

CHAPTER 3

FENG SHUI IN THAI SOCIETY: DATA PRESENTATION

Transcript of the Interviews

The interviews are in the following order:

- Feng Shui Masters and Professionals: Practitioner#1,2,3,4
- Thai fortune tellers: Fortune tellers#1,2
- Retailers of Feng Shui items: Retailer#1,2,3
- Architects: Architect#1,2
- Project manager and real estate agent
- Hoteliers: Hotelier#1,2

All the interviews are based upon the responses of the interviewees from a questionnaire previously prepared. However, due to changing circumstances, I have omitted or added other questions that were thought to be relevant during the process of interview. Moreover, some of the interviews have been conducted with the help of an interpreter.

The following is the Questionnaire used for the interviews:

Questionnaire for Feng Shui Masters/ Practitioners

Part 1 Personal Data

1. Age: 20s / 30s / 40s / 50s / 60s / 70s / 80s
2. Gender: male / female
3. Descendant from:
4. Educational background: elementary / Junior HS / HS / university / higher education / etc.
5. Occupations:

Part 2 Opinions on Feng Shui

1. How long have you been practicing Feng Shui?
2. Where have you learned Feng Shui?
3. When did you start being interested in Feng Shui?
Why did you start?
4. What kind of people (customers) ask for advice?
5. What kind of information is asked the most?
business/health/education/etc.
6. During what period, was Feng Shui most popular in Bangkok?
Specify? Boom years, etc. why or why not was Feng Shui popular at that period of time?
Was Feng Shui visible or not during the boom years?
7. How would you categorize Feng Shui? As science, knowledge (philosophy), or art?
Why?
8. Why do you think Feng Shui is important for business, personal life and etc?
9. Reasons why, you believe in Feng Shui.
10. Why do you believe Feng Shui will bring wealth, good etc?

11. Do you think the principles of Feng Shui are in conflict with modern scientific principles? Why?
12. Do you have a "Fuk, Luk, Sau" (the gods of wealth, high rank, and longevity) in your house, or a Pa Kua mirror outside your home or at work?

Questionnaire for Architects, Real Estate Agents and Others

Part 1 Personal Data is the same as the above.

Part 2 Opinions on Feng Shui

1. Do you practice Feng Shui?

From 2-12 the questions are basically the same as the first questionnaire.

Interview 1/Practitioner#1 with Interpreter

Practitioner#1 is the founder of "I-Ching and Geo-Astrology Club", which has been in operation since 1988 at Hotel T. He made the following comments on the followings about Feng Shui in Thai society and the growth in popularity in recent years.

The popularity of Feng Shui has grown in the past three years in this club through various reasons and purposes:

1. Knowledge towards Feng Shui has accumulated throughout the years.
2. Architects were required by their customers to understand the knowledge of Feng Shui.
3. To rely in some kind of force in times of problems.
4. To become Feng Shui masters.

Practitioner#1 is a second-generation Chinese, aged 65, and he is a master of Feng Shui including The Four Pillars of Destiny and the Flying Star. He started practicing Feng Shui from in his 20's. He learned it from his grandfather's younger brother. His cousin also studied Feng Shui from China, but never as a professional. His family in China was one of the founders of the Feng Shui schools. The family mainly concentrated on the making of the calendar (or almanacs). He mentioned that Feng Shui was always a secretive metaphysics in China, therefore the knowledge has been transferred to one generation from another in the same family and rarely revealed to the public.

He states the four fundamental studies essential to Feng Shui. These are:

1. The Four Pillars of Destiny
2. Directions

3. Surroundings and landscapes

4. Time

Recently, he only consults his relatives and very close friends, and the questions asked from them are mainly related to health, the future incidents in relation to the family (ex: tragedy or disasters), and in business (if there will be an bankruptcy in the future).

He feels that Feng Shui drew more attention between the period of the Boom Years and the recession of the economy in Thailand, which would be three years ago according to him.

According to Practitioner#1, the popularity of Feng Shui during this period is not due to the Boom in the economy nor the recession, but more because of his promotion of opening secrets of his knowledge of Feng Shui to the people. The knowledge of (Chinese Feng Shui) was never revealed to the public before. He was one of the first ones in Thailand to do so. The reason for doing so was his many experiences throughout his life.

He has faced some significant situations in his life beginning from 1985, when he was diagnosed with a serious liver illness. According to the doctors he would not live long. From that time he decided to commence using the Feng Shui knowledge to recuperate from his illness, he became

well to his own astonishment. Likewise, with his relatives and close friends he applied Feng Shui for curing their problems. The same results appeared. What he did to cure himself with implementing Feng Shui was to prepare his own funeral, and build his own graveyard, (which is now destroyed his health has been restored). Since then, he decided to reveal his Feng Shui knowledge to the people who are interested in it, and for the well being of the society.

To him, he does not know if Feng Shui can be categorized as science or not. However it is a philosophy dealing with the natural happenings. It is a philosophy of natural occurrence because it can be experimented with a tested result. As science has a natural result and nature can be explained scientifically, Feng Shui is also science. It is also logical. Sometimes Feng Shui can be explained scientifically. For instance, A Feng Shui master is like a TV expert who can adjust the antenna to the waves for a better vision. A Feng Shui master can adjust to a good direction for the people to have a better life. If the person knows what he wants to do, then he has to move to that direction. By acquiring the advice from a Feng Shui master he will know where to move. There are plenty of

waves to the signals; for example, if you want to see a certain channel, then you have to turn the antenna to that direction. The same applies to Feng Shui. Feng Shui is the study of the laws of nature, the environment and the effects of the surroundings of the human being. Studying more and more may provide us with better knowledge on the right waves for the right signals. Therefore, in general, science has no conflict with Feng Shui.

He uses the Fuk Luk Sui statues just like the antennas; to receive or gather the good Chi (waves). He places the Gods (ornaments) in the exact location according to the Feng Shui calculation or formula, while some people just place them as decoration.

In conclusion, he states that "people should know more about Feng Shui", for he believes that it up lift life into a better state. Moreover, in order to attain good Feng Shui, 5 things should be learned:

1. Good morals
2. Respect and pay respect back
3. Politeness
4. Knowledge
5. Honesty (keeping your word)

Interview 2/Practitioner#2 with Interpreter

Practitioner#2 is a Feng Shui practitioner of "I-Ching and Geo-Astrology Club" at Hotel T. He has been a Feng Shui professional for three years. Many of the clients that consult him for help mainly desire wealth and happiness. In recent years people come to ask for advice on financial, health related problems and legal issues. Depending on the persons, some desire to be wealthy because they already are healthy and vice-versa. If they have already obtained both, they will next search to achieve higher status in society.

He acquired his interest in Feng Shui in Taiwan where he obtained a degree in engineering. However, he became profoundly interested in this philosophy when he faced deep business problems of his own. He wanted to find the cause and the reason for the difficulties he was having. His own experience of applying Feng Shui to improve his situation, and that of the others, resulted in Feng Shui being considered to be true.

According to Practitioner#2, Feng Shui's popularity in Thailand (Bangkok) had increased in recent years, due to Practitioner#1's efforts to teach Feng Shui to the public.

At a club founded by Practitioner#1, around six to seven years ago, there were only ten to twenty students eager to learn about Feng Shui. In the last three years, just for a beginner's class, more than four hundred to five hundred students enrolled. Now there are six levels of teaching. Higher levels of study will be opened soon.

The essence of Feng Shui is to live in harmony with the environment. In other words, the basic ideas and what the masters are trying to practice is to achieve the equilibrium between the building and the environment, using the natural forces to influence the good results to all the inhabitants. Feng Shui masters are not fortune tellers, who make future predictions. Therefore, they will not tell about political changes, such as the economic boom or recession of the country. However, it is possible to identify some of the reasons of some phenomena, for instance, the recession in Thailand.

In recent years, the streets of Bangkok have been going through large-scale constructions, and almost all of the business streets are excavated to build expressways or the metropolitan railways. This has deeply affected the balance of Feng Shui in the area. In Feng Shui, the roads or the streets symbolize the Dragon, which represents the

flow of the water signifying wealth. This denotes that injuring of the dragon implies the damage of the wealth of that area (with Bangkok being the center of Thai's economy, the entire country is damaged).

"Water can trap the wealth; the mountain influences the health," he continues.

In the city, the street symbolizes the flow of the water. The skyscrapers are the mountains signifying the health. The buildings influence the health of the people as well. A building that has been facing financial problems will affect the peoples' health, especially the unfinished buildings. Higher buildings have a great influence on the people living close to the building. Logically it can be explained that the taller building traps air-pollution. These buildings will block the wealth and the health, because it blocks the good 'chi'. An example is the C Building. Although the building was completed before the recession, the building is still rather empty. This is due to its odd shape and the traffic direction affecting the Feng Shui. However, its location near the construction of the expressway is one of the strong factors. Moreover, the half-circled and triangle shape of the building, which in Feng Shui signifies metal for the former, and for the

latter fire; therefore these two elements when combined crash with each other, the result of which is 'bad chi'.

According to Practitioner#2 Feng Shui can be categorized in all ways, as philosophy, art and science.

- Science: Tall buildings cause pollution.
- Philosophy: Good comes from good.
- Art: Placing auspicious objects or removing inauspicious object, as in placing a crystal to enforce such energies.

The philosophy of Feng Shui relates with heaven and earth. If you are a good person on earth, then the heavens will endow you with a good Feng Shui.

To obtain a good Feng Shui one needs to practice two things:

1. Good morality
2. Respect to one another/ reciprocal relationship

If you lack one of the two, you cannot obtain a good Feng Shui. A person who has good Feng Shui practices both.

Some Feng Shui fundamentals can be explained scientifically and some cannot. As in the compass schools, it can be explained how strong the magnetic force of the earth (of that place) and how it influences man. Different

places have different magnetic field and human beings react to it. Therefore, in Feng Shui it is said that it is not good to sit beneath a beam (because it has steel passing through, and therefore, it is not favorable to the body). Location and the magnetic fields of that place are what influence the body.

As for the Fuk Luk Sau, he does not own them, because he does not believe in works of art and household gods to enchant the house. However, he does apply the natural objects, such as crystals and plants to convey good energy. The best place to find various objects used to enchant good Feng Shui is at Tang Toh Kang in Yawarat.

Moreover, he mentions about some of the misconceptions with Feng Shui by the public. One of them is the Bank T (head office), which is known to the public as being in the middle of the belly of a pregnant dragon (signifying an auspicious location that will bring fortune and wealth). However it is not as auspicious as it seems, according to Practitioner#2.

The building is shaped like a knife, as represented by the numerous triangle features, in order to cut the bad chi because of a bridge in front of the building. At the entrance of this building there are two metal lions, which

roar every hour, also to scare the bad chi to enter. Moreover, the location is not auspicious anyway, because in the past this site was used as warehouses. This shows that the location is not as auspicious as it is said to be.

In conclusion, Feng Shui is used to make life better, states Practitioner#2.

Interview 3/Practitioner#3 with Interpreter

Practitioner#3 was a district governor from 1994-1995 and a member of the Surat Thani Town Municipality Council 2533-2538 (1990-1995). He has been well known in recent years, through his many books on Feng Shui published in Thai. He conducts seminars and speeches around Thailand.

His comments on the popularity of Feng Shui in Thai society are as follows:

Ten to twenty years ago, Chinese-Thai businessmen invited Masters from China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong to look at the Feng Shui for their businesses and homes. According to Practitioner#3 the popularity of Feng Shui is quite a recent phenomenon. Many individuals began to be enchanted with the Feng Shui philosophy especially the Westerners,

who went to study in China and other places with their Masters. Furthermore, there were many publications on this subject brought out in recent years, resulting in widespread popularity. In Thailand, many books on the subject were translated and published during the 1980's.

However, they are problems with some of these books. Many of them only give basic examples of Feng Shui. Moreover, as from the book "Feng Shui for the Home" by Evelyn Lip 1953, mistranslation or misinterpretations are found in them. One of the mistranslation is with the word 'beam', as it was mentioned previously, that it is not safe to sit right below a 'beam' which signifies a steel passing across it, and not 'light' as it is translated in the book. Furthermore, this book illustrates a drawing with inaccurate information. For instance, there is a drawing of the kitchen. The sketch has a refrigerator and the stove placed next to each other. In Feng Shui principles, the elements of fire and water should not be together.

Through these occasional misinterpretations of Feng Shui techniques in some books, the readers will apply the knowledge contained in the book without critical study. This is not enough to practice the philosophy. The core of this subject has to be taught by the right master to the right student.

However, this is not much of a concern compared to the fact that a person claimed himself to be a Feng Shui master and applies the methods from the books to gain profit. What he wishes to specify is that you cannot learn the knowledge of Feng Shui through books; it has to be taught from the 'Right master to a student' (a selected student). There are secrets from this knowledge that cannot be revealed to the public.

Therefore, in his recent book "*How to select a Fortune teller (Astrologer)*" (not yet published at the time of the interview), he has researched almost all the Feng Shui masters, and most of the (self-appointed) fortune tellers around Thailand reveal their true identities according to him. (He classified them in category as fraudulent and authentic Masters of the field.)

His reason for writing this book is that more people have become attracted to fortune telling, which includes Feng Shui from the point of view for the Thai people. The people who would practice also have increased in number. He indicates that many of them just transformed themselves into a master without the proper training. In other words, some of them may be impostors.

In pre-modern Thailand, the Chinese immigrants and Chinese-Thai used Feng Shui to determine the right location

for their graveyards. Today, they still use it in the same way, however there is a difference between the Feng Shui methods practiced for the graveyard and the home. Moreover, with the increasing number of apartments and office buildings, the way of practicing Feng Shui had to be modified in a more pragmatic way.

In the next section, Practitioner#3 provides us with the reasons for following his path of becoming a Feng Shui Master in Thailand.

It started with tragic happenings with consecutive deaths in his family. First, it was with his grandfather's death. Four years later his father passed away, and again within four years, his uncle followed. (There are some photos he had shown, with his grandfather's face remaining quite intact after ten years under the ground and his father's body with still nails and hair growing three years and a half after he was buried.) This phenomenon is very unusual. The corpse normally should be decomposed. His family began to question the strange incidents, and Practitioner#3's consulted a Feng Shui master from Malaysia whom his mother has known prior to these incidents. They had found that it was related to the land where the corpses were buried. It was a "Zombie land", which means that

zombie inhabited the land (his definition of zombies is: beings that would take (eat) 4-year-old children alive.)

The Feng Shui Master analyzed the graveyard, and advised them to cremate all the corpses. During the cremation of his father, blood was seen oozing from his corpse. Before the cremation, another uncle became ill, but he recovered.

Yet, the Feng Shui Master felt there was still something incorrect about the whole situation. He decided to examine the family's ancestral graveyard in China. He traveled there and learned that there was something terribly wrong about the site. He advised the family to modify the graveyard in China. However, nobody listened to his advice. Later on, this uncle who was recovering, soon died of cancer. Confounded by the string of these events, Practitioner#3 became very interested in Feng Shui. By this time he was selected by the same Master to be his student, and began his study. Today, he has a 10-year career in Feng Shui, giving speeches, publishing books and consulting clients.

Regarding the popularity of Feng Shui, Practitioner#3 feels that the increased interest in Feng Shui can be related to the Boom Years in Bangkok for which he relates

as the years from about 1991-1992. He explains that during those years and even today, there has been a misconception towards Feng Shui among some practitioner and the public. (Many people regard Feng Shui as a tool to gain easy profit) "It doesn't make people wealthy", he said.

"It is about a piece of land with good soil, with different kind of seeds planted. However, the land can be one that propagates mangoes in different ways, one that makes quantity or one that makes quality mangos. The quality or the nature of the Land does not make much difference. It depends more on what the person will do with the land, and that is where Feng Shui comes in."

For example, The Company C asks various masters of Feng Shui from Hong Kong, Taiwan, etc. for various reasons. For instants when choosing an employee for a job, they use physiognomy (face reading) in an interview.

He also comments on the economic recession t a lot to do with the use of Feng Shui imposters and misleading books. However there is also the element o destiny. To achieve the motives, it is 50% destiny and Feng Shui.

Moreover, he presents some information on the origin of Feng Shui in China in order to explain some phenomena of this philosophy.

According to Practitioner#3: In the olden days, no air-conditioning or electric fans existed. There were no rules to building houses. The wind was the only natural force that they would check to construct a house that would be comfortable to live in. For example, the wind circulation would make the house less stifling. As for the doors, it should not be facing the bed nor the toilet bowls simply because it is impractical to see directly a person sleeping or sitting in the toilet. In such ways, Feng Shui is formed from simple reason, or logic. However, it has turned into a more complicated philosophy, full of perplexing reasons for locating the objects in the house. Therefore, Practitioner#3 states two basic concepts for Feng Shui: it is geography and logic, with some mystery.

Finally, he specifies the application of Feng Shui in the house for activating good fortune as it is said that the constitution of a house is a reflection of your own self.

There are four sections of the house that are essential to activate the good energy. The first is the front of the house, which represents the face. He gave an example of choosing a gas station. If you have a good impression from the appearance of the gas station, you

would likely use it. However, if you do not have a pleasant impression, it is more likely that you would avoid even going in. The same applies to a person. There are people with pleasant faces, and some less pleasant. There are some faces of people you would be interested in being acquainted with, while some you may not, as one that you may feel like avoiding. Therefore, the pleasant appearance of a house which is the personification of one's self can bring many encounters and relations with others, which is a very important aspect to our lives.

The second is the location of the working desk. It represents the hands and legs. To activate this area with right Feng Shui is very consequential to the work you are handling.

The third is the kitchen, which symbolizes the stomach. The position of the stove is very important, because it represents your money bank. The stove with good Feng Shui will bring good food everyday, which links to good health, and leading to producing wealth. The last section is the location of your bed, which symbolizes the head. It is essential to sleep well, as sleeping well provides good health.

To Practitioner#3, to use Feng Shui is to activate the four locations of the house mentioned above. The rest is

not of grave concern, as they are only about interior decoration and architecture.

Interview 4/Practitioner#4 with Interpreter

Practitioner#4 acquired his knowledge of this science from a Feng Shui Master in Hong Kong. He is not only considered amongst the top five in Tarot reading in Thailand, but he also is talented in other methods of fortune telling, such as the *Ngow heng* (face reading).- Moreover he is the youngest (27 years old) Feng Shui professional amongst the top ten well-known practitioners in the field. He also appears on three TV programs relating to his profession. 1) Amazing of Tarot (UTV/ channel 14, Mondays, 22:00-23:00), 2) *Fasai* (channel 9, 8:00 for 10mins.), and 3) Love Thailand (channel 5, Wednesdays, 22:00-23:00). In the TV program, he advises the customers with their problems from letters, telephones and directly on air.

According to him, Feng Shui is practiced by 70%-80% of the Chinese-Thais, and in recent years there is an increase in its popularity in Thailand (mostly in Bangkok), not only among by Chinese-Thais but also among the Thais themselves.

Furthermore, the Chinese Thai practicing this science request an annual analysis of their individual Feng Shui in the beginning of the Chinese New Year. This seems a customary activity to those who practice it.

He has noticed the increase in popularity as more clients consult him for advise on their interior decorating, company logos, and location of buildings according to Feng Shui, although he is more popular for his Tarot reading than in Feng Shui.

One of the companies that Practitioner#4 advises on Feng Shui is Company C. He is not directly involved with the Chairman of the company however; he advises the board of executives. In another company, one of the changes practiced by him was in the change of colors of a Telecard. The blue card has been transformed into green and red to symbolize growth. Another modification with a different company was of a logo. He mentioned that he has applied a line or an arrow through the letter "P" in order to show "movement."

Moreover, according to Practitioner#4, some of the companies, mainly one of the three major banks in Thailand pursue Feng Shui. Bank T, which has its main office situated at the curve of the river, symbolizing a pregnant

Dragon (indicating prosperity). Also its logo has a symbolic meaning of "growth".

Practitioner#4 explains some of the reasons of the popularity of Feng Shui in recent years. He comments that Feng Shui has provided peace of mind, comfort, and support during these recent two years, which already saw the decline of the growth in the Thai economy. Moreover, some of the successful companies in Thailand practice Feng Shui and therefore, other companies follow it by reason of the reliability. Therefore, according to Practitioner#4, the Boom Years in Thailand had helped to popularize the philosophy. Moreover, it had been practiced by more people right before and after the economical recession, because of the feeling of security that Feng Shui provides.

Interview 5/Fortune teller#1

The following interview is from a Thai astrologer and a palm reader in Siam Discovery shopping center. Unfortunately, the interview was very short, due to the fact that there were many customers waiting to be consulted.

Fortune teller#1 admits that in recent years, although he is an expert in Thai Astrology, he is obliged to study Feng Shui, because of the demand from customers. He recalls that it started about two to three years ago.

The books about Feng Shui that he has studied from is mainly from English translations, such as the books by Lillian Too and Raymond Lo. He combines his knowledge of Thai Astrology with Feng Shui knowledge acquired from those books, and provides his own holistic interpretation of the situation. (According to Lillian Too, many of the Feng Shui practitioners combine the interpretations as well). His opinion on the reasons for the increased demand of Feng Shui in recent years is that it is a trend to use Feng Shui in order to have a successful business in Thailand.

Interview 6/ Fortune teller#2

Hotel M is one of several places in Bangkok where, the fortune tellers are waiting to read clients' fortune on a daily basis. Due to the fact that this place has a reputation for being more costly than other places, it was not as crowded as it once was.

The interviewee, a Tarot reader, said that she does not believe in Feng Shui. She said she has read about it from books; however she does not believe in Feng Shui master telling you what to do. She only believes in herself and karma. She feels that, only 50% of the population in Thailand believe in Feng Shui and the others are not interested in it at all. She continues by emphasizing that Feng Shui is not essential to her.

She thinks Feng Shui was visible during the Boom Years in Thailand however, but it was only practiced amongst the wealthy. In other words, only the rich followed it, because Feng Shui is expensive. The consultations of Feng Shui masters, and the objects to enchant good fortune are most of them not inexpensive.

In concluding this interview, she again emphasized that she does not believe in Feng Shui; however, she has a Pa Kua mirror outside her house. She mentioned that it was her friend, who advised her to put one up, because it was considered to be good. I persistently questioned why she has a Pa Kua when she does not believe in Feng Shui. The interview finished with her apparent uneasiness towards the demanding questions, and she answered simply because her friend said that putting a Pa Kua outside her house is good, and therefore she also thinks it is good.

Interview 7/Retailer#1

Wholesalers and retailers specializing in precious stones, Thai, Burmese, Chinese arts wood carving antiques, and reproductions are found in the River City Shopping Center in Bangkok. In many of the shops it is apparent that the three statues of gods of fortune (Fuk Luk Sau), are placed in front of the show windows. Shop A is one of those with these figurines occupying the shop among many other items mentioned above.

Many objects related to Feng Shui are sourced from Beijing. The Fuk Luk Sau is in various shapes and sizes. Other items are related to the 12 animals of the Chinese zodiac, which are: the Rat, Ox, Tiger, Rabbit, Dragon, Snake, Horse, Sheep, Monkey, Rooster, Dog, and the Boar. The Kuan Kung, the God of Wealth and Protection is also displayed on the shelves, together with the Happy Buddha that can be considered an object to enchant good fortune. Furthermore, the auspicious animals such as frog, tortoise and fish are also included in the collection. They are made of fish bones, some kind of nut seeds and perhaps ivory. Then come the precious and semi-precious stones, which include crystals, amber, amethysts and others that are also said to convey good luck.

The owner of Shop A started this business with her husband 15 years ago. She is from Shan State, Burma and had always known about Feng Shui. However, it is only recently that she began collecting items related to Feng Shui for her shop. There had been a demand for these items five years ago (1993). She also became deeply interested in the art from that period of time. She mentions that there were many construction business investors from Hong Kong that wanted to invest in Thailand, and many of them consulted Feng Shui masters before buying or constructing anything. Now that the economy is in the 'slump', more people seem to be interested in Feng Shui, to seek support to overcome the crisis.

Interview 8/Retailer#2

There were several shops displaying items related to Feng Shui in Thanya Plaza. Shop B is one of those with elegant antique lamps decorated on the ceiling and a variety of objects that are related to Feng Shui and other good luck charms. The owner is a fourth generation Chinese-Thai. Since about ten years ago, she started to become interested in the art of Feng Shui and practiced

according to the instructions from books, newspapers, TV and other sources. Her father advised her not to consult a Feng Shui master, as he felt that they only practice for money. Therefore, her father practices it in his own ways.

According to Retailer#2, Thais began to purchase more items related to Feng Shui four to five years ago.

However, it was seven years ago that sales were very profitable. The decrease in sales began after the decline in the stock market. However, when the Baht decreased to 50 Bahts to a US\$ 1, the sales increased with tourist customers from Japan, Taiwan, and Singapore.

She believes that Feng Shui is half 'nature' and half science/knowledge. "It is all up to you." She mentions that there is no harm in believing, and she has been surrounded by this practice since she was young, and therefore she does believe it is important.

There is no conflict between science and Feng Shui (nature) for she feels that for those who do not know science, Feng Shui provides its reasons.

Her shop is stocked with Feng Shui objects such as huge Fuk Luk Sau statues in the main entrance window and other items are decorated with carvings or paintings of auspicious animals, deer, crane, and bat. They all signify good life and power. Some of the other objects are in laid

with mother pearls symbolizing good fortune. She referred to the Chinese objects as all representing good luck. The motifs, the Chinese characters, the colors, and the shapes are all related to good luck thus attracting good Feng Shui.

She believes that people should respect all beliefs and therefore, if people relate Feng Shui as good, it is good.

She has a Fuk Luk Sau in her house, and a Pa Kua at the back of the house, which is in front of a junction, to prevent bringing bad fortune.

Interview 9/Retailer#3

Amarin Plaza is another shopping mall in which I have encountered several shops with a variety of Feng Shui items. One of the stores is Shop C. The shop is packed with so-called lucky charms. Thai, Chinese, Indian, Japanese, and from other origins that perhaps even the owner would not know where they came from. For instance, from Thailand comes the famous *nang kuak* (the lady in a sitting position with her hand waving people to come in).

Miau kuak (manekineko, in Japanese) is a cat with one of its paw raised up, which in Japan is placed facing the door of the stores to bring in profit. Moreover, the *phra-kanet* (Ganesh), the Hindu god with an elephant head can also be found. Lastly, the Fuk Luk Sau, the gods of wealth, high rank, and longevity is found amongst them all. All bear similar significance of wealth, profit and happiness to those who own them.

The owner is a third generation Chinese. She was interested in Feng Shui. However, she was not deeply involved with practicing the art. She became interested in Feng Shui 10 years ago. She noticed the frequent and highly visible appearance of Feng Shui subjects on TV, in magazines articles and books five years ago (1993). She learned more about how to apply Feng Shui in her daily life, but did not believe in consulting a Feng Shui master to increase the luck.

At her shop, many customers from Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore and Taiwan purchased Feng Shui related items during those years. Likewise, foreigners (Westerners) also started to be interested in Feng Shui objects about two-three years ago (around the years 1995-1996).

According to her, the popularity of Feng Shui in Thailand increased about two years ago (1996), and it is

becoming more popular after the economic recession. The reason she feels is that, people wish to be more secure by believing in something. She comments that all Chinese are interested in Feng Shui, but believing in it or not is another question.

She comments that Feng Shui objects make her feel good because she believes that it will bring good luck. "If decorating with the objects conveys happiness to oneself, that is good."

Interview 10/Architect#1

This section is based upon the book titled "Sumet Jumsai" and the interview with the artist.

According to the aforementioned book, Architect#1 is 'an international architect whose works are marked by strong sculptural forms and colors. These architectural projects, in turn, are linked to his paintings, which border on abstract expressionism. Both architecture and painting are embedded with a sense of adventure and humor'.¹⁷ As it has been commented, his architectural projects can be truly noticed in Bangkok, such as the Robot

shape building built in 1986, the residential complex/supermarket and the headquarters of a newspaper office built in 1991 were such examples. The hotel/department store on Sukhumvit built in 1993, the architect's own residence built in 1973 and many more are all unique in their own shape. Some of his buildings are still easily visible, while others are too low-rise to be as noticeable as it might have been just a few years ago, due to the rapid appearance of skyscrapers during the recent years.

In the interview with Architect#1, he mentioned that there was no connection between his works and Feng Shui. He respects the ancient Chinese philosophy, and describes Feng Shui as 'a body of knowledge gained from experience accumulated from logic. He continues that the art was now becoming a trend, which he described as "Corrupted Feng Shui". Furthermore, the demand for the practice of Feng Shui in recent years by clients is causing not only him but also the architectural world difficulty to complete their projects. Consequently, if the building is already completed, it is not easy to modify. In conclusion, he comments that 'perhaps a freely expressed edifices (such as

¹⁷ Chadanuch Wangrungrun, Sumet Jumsai, (Bangkok, The Key Publisher Co., Ltd., 1996), cover page.

the ones he had created), will be difficult to be realized when more people become aware of Feng Shui.'

Interview 11/ Architect#2

I have been living in a service apartment related to Bank B. This apartment has a similar style as some of the buildings in Hong Kong. It is shaped in an octagon. The interior is very practical, and I assume that the designer, architects and the developers emphasized Feng Shui, in architectural plan. However, after interviewing one of the architects involved with the building, I have learned that it was different from what I had assumed.

Architect#2, one of the architects involved in this apartment, commented that this building has no influence of Feng Shui in the sense of asking a Feng Shui expert or implanting any Feng Shui fundamentals. The interior designer of this apartment is from Hong Kong, living in New York. She might have integrated some kind of practice related to Feng Shui; however, it would have been pure coincidence. What she can say is that they have tried to put logic in the design.

Even in Thai homes and gardens, there are rules, which are based on logic and some mystic beliefs. According to her knowledge on Feng Shui, this art is based upon common sense and logic, and therefore, she believes that Feng Shui is similar to these concepts as when building a Thai structure.

Interview 12/Project Manager

The following interviewee is a project manager, and a planner in the development department from one of the dominant real estate agencies in Thailand. Unfortunately, with his busy schedule, I did not have the opportunity to have a full-length interview.

However, from the little time we spoke, he mentioned that many of his recent clients were interested in Feng Shui. The demand of the knowledge in Feng Shui in his field of work was increasing to the extent that he had to act like he had a lot of knowledge in Feng Shui. Otherwise, the clients would lack trust in the agent.

Interview 13/Real Estate Agent

Real Estate Agent is the Senior Consultant of a leading real estate company in Thailand. He has been in this field for several years. In his personal opinion, he is not too much concerned with Feng Shui. However, he has known about this Chinese metaphysics through his father, who is interested in it, and through his uncle, who is a Feng Shui professional.

Moreover, he mentioned that Feng Shui is being promoted on TV and in magazine and newspaper articles more than ever in recent years. Since 1990 and once every two years, his father has consulted a Feng Shui master from Taiwan to see his house and make alterations in order to bring good 'chi' to his home. The guidance for wealth was estimated about Baht 8000-12,000 per consultation. This excludes what he had to pay to redecorate and reconstruct the house according to the advice. However, he does not consult the Feng Shui master as frequently as he used to, due to financial reasons, and moreover because he has been hospitalized twice since the last consultation.

In the real estate business, Agent comments that there are situations in which the buyers bring a Feng Shui master to a site, to read the location. He recalled the increased

interest in Feng Shui as initially beginning from around the years 1990-1994. Moreover, it was the buyers who formally requested more knowledge regarding Feng Shui from real-estate agents. Later, the sellers also complied with the same demands.

His opinion on the popularity of Feng Shui during the period mentioned above was the extreme public consciousness in wealth. The pursuit of wealth became greed. The affluent was determined to become wealthier. The trend on the interest was more for the rich society.

Notwithstanding, to consult a Feng Shui master especially from abroad, and moreover, if they are the accredited ones, is very costly.

The Agent's understanding of Feng Shui is that it is an easy way to understand architecture for the public. It is logical and is in line with common sense. Therefore, he does not believe in consulting masters.

Interview 14/Hotelier#1

In a pamphlet from The Oriental Hotel, there are captions indicating a concern on Feng Shui in the hotel's decorations. One of the captions says:

'Guests have always breathed a sigh of content when they enter The Oriental's Lobby, a fine example of good *feng shui*. Behind them is the rush of the city. Facing them is the quiet hush of the river.'¹⁸

Guided by the instinct that the hotel might be engaged with Feng Shui, I organize an appointment with them. However, I had just the chance of speaking with the secretary of the PR manager on the telephone, and according to her, she mentioned that the hotel was not deeply involved with practicing Feng Shui. The captions are simply a remark added by the publishers of the pamphlet and nothing more. Unfortunately, I could not get an interview with any managerial personnel from any division, since they were too busy, according to the secretary.

Interview 15/ Hotelier#2

According to a source, I have obtained information concerning the fact that Hotel T practices Feng Shui strictly according to the Feng Shui master's advice. Consequently, I requested an interview with one of the managers of the hotel who happened to be an acquaintance of some one I knew. Notwithstanding, this manager refused to

¹⁸ The New Edition of "Our Living Legend", The Oriental.

be interviewed, saying: "Sorry I can not help. It is confidential data. I've checked around but nobody is willing to reveal the information." It occurs that the Hotel would like to keep it discreet concerning the practice of Feng Shui. Subsequently, I have found out, that the owner of the hotel would like to keep it discreet and do not want to reveal that they consult Feng Shui masters. They do not want the customers to think that the hotel is too devoted to the practice of Feng Shui as some customers might regard it as an occult practice and feel awkward about it. However, rumors indicate that the Feng Shui practiced in that Hotel has increased the number of customers.

Feng Shui in the Media

The following section looks at presentation of Feng Shui including newspaper articles, from periodicals and media archives, which indicate the popularity of the utilization of Feng Shui during the Boom Years and the reasons it has spread throughout Thai society in recent years.

The excerpts and summaries of the articles are from interviews with Feng Shui Practitioners (Masters), Thai

astrologers, architects, interior designers, company executives (mainly banks) and from public opinions related to the subject.

The following articles acknowledge the rise of popularity of Feng Shui in recent years. The following was published in 1998:

- Feng Shui, the Chinese way of organizing a building auspiciously, came into vogue in Thailand about a decade ago. The fad was kicked off by the translation and publication of an English-language book on the subject written by an interested westerner who had compiled it from Chinese sources.
- Before long it was reprinted several times and a crowd of feng shui experts suddenly appeared.
- Consultants specializing in the fashionable pseudo-science opened offices and advisers on the dos and don'ts of Chinese-style geomancy began fielding questions on radio and television programs.
- Feng Shui columns sprouted like weeds in the pages of house-and-garden magazines.¹⁹
- Many leading Thai business people put more faith in the supernatural than in a scientific approach to business. When considering investing in research and development projects, which can "scientifically" lay the foundation for a new best-selling product, an executive would weigh the real cost against the potential gain.²⁰

The followings are excerpts on the Perspectives of Feng Shui Practitioners during the 1996's:

¹⁹ Suthon Sukphisit "Braving the elements" Outlook, The Bangkok Post, 18/7/98

²⁰ Jirajaree Chaimusik, and Busrin Treerapongpichit, "Future assured for soothsayers", The Bangkok Post 26/6/98

One of the Feng Shui Practitioners (Masters) and his former student, with whom I had the chance to interview, reaffirms the popularity of Feng Shui since the year 1992 in this article.

- At the Saha Pathanapibul Group, a top consumer products trading house, many senior executives are said to utilize Feng Shui and astrology in making business decisions. One executive said company founder Thiem Chokewattana routinely consulted a fortune-teller for important decisions, such as whether a given year was auspicious for large investments, or which family member should run which division. 'People turn to Feng Shui for a variety of reasons, said Damrongchai Thansricharoen, a former student of Mr Kriangkrai [Ajahn Ghang Grai Boontaganomt] and now a Feng Shui Practitioner. 'It can be for the purchase of a new home or office, changes in an owner's personal life or business fortunes, or just out of simple curiosity. The heart of Feng Shui is about both personal virtue and aligning yourself with nature. The reason why some building projects fail isn't always because the location's Feng Shui is bad, but because the owners don't have any morals.' Mr. Kriangkrai [Ajahn Ghang Grai Boontaganomt] said that while using Feng Shui to improve one's home or office is positive, owners should still use common sense, if only to guard against practitioners without sufficient knowledge. Feng Shui offers a variety of ways to improve problematic situations he said. Clients should always ask a practitioner for a list of choices in order to select the most appropriate method, both in terms of cost and effect on the environment. He said there are more than 100 full-time Chinese Feng Shui practitioners in Thailand, and at least that many Thai practitioners. Quality and ability vary. 'Some can rightly identify what's good and bad about a given environment, but have no idea about how to correct the problems,' said Mr Kriangkrai [Ajahn Ghang Grai Boontaganomt].²¹

²¹ Busaba Sivasomboon, Jirajaree Shaimusik and Chiratas Nivatpumin, "Lessons in Harmony from China", The Bangkok Post, 4/3/96

Excerpts of the Perspectives from architectures and interior designers in the 1996's:

- "Feng Shui, also known as geomancy, is a thousand-year-old Chinese tradition of bringing man-made construction in harmony with nature. It is gaining increased popularity among developers, owners and architects, both big and small. Over the past four years, clients have increasingly asked that Feng Shui principles be incorporated in their architectural designs, said Wittaya Limwichitwong, an architect with Archimedia. Up to 90% of the firm's clients mentions Feng Shui during consulting sessions for both residential and commercial projects. Mr Wittaya believes some of the interest is rooted in the fascination many Thais have with the supernatural. But more importantly, people don't want to dismiss lightly the possibility that Feng Shui can aid one's fortunes. Many corporate giants, especially those run by Sino-Thais, are said to use Feng Shui extensively. The Charoen Pokphand group is a big believer. 'People look to Feng Shui to bring success to their business,' said architect Visit Techakasem of Terra Massa Ltd. 'That's why Feng Shui is so hot right now.' Much of the popularity of Feng Shui can be traced to the financial success enjoyed by Chinese immigrants who brought the belief to Thailand. As awareness grew, marketing executives began to see its business potential, especially in the property sector. Now architects are looking at Feng Shui in a less skeptical light. The reason? The clients. When one demands that Feng Shui be incorporated in a design, a small investment in a practitioner can be the difference between winning and losing a commission. Whether the architect actually believes it isn't important, said Mr. Visit. " For all of my designs, whether it's a house or an office building, I want to believe that my clients have been rewarded because of the quality of the project. 'Feng Shui, however, has its place in helping clients have increased confidence [in the building design].²²

²² Busaba Sivasomboon, Jirajaree Shaimusik and Chiratas Nivatpumin, "Lessons in Harmony from China", The Bangkok Post, 4/3/96

- Developers, architects, designers. They're all looking for something new to make developments better, bigger, and more beautiful. But one tradition stays. Feng Shui—the 2,000-year-old Chinese belief which stipulates the best way to have the shape and aesthetics of a building for good luck and fortune—is still used in the design process of most buildings in Bangkok. One development in the CBD, Ban Sub-Surawong, launched in March and to be completed in mid-1998, has employed feng shui experts from Singapore and Hong Kong to inspect the design of the project three times. The project is to be built in a currently run-down area with freehold title and is within minutes of the bustling Silom and Surawong business metropolis.²³

Followed by additional comments from the above professionals from articles in the 1998's:

- Architects and interior decorators suddenly found their designs being altered to bring them into line with the requirements of *feng shui*.
- The delays these changes introduced into construction schedules were only one of the disruptions caused by the new geomancy-consciousness, and some professionals affected by the phenomenon have had things to say about it.
- Somphoch Tuayhamraksa, who has his own interior design business, explained how the *feng shui* business [is used] as a way of boosting consumer confidence.
- "Suddenly experts appeared in great numbers. It was a good way to make quick money. Some of them did not know much about it, they were just camp followers.
- The interior designer's considerations might revolve around how comfortable a room is, whether it is functional, easy to maintain, attractive and whether it will remain fashionable for a reasonable amount of time. And of course the price is also important.
- Architect Ronarit Thanakoset works with the Fines Arts Department's Bureau of Archaeology and the National Museum and his work mainly involves religious sites and houses. (comments...)
- "Today, people's lifestyles and the economic conditions that surround them are complicated. They are grasping at

²³ "Keeping the Peace" , The Bangkok Post, 24/5/96, p.26.

things to give them confidence in themselves, and this trend has led to many people setting themselves up as experts in one subject or another.

- "Some of what they know is true, and some of it is nonsense.
- "There is too much talking about half-baked ideas and beliefs. Some people take it all in and it costs them their happiness."
- As far as designing a house goes, Mr Ronarit thinks it is enough to make it an orderly place to live.
- "We go along with the Buddhist belief the good and bad things that occur in life depend largely on a person's behaviour. If you do good, then good things will happen to you. Happiness comes to us because we behave virtuously, not because we arrange our homes according to the rules of *feng shui*.
- "I'm an architect and there was a time I became very interested in geomancy. I was afraid if we did something incorrect in terms of *feng shui* in our works, everything would go wrong. -
- "But once, when the owner of a building I was working on called in a number of Chinese experts to give advice, I found all their views differed as to what should and should not be done.
- "There were arguments, but I felt comforted by the situation. If these *feng shui* experts didn't know for certain what should be done, that made our work easier!"
- But, he said, there are things in *feng shui* that make sense and have a scientific basis. For example, *feng shui* dictates it is bad to build a house facing on-coming traffic at a T-junction.
- Architects say this is logical because if a house is placed in such a spot lights from the traffic will pour into the house at night-not to mention the danger of potential accidents from vehicles which might fail to break.
- "We make use of the good aspects and it does make things better. Another good thing about having studied *feng shui* is that we take a little more time in what we do. We're more thorough."
- So, when such traditional beliefs clash with the work of architects and designers, what's the best way out? Assistant professor Dr. Napaporn Havanont of the graduate school at Srinakharinwirot University's Prasarnmit Campus may have the answer.

- She interprets the move towards pseudo-sciences such as *feng shui* as stemming from people's desire to empower themselves-to feel more secure.
- "We have to follow the middle path on this issue. Architects and designers should do some studying up on *feng shui*, so that geomancers don't get too much power over their work. The architects and designers and the geomancers must be able to compromise," she said. "The situation is similar to the one that once existed between modern medical doctors and traditional herbalists. At first they were at odds, but then it was shown some of the herbal remedies were effective. Then there was mutual respect."²⁴

One of the latest articles on Thai businessmen utilizing Feng Shui in recent years was in a Hong Kong based newspaper:

- "Businessmen are using astrology but will not admit it because this is the scientific age. Just go and stand on the tallest building in Sathorn Road and you will see all sorts of astrological symbols on the roofs, like eyes and hands," said Mr Anant, one of a growing number of Thais turning to feng shui masters, monks, merit-making and the stars to help them sharpen up in the wake of Thailand's worst financial crisis in a decade.
- Scores of entrepreneurs now place more faith in their astrological charts than in the forecasts of economists and analysts when it comes to making business decisions.
- Skeptics say businesses are turning spiritual only in a bid to restore their fortunes following the collapse of the finance and property sectors. Hundreds of Thais have joined lectures offered by the International Astrological Association, with the number of students rising six-fold to 600 in the past two years.
- The influence of astrology is pervasive. Executives meeting in hotels across Bangkok can often find an astrologer on hand in the lobby for consultations before making deals.

²⁴ Suthon Sukphisit "Braving the elements" Outlook, The Bangkok Post, 18/7/98

- Even Dhanin Chearavanont, chairman on the huge Charoen Pokphand agricultural group, is said to use 'face-reading' techniques to weigh up potential employees. Readers examine applicants 'ngow heng', give facial elements, to ascertain what a person's character and habits are.
- Thai Farmers' Bank took the advice of a feng shui master in 1996 and changed its logo, adding water and a circle to a rice stalk. It is now the best performing Thai bank.²⁵

²⁵ James East, "Profits seen written in stars as Thai get metaphysical", SCMP, 8/8/99, Archive search, Available at <http://www.scmp.com>