowledge and help to balance the environment for the well being of others.

For Practitioner#4, his drive to master Feng Shui was more from his 'gift', rather than from any kind of personal reasons. Nevertheless, he believes Feng Shui is a more logical way to discover the unfavorable occurrences in life and correspondingly to ease or solve them by harmonizing the environment.

The customers, who seek advice from these practitioners, pursue various solutions to their problems. Overall, they look for happiness, which in Feng Shui terms is to balance and harmonize their environment. Most consulted matters related to health, and business. As mentioned by Practitioner#2, "those who desire to be wealthy are those who are already healthy and those who desire to be healthy are those who are already wealthy. If they have already obtained both, they will next seek to achieve a status in their society." The information given by these practitioners, about what most people seek advice on indicates what the people are most interested in.

The four practitioners all agree that Feng Shui has become increasingly popular in recent years and its popularity is continuing to rise. So what are the reasons? There are many factors that the practitioners have considered. The reasons highlighted by the Feng Shui practitioners are divided into five aspects:

- One is the trend of Feng Shui in other Asian countries. For countries such as Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore, Feng Shui is taken into consideration to deal with many aspects of the people's lives. Their economic growth has been tremendous in recent years, and one of the secrets of their success was considered to be the practice of Feng Shui. This led to the phenomenon of Thai business people following the practice of other Asian countries, so that they may also profit from utilizing Feng Shui. This also led to the increasing number of people interested in learning the science.
- Another explanation, according to Practitioner#3, is that, many of the Feng Shui Masters in Thailand practiced Feng Shui according to the ancient landscape methods, which is Feng Shui of the burial grounds. They had no experience with scenery of tall skyscrapers and road

networks. In order to apply Feng Shui to the fullest extent, they had to invite Masters from countries with more experience on modern landscapes. Companies, such as the Company C, invited such Masters. As a result, the other companies began to imitate the practice of Feng Shui, as a status symbol and with the hope of prospering even more.

- The next factor, according to the Feng Shui practitioners, is the influence of the popularity of Feng Shui in the West. Non Asian people became more interested in the Oriental philosophy, which also included Feng Shui. The books that are related to Feng Shui are in Chinese and they are very complex. However, as Feng Shui became popular in more Western countries, more books on Feng Shui have been translated into English. These books were simplified and are easy for the general public to understand. Along with the trend, many of these books were translated into Thai. This made it easier for Thais to understand the concept of Feng Shui. As more people have recognized Feng Shui, the more people would become interested in the subject.

- Practitioner#2 and Practitioner#1 stated that the increasing popularity of Feng Shui did in fact develop during the boom years in Thailand. However, more precisely the popularity peaked between the periods of the economic growth and recession, as more people demanded to know more about the knowledge to help them cope with their problems. Nevertheless, Practitioner#1 believes that the popularity of Feng Shui is due more to his revealing his secrets during this period.
- Furthermore, uncertainties of the future, just before the economic crisis in Thailand, caused many people to rely on mystical powers. Although Feng Shui practitioners would not categorize Feng Shui as mystical powers, in Thai society in general Feng Shui is classified within the category of astrology and fortune telling.

Many of the practitioners consider Feng Shui as a science, a philosophy and also an art. It is considered a science because they say many of the practices or so-called 'cures' (in order to harmonize the environment) are logical and can be scientifically proven. For instance, you should not sleep or sit right below a 'beam' because normally there will be steel grounded in them, and that affects your

body. However not all of the techniques are explainable. Moreover, according to the Masters, there are invisible waves that act upon us in good or bad ways, as in the radio waves that transmit the sounds. In order to obtain good waves, the Feng Shui Masters is the one who could find the right directions with his/her experiences.

"It is a philosophy of dealing with the natural happenings," says Practitioner#1. It is also the way of thinking for the Chinese who has learnt the Confucian wisdom, which is an integral part of their culture. It is an art of placements of objects to harmonize the environment. Therefore Feng Shui may be categorized as included in all of these subjects.

The reasons why they think Feng Shui is important in their lives and why they believe in it, is that they have all experienced the results of what Feng Shui has done to them, which consequently, has brought a better life to them. They all believe it brings happiness.

Some of the Masters does utilize the Feng Shui objects to attract or activate the directions of the good 'chi' (energy). However, some do not believe in utilizing statues such as Fuk, Luk, Sau in the locations, because they consider them as mere decorations.

The Perspectives of Thai Fortune tellers

According to an article in The Bangkok Post, Ms. Woraphan Laohawilai, (the president of the Astrologers Association of Thailand) 'believes that astrology is part and parcel of the Thai way of life. Moreover, she mentions that "Thai, consider a fortune teller to be more reliable than a therapist." As Feng Shui is in the category of one of fortune telling methods in Thai society, the information from the interviews with the fortune tellers verified various aspects of Thai society towards Feng Shui.'²⁶

With a multitude of fortune tellers in Thailand, I have interviewed two at random in Bangkok. One was an astrologer at Siam Discovery Shopping Center and a tarot reader at Hotel M. These locations are some of the popular sites that the public goes to have their fortunes read. Indeed, there are many other locations that are much more popular than the above mentioned, such as the temples near China Town, Wat Pho and the places of other famous fortune tellers in Bangkok.

²⁶ Chitraporn Vanaspong, "Superstitious rely on heavenly bodies", The Bangkok Post, 6/7/97

The two fortune tellers had different opinions on Feng Shui. Fortune teller#1, a Thai astrologer and a palm reader in Siam Discovery agreed, that the popularity of Feng Shui has been evident over the last two to three years. The periods would be the Boom Years in Thailand, but also the period leading to the economic recession.

According to him, Feng Shui became popular through the influence of successful companies in Thailand, predominately Chinese owned. The success that they have achieved was considered to be due to their practice of Feng Shui. Consequently, the public began to follow in their footsteps, and later on practicing Feng Shui became a trend. Moreover, around that period, many Feng Shui books written in English, which are already becoming popular in the West and re-acknowledged in other parts of Asia, increased in numbers. These books were simplified compared to the original Feng Shui scripts that were written in Chinese. The modified books helped the public to understand the subject easier.

The Tarot reader at Hotel M, stated that in her opinion it was more likely practiced among the wealthy in Thai society. The reason for that is that her perspective

of the practice of Feng shui is expensive for the general Thai public.

Retailers of Feng Shui Items

The wholesale and retail shops selling Feng Shui related items are scattered around Bangkok from the luxurious malls to small shops in China Town, Yawarat. These shops are usually filled up with the objects, the majority of which are related to Feng Shui.

The objective in interviewing the owners of these shops was to see the movements of the sales of these items. Through them, it is another way of finding out the popularity of Feng Shui items during the Boom Years.

I went to the locations that I believed to be most suitable for the investigation. From the numerous shops selling items related to Feng Shui, I interviewed three retailers.

The three retail shops, although decorated in different styles, all displayed similar items related to Feng Shui and objects said to convey luck. The reasons the retailers gave for starting the business varied, though all

of them were quite interested in the objects that they sold. They themselves are not devoted to the practice of Feng Shui. Their customers' demanded for the inclusion of these items. The retailers of these shops believe in Feng Shui because everyone else does, and if everyone says it does good, they believe it will.

They all agreed that the popularity started during the Boom Years, or about five years ago. However, they also agreed that the economic recession increased the popularity, because the people felt more insecure and in need of some kind of support to overcome the crisis.

Architects, and Real Estate Agent

The architects and the real estate agents are important sources to identify when Feng Shui gradually became popular and influenced their business in Thailand.

I interviewed two architects, and two real estate agents. The first architect, Architect#1 is a renowned artist in Thailand. As he commented in the interview, his work has not been influenced by Feng Shui; however, as more prospective clients became interested in Feng Shui in later

years, this started to affect his architectural style. He said he was willing to compromise to a certain extent; however, his clients sometimes went to the extreme. For instance, a house owner may ask a Feng Shui Master to look at the floor plan. If it is not consistent with his calculations, he may ask for the total rearrangement of the building, or even go to the extreme to demolish parts of the already constructed sections.

Architect#2 is another architect who does not identify herself with any influence of Feng Shui on her work; however she believed that in architecture, the logical principles of location is related to Feng Shui, because Feng Shui itself is logical.

Both architects agreed that there is an increased demand from the owners and developers to adapt some of the Feng Shui methods for designing the buildings in recent years.

Some Thai architects also learned the art of Feng Shui, and have mixed it with that of their architectural professional knowledge to respond to strong requests from their clients.

Comments from the real estate companies, and their perspectives are in agreement with those of the architects.

They have sensed the indispensable knowledge of Feng Shui for their jobs. In recent years, owners and developers have sought agents who are more aware of the importance of Feng Shui. As one of the project manager of Company CR mentioned, lack of recognition of the significance of Feng Shui may cause uneasy feeling between the client and the agent.

A real estate agent from Company R, furthermore, describes how not only his father, but also the public became interested in the subject in recent years from watching TV and reading published articles. In real estate business, during the period of 1990-1994, the interest of Feng Shui caught on with the buyers and then spread to the sellers. He commented that the avaricious wealthy were the ones who probably started the trend of consulting Feng Shui masters.

Hoteliers

Hotels in other countries, such as Hong Kong and Taiwan, are said to utilize Feng Shui because of the strong influence it has in these countries. However, as Lillian Too mentioned in her book, 'some hotels do not disclose the

utilization of Feng Shui because it is considered a secret weapon.'²⁷ Perhaps that may have been the case why a lot of information or interviews were hard to obtain from the hotels in Bangkok. I have tried some of the riverside hotels for interviews, but most of them replied that they had no connection with Feng Shui, and the two hotels which I had information that they utilized the art refused to give more information on the subject.

In the case of Hotel O in Bangkok, there were clear indications of Feng Shui being utilized, as evidenced in their hotel pamphlet. However, I have received a different answer from Hotelier#1 by telephone, stating that it was the publisher of the pamphlet who placed the captions, because of the popularity of the usage of the term 'Feng Shui', though, the hotel does not apply Feng Shui.

Despite the information from a source, that Hotel T utilized Feng shui on their premise, I could not obtain direct information on the subject. However I was able to certify that they actually use Feng Shui. In one of the manager's responses by telephone, she mentioned that they want to keep this sort of information discreet, because if some customers discover this factor, some might regard it

²⁷ The information is from Lillian Too, The Complete illustrated Guide to Feng Shui, 1997.

as an occult practice and they would feel awkward about staying at the hotel.

Unfortunately, I could not have a direct interview with both hotel representatives. However, it is clear from Hotelier#1 that there is a trend of using the word 'Feng Shui' on pamphlets, just to attract the public. As for Hotel T, it was apparent. In the case of these two hotels, and probably other hotels, in Bangkok, Thailand, the utilization of Feng Shui may seem to be considered a secret weapon, as mentioned by Lillian Too.

Analysis from Media References

The increasing interest in Feng Shui can be evidenced in many articles describing the popularity of the utilization of Feng Shui in recent years. From the years 1996 to 1998 most articles that describe the spread of Feng Shui can be found. In the periodicals, it is visible that the practice of Feng Shui gradually penetrated the Thai society through publications of English books translated to Thai, and quickly Feng Shui consultants began to appear on radios and television programs influencing the public. As it is mentioned in one of the articles, the Feng Shui

spread more as a fad, trend and fashion, which indicates that the Feng Shui memes were 'successful memes' in Thai society at least in Bangkok, during the periods mentioned above.

According to the articles, one of the reasons of the success for the vulnerability of the society to follow the trend of practicing Feng Shui during this period was based upon the success of the leading Thai business people. The people believed they should approach business with Feng Shui and other source of supernatural powers. It was stated in the articles that the increase in popularity in the practice of Feng Shui was firstly found among the professionals, whose services in Feng Shui were requested by clients, especially in the real estate sector. As architect Visit Techakasem comments in from the excerpts, " People look to Feng Shui to bring success to their business."²⁸ In other words, the popularity is based on the belief that Feng Shui brings financial success.

²⁸ Busaba Sivasomboon, Jirajaree Shaimusik and Chiratas Nivatpumin, "Lessons in Harmony from China", The Bangkok Post, 4/3/96

Although the Feng Shui professionals acknowledge the essential meaning of Feng Shui and explain them to the public, the public were more interested in the results of what Feng Shui may convey with their fortune in retrospective with 'wealth' rather than their fortune of 'happiness'

Moreover, most of the periodical archives found relating to Feng Shui were from 1996's onwards. This indicates that the increase in Feng Shui popularity started during the Boom Years, but it more likely spread rapidly between the end of the Boom Years and the beginning of the economic recession. In my opinion, the articles from 1996 were more of an introductory information on Feng Shui and how it is beginning to be recognized and is spreading. However, the articles from 1998 contain more criticism on Feng Shui itself, as being used as profit gain for the consultants, publishers and others related with Feng Shui rather than the people who consults the Feng Shui professionals, and practice them.

Apparently the latter article, give us more awareness of how Feng Shui or any type of fortune telling helps people with relief from the problems in our lives that cannot be entirely answered. Problems of natural cause

that no scholars nor anyone can answer because "life itself is and will always be a mystery. Therefore, the one way that people can depend to be free from these problems (or the mysteries of life) is to ask for the services of fortune tellers, clairvoyants, which in Thai society include the Feng Shui masters. Whatever the reason, most of the Thais people do accept the natural phenomena of life, consulting these people convey peace within themselves.

Believes in supernatural powers and the combination of hard work were the product of wealth, which in the Boom Years people related with the idea of 'happiness'. But it is not always wealth that conveys happiness.