

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Identification and Significance of the Challenge

Feng Shui is a belief system that has roots in ancient China. All provincial capital cities in China, from at least the time of the Xia, the first prehistoric dynasty (21st – 16th century B.C.), were built according to the rules of Feng Shui (Eitel, 1873; Rossabach, 1983). In the Chinese language, the literal translation is Wind Water. The Book of Burial (c. 300 BCE) provides a clue for the name: "The energy that rides the wind stops at the edge of water and is retained."

In Hué, Viet Nam, Feng Shui is a significant part of the landscape and architecture. It was used to explore topography, to locate building sites and to observe the cardinal points to determine building.

Feng Shui was also significant for all social classes. In order to consolidate the conquered dynasty in ancient times, the Nguyen Emperors of Viet Nam sought the advice of the Feng Shui proponents about the optimum positioning of the new Citadel and the date to accede to the throne (Phan, 1998). The feudal Mandarins used Feng Shui as a tool to rule the peasant class, which had been oppressed by the dominant class. They believed in Feng Shui in order to achieve transitory fulfillment (Vuong, 2004).

Currently, the principles of Feng Shui are applied to transactions in real estate (Vuong, 1996); to optimise opportunities for advancement (Vuong, 2004); to improve business and commercial activities (Phan, 1998); and to choose a good day for sowing and harvesting farms (Wydra, 1978).

Many believe in the positive power of Feng Shui and depend upon its application to improve the conditions of living environments. Feng Shui helps subscribers live in harmony with nature and satisfies the thinking of “worships holy, avoids misfortune, and obtains good omens” (“*có thờ có thiêng, có kiêng có lành*”).

Since many believe that Feng Shui can help them increase their general well-being, they regard Feng Shui as an important social element.

However, the application of Feng Shui principles, without deep understanding, can render Feng Shui less reliable and ultimately discrediting the principles (Johnson, 1881; Eitel, 1873; De Groot, 1897); an additional consequence is the applications have negative effects. For instance, Feng Shui consultants usually claim to be Feng Shui specialists and elevate themselves as professors (*“thầy Phong Thủy”*). They try to create mysterious and transcendent force by threatening others with ill omens of Feng Shui, voicing obscure rhetoric and directing Feng Shui applications that lack clear explanation. Moreover, excessive applications of Feng Shui in life become uncontrollable, unexplainable and ineffective. Feng Shui is also ineffectively promulgated through word of mouth or reference books – both potentially poor sources.

As one of the modern environmental design professions, architects tend to omit Feng Shui in their architectural or landscape practices. This is the result of not been taught in either Landscape or Architecture school in Viet Nam. At both the Ha Noi Architectural University and the Ho Chi Minh City Architectural University, the two major universities of Architecture and Landscape in Viet Nam, architectural design and modern landscape education base their curricula on a purely environmental approach taking no account of Feng Shui principles.

The need to integrate Feng Shui in design schemes for clients appears essential, especially in Huế. Clients insist that architects apply Feng Shui principles in the design stage, while the architects try to persuade their clients that Feng Shui is not scientific and therefore inapplicable (Vuong, 1996).

This has created increasing conflicts between clients and architects. In many instances, the unsatisfied clients submits the architects’ outline plans to Feng Shui consultants, who lack training in architectural or landscape designs, for modification. Therefore, the overall design costs, incorporating both design and Feng Shui consulting fees, are increased, whilst the design is a compromise of both architectural and Feng Shui principles.

Furthermore, the application of the ancient values of Feng Shui to modern landscape design may not be as easy as it appears since there are barriers such as lack of understanding and knowledge of Feng Shui and appropriate applications. To resolve these challenges, the principles underpinning Feng Shui must be compared against modern landscape design practice to understand how the two might be the same; thereby, eliminating any discreditable and superstitious attributes of Feng Shui.

As the intent of both modern landscape design and Feng Shui is to create improved environments to promote general well-being, it is critical that Feng Shui applications be explored in respect to modern landscape design to empirically demonstrate that both disciplines are compatible. This research hypothesis is that both Feng Shui and modern landscape design are not only compatible but amenable to integration and even enhance the ultimate design.

1.2 Objectives

Human demands are more complex as living harmoniously with nature, maintaining ancient cultural values, achieving comfort and convenience are more challenging. Feng Shui has been adapted in its applicability to current requirements (Mak, 2002; Vuong, 1996; Yu, 1998). Researchers of the application of Feng Shui to modern landscape design hold that Feng Shui plays an important role in environmental design (Xu P., 1990; Xu J., 2003; Mak, 2002; Yu, 1998). Although Feng Shui is widely practiced in Asia, the applications of Feng Shui may differ in other cultures and in other design applications (Essen, 2000, Wydra, 1978, Vuong, 1996). This research is focused on the Feng Shui practice in Viet Nam.

Feng Shui caused the Chinese to invent the compass, called a *Luopan*. Feng Shui also employs a comprehensive array of calculations encompassing mathematical iterations together with foundation texts, core theories and methods, and an impressive past based on archaeological discoveries and the work of archaeo-astronomers.

The techniques fall into two categories:

❖ **San Yuan:**

This school is called “Compass School”, though the compass name means “Three Cycles”. This school can be described as mysterious and superstitious (Vuong, 1996, Wydra, 1978). It has a limited application in integration with modern landscape design practices.

❖ **San He:**

This school is called “Form School”, though the form name means "Three Harmonies". This school has been well recognised and widely accepted by a number of researchers as mentioned previously. This research emphasizes only the Form School - *San He* - Feng Shui applications since it comprises a rational basis in the analysis of the design environment (Mak, 2002).

An essential inheritance from previous researchers, the overlap factors between Feng Shui and modern landscape design - derived from Xu’s research (2003) - are studied to attain the basic compatibility. A methodological framework through which the compatibility of the both disciplines is explored is derived from Yu’s research (1998) and Mak’s research (2002). These methodological approaches are explained in chapter 4.

This research is intended to:

1. To demonstrate the compatibility between Feng Shui and modern landscape design by illustrating their essential attributes of compatibility.
2. To confirm the potential of achieving the Feng Shui applications by using modern landscape design techniques: which can be effectively implemented by architects.

Finally, the conclusions of this research suggest alternative recommendations for architectural practice. Although there are ways to achieve the Feng Shui applications in a landscape design project, the results of this research could assist architects in understand the benefits of Feng Shui applications and its compatibility

with modern landscape design techniques. Once architects understand Feng Shui applications and the possibility of integration with modern landscape design techniques, conflicts might be reduced not only between the architects and the Feng Shui consultants, but also between modern and traditional practices. Project solutions can then be more efficient in terms of cost reduction, improving function and maintaining the aesthetic quality of landscape design.

1.3 Research Site

This research is conducted in Hué, Viet Nam, since the objectives deal specifically with the condition of landscape design practice in Hué. The scope of this research and its results are primarily for garden design, which is a part of landscape design, especially for garden design in Hué city.

Ha Noi Architectural University (HAU) is the foundation of the Hué architectural profession, graduating the first architectural students in 1995 and continuing until 1999. The respondents are architects who are working in Hué and graduated between 1995 and 1999. Other respondents are fourth and fifth-year architectural students at the College of Sciences, Hué University, Viet Nam. The reasons for including fourth and fifth-year architectural students is that they have studied and practiced several years in academic projects and some landscape projects. Moreover, they have already studied about theories of modern landscape design, including modern landscape design techniques.

The language used in questionnaire survey is Vietnamese, the native language of both the researcher and the respondents. The answers of respondents are translated into English; the original comments with Vietnamese language are also presented in appendices as references.

1.4 Definition of Keywords

In this research, some Feng Shui words have specific, different meanings. In order to understand their applications, which are italicized in this document, this section explains Feng Shui word meanings.

The Feng Shui terminology is based on the Chinese language and will be expressed in English, as introduced by Mak (2002), Xu (2003) and Xu (1990). Some other Vietnamese sayings are in English with the Vietnamese original in brackets.

Feng Shui principles:

- ❖ **Qi:** It is the energy, air circulation, vital breath, or life energy. *Qi* comprises *Living Qi* - good and *Dead Qi* - bad. *Qi* is the essential concept of Feng Shui.
- ❖ **Yin-Yang:** *Yin-Yang* comprises complementary opposites; one cannot exist without the other. *Yin-Yang* is a way to perform *Qi*.
- ❖ **Five Elements:** *Water, Wood, Fire, Metal, and Earth* are the elements of *Five Elements* that constitute the physical world. They operate in their cyclical interactions. *Five Elements* are also a way to perform *Qi*.

Feng Shui elements:

- ❖ **Qi prospect:** Symbols and Signs of *Qi*.
- ❖ **Five Geographical Elements:** *Water, Cave, Direction, Dragon Vein, and Sand* are the basic components of the Form School of Feng Shui. *Five Geographical Elements* are a way to perform *Qi*.

1.5 Organization of Research

The research comprises six chapters:

❖ **Chapter One**
Introduction

This chapter lays out statement and significance of challenges and addresses research objectives. It also discusses the location of the research operation and keywords.

❖ Chapter Two

Literature Review

This chapter reviews the basic understandings of Feng Shui applications through a brief history and concepts of Feng Shui of the Form School (including a brief Feng Shui history, principles of *Qi*, *Yin-Yang* and *Five Elements*, and *Five Geographical Elements*).

It also explores modern landscape design techniques, focusing on categorizations of Grant, W. Reid (1993) (including *Simplicity*, *Harmony*, *Unity*, *Proportion*, *Balance*, *Sequence*, *Interest* and *Emphasis*), again such special use of these words are italicized.

❖ Chapter Three

The Influences of Feng Shui on Landscape and Architecture of Hué, Viet Nam

This chapter explores the important influences of Feng Shui on four categorizations from large to small scale, that is from the whole system landscape of Hué to the system of the Citadel and its landscape, to the pagodas and their landscape, and finally to the garden houses and their landscapes.

❖ Chapter Four

Methodology

This chapter details existing research methodologies about the relationship between Feng Shui and landscape design. It explores the work of Xu (2003) in terms of the overlap factors between Feng Shui and modern environmental design, and the work of Yu (1998) and Mak (2002) in terms of the architects' perception in relation to Feng Shui and modern landscape design. Previous research assists in determining the methodology of this research to verify the compatibility between both disciplines.

It also discusses about the analysis and verification methodology of the compatibility between Feng Shui application and modern landscape design

technique. The analysis of both modern landscape design techniques and Feng Shui applications into comparable attributes are introduced as essential material for the questionnaire, of which the results are discussed later on.

❖ **Chapter Five**

Compatibility between Modern Landscape Design Techniques and Feng Shui Applications

This chapter discusses the results of a questionnaire that demonstrates the compatibilities between Feng Shui principles and Modern Landscape techniques. The questionnaire was used to verify the compatibility as to whether the Modern Landscape design techniques preferred by respondents achieve the optimal Feng Shui application. This chapter is divided into eight parts; each part corresponds to one of the eight techniques of modern landscape design - *Emphasis, Sequence, Simplicity, Interest, Balance, Proportion, Unity and Harmony*.

❖ **Chapter Six**

Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter summarizes general conclusions and limitations of this research and proposes alternative suggestions in modern landscape design technique practice to achieve Feng Shui applications. There are two options which are based upon the level of commitment of architects who want to practice Feng Shui applications in their design. Finally, this chapter details the conclusion of this research.