



## Feng Shui and Buying House

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### Abstract

*This article attempts to quantify, using scientific tools, the extent of influence of feng shui principles on prospective purchaser's decision in buying house. Architectural and environmental principles are compared with feng shui principles. The factors to consider when buying a house are explained, and the uses of feng shui are outlined. Favourable (auspicious) and unfavourable (inauspicious) features of feng shui for houses are identified through literature review. Microsoft EXCEL is used to analyse the data collected and obtain other statistics.*

**Keywords:** *Feng shui, auspicious and inauspicious features, buying house*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

China was the cradle for one of the world's earliest and oldest civilisation [4] (People's Daily), which dated back some few thousand years ago. Chinese make up about one fifth of the world's population, which now stands at 6.45 billion [8] (The World Factbook). It is believed that feng shui started in China some five to six thousand years ago [6,3] (Webster, 2005, pg. 1; Shen, 2001, pg. 10). As such, the belief in and practice of feng shui is deeply rooted among the Chinese, and since it is not a recent phenomenon or creation, the ever popularity of everything related to feng shui is not a fad, and it will never come to pass.

The belief in chance, *feng shui*, luck, fate and destiny among the Chinese is pervasive. One ancient Chinese saying on good fortune sounds like this: "*Yi ming, er yun, san feng shui, si de, wu du shu*", which literally means "the most important factors influencing a person's life are fate first, luck second, *feng shui* third, virtue or philanthropy fourth, and studying fifth" [2,3,6] (Lip, 1986, pg. 25; Shen, 2001, pg. 11; Webster, 2005, pg. 3). If one was born to a poor family (which Chinese considers to be fated and due to luck), he could only count on the virtue and good deeds accumulated by his forefathers, and look up to education to improve and succeed in life. He could use *feng shui* to guide him to live in harmony with the world and everyone, to improve every aspect of his life, including luck. This explains

why education is very important to the Chinese.

The belief in and the practice of *feng shui* among the Chinese permeates through almost every aspect of their activities. It is very much a part and parcel of their life. This could be explained as *feng shui*, besides Chinese medicine, Taoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, is one of the principal pillars of Chinese culture. Shen [3] (2001, pg. 15) put it succinctly, that "*feng shui* was not an esoteric discipline practised only by certain tribal members in ancient China, it was an integral part of native culture, something that touched everyone's life."

*Feng shui*, influenced Chinese architecture too [3] (Shen, 2001, pg. 14). Lip [2] (1986, pg. 6) mentioned that "it has exerted its influence on numerous people and puzzled countless architects, interior designers and developers." Lip [2] (1986, pg. 25) advised that it is best to consider architectural and environmental principles together with feng shui principles. This is because good architecture is synonymous with good *feng shui*, and vice versa. The School of Design of one renowned local college recently held a special seminar entitled "Applying *Feng Shui* in Design for Art of Living" by Grand Master Yap Cheng Hai (The Star, 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2005).

*Feng shui* is strongly associated with Taoist tenet on nature as the ultimate power. Taoists believe that "humans, as part of nature, will benefit by following

natural laws. Because nature is perfectly balanced, a house or other structure can cause imbalance unless carefully placed. Living out of balance with nature eventually affects mankind [3] (Shen, 2001, pg. 17)." Newtonian mechanics predicts that a building that is statically not in equilibrium would be unstable, and eventually collapse.

According to Shen [3] (2001, pg.11), modern Chinese believe that the following elements influence good fortune, namely, fate, opportunity, *feng shui*, doing good things for next life, studying, timing, location, and people. The widespread application of *feng shui* is evident from:

- a) various advertisements put up in newspapers such as Cheng's *Feng Shui* services (StarMetro, The Star, 27th October 2005) which include:
  - house, condominium, factory, office, shop, mall and vacant land.
  - feng shui of ancestor's tomb, and
  - feng shui courses.
- b) numerous courses and seminars on feng shui organised by various institutions, including reputable institutions of higher learning for enhancing life and career, as well as doing business.

From her experience as an architect, Lip [2] (1986, pg. 5) argued that the practice of feng shui, though ancient, can still be used to guide us in building and furniture placement. She encouraged her readers to

place the interior elements in their homes according to geomantic principles for enhancement, even though structurally it is impossible to re-orientate their homes. Shen, an architect too, believed that “one can successfully practice feng shui without a practitioner. All that is needed is common sense. It was created through common sense and still works as common sense [3] (Shen, 2001, pg. 9)”.

The aims of this article are twofold, to investigate whether:

- a) prospective buyer uses *feng shui* to help him/her when looking for a choise house, and
- b) *feng shui* influences one’s decision in buying or not buying a house.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Definitions on Feng Shui

*Feng shui*, in Mandarin, literally means “wind and water”. *Feng shui* is also known as Chinese geomancy [2] (Lip, 1986, pg. 1). Shen [3] (2001, pg.10) mentioned that Chinese considered *feng shui* to be interrelated to the following disciplines: astrology, ecology, geology, psychology, astronomy, geography, and meteorology.

Shen [3] (2001, pg. 18) defined *feng shui* as the “art and science of life-space design”. *Feng shui*, as one of the healing arts in Taoism, is the science of maximising natural positive energy by strategic placement to allow people to exist harmoniously with the earth [3] (Shen, 2001, pg. 17). Lip [2] (1986, pg.1) mentioned that *feng shui* is the art of placement of things, ranging from the orientation of buildings to the furnishing of interiors, to influence the *chi*, *qi* or cosmic breadth of a site. According to Webster [6] (2005, pg. 1), it means living in harmony with the environment.

### 2.2 Factors to Consider when Buying a House

If one has to work for eight hours everyday, it is simple mathematics to calculate that about two-third of one’s time is spent at home. Buying a house is a major decision, which financially involves a huge sum of money, and ties one down for some 15 – 20 years if one was to buy a house by hire purchase. Whether one is buying a new house or second home, there are many factors/aspects to consider, among them are location and

locality (or neighbourhood), availability of facilities/amenities, accessibility, connectivity (or transportation) for mobility to work, and affordability or price. Internally, there are many details to deliberate too: façade, design, shape, style and décor, and size. It is rather difficult to mention which one is the deciding factor and most important.

Since one might be shifting again later, and buying a house is a lifetime investment for the majority of people [1] (Diana Chin and Loo Pik Kwan, 2005), it is important to always remember that one buys a house with selling in mind. There is a high probability that, the features of a house that make the owner comfortable and fit will also attract prospective buyers later on. Therefore, when one is buying a house, special consideration should be paid to the following:

- a) Growth potential: look for an established neighbourhood where its value will be enhanced by future growth.
- b) Resale value/Price appreciation: seek a prime neighbourhood where houses sell well at any time, and appreciate in value in a short time.
- c) Location: consider availability of facilities or amenities for convenience, recreation and entertainment, and all aspects of transportation for mobility to work.

With these three considerations in mind, the influence of feng shui on buyer’s decision in selecting a house is understandable. SWOT could be used to help one in identifying the deciding factors, as given in Table 1.

### 2.3 Comparing Architectural and Environmental Principles WITH FENG SHUI PRINCIPLES

#### 2.3.1 Location

Good architectural or structural design advises one to construct a building on strong foundation, such as on originally virgin ground. It is rather risky to buy a house constructed on:

- a) Backfilled grounds, reclaimed lands, and ex-mining lands which are susceptible to foundation failures and settlement problems. Use of deep foundation as a remedy would incur higher construction cost. Too [5] (1994, pg. 40) said that the earth *chi* in such places is often unstable, and hence these places are inauspicious.

- b) Foothills, sloping places, or places close to steep slope and precipice which are prone to erosion and land slips/slides.

Too [5] (1994, pg. 97) considered these places as inauspicious because beneficial *chi* flows downhill and disappears, hence could not be tapped.

- c) Low lying areas, which are liable to flooding problems if drainage is poor or there is no proper/good drainage design.

From *feng shui* viewpoint, Shen [3] (2001, pp. 80 – 81) considered these places as inauspicious because *feng shui* is concerned with safety.

#### 2.3.2 Exterior of Building

Table 2 is a brief comparison or architectural and environmental principles with feng shui principles on the exterior of a building.

#### 2.3.3 Interior of Buildings

Table 3 is a brief comparison of architectural and environmental principles with feng shui principles on the interior of a building, with the building fabric acting

Table 1: SWOT Analysis to Determine Deciding Factors

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Availability of amenities/facilities	Expensive	Job opportunities	Natural hazards (water and air pollution)
Accessibility	Traffic jam	Good appreciation in price	Social ills
Resale potential	Bad <i>feng shui</i>	High resale value	Hard to resell. High holding cost
Growth potential	High population density	High rental/Quick to rent out	Natural calamities (earthquakes, typhoons, floods)

Table 2: Exterior of a Building

Exterior of a Building	
Environmental Principles (Lip, 1986, pg. 18)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- If a building is designed without proper protection, rain will penetrate the interior and dampness will spoil the internal finishes.</li> <li>- If the roof is not designed at the appropriate angle, rain water will seep in.</li> </ul>
Environmental Principles (Shen, 2001, pg. 155)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- It is important to orientate a home to take advantage of pleasant weather while simultaneously protecting humans from more severe elements.</li> </ul>
(Shen, 2001, pg. 155)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Environmentally comfortable conditions to humans are:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Temperature: 17 – 27 0C,</li> <li>b) Humidity: 30 % – 70 %,</li> <li>c) Wind speed: 0.1 – 5 miles per hour,</li> <li>d) Sunlight: appropriate amount to keep a home healthy and fresh,</li> <li>e) Rain: appropriate amount to maintain plant growth and water supplies for human use.</li> </ol> </li> </ul>
<i>Feng Shui</i> Principles (Shen, 2001, pg. 154)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Severe weather conditions can disrupt the constant, steady flow of <i>chi</i> within the body.</li> <li>- Severe weather conditions affect the earth's magnetic and energy fields, which, in turn disrupts the constant, steady flow of health-supportive <i>chi</i> within the body.</li> </ul>

Table 3: Interior of a Building

Interior of a Building	
Environmental Principles (Lip, 1986, pg. 60)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The building should be well protected from weather, and radiation from the sun should be minimised.</li> <li>- Good ventilation is also important.</li> </ul>
Environmental Principles (Lip, 1986, pg. 60)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Using space, light, and colour to create an atmosphere appropriate for dining, sleeping and working.</li> <li>- A house should have good functional plan with good circulation and an interesting spatial concept. It should be aesthetically pleasing, with a good sense of proportion and an appropriate colour scheme.</li> </ul>
<i>Feng Shui</i> Principles (Lip, 1986, pg. 60)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Placement of furniture and the location of <i>chi</i> can enhance the potential of the occupants.</li> <li>- Good feng shui is synonymous with good ventilation, appropriate lighting, good proportion, and a sense of balance. <i>Chi</i> should flow through the body the way fresh air flows through the house.</li> </ul>

Table 4: Feng Shui viewpoint on location of houses

Location	<i>Feng shui</i> viewpoint	References			
		Lip (1986)	Shen (2001)	Webster (2005)	L.Too (1994)
a. At a T-junction.	Unfavourable	Pg.14	Pg.90	Pg.28-29	Pg.27, Pg.42
b. At an interchange.	Unfavourable			Pg.30	
c. At a dead-end or cul-de-sac.	Unfavourable	Pg. 14	Pg.90	Pg.31	Pg.27
d. Near to transmission lines.	Unfavourable		Pg.159	Pg.34	Pg.27-28
e. Besides an area for heavy industry	Unfavourable		Pg.161		
f. On top of a hill or elevated ground	Unfavourable				Pg.97
g. Facing the gap between two tall buildings	Unfavourable			Pg.33	Pg.51
h. With power substation nearby	Unfavourable				Pg.40
i. With large water tank nearby	Unfavourable				Pg.40
j. With sewage treatment plant nearby	Unfavourable	No reference			

as an environmental envelope to create a built environment that is comfortable to live and work in.

#### 2.4 Feng Shui in Buying House

Shen (2001, pg. 84) advised those who are

in the market for a new house to think about its orientation. Webster (2005, pg. 37) commented that buying a home is the most expensive purchase one will ever make. As such, it is vitally important that one chooses a home that will be well

suiting for one's needs and also contains plenty of beneficial *chi*. The importance of feng shui is clearly explained by Shen (2001):

“The purpose behind feng shui is to balance the energy or *chi*. Design of our surroundings affects the flow of *chi*, and has a tremendous impact on our subconscious over time. For good health, serenity, peace of mind and even wealth, conception, and luck, this energy must circulate unimpeded throughout a person's environment.”

In his foreword, Stephen Skinner (Shen, 2001) equated luck to opportunity, and wrote that “feng shui stirs up the subtle environment in such a way that more opportunities are attracted to the person who has improved his or her feng shui”. Webster (2005) mentioned that “in feng shui, one always looks for places where *chi* accumulates or forms as this is the perfect place to live happy, prosperous, successful lives.”

On the contrary, inauspicious feng shui features such as severe angles, awkwardly placed doors and windows, and other factors are to be avoided because they can disrupt the constant, steady flow of this important energy or *chi* (Shen, 2001).

Shen (2001) suggested the following uses for feng shui:

a) To help in determining a comfortable location that benefits one's health, career, wealth, luck and family.

Table 4 gives a list of inauspicious locations to be avoided when looking for a house to buy. Note that different authors give the same feng shui interpretation for the same feature.

b) To determine a building's relationship with the environment through geomantic theory of the outside environment, to help one to locate and adjust the orientation, shape, entrance, road, and exterior factors of a house to make it more auspicious.

Lip (1986) argued that the layout of the buildings should be in harmony with the surrounding environment and in balance with the neighbouring blocks. She opined that buildings in the tropics should be oriented in such a way that

Table 5: Feng Shui viewpoint on exterior features of buildings

Orientation with Environment/ Exterior of Buildings	Feng shui viewpoint	References			
		Lip (1986)	Shen (2001)	Webster (2005)	Wong Seng Tian (1995)
a. Directly facing a transmission tower	Unfavourable		Pg.159		
b. Directly facing a lamp post	Unfavourable				Pg.57, Pg.60
c. Directly facing an electric pole	Unfavourable				Pg.57, Pg.60
d. Directly facing the chimney of a factory	Unfavourable			Pg.32	Pg.42, Pg.57
e. Directly facing a tall building	Unfavourable			Pg.32	
f. With a river at the back	Unfavourable				Pg.40, Pg.46
g. Facing a cemetery	Unfavourable			Pg.32	Pg.40, Pg.45
h. Facing a funeral parlour	Unfavourable				Pg.40, Pg.45
i. Facing a hospital	Unfavourable			Pg.32	Pg.40, Pg.44
j. Facing a transmission tower	Unfavourable			Pg.28	
k. Facing a T-junction	Unfavourable			Pg.28	Pg.40, Pg.57
l. With main door facing gate	Unfavourable				Pg.57
m. Directly facing a tree	Unfavourable		Pg.104		Pg.42, Pg.57

Table 6: Feng Shui viewpoint on interior features of buildings

Interior of Buildings	Feng shui viewpoint	References			
		Lip (1986)	Shen (2001)	Webster (2005)	Wong Seng Tian (1995)
a. With a spiral staircase	Unfavourable		Pg.106	Pg.42	
b. Has an inauspicious house number such as 4, 14, 34, 44,54, etc.	Unfavourable	Pg.71			
c. With staircase facing main door of the house	Unfavourable	Pg.48			Pg.57, Pg.60
d. With toilet directly above the main door of the house	Unfavourable	Pg.56	Pg.69		
e. With main door and back door of the house in a straight line	Unfavourable	Pg.43	Pg.52	Pg.40	Pg.57, Pg.64
f. It is an L-shaped house	Unfavourable		Pg.98	Pg.38	
g. It is an U-shaped house	Unfavourable		Pg.98	Pg.38	
h. Split levels, with living room and dining room at different levels	Unfavourable		Pg.69		
i. Bathroom door facing bedroom door	Unfavourable		Pg.69		
j. Kitchen door facing bedroom door	Unfavourable		Pg.62		
k. Main door on the left-hand side of the front of the house	Unfavourable			Pg.119	

they benefit from cross breezes, so that the interiors are cool and comfortable. She advised that, in Singapore, it is best to orient a building north/south because of the path of the sun. This principle is applicable to buildings in Malaysia too as both countries are located near the equator.

Table 5 gives a list of unfavourable exterior features to be avoided when looking for a house. Note that, again, different authors give the same feng shui interpretation for the same feature.

- c) To determine a building's relationship with humans.

The interior design of a house has great influence on one's health and luck. Factors which can help or hinder the flow of chi include furniture placement, decorating materials and colour schemes.

Table 6 gives a list of unfavourable interior features of buildings to be avoided when looking for a house. Again, different authors give the same feng shui interpretation for the same feature.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

Questionnaire survey is employed to collect the data for this research, which is needed to quantify the extent of influence of feng shui principles on prospective purchaser's decision in buying house.

Based on the three uses of feng shui as suggested by Shen (2001, pg. 10), a survey questionnaire with the following framework is designed. In Section 1, the name, age and occupation of each respondent are requested to ensure that the data elicited came from prospective adults with potential to buy a house in the near future for personal residence or investment.

Section 2, with five parts, uses a dichotomous nominal scale of yes or no. The respondents are requested to answer questions on locations and surrounding features, geometrical shape of house, façade and direction, interior features of the house, and other related factors. The scoring is deemed sufficient as favourable (suitable) or unfavourable (unsuitable) is a fairly determinate question. Question 26 in Part E of Section 2 is an open-ended question.

The questionnaires were administered to prospective buyers who came to the show office of a housing developer in Seremban who recently launched a new phase. One of the authors waited for the respondents during office hours (from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.) for a continuous period of three days.

### 4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

A total of 50 completed questionnaires were collected. The average age is 36 years old, a potential age for most people to buy a house for personal residence or lifetime investment. The results are presented in Tables 7 to 9.

All the respondents considered graveyard and funeral parlour as unfavourable surrounding features for houses. Vincent Ng, Chief Executive Officer of Kim Realty, could only admit defeat in salvaging such unwise choices when the problem lies with an unbearable hindrance which is an eyesore (Diana Chin & Loo Pik Kwan, 2005). Another totally unfavourable feature is houses located near to the LRT lines.

For all the features considered as inauspicious for houses by the feng shui practitioners, majority of respondents considered them as unfavourable too. This is clearly reflected in the percentages (about 70% and above) collected for features mentioned in Questions 1 – 25.

Table 7: Results of questionnaire survey

Question Number	Question	Percentages	
		Yes	No
<b>Part A: Location and surrounding features</b> <b>Questions 1 – 5:</b> Imagine you are a prospective purchaser who wishes to own a house, which of the following locations you consider are unfavourable in <i>feng shui</i> and unsuitable for residential houses	1. A house located ext to an industrial area.	98%	2%
	2. Located alone on top of a hill.	74%	26%
	3. Located beside LRT rails.	100%	0%
	4. Located at dead-end street or cul-de-sac.	98%	2%
	5. Located at cross-roads.	96%	4%
<b>Part A: Location and surrounding features</b> <b>Questions 6 – 10:</b> Which of the following surrounding features mentioned are considered bad <i>feng shui</i> for a house?	6. Electrical sub-station	86%	14%
	7. High voltage tower	92%	8%
	8. Graveyard	100%	0%
	9. Funeral parlour	100%	0%
	10. A house will enjoy excellent <i>feng shui</i> if larger buildings are located at the back and empty field is located is located in front.	96%	4%
<b>Part B: Geometrical Shape of the house</b> <b>Questions 1 – 5:</b> Of the follow-ing geometrical shape, which one is considered favourable and relatively suitable for the design of residential houses?	11. Rectangular shaped	92%	8%
	12. Cutting blade shaped	14%	86%
	13. Too angular shaped	24%	76%

Table 8: Results of questionnaire survey (continue)

Question Number	Question	Percentages	
		Yes	No
<b>Part C: Facade and direction</b>	14. Facade of a house with elegant design is considered good <i>feng shui</i> because it would attract good chi flowing into the house	90%	10%
	15. Direction in which the main door is facing is one of the factors purchasers would consider because it would effect the <i>feng shui</i> of the house.	92%	8%
<b>Part D: Interior of the house</b> Feng shui of a house would be affected if the features mentioned below are found inside the house. As a purchaser, would these features affect your decision making?	16. A series of doors placed in a straight line	78%	22%
	17. Too many corners in the living room	84%	16%
	18. Bedroom door facing the main door	90%	10%
	19. Bedroom is facing a long and dark hallway	88%	12%
	20. Ceiling of dining room designed with openings or windows	66%	34%
	21. Dining room facing the toilet door	80%	20%
	22. Toilet on 2 <sup>nd</sup> floor located on top of main door	74%	26%
<b>Part E: Other related factors</b> Other than the features mentioned above, would you consider also the:	24. Colour scheme used for the house	80%	20%
	25. House or lot number of the house	90%	10%
	26. Other features (please state)	This is an open-ended question. The responses are summarised in Table 9.	

## 5. CONCLUSION

The results of the questionnaire survey, which were distributed to prospective buyers who visited the show office during the launching of a new housing

development, clearly showed that prospective buyers use *feng shui* to help one in looking for a choice house. The ordinary Chinese folks, though devoid of architectural knowledge, have appreciable

knowledge of *feng shui* to guide them in deciding the best house to buy. This is perfectly practicable as good *feng shui* is synonymous with good architecture, as exerted by Lip (1986, pg. 25). ■

Table 9: Results of questionnaire survey (continue)

Question Number	Total No. of Responses
26. Main door is facing poison arrow.	2
Road level is higher than the floor level of house.	5
Drive way at 45-degree slope.	1
Main door is facing lamp post (a poison arrow).	5
House is facing spiritual structures (Church, temple, etc).	5
House is facing oxidation pond/sewage treatment plant.	6
House is located near to river bank.	1
Fence wall is higher than the house.	2
Stove location.	2
Swimming pool with too many corners.	1
Exposed ceiling beams.	2
House is located at T-junction.	5
House is located at Y-junction.	3
House is facing factory chimney (a poison arrow).	1
House at sloping site.	2
Design.	1
House is facing hospital/healthcare centre.	2
House is surrounded by tall buildings.	2
Spiral staircase in the house.	1
Brightness of the house.	2
House with two main doors.	2
Isolated column inside the house.	1
Appropriately big car porch is considered good feng shui "Spirit" of the house (First impression).	4
House with too many openings (windows and doors).	1
House is too big for few occupants.	1
House with too elegant design.	1

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