

The Manifestation of Traditional Feng Shui in the Modern Urban Setting: the Practice and Contemporary Role of Feng Shui in Chinese Historic Neighbourhoods

2016

S Zhang

Abstract

The principles and techniques of Feng Shui have been widely practiced in Chinese communities. It is an intangible knowledge system that has influenced the tangible configuration of Chinese built environment. However, with the combination of mysterious theories and religious beliefs, Feng Shui has been regarded as superstitious and abandoned by the communist government. In addition, because of the fast urbanization process and the economic boom, the existence and evolution of Feng Shui has been threatened.

By studying Feng Shui as it was applied on historic neighbourhoods in China, this study aims to explore the current situation and the modern social attitudes towards Feng Shui. This study first introduces the basic principles and techniques of Feng Shui. Then it will illustrate the physical and social embodiment of Feng Shui with two historic neighbourhoods in Langzhong and Hong Kong. These two places have been shaped by Feng Shui principles and methods, and both of the Feng Shui landmarks and Feng Shui culture have been fairly well preserved. In addition, these two places have been run under different economic, political, social, and cultural systems, and indeed, have experienced different patterns of modernisation, which cause differences in the survival and evolution of Feng Shui. The data are collected from direct observation, documentation, archive, physical survey, and interviews.

The analysis shows that Feng Shui still exists in China in both physical and social sense. Despite having gone through two different patterns of modernisation in the two cases, Feng Shui tradition has evolved to adapting itself into the changing environment. Therefore, as a cultural belief and practice, it continues to be held and can be used in new ways in modern built environment. This study will be of interest to the scholars seeking to understand the undercurrent of Feng Shui as a cultural heritage in modern China.