FENG SHUI: INTUITION, NOT JUST SUPERSTITION. ARCHITECTURE: SUPERSTITION, NOT JUST INTUITION.

Derham Groves

The University of Melbourne

ABSTRACT

Architect Derham Groves discusses some similarities between the branch of feng shui known as 'the form school' and postmodern architecture. He argues that among the main concerns of both include creating, manipulating and interpreting symbols in the built environment. As such, there are also some similarities between the role of a feng shui expert and an architect. A number of instances where the principles of the form school and postmodern architecture coexist hand-in-glove are presented—in particular, at Hong Kong Disneyland, where the Walt Disney Company, for many years a major patron of postmodern architecture, successfully embraced feng shui for the first time in the design of one of its theme parks. Groves also argues that a better appreciation of some similarities between the form school and postmodern architecture could possibly be of benefit to both. For example, it might lead to feng shui being presented in a wider, more open, architectural context; also, it might help architects to regain their former role as a master of ceremonies.

KEYWORDS

Feng Shui, architecture, intuition, superstition

INTRODUCTION

Feng shui (Chinese for 'wind' and 'water') is an ancient Chinese system of geomancy, used to favourably position everything from whole towns to items of furniture, in order to bring good luck to those somehow associated with them. However, it is used most commonly to find lucky sites for houses (dwellings for the living) and graves (dwellings for the dead). To explain this simply, the occupants of a house with good feng-shui will be happy, healthy, wealthy, and wise, while the relatives of a person buried in a grave with good feng-shui will experience good fortune as well. However, those associated with houses and graves with bad feng-shui will be sad, sick, poor, foolish, etc.

Feng shui is based on the idea that energy or 'qi' (the breath of nature) is everywhere. Positive, lucky, life-giving energy or 'sheng qi' (vital vapour) emanates from the south and meanders through the landscape, while negative, unlucky, destructive energy or 'sha qi' (noxious vapour) emanates from the north and travels in straight lines through the landscape. Basically, achieving good feng shui involves finding a place with plenty of sheng qi, while at the same time avoiding any sha qi. Of the two types of energy, sha qi is much easier to identify, because straight things like canals, fences, paths, railway tracks, roads, etc. produce it as a matter of course. These straight things are called

'secret arrows' and must be avoided at all cost in order to have good feng-shui. Consequently, for example, during the 19th century, the Great Northern Telegraphic Company was not permitted to erect a landline between Fuzhou and Xiamen due to the locals' extreme aversion to having long, straight, rows of poles and wires, i.e. secret arrows, in the vicinity of the towns.[1]

The branch of feng shui known as the form school is based on the observations of patterns in nature and the built environment, made over a very long period of time and developed into a very long list of feng-shui rules of thumb, which people follow to achieve good feng shui and to avoid bad feng shui. Thus places with good feng shui tend to have a flat open plain with a gently flowing stream to the south (symbolized by a red finch), a mountain to the north (a black tortoise), a slightly lower mountain to the east (an azure dragon), and a still lower mountain to the west (a white tiger). Buildings with good feng shui tend to have main doors and windows in the south facade, secondary doors and windows in the east and west facades, and no doors or windows in the north facade.

What I described above also happens to be a very architectural approach to place. After observing many different architectural patterns or scenarios around the world—ranging from a humble doorstep to a busy city square—a team of US architectural theorists led by Christopher Alexander, Sara Ishikawa and Murray Silverstein identified 204 favourable or successful architectural 'patterns', which they published in an encyclopaedic 1,171-page book titled, *A pattern language: Towns, buildings, construction* (1977). In many respects, this book is a lot like a list of feng shui rules-of-thumb. Some of the patterns in it even read like feng-shui rules-of-thumb. For example, one pattern says:

> Always place buildings to the north of the outdoor spaces that go with them, and keep the outdoor spaces to the south. Never leave a deep band of shade between the building and the sunny part of the outdoors.[2]

Feng shui's form school, in particular, is concerned with the interpretation of symbols in both the natural and built environments. For example, long ago in China, the citizens of Yung-chun regularly plundered the neighbouring town of Tsuen-cheu-fu. The citizens of Tsuen-cheu-fu clearly had a serious problem, so they consulted a geomancer or feng shui expert in search of a remedy. He observed that Yung-chun was shaped like a fishing-net and Tsuen-cheu-fu was shaped like a carp. So, he instructed the citizens of Tsuen-cheu-fu to erect a pair of tall pagodas in the middle of town, which would intercept the symbolic fishing-net of Yung-chun before it could trap the symbolic carp of their town. After the two pagodas were constructed, the plundering of Tsuen-cheu-fu stopped.[3] Ordinarily, Tsuen-cheu-fu should have been a very lucky town, because the word for 'fish' in Chinese also sounds like 'surplus'.

The case of these two towns illustrates the highly symbolic nature of the form school. Like produces like is the predominant idea behind this branch of feng shui: if something looks like a fishing-net, then it will behave like a fishing-net; if something looks like a fish, then it will behave like a fish; if something sounds like 'surplus', then it will result in a surplus—and so on. A good way to overcome a feng-shui problem is to firstly interpret the negative symbolism and then trump it with a positive, more powerful

symbolism. To some extent, this process reminds me of the children's hand game, rock-paper-scissors.[4]

Of course, there is much more to feng-shui than I have described here. I have not mentioned yin and yang, the five elements (at least not yet), the eight trigrams, the ten stems, and the twelve branches, which are all important components of feng-shui.[5] Nevertheless, in a nutshell, feng-shui is about locating sheng-qi and avoiding sha qi.

FENG SHUI IN AUSTRALIA

Finding a place with good feng shui in an ever changing, imperfect world is often easier said than done. J.J.M. DeGroot inferred as much in his classic book, *The religious systems of China* (1897). According to him:

> The repairing of a house, the building of a wall or dwelling, especially if it overtops its surroundings, the planting of a pole or the cutting down of a tree, in short any change in our ordinary position of objects, may disturb the good luck of the house and temples in the vicinity, and of the whole quarter, and cause the people to be visited by disasters, misery and death.[6]

Consequently, feng shui rules need to be flexible and open to interpretation, otherwise it would be impossible for someone to improve a bad feng shui situation short of moving to somewhere else. To illustrate how this 'feng shui wiggle room' works, let me briefly discuss some early Chinese temples or joss houses in Australia. Many people may be surprised to learn that the practice of feng shui in Australia probably dates back to 1851, when thousands of Chinese began arriving here in the hope of striking it rich following the discovery of gold. Of the many joss houses built in Australia by this first wave of Chinese immigrants, only a few still exist today: Viz., the joss houses at Atherton (1903) and Breakfast Creek (1885) in Queensland; Alexandria (1910) and Glebe (1897) in New South Wales; and North Bendigo (1860s) and South Melbourne (1866) in Victoria.

The joss houses at Alexandria and Breakfast Creek each comprise one building: a temple dedicated to Guan Di, the god of war. The Atherton joss house comprises two buildings side by side (facing the joss house and going from left to right in all cases): a temple keeper's residence and a temple to Guan Di. The joss houses at Glebe and North Bendigo each comprise three buildings side by side: the Glebe Joss house has an ancestral hall for ancestor worship, a temple to Guan Di and a temple keeper's residence; and the North Bendigo joss house has a temple keeper's residence, a temple to Guan Di and an ancestral hall. The South Melbourne joss house originally also comprised three buildings: a temple keeper's residence, a temple to Guan Di and an ancestral hall. However, in 1901, a second ancestral hall was constructed next to the first one.

Interestingly, even though the buildings that make up the Atherton, Glebe, North Bendigo, and South Melbourne joss houses are only very simple gabled structures, a very complex interplay exists between them, which may be glimpsed through the gaps between the buildings. Clearly, from an architectural point of view, they are much more than the sum of their parts.

As a general rule, the six Australian joss houses mentioned above have the main doors and the largest windows in the front façade, no doors or windows in the rear façade, and hardly any doors and windows in the side façades. For example, the Glebe joss house has the main doors and windows in the front façade and no openings in the rear and side façades, while the Alexandria joss house has the main doors (but no windows) in the front façade, no openings in the rear and the right hand side façades, and a door in the left hand side façade.

On analysis, it seems that the six joss houses were built according to feng-shui principles. As there was probably a shortage of specialist geomancers on the goldfields, the majority of Chinese goldminers most probably relied on stock feng shui advice found in books like the Chinese almanac. According to Jean Gittins, author of *The Diggers from China* (1981):

> Even though the seasons in the strange land [i.e. Australia] were reputed to be topsy-turvy, it was hoped that life would continued to be guided not only by seasonal variations recorded in the almanac, but by advice set down for matters of daily routine. It would, for example, be advantageous to know the exact day on which proposed ventures gave promise of successful conclusion or when it would be wiser to step quietly to avoid meeting up with evil spirits.[7]

As Gittins suggested, Australia is 'topsy-turvy' compared to the majority of countries where feng shui is practiced, because it is in the southern hemisphere. This causes a real dilemma: should the feng shui rules of thumb be inverted when dealing with the other side of the world? Some contemporary feng shui experts believe they should be, while others believe they shouldn't.[8] Furthermore, to the casual observer, the 19th century Chinese goldminers also appeared to have been in two minds about this. For example, the joss house at Glebe faces northwest, while the one at nearby Alexandria faces southeast. Were the feng shui rules of thumb inverted at Glebe or not? Surely both joss houses can't have good feng shui—or can they?

When selecting sites for joss houses in Australia, the Chinese goldminers clearly preferred ones with a southerly aspect. Four of the six Australian joss houses mentioned previously face south (or at least south to some degree): Atherton faces south, Alexandria faces southeast, North Bendigo faces south-southeast, and South Melbourne faces southeast. The two exceptions are Breakfast Creek, which faces east, and Glebe, which faces northwest.

However, when the Chinese goldminers had to choose between a site that faced south and one that faced water, they always chose the one that faced water. The six joss houses all face water: Atherton faces Piebald Creek; Breakfast Creek faces the Brisbane River; Alexandria faces Sheas Creek; Glebe faces Rozelle Bay; North Bendigo faces Bendigo Creek; and South Melbourne faces Albert Park Lake (formerly South Park Lagoon). The proximity of these joss houses to water suggests to me that their builders were seeking to retain sheng qi, perhaps in accordance with the well known feng shui saying, "[Sheng qi] rides the wind and is dispersed, [reaches] the boundary of water and is retained."[9]

The six joss houses all have a cross-wall or spirit screen near the main doors to block sha qi from entering the building. At Breakfast Creek the spirit screen is located outside the joss house a few metres in front of the main doors, while at the other five joss houses the spirit screens are located inside the joss houses a short distance behind the main doors.

Significantly, in the process of attracting shang qi and avoiding sha qi, creative design solutions are often required. Consequently, the six Australian joss houses discussed earlier have a measure of character, an air of mystery and a hint of paradox that many buildings of comparable size and structure, but devoid of feng shui thinking, do not seem to have.

When I was growing up in the early 1960s, my parents would sometimes say that my toy-strewn bedroom "looked like a Chinese joss house". As far as I know, they had never been inside of a Chinese joss house, but in their minds it represented total chaos. However, architecturally speaking, nothing could be further from the truth.

When I was doing the research for my book, *Feng-shui and western building ceremonies* (1991), during the late 1980s, hardly anyone in Australia had even heard of feng-shui, let alone understood it.[10] However, these days feng shui is a part of everyday Australian life. If you feel off colour; if your best friend suddenly turns against you; if your business goes bust; then perhaps bad feng-shui is the cause? Certainly, an increasing number of non-Chinese Australians are looking to feng shui for answers these days. The change over the past 30 years or so has been remarkable.

POSTMODERN ARCHITECTURE

Postmodern architecture is difficult to define precisely. Unlike modernism, the architecture style that preceded it, postmodern architecture is much concerned with ornamentation, storytelling and symbolism. Postmodern architecture is evident in a wide variety of building types, ranging from everyday ordinary structures to quirky and unusual ones, including (but not limited by) the following:

1. **Suburban houses**—not only those designed by architects, but especially those designed by builders, and in particular those that incorporate do-it-yourself elements created by the home owners themselves, such as jerry-built outbuildings and homemade letterboxes (more about these later).

2. **Entertainment facilities**—such as Luna Park (1912) in St. Kilda, Victoria, an early amusement park inspired by several different styles of architecture from around the world; the State Theatre (1928), later renamed the Forum Theatre, in Melbourne, a Moorish-style cinema designed by John Eberson and Bohringer, Taylor & Johnson; and the Skyline (1954) in Burwood, Victoria, Australia's first drive-in cinema.

3. **Roadside buildings**—such as the Oakleigh Motel (1956) in Oakleigh, Victoria's first motel designed by Tecdraft; the Big Pineapple (1971) in Nambour, Queensland, a pineapple-shaped shop and restaurant on a pineapple plantation open to the public; the Big Banana (1964) in Coffs Harbour, New

South Wales, a walk-through banana at an amusement park in banana-growing country; and the Giant Koala (1989) in Dadswell Bridge, Victoria, a koala-shaped shop selling souvenirs close to the Grampians National Park.

4. **Shops and shopping centres**—such as the Allan & Stark Drive-In Shopping Centre (1957) in Chermside, Queensland, Australia's first shopping centre complex; and the Chadstone Shopping Centre (1960) in Chadstone, Victoria's first shopping centre complex designed by Tomkins, Shaw & Evans.

One of the most prominent champions of postmodern architecture is American architect Robert Venturi (b. 1925), who helped to popularize the style through his writings, especially his book *Learning From Las Vegas* (1972) co-written with Denise Scott-Brown and Steve Izenour, and also through many of the buildings he designed, such as the Vana Venturi (his mother's) house (1964) in Philadelphia, the Best Products showroom (1973) in Langhorne, Pennsylvania, and the fire station (1992) near Walt Disney World Resort in Orlando, Florida. Venturi et al. argued that virtually all buildings could be classified as either: a) 'ducks', i.e. buildings that are unmistakably identified by means of their peculiar external forms, such as the category's namesake, the Big Duck (1931) in Flanders, New York, a duck-shaped roadside shop that sold ducks and duck eggs; or b) 'decorated sheds', i.e. plain box-like buildings that are identified by signs on their façades or nearby the buildings.

While there is really no equivalent figure in Australia to Robert Venturi, over the years several local architects have designed some good examples of postmodern architecture in, say, Melbourne, including Neptune's Fishbowl (1970), a fishbowl-shaped fish and chip shop at South Yarra by Robin Boyd (who had formerly been a vehement critic of postmodern architecture); the Keysborough Parish of the Resurrection School (1975-1978), a celebration of the Australian suburbs in polychrome brickwork at Keysborough by Edmond & Corrigan (in the 1960s, Peter Corrigan encountered Venturi et al. at Yale, however initially he was very sceptical about the American architects' work); the book-shaped extension to St. Kilda Library (1994) at St. Kilda by Ashton, Raggatt & McDougall (Ian McDougall was an early disciple of Corrigan's); and the sunshine-inspired façade of the extension to Sunshine Hospital (2001) at Sunshine by Lyons (Corbett Lyon worked for Venturi during the early 1980s).

One of the first books to critically examine postmodern architecture was *The language of postmodern architecture* (1977) by Charles Jencks, who described the style as "historically specific, rooted in conventions, unlimited or ambiguous in zoning and 'irrational' or transformational in its relation of parts to whole. The boundaries are often left unclear, the space extended infinitely without apparent edge."[11]

Jencks also compared postmodern architecture to Chinese garden or landscape architecture:

> Postmodern, like Chinese garden space, suspends the clear, final ordering of events for a labyrinthine, rambling "way" that never reaches an absolute goal. The Chinese garden crystallises a "liminal" or in-between space that mediates between pairs of antimonies, the Land of the Immortals and the world of society being the most obvious mediation. It

> suspends normal categories of time and space, social and rational categories, which are built up in everyday architecture and behaviour, to become "irrational" or quite literally impossible to figure out. In the same manner postmodernists complicate and fragment their planes with screens, non-recurrent motifs, ambiguities, and jokes to suspend our normal sense of duration and extent. The difference, and it is a profound one, is that the Chinese garden had an actual religious and philosophical metaphysics behind it, and a built up conventional system of metaphor, whereas our complicated architecture has no such accepted basis of signification.[12]

As Jencks rightly pointed out, there are some significant differences between Chinese landscape architecture and postmodern architecture. However, being a postmodern architect myself, I am very interested in exploring those aspects that they share. I am willing to go further than Jencks though and claim that these similarities are not limited to Chinese landscape architecture, but they also extend to Chinese architecture generally. Furthermore, the mechanism chiefly responsible for giving Chinese architecture its postmodern characteristics is feng shui. In my view, feng shui's form school and postmodern architecture are both mainly concerned with creating, manipulating and interpreting symbols in the built environment. In this respect, a geomancer and an architect often perform similar roles and, therefore, perhaps they should learn from each other.

With regard to feng shui's form school, I am much more interested in 'ducks' than 'decorated sheds', because lots of Chinese buildings are literal analogies like 'ducks'. These include ancient religious structures like the tomb of Empress Wu Zetian (circa 705) in Qian County, Shaanxi Provence, which resembles two female breasts, literally the size of hills; and contemporary commercial buildings like the Tanzi Hotel (2001) in Langfang, Hebei Provence, which is a 10-storey representation of Fu, Lu and Shou, the Chinese gods of wealth, status and longevity. Chinese 'duck' buildings seem to express the positive hope that like will produce like, i.e. the legendary beauty of Empress Wu will be eternal; Fu, Lu and Shou will bless those staying at the Tanzi Hotel—and so on.

FENG SHUI AND POSTMODERN ARCHITECTURE

I have been combining feng shui thinking and postmodern architectural design thinking since the 1980s. For example, in 1988, I asked a group of architecture students from RMIT University, where I was teaching at the time, to design a house in Little Bourke Street, in Melbourne's Chinatown, on a site at a T-junction, i.e. a secret arrow. The house itself had to deflect sha qi rather than relying on the protective charms usually hung above doors and windows, such as baguas and mirrors. The students experimented with armour plating; cactus gardens; gargoyles; jagged edged walls; mirrored glass; obscured doorways; pools of water; screen walls; sharp sticks; tiny windows; and twisted metal. Of course, a number of these things also proposed remedies for some of the more mundane but no less difficult to solve problems associated with living in a house directly facing oncoming traffic, such as light from invasive car headlights and noise from persistent traffic. Good feng shui and good design are not incompatible by any means. In fact, I am sure that many people would have liked the houses the students designed irrespective of whether they knew about feng shui or not, because the students had come up with some imaginative solutions to some common problems regardless.

In *Feng-shui and western building ceremonies*, I discussed the origins of groundbreaking and foundation stone ceremonies. The first type was performed to physically locate the centre of the world, and the second type was performed to commemorate and permanently mark this very special spot. The foundation stone of Australia's proposed (but never completed) Capitol building is a good example of the second type of ceremony. The inscription on its flat stone slab said, 'His Royal Highness, Edward, Prince of Wales, laid this stone 21 June 1920,' with a dot at the centre of the letter 'o' in the word 'of' indicating the centre point of Canberra, which has a circular plan.[13] I argued in the book that performing groundbreaking and foundation stone ceremonies in the past—and not so very long ago at that—was in many ways akin to locating a place with 'blue ribbon', guaranteed, good feng shui.

While a geomancer by and large remains an active and vital participant in the process of finding places with good feng shui for people, unfortunately an architect's traditional role as Master of Ceremonies disappeared long ago. It may return—at least to some degree—in the future if the roles of the geomancer and the architect are combined or merged. Given the large number of Chinese architecture students that I have taught over the years, it is rather disappointing that more have not taken up this challenge. As eccentric as architects are popularly supposed to be—take Wilbur Post, for example, the architect who talked to his horse in the American TV sitcom *Mr. Ed* (1958-1966)—I guess nobody wants to be labelled as a kook by their peers. Unfortunately, I suspect that many architects dismiss feng shui as mere mumbo jumbo. However, this might change if the architecture profession at least better understood some of the similarities between feng shui's form school and postmodern architecture.

Feng-shui thinking is not exclusively Chinese, and sometimes it emerges in unexpected places and unusual ways. Australian letterboxes are usually located on the street boundary, either next to the driveway or the garden gate. While most people feel sufficiently secure behind their wire doors and front fences, some people appear to have turned their letterboxes into feng shui style good luck charms in order to provide themselves with some additional protection. Are letterboxes in the form of cannons, dogs and Ned Kelly meant to deter burglars? Are letterboxes made from old fire alarms, fire extinguishers and fire hydrants meant to prevent fires? The symbolism of these letterboxes is so unmistakable that it is difficult to believe that it was not intentional.[14]

After *Feng-shui and western building ceremonies* was published in 1991, a number of property developers keen to attract Chinese buyers hired me to suggest various ways of improving the feng shui of the apartment buildings they were constructing in Melbourne. Usually this involved me simply modifying the layouts here and there to avoid secret arrows, but occasionally the feng shui problems that I was presented with were more challenging to solve, like the time I was hired by a Malaysian developer who wanted to purchase the multi-storey office building at 520 Collins Street in Melbourne and convert it into apartments. The building had terrible feng shui, mainly because it was directly opposite—and thus overshadowed by—the 66-storey, 270-metre high Rialto building (1986), which at that time was the tallest building in the Southern Hemisphere.

How do you shrink the Rialto building? I suggested fixing a large stainless steel convex disc (like the back of a giant soup spoon) onto the front façade of 520 Collins Street, at

the top near the roof. Not only would it function like a conventional feng shui mirror, but the top of the Rialto building would be reflected in it as well. Consequently, the offending skyscraper would 'magically' appear to be shorter than 520 Collins Street—at least in the shiny disc. The developer was very impressed by my scheme. Nevertheless, he wanted to take a 'belt and braces' approach to the building's bad feng shui. So, in addition to having my large stainless steel convex disc, he also wanted to place two decorative brass cannons, aimed directly at the Rialto building, on the parapet of 520 Collins Street, i.e. my secret arrow is bigger than your secret arrow. However, in the end, he (very wisely, I suspect) didn't go ahead with the purchase of the building, mainly because its feng shui was just too bad.

HONG KONG DISNEYLAND

In 1999, the Walt Disney Company announced plans to build a new Disneyland theme park on a 130-hectare site on Lantau Island, the largest of Hong Kong's 236 islands, about a 30-minute train ride from downtown. Hong Kong Disneyland (2005) was Disney's eleventh theme park worldwide and its first in Asia. Having learned from previous mistakes that it had made overseas, Disney was very keen to respect local customs this time around: "We spend a lot of time trying to understand the culture and areas where we're creating parks," explained Disney spokesperson Marilyn Waters. "You do the best you can to be cognizant and respectful of that and the additional lessons you learn as you go along."[15]

Disney's nod to Hong Kong culture included hiring feng shui experts and following their advice throughout the design and construction process of the new theme park. As the company has been a leading patron of postmodern architecture for well over 30 years, commissioning such luminaries in the field as Robert Venturi, Robert A.M. Stern and Michael Graves to design many of its buildings, it came as no surprise to me that it took to feng-shui like a duck to water once the similarities between feng shui and postmodern architecture were evident.[16]

As mentioned earlier, a place with good feng-shui has a mountain to the north; lower mountains to the east; hills to the west; and an open plane and flowing water to the south. Hong Kong Disneyland has all of these features, which prompted Disney's Chinese-American executive vice president of master planning, architecture and design worldwide, Wing T. Chao, to remark, "It's a very prosperous and fortunate site."[17]

As the mountains surrounding Hong Kong Disney on three sides are clearly visible from inside the theme park, it appears that achieving good feng shui was even more important than following one of Walt Disney's golden rules about theme park design: "I don't want the public to see the real world they live in while they're in the park," Disney said, talking about his first theme park, Disneyland (1955), at Anaheim, California. "I want them to feel they are in another world."[18]

Since blocking the view of the mountains from inside Hong Kong Disneyland was difficult from a practical point of view and undesirable from a feng shui perspective, all that Disney's imagineers could do was make the best of a 'bad' situation: "Everyone from Southern California walks in and it strikes them right away—the train station, Main Street, the castle, even the music are the same as in

Anaheim…Then there's this beautiful mountain range right behind the castle. That's when you quickly realize you're in the South China Sea," said Disney imagineer Tom Morris.[19] However, this was the only case that I could find where Disney's design principles did not coincide with good feng-shui practice.

Disney's imagineers designed a landscaped embankment over 6 metres high around the perimeter of Hong Kong Disneyland in order to block the view of several manmade eyesores from inside the park, including three tall chimney stacks belonging to a coal-fired power station on nearby Lamma Island. In this case, the imagineers were following both Disney's design principles and also good feng-shui practice, because eyesores like these chimney stacks are potential sources of sha qi and should be hidden from view at the very least.

While the imagineers were probably unaware of it, they were also following in the footsteps of Kublai Khan (1215-1294), Emperor Zhu Di (1360-1424) and a number of other rulers of ancient China who had constructed huge earthworks around their palaces to protect them from malign outside forces.[20] The imagineers also used several other Chinese landscaping techniques at Hong Kong Disneyland, such as framing views, hiding views and using water reflections to advantage. They had also used them before at other theme parks, but without fully appreciating their Chinese origins.

Disney's feng shui experts suggested reorienting Hong Kong Disneyland's front entrance by 12 degrees from its original position. They also located several large rocks around the park to trap shang qi and prevent it from escaping. But as Tom Morris observed: "The thing that is most visible is the heavy usage of water in the park."[21]

The feng shui experts recommended that a fountain be placed outside Hong Kong Disneyland's front gates, to block a straight road leading to the park, i.e. a secret arrow. The fountain was designed by Disney's imagineers and featured Mickey Mouse surfing a jet of water shooting out the blowhole of Monstro the whale, illustrating that good feng shui does not exclude a sense of humour.

In addition, Disney's feng shui experts also proposed locations for a number of lakes, streams and waterfalls inside Hong Kong Disneyland. In my view, the fact that visitors to the park enjoy these landscape features regardless of whether or not they know anything about feng shui demonstrates how seamlessly the feng shui experts' recommendations were incorporated in the park.

Disney's feng-shui experts consulted the *Tung Shu*, the ancient Chinese almanac, and chose auspicious dates to perform the theme park's groundbreaking ceremony (12 January 2003), topping-out ceremony (23 September 2004) and opening ceremony (12 September 2005). Furthermore, a lot of the feng shui experts' advice was based on Chinese numerology.

In Chinese culture, '4' is considered to be a very unlucky number, because in Chinese it also sounds like 'death'. Consequently, Hong Kong Disneyland's two tourist hotels—the Victorian style Hong Kong Disneyland Hotel and the art deco style

Hollywood Hotel—do not have floors marked '4' for fear that like will produce like, i.e. people who live on the fourth floor will soon die as a result.

On the other hand, '8' is considered to be a very lucky number, because in Chinese it also sounds like 'fortune'. Furthermore, the number '8' physically resembles the Chinese character for 'happiness'. Consequently, the ballroom at the Hollywood Hotel is 888 square metres in area. This time it is the hope—not the fear—that like will produce like, i.e. its patrons will be triple fortunate and triple happy. Therefore, not surprisingly, the ballroom is one of the most popular venues for wedding receptions in Hong Kong. Over 300 couples planning to get married booked it before the park had even opened. One woman was so keen to hold her wedding reception there she booked it despite not yet having a boyfriend.

Another very lucky number is '2,238', because in Cantonese 'two, two, three, eight' also sounds like 'easily generates wealth'. Thus the Crystal Lotus, the up-market Chinese restaurant at the Hong Kong Disneyland Hotel, is decorated with 2,238 crystal lotus flowers. Once again, the hope is that like will produce like, i.e. eating at the restaurant will be good for one's business.

In order to achieve good feng shui, the five elements of Chinese cosmology—earth, fire, metal, water and wood—must be balanced in the environment. The feng-shui experts paid very close attention to this at the Crystal Lotus restaurant. The lotus flowers described above signify the element earth. Six computer-generated flames projected behind a row of bottles in the bar signify the element fire.[22] (Hong Kong's fire code wouldn't allow real naked flames in the restaurant.) Furthermore, the stoves in the kitchen were placed in auspicious places, while other areas were designated as 'no fire zones'. The restaurant's furniture is made from two more elements—metal and wood. Finally, a computer-generated fishpond projected onto the wall near the entrance signifies the element water. In addition, the computer-generated carp swimming in the fishpond are considered to very lucky, because, as mentioned previously, the word for 'fish' in Chinese also sounds like 'surplus'.

In China, auspicious symbols are sometimes incorporated into everyday objects to bring good luck to the people using them. Take the front door of an old house in Suzhou I once visited for example. The doorhandle was shaped like an ancient Chinese coin to represent wealth; the head of the door bolt was shaped like two peaches to represent longevity; and the escutcheon was shaped like a bat to represent happiness. Therefore, every time somebody simply opened this door they encountered wealth, long life and happiness.

Interestingly, a similar thing has been done at Hong Kong Disneyland's Hollywood Hotel. The three circles which make up Mickey Mouse's iconic head have been integrated into the hotel's carpets, curtains, doormats, furniture, grilles, light fittings, mirrors, planter boxes, windows, etc. As far as the Walt Disney Company is concerned, no symbol is more auspicious than those three circles.

Disney's feng-shui experts also fine-tuned the layouts of the retail stores in Main Street USA, "right down to where the cash registers are placed in every shop", according to Roy Tan Hardy, Hong Kong Disneyland's senior vice president of sales and marketing.[23] The feng shui experts made sure that nothing sharp was pointing

towards the doors. They also advised not to sell either clocks or green hats in the stores, because the words for 'giving a clock' in Cantonese also sound like 'going to a funeral', while the Chinese idiom "wearing a green hat" signifies a woman who cheats on her husband or boyfriend.

Finally, the feng-shui experts recommended using red throughout the park, because it symbolizes joy and is considered to be a very lucky colour. That is why, "particularly on Main Street USA, we see a lot of accents done in red", said Tom Morris.[24]

Feng shui's form school involves reading symbols—hills represent animals, fish symbolize money, numbers represent death or happiness, etc. Essentially, this is a type of storytelling, which also happens to be Disney's—and postmodern architecture's—bread and butter. Thus the rides, the landscape and even the food at Hong Kong Disneyland all serve to tell stories:

"First, everything is fundamentally story-based—we are storytellers,' said Jay Rasulo, Disney's president of theme parks and resorts. 'We use a broad variety of tools, technology and devices to deliver stories; fundamentally every ride and attraction really is a story.'[25]

"The landscaping is driven by the stories told at Hong Kong Disneyland," said Paul Comstock, Disney's director of landscape design. "It serves to support and exemplify the story lines inside the theme park including a jungle, a castle, fantasy themes, and a journey through space."[26]

"We brought the importance of the story to them," said Karlos Siquueiros, who travelled from Disneyland at Anaheim to train Hong Kong Disneyland's restaurant staff. 'In Anaheim, we say keep the story alive right down to the last bite.'[27]

In my view, storytelling through the design of buildings, everyday objects and the landscape is the main reason why Disney's design principles and good feng shui practice coincided so well at Hong Kong Disneyland. After all, the fantasy architecture of the theme park's four 'lands' or divisions—Adventureland, Fantasyland, Main Street USA, and Tomorrowland—is from practically the same mould as the Tanzi Hotel in the form of Fu, Lu and Shou; the fish-shaped town of Tsuen-cheu-fu and the fishing-net shaped town of Yung-chun; the symbolic door hardware on the old house in Suzhou; the breast-shaped tomb of Empress Wu—and so on.

CONCLUSION

Feng shui in general and the form school in particular is not only as a system of geomancy, but also an important mechanism for engaging with the built environment. It creates a strong bond between people and places; it provides an opportunity for people to participate in the building process both actively through ceremony and passively through narrative; it reflects people's aspirations and values via the built environment; it has a magical side and a rational side; and it is a powerful design tool. Significantly, postmodern architecture shares all of these characteristics.

Therefore, at least in my world, feng shui is a form of postmodern architectural expression, and postmodern architecture is a form of feng shui practice. While purists on both sides may very well disagree with me, I see advantages in merging the two ways of thinking in this manner, which could, for example, lead to feng shui being viewed in a wider, more accessible (and perhaps more acceptable) architectural context; and also help architects to regain their former role as a master of ceremonies.

---

[1] Anon., 'Telegraphs in China', *Northern Territory Times and Gazette*, 25 March 1882, p. 3.
[2] Alexander, C., Ishikawa, S., Silverstein, M., et al., *A Pattern Language: Towns, Buildings, Construction*, Oxford University Press, New York, USA, 1977, p.516.
[3] Frazer, Sir J.G. (1922), *The Golden Bough*, http:// www.bartleby.com/ 196/ 6.html, paragraph 40 (viewed 2/ 2/ 2017).
[4] Anon., *Wikipedia*, http:// en.wikipedia.org/ wiki/ Rock-paper-scissors (viewed 2/ 2/ 2017).
[5] For a general description of feng-shui see: Lip, E., *Chinese Geomancy*, Times Books International, Singapore, 1979.
[6] DeGroot, J.J.M., *The Religious System of China*, vol. 3, Brill, Leiden, 1887, p. 1041.
[7] Gittins, J., *The Diggers from China*, Quartet Books, Melbourne, 1981, p. 28.
[8] For a summary of the pros and cons for reversing feng shui rules of thumb see: Chan, S., "Authentic Xuan Kong Fei Xing Feng Shui http:// netgent1-creativelife.blogspot.com.au/ 2013/ 01/ should-we-turn-ba-gua-around-as-we-are.html (viewed 2/ 2/ 2017).
[9] Guo, P. (276-324), 'Zangshu or Book of Burial' (translated by Field, S.L.), http:// www.fengshuigate.com/ zangshu.html (viewed 2/ 2/ 2017).
[10] Groves, D., *Feng-Shui and Western Building Ceremonies*, Graham Brash, Singapore, 1991.
[11] Jencks, C. (1977), *The Language of Postmodern Architecture*, Academy Editions, London, 1978, p.118.
[12] Jencks, C., p.124.
[13] Groves, D., 1991, p.57.
[14] Groves, D., 1991, pp.40-41 and Groves, D., *Mail Art: The Do-It-Yourself Letterbox from Workshop to Gatepost*, Hale & Iremonger, Alexandria, NSW, 1998, pp.12-13.
[15] Waters, M., quoted in Showley, R., 'Hong Kong Disneyland Blends the New, Borrowed,' *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, 26 February 2006.
[16] Groves, D., 'Hong Kong Disneyland: Feng-Shui Inside the Magic Kingdom', in Jackson, K.M. and West, M.I. (eds.), *Disneyland and culture: essays on the parks and their influence*, McFarland, Jefferson, NC, 2011, pp.138-149.
[17] Wing, C. quoted in Krivada, C.D., 'Behind the Magic: Hong Kong Disneyland,' *Primavera Magazine*, vol.4, no.1, 2005, p.10.
[18] Disney, W. quoted in Sklar, M.A. (1964) *Walt Disney's Disneyland: The Behind-the-Scenes Story of How it was Done ..of the Man Who Made It Possible ..and of the Millions of Visitors Who Have Helped Make It the Happiest Place on Earth*, Walt Disney Productions, Anaheim, USA, 1969, unpaged.
[19] Morris, T. quoted in Himmelberg, M., 'Pacific Exchange' *Orange County Register*, 10 September 2005.
[20] Polo, M., *The Travels*, Penguin Books Ltd. Harmondsworth, 1978, p.27.
[21] Morris, T. quoted in Ashman, M., 'Disney Uses Feng-Shui to Build Mickey's New Kingdom in Hong Kong,' *USA Today* 7 September 2005. Also online at:

www.usatoday.com/ travel/ destinations/ 2005-09-07-feng-shui-disney_x.htm (viewed 2/ 2/ 2017).
[22] In addition, '6' is considered to be a very lucky number, because in Chinese it also sounds like 'well off'.
[23] Hardy, R.T. quoted in Gluckman, R., 'Mickey Mouse Meets Mao,' *Silk Road* (the magazine of Dragon Airlines), September 2005. Also online at: www.gluckman.com/ HKDisney.htm (viewed 2/ 2/ 2017).
[24] Morris, T. quoted in Ashman, M.
[25] Rasulo, J. quoted in Cellini, A., 'New Generation,' *Variety*, 28 April 2005. Also online at: www.variety.com/ article/ VR1117921882.html?categoryid=1928&cs=1 (viewed 2/ 2/ 2017).
[26] Comstock, P. quoted in Anon., 'HK Disneyland Unveils Landscape Design,' *People's Daily*, 19 September 2003. Also online at: www.chinadaily.com.cn/ en/ doc/ 2003-09/ 19/ content_265594.htm (viewed 2/ 2/ 2017).
[27] Siqueiros, K. quoted in Himmelberg, M.

Corresponding Author:

Dr Derham Groves
The University of Melbourne
Email: derham@unimelb.edu.au