

Analysis of the Application of Traditional “Feng Shui” Theory in Modern Home Space

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Abstract

Feng Shui theory is a traditional Chinese cultural specialized cultural phenomenon. It manifests in all aspects in society and is closely related to people's lives. This paper conducts research on Feng Shui theory in home space. By researching the origin of Feng Shui theory and Feng Shui theory's performance in home space, the paper focuses on research of the application of traditional Feng Shui theory in modern home space design and then concludes that Feng Shui theory is useful to modern home space design.

Key words: Feng Shui theory; Home space; Application research

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INTRODUCTION

Feng Shui theory is a cultural phenomenon with Chinese characteristics. It is derived from the *Book of Changes*. It has developed and integrated with Yin Yang and the Five Xing, including the content of philosophy, aesthetics, operational research and environmental art science and etc. It is a comprehensive science. Currently, there are various different views and opinions in society for the research on Feng Shui. There are two typical views: one is that people think Feng Shui is absolute and they completely follow the Feng Shui concept to live and

even become obsessed with it. The behavior increases the mystique of Feng Shui, making it difficult for most people to accept; the other one is that they don't believe that Feng Shui is scientific and authentic and never care about Feng Shui, which is not desirable either. First, Feng Shui is a tendency theory in which we try to avoid danger and tend to get auspiciousness. We do things according to the views and approaches proposed by Feng Shui. As long as the direction is correct and we are taking efforts towards auspiciousness, the result might be good. Second, Feng Shui is a system theory; Feng Shui theory takes the whole living environment as an overall system. Each subsystem in the environment is an element that restricts each other, depends on each other and mutually transforms. The function of Feng Shui theory is to microscopically grasp and coordinate the relationship between systems to achieve the most harmonious state.

1. FENG SHUI AND HOME SPACE

1.1 The Origin of Feng Shui Theory

“Feng Shui” mainly refers to the comprehensive evaluation of the climate, geology, geomorphology, ecology and landscape and other architectural environmental elements as well as the general outline of some techniques and various taboos in the construction when ancient people selected building sites (Sun, 2012). It originated in the early humans' choosing a place to settle down, formed in Han and Jin dynasties, matured in Tang, Song and Yuan dynasties, and increasingly improved in Ming and Qing dynasties. In ancient times, Feng Shui was prevalent all over the country and it was an important factor which affected people's life in all aspects. Professor Pan Guxi in the book, *The Origin of Feng Shui*, points out that:

The core of Feng Shui is the knowledge of people's selection of their living environment, which included residential building,

palaces, tombs, temples, villages, urban planning and etc. Places involved in mausoleum are called Yin Zhai and places involved in residential living are called Yang Zhai.

Long-term practice has proved that the content of Feng Shui has scientific reasons and it is the experience of our ancestors summarized a lot of practices. It is linked with the concept of human care and healthy living that are advocated today. Therefore, when studying Feng Shui, we should uphold an objective position, while absorbing the latest achievements in academia, and take Feng Shui as a traditional cultural phenomenon as well as a scope of folklore.

1.2. Elements of Feng Shui Theory That Affect Home Space

There are many elements in Feng Shui theory involving affecting home space and the reasons are also very complicated. The most prominent elements are air culture, light culture and botanical culture; the so-called “air” in a room, also known as “making air”, is the material to keep everything vital. In Feng Shui theory, it is important to hide the wind, obtain the water and gather the air. The most important thing in Feng Shui is to keep the “air” in the room so as to have beneficial effects on people. Jiang Pingjie in Ming dynasty says in “On The Skillful Transformation of Air” in *The Water and Dragon Book* that:

The very origin of the nature is air and then comes out of water. When dirt gathers in water, there come out mountains. Air is the parent of water. It transforms the forms in many ways. It can go up to the sky and down to the earth. It creates everything.

In Feng Shui theory, air is divided into vital air, dead air, Yin air, Yang air, storing air and air pulse and etc. It is believed that no matter for living people or dead people, as long as they can get air, they have good omen. The aim of Feng Shui is to manage the air, i.e. seeking for vital air. The so-called places of vital air should be: Places which can avoid wind, face the sun, have flowing water, growing trees, singing birds and flowers. From this we can see that, the concept of making air is of practical significance in modern home design. Modern home design aims to create a vibrant living environment where the air is adequate, the ventilation flows smoothly and the temperature and the humidity are pleasant.

The so-called “light” in Feng Shui mainly means how to appropriately use light in the living environment and the light mainly refers to sunlight. Ancient and modern Feng Shui experts are all very serious about the orientation and the sunlight of the house and they often have the pursuit of “sunny mansion” and suggest people avoiding “a house in the shade”. There are also some Chinese poems describing how sunlight brings blessing to people. In addition to the light of the house and the improvement of the hygiene conditions of the house, modern house design emphasizes lighting. Appropriate lighting makes people’s visual function and nervous

system in a comfortable state and has a positive impact on people physically and psychologically. If the lighting is inappropriate, it will not only produce light pollution, but also produce damage to the human body. If one lives in such an environment for a long time, this will destroy his vision, make his nerves excessively tense, and lead to general fatigue, resulting in mental illness. From this we can see that, light culture plays an important role in modern design.

The last important element in Feng Shui is the “plant”. The plant is listed as an important part in Feng Shui for house design and there are two reasons: the first one is that plant is a “living” creature which has the vitality; the second one is that plants must rely on sunlight to survive, which is a symbol of maturity and exuberant yang air. (Chen, 2009) In Feng Shui theory, plants also are divided into Yin, Yang and the Five Xing. To place plants in different orientation in home space will produce a special regulation. Especially in recent years, with the intensifying of air pollution, people’s pursuit of ecological environment and the desire to reduce the radiation of various electrical devices appropriately shows in the design of plants in their home space and the role of plants becomes particularly important. They reduce the radiation, regulate the air flow, and make the living environment full of vitality.

2. RESEARCH ON THE APPLICATION OF TRADITIONAL FENG SHUI THEORY IN MODERN HOME SPACE

2.1 The Application in Modern Home Space Design Concepts

The core of traditional Feng Shui theory is the thought of “harmony between heaven, earth and people”. Our ancestors have always been focusing on exploring the harmony between the living environment and the natural environment when they select the living environment. They emphasize that we should follow the laws of nature and oppose any form of violating the laws of nature to transform the nature. In *Inner Canon of Yellow Emperor*, it says that “as the progenitor of heaven and earth, for the respect of pregnancy, to follow it will enjoy and to oppose it will be punished.” It clearly states the benefits of following the laws of nature and proposes that we should follow the laws of nature and shape the ideal life pattern with the practice of prevailing circumstances. This Feng Shui idea is consistent with the “people-oriented” design idea which we advocate today. The “people-oriented” design idea in modern home space design stresses to start the design with the needs of people, including people’s physical and psychological health and people’s development. The Feng Shui theory in modern home space is rooted in Chinese culture under traditional

Chinese way of thinking. It ultimately makes people's living environment achieve imitation of nature and harmony between man and nature.

2.2. Application in Home Space Selection

According to traditional Chinese Feng Shui theory, the best selection of the site for people's living environment is bearing Yin and hugging Yang and relying on mountains and facing water. This is the ideal architectural Feng Shui pattern and also an important principle of an approach to selecting the site of ancient settlements and architectures, which is scientific in some way. With the development of the society, this Feng Shui pattern is still reflected in the modern living environment.

2.2.1 The Structural Selection of Home Space

The *House Canon of Yellow Emperor* says:

A house takes the condition as its body, spring as its blood, land as its flesh, grass and trees as its hair, rooms as its clothes, doors as its hat band. If one has such a house, it is really elegant and extremely auspicious.

It vividly states ancient people's requirements on the structure of their living space. Whether the space structure is good or bad has a very important significance to the emotion and life of the occupants, because the structural selection of the home space is an irreversible congenital factor which usually influences the ventilation, lighting, air and sewage and other function of the whole house and then influence the life and health of the occupants. Therefore, to measure whether the structure of the home space is reasonable or not, we should first review whether the overall pattern and the configuration of the hardware structure are reasonable or not and whether they are in compliance with the relevant national residence norms. Reasonable living space structure must have a good pattern with excellent ventilation and lighting which can provide the occupants with excellent experience and feelings on the perception, sight, smell and other senses as well as psychological aspect.

2.2.2 Selection of the Living Area

The *House Canon of Yellow Emperor* points out that:

A house has five weaknesses which leads to poverty: the first weakness is that the house is too big while the people are too few; the second one is that the house gate is big while the inside is small; the third one is that the wall of the yard is incomplete; the fourth one is that the well and the kitchen are not convenient; the fifth one is that the house land is large while the rooms are few and the yard is too large.

From this we can see, the size of the house and the number of people are in a Yin and Yang relationship and there must be a balance between them. Yin Yang means the vitality. It clearly points out the relationship between the residential space capacity and people. Therefore, the size of the house needs to consider the number of occupants. If many people are in a small area, there will be a crowded feeling and the occupants will easily feel agitated.

However, if there are few people in a large area, the place will appear deserted and lonely and the occupants will suffer in body and mind. This shows that the size of the living space area does have a significant impact on the occupants. Only when the room space is directly proportional to the energy emitted by the occupants will balance and harmony between man and residential space be achieved. Otherwise, people's energy may easily be dissipated, causing illness and psychological discomfort. Therefore, when we select residential space, we must consider its impact on human psychology.

2.2.3 Orientation Selection of the House

Traditional Chinese Feng Shui theory emphasizes that the landscape, topography and orientation, etc. of the house is essential for a family's fortune. The selection of the orientation of the house is especially important since it is the standard for the occupants to avoid bad luck, get fortune and gather luck. The most fundamental purpose of the orientation selection of the house in Feng Shui theory is the pursuit of the lighting and ventilation of the room. With regard to the lighting of the room, Feng Shui theory says "south faces the sun and it is bright and open" to indicate the importance of adequate sunlight. In this way, it will form a good ecological environment. The room lighting is mainly based on direct sunlight. On the one hand, the radiation of the sun can sterilize virus to maintain the health and hygiene inside the room. On the other hand, we should avoid excessive exposure to sunlight to avoid physical harm to occupants. There are specific requirements regarding sunshine in the national residential norms. Secondly, the best room orientation also should have good ventilation. Rooms such as kitchen and bathroom will produce water vapor easily. If the ventilation is poor, the room will be too humid, and that on the one hand will grow bacteria and harm physical health and on the other hand will damage the building. We can see that Feng Shui theory in home space look mysterious. It has been constantly mystified in its development process and its scientific features have been concealed.

2.3 Application in Room Space Design

In addition to its application in home space selection, traditional Feng Shui theory also involves every corner in home space. In the following section, I am going to discuss the application of Feng Shui theory in the entrance of the house and some other functional layouts.

2.3.1 The Design of the Entrance of the House

Traditional Feng Shui theory emphasizes the design of the entrance of a house in most. The first one is the gate which is called the air exhaling and gathering portal. Our ancestors took the gate as the face of their house. It is the air inlet of welcoming fortune and gathering luck. The environment and orientation of the gate are vital for the host's fortune; the Feng Shui of the gate is a symbol of the home pros and cons. For example, the gate facing east is

called “Li” gate which stands for the place of sunrise with a lot of Yang air and symbolizes vitality. The gate facing south is called “Qian” gate, which stands for sitting in the north and facing the south and symbolizes big success of one’s official career. In terms of modern home entrance space, the gate is also called small air mouth. The orientation of the gate and the layout and air field that the landscape and surroundings have formed will also have a great effect on the living space.

The second one is the Feng Shui layout of the porch. As the transition space of the living space, the importance of the porch cannot be underestimated. The biggest Feng Shui function of the porch is to invisibly defuse bad luck and disasters. There are two approaches for the porch to defuse bad luck: One is to push the outside air to change its direction and the other one is to avoid the lucky air going out. The porch can change the direction of bad luck air entering the entrance and it can also prevent lucky air from leaking out. In these ways, it achieves the fortune and avoids disasters in Feng Shui. In addition, Feng Shui theory also advocates that “the design should be roundabout and avoid straightness.” That means the lucky air and fortune air entering from the gate should be roundabout in the room and the role of the porch is to make the lucky air swirl more in the room and we should avoid the gate and the windows form a direct line. Additionally, the porch can not only change the air direction at the entrance, but also plays the role to decorate the entrance. Therefore, whether its decorative function or its function in Feng Shui, the role of the porch cannot be underestimated.

2.3.2 Other Functional Space Design

The first one is the living room. As the main place for conducting communicative activities of the occupants, the status of the living room space is more prominent. Good Feng Shui for the living room is also crucial. China’s ancient Feng Shui emphasizes the thought of “hemispherical heaven and square earth”; therefore, traditional houses in China are mostly square. From the perspective of Feng Shui, a square house is favorable. Square residential place belongs to earth in the Five Xing. Rectangular residential place belongs to wood in the Five Xing. Therefore, the living room should be square for the best while narrow, long and irregular living rooms are considered unlucky and such living rooms will bring uncomfortable psychological and visual feelings to the occupants.

The second one is the bedroom. As an important place to rest, the occupants will be influenced by the energy of the bedroom for a long time and the environment of the bedroom will directly influence the occupants’ mental and physical health; therefore, the design of the bedroom is also very important. According to Feng Shui requirements for the bedroom, the area should be smaller than that of the living room. In terms of the orientation, it

should choose east and north and avoid south and west. Meanwhile, the room should be square for the best and avoid a circular shape. The overall environment should be quiet, gentle and peaceful to create a relaxed environment for the occupants.

Like other rooms, the design of the dining room should use a square pattern for the best. Square is a more structured space and it gives a comfortable feeling to people. From the perspective of Feng Shui, the dining room should not directly face the gate of the house because the dining room symbolizes the fortune of the family and should avoid being seen by guests. The dining room door should not be opposite to the door of the bathroom to avoid the smell from the toilet affecting the emotion of the diners.

Finally, the kitchen and the bathroom are the sewage room space of the house and they also play an important role in home space design. The bathroom space design particularly influences the happiness and health of the occupants. Our ancestors paid a lot of attention to the location of the bathroom. According to the combination of the original Eight Diagrams in Feng Shui theory, the air site, the Yannian site, the Tianyi site, the Fuwei site, the Disaster site, the Six Sha site, the Five Ghosts site and the Jueming site listed in order. It emphasizes that the bathroom is a polluted place and should be designed at the Jueming site, using the way of “combating poison with poison” to change bad luck into good luck. In addition, it also stressed that the bathroom should be set at a hidden place with the premise of good ventilation and lighting and should not be set in the center of the house. Particularly the bathroom cannot be opposite to the gate to prevent the center being contaminated and damage the fortune of the house.

CONCLUSION

From the early theory and practice researches, we can see that traditional Chinese Feng Shui theory mainly explore the harmony of people’s living environment from a macro perspective. For living environment in particular, the integration of Feng Shui theory provides more good living conditions of tending auspicious and avoiding bad luck for the occupants. The reason why Feng Shui theory looks so mysterious is that there are few people understanding it, which in return deepens the mystery of Fei Shui. Feng Shui theory is the essence of our ancient ancestors’ practical experience and it provides a reliable basis for the shaping of living space environment. Today’s most advanced material conditions do not represent a high quality of long living environment. On the contrary, it isolates people with the nature and is not good for the development of people’s mental and physical health. At the same time, home space design lacking humanistic feelings cannot withstand the test of history. The application

of Feng Shui theory in home space design will not only increase the historical continuity of the room environment, but also enhance the strong sense of folk culture, making the house become the carrier of folk culture. Therefore, the integration of living space design and Feng Shui theory can really provide a people-oriented living environment to satisfy people's material and spiritual requirements and create a natural and harmonious living environment.

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