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Feng Shui Practices among Selected Business Establishments in the Chinatown Districts of Kuala Lumpur, Manila and Singapore: A Comparative Study

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Abstract: This study is focused on the use of *feng shui* in business establishments located in shophouses within the Chinatown districts of the cities of Kuala Lumpur, Manila, and Singapore. These cities are strategic in Island Southeast Asia as centers of migration of Chinese nationals who controlled the regional trade in the region during the colonial period. These migrants came as merchants, resident traders, and/or coolie laborers for the tin mines of the peninsula. Moreover, these cities were entrepôts of trade and the centers of the traffic of goods along the route between the China Sea, the Indian Ocean, and the Pacific Ocean. Hence, the colonial powers, specifically the Spanish and the British, carved Chinatowns in Kuala Lumpur, Manila, and Singapore from portions of the colonial real estate to sustain this extremely profitable partnership generated in the region by the Chinese merchants, traders, and coolie laborers. Events in China and the battering suffered by the country in the hands of the colonial powers in the 19th century altered the character of the migration process: The existing Chinatowns populated by resident merchant families and their business activities became havens for Chinese intellectuals, scholars, and political exiles. Furthermore, challenges posed by ethnicity issues within the plural and multi-racial societies of Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore further strengthened and entrenched Chinese traditional values and culture within these enclaves. Today, these Chinatowns embody the culture and values of the homeland reflecting the tradition of strong family ties, the humanism of Confucianism, the harmony between man and nature of Taoist philosophy and geomancy, the spirituality of Buddhism, and the importance given to industry and a productivity-oriented work ethic. This study documented and established the dominant use of *feng shui*, a cultural practice that traces its origins in early Chinese history, among the owners of business establishments located in shophouses within the Chinatowns of Kuala Lumpur, Manila, and Singapore. Using descriptive research, the data gathering process started with an ocular survey of selected businesses located in shophouses within the catchment areas of the three Chinatowns to determine whether *feng shui* was used in these establishments. In the second phase, surveys and interviews were conducted with owners as key informants to determine why *feng shui* was used in their business establishments. The study documented the fact that like typical business establishments and homes in the homeland, *feng shui* was used by business establishment owners in the Chinatowns of Kuala Lumpur, Manila, and Singapore to bring good health, prosperity, and harmonious family relations.

Keywords

Ch'i, Chinese kapitans, Chinatown, Ethnicity, *Feng Shui*, Geomancy, Multi-racial societies, Plural societies, Shophouses, *Taoism*, *Yin-Yang*

Introduction

Asia, known for its ancient religious and mystical arts, nurtures a variety of cultures that evolved from many racial groups. Asians believe, among other things, that the environment is a pool of stimuli which affects human behavior. Man is the supreme organism in the ladder of evolution with his ability to manipulate, control, and adapt to his environment (Altman, 1976).

The Chinese who belong to the oldest continuous culture in the world, struggle to live in harmony with

nature. The China, today, remains largely an agrarian nation with most people living close to the land. Survival for many always means accommodation with Mother Nature. Through keen observation and practical wisdom accumulated over the last 3,000 years, (Mango, 1996) a practical body of knowledge evolved within Chinese culture. This ancient wisdom, originally called *Kan Yu* or “Raise the head and observe the sky above; lower the head and observe the environment around us”, (Sang, 1996) means “cover” and “support” or loosely translated as “under the canopy of heaven” (Lip, 1993). *Kanyu*, a term for



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feng shui, enables its users to live more harmoniously within their environment. Although many human beings today live in large cities and choose to work indoors, the science of *feng shui* remains useful for people of Chinese origin.

Feng shui literally “wind” (*feng*) and “water” (*shui*) (Walters, 1990) is the Chinese name for an intuitive practical art that seeks to bring people and their environment into the most positive level of relationship. It is the mother of natural science in China, the original “environmental impact statement”. By knowing the influence of place, weather, the cosmos, and all the conditions of the environment, man can help shape destiny. For the last 3,000 years, *feng shui* has been used as environmental science, magic, object of worship, and therapy to bring security, wealth, harmony, and happiness to homes, communities, businesses, workplaces, cities and countries (Post, 1998). *Feng shui* is the skilful use of the best available knowledge, incorporating both ancient and modern ideas to create the most suitable conditions for living and working.

Feng shui, thus, harnesses the energies of nature. It is a set of technologies and a body of knowledge that can be studied and then systematically applied to one’s personal space and environment. When applied correctly, *feng shui* holds the promise of generating good fortune to those who arrange their homes and offices according to its principles of harmony and balance (Too, 1998).

Feng shui enhances fortunes, improves material well-being and maintains one’s good health. It directly addresses all the aspirations of mankind, bringing opportunities for advancement and prosperity even as it magnifies chances of achievement, promotion and success. Tools employed by the Asians to ensure the prosperity of their business, for instance, are utilized alongside with *feng shui*. Truly, customs and traditions have a strong influence on the thinking of Asian businessmen. In fact, many of the most wealthy and successful Chinese businessmen and women practice *feng shui*. For many of them, the mythical dragon of *feng shui* cosmology reigns, exerting an enormous influence on office arrangements, on building design, on entrance orientations, on furniture placements, and on the timing of business and commercial decisions. In the world of Asian commerce, *feng shui* gives to those who covet it, a competitive edge. Those in business who use this ancient science believe they are adding an essential and metaphysical dimension to the modern day management of their businesses (Too, 1998).

It is not just the rich and powerful who believe in *feng shui*. Its practice among the Chinese and overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia cuts across social classes: the practitioner of *feng shui* is a tycoon, a taxi driver, a successful wealthy magnate, or a struggling merchant. *Feng shui* promises continued prosperity for those who have made it and gives hope to others for success.

The Chinatowns in Southeast Asia are the finest existing examples of Benedict Anderson’s scholarly reflections on “imagined communities” whose identities, in this instance, are moored in the rich heritage of Chinese culture in history of which *feng shui* is an important part (1983). These communities of expatriate overseas Chinese in the Philippines, Malaysia, and Singapore mirror the reality of the struggle for cultural homogeneity among others in a world moving with unprecedented speed into modernity, diversity, and plurality.

An ocular survey of Ongpin Street, the main thoroughfare of Manila’s Chinatown which connects Binondo Church to Sta. Cruz Church at both ends, for instance, shows that *feng shui* practices dominate the display areas and the interiors of business establishments located in shophouses cutting across industry lines: the use of *luopan*, the display of the elements, the frog, the brightness of the interiors, the articulation of entrances and exits in relation to the cardinal points etc. Lillian Too (1998) also writes that in Singapore and Malaysia, businessmen, career people, corporate managers and small-time entrepreneurs of Chinese origin, include *feng shui* features in the designs and layout plans of their homes and offices. In these two prosperous ASEAN nations, indicators of *feng shui* are evident in real estate and housing projects everywhere.

Ironically, Chinatowns in Southeast Asia were not historical creations of the Chinese residing overseas as labourers or merchants. Products of the architecture and the political economy of colonization and imperialism, the Chinatowns of Manila (1594), Kuala Lumpur (1896), and Singapore (1819) provided the European powers with a convenient but manageable infrastructure with which to sustain a thriving trading economy profitable to Chinese traders and resident-traders and maximally beneficial to the colonizers. Wickberg discusses the role of Chinese merchants in the regional trade of Southeast Asia during the Spanish colonial period which prospered into a global network of goods that encompassed Asia, Latin America through Acapulco and Havana, and, eventually, Spain, itself (2000). This trans-continental traffic of goods crossing two oceans, the Pacific and the Atlantic, was sustained by the regional trade in Asia whose principal players

were the Chinese merchants who traded and/or resided in Manila (Ruescas and Wrana, 2009). Malaysia's Chinatowns grew out of the mass migration of Chinese to the peninsula as workers in the tin mines. The colonial power needed the labor force to enhance the productivity of a fledgling mining industry vis-a-vis the migration of numerically lesser number of Indians from British India as workers in its rubber plantations. These settled migrants who are both labourers and traders are the major components of the demographical-cultural landscape of the modern state of Malaysia. On the other hand, Stamford Raffles' congenial and nurturing attitude towards Chinese traders and immigrants is reflected in the Jackson Plan of 1820 which appropriated a sizeable tract of real estate at left bank of the entrance to Singapore River for Chinese nationals (De la Rosa, 2010). This inspired a more dynamic trade and uninterrupted Chinese migration into the most strategic among the strait settlements which guards the route between the China Sea and the Indian Ocean.

These Chinatowns evolved as repositories of Chinese culture for a minority group in a society of increasing plurality resulting out of an expanding international trade. Indeed, Chinatowns were founded by colonial powers to quell resistance to stringent policies and to confront the migrants with the realities of their "foreign-ness," their inferiority and powerlessness (vis-à-vis the colonizer), the limitations imposed by their number, and their isolation in physical locations outside of the colonial centers of power (Ileto, 1986): Colonial cartography conveniently (re)located Chinatowns across the river, a shared trading artery, from administrative centers, particularly in Manila and Singapore. Moreover, in Manila, the early residents of Parian (Chinatown) in Binondo, across the river from Intramuros, were products of some mode of social engineering (May, 1980) which designated the area during its foundation as the enclave and residence for baptized Chinese males and their Filipino wives inserted within a parish managed by the Dominican Order (Wickberg 2000). These inter-racial marriages resulted in the birth of the *mestizos* who configure significantly in Philippine history.

Each of these three contemporary Chinatowns represents a slight demographic variation: Binondo shows cultural homogeneity of a minority Chinese culture within a larger society dominated by a Hispanicized and/or Americanized Filipino majority; Kuala Lumpur is the paradigm of a Chinatown within a society demographically balanced between politically dominant Malays and economically powerful Chinese; and Singapore has a Chinatown within a city-state dominated by a majority of citizens who are racially Chinese in origin.

The Chinatown districts of Kuala Lumpur, Manila, and Singapore have a physical identity that shows the cultural origins of their residents and merchants. These provide the best settings to examine remnants of expatriate Chinese traditional culture and practices like *feng shui* which is found in *shophouses*, a typical and practical structure that houses the business and homes of the resident-traders in all these enclaves.

Theoretical Framework

The research project focused on the practices of *feng shui* within business establishments cutting across industry lines within the Chinatowns of Kuala Lumpur, Manila, and Singapore is best examined in the context of the foundation, growth, and evolution of these Chinatowns as enclaves which provided residence and places of business for overseas Chinese immigrants to Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore. The discourse on Chinatown is an illustration of the contemporary phenomenon of ethnicity that accompanied the emergence of nation-states in Asia in the aftermath of colonization. Manning Nash (1989) attributes the rise of these small pockets of culture and difference who assert their individual identities vis-à-vis the culture of a politically dominant people/group to the birth of modern nations struggling for integration based on citizenship. Indeed, many existing cultural enclaves of indigenous peoples in Southeast Asia are products of centuries of inter-cultural tension among border-crossing expansionist empire-building pre-colonial cultures which were overtaken by colonization. The Chinese in Island Southeast Asia, on the other hand, trace their origins from pre-colonial traders or 19th/20th century laborers who migrated from the homeland and settled in many areas in the region since the advent of colonial rule.

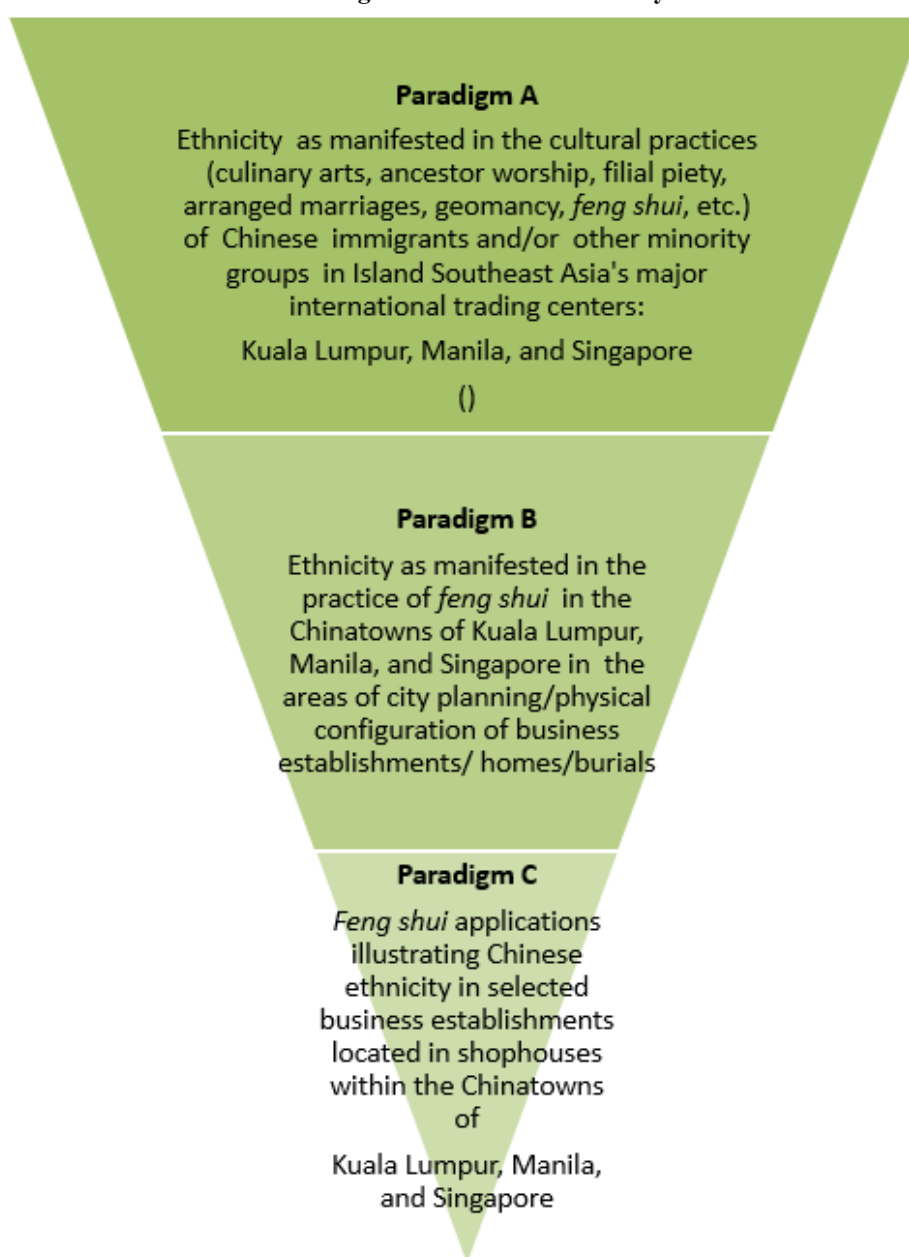
These Chinatowns display the Chinese culture brought by resident-traders and immigrants mostly originating from southern China. Indeed, turbulent events in China initiated by the colonial powers in the 19th and 20th centuries intensified migration of traders and non-traders into these Chinatowns and, perhaps, strengthened and homogenized the existing culture further.

Manning Nash theorizes, thus, that ethnicity is at the root of the survival and strengthening of cultural practices originating from the homeland for immigrants and/or minority groups within a country (1989). (See Diagram Paradigm A) When minority cultures (ie Chinese culture in Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore) exist within a plural society (ie in Southeast Asian societies with Islam, Chinese, Hindu, indigenous groups, and Westerners) or when the culture of a majority seeks to dominate or threatens minority cultures, ie. indigenous Malays in Malaysia and lowland Filipinos in the

Philippines), the tendency for the minority culture is to seek refuge in traditional practices (for example, in the case of the Chinese, filial piety, geomancy, arranged marriages, ancestor worship, etc.) which originate from the homeland and assert identity and the integrity of this culture in all aspects of life including business. (See Diagram Paradigm B) Hence, Chinatowns are good examples of the tenacity and ability of traditional cultures to survive outside the Chinese homeland. It is in this context that *feng shui* practices have survived alongside the Chinese New Year celebrations, the lunar calendar, the family associations representing the power of the clan and countless of other practices. (Paradigm B) One of the most visible practices of Chinese origin in Southeast Asia is the use and application of *feng shui* in the

business establishments cutting across industry lines located in shophouses within the Chinatowns of Kuala Lumpur, Manila, and Singapore. Shophouses are two-storey structures which are associated with Chinese resident immigrants in Southeast Asia. These are convenient places of business located on the ground floor and provide space for residence on the upper floor. An ocular survey of the business area of a typical shophouse will show applications of *feng shui* as it was practiced in the homeland to bring luck and success in business enterprises cutting across industry lines. (See Diagram Paradigm C) This, in part, rationalizes the prosperity that is normally associated with business establishments managed by owners of Chinese origin or ancestry in the Southeast Asian context.

Manning Nash's Table of Ethnicity



Chinatowns in Southeast Asia are not simply artifacts of the past or convenient bargain centers or showcases of a quaint subjugated minority culture within a larger hegemonic community. These are dynamic and vibrant communities that seek to preserve continuities (in lifestyle, leisure, entertainment, media, architecture, worship, business practices, rituals, cuisine, social habits, family life, values etc.) in another setting of a homeland culture which affirms a people's shared origins, "belongingness," and identities. It is not surprising that the influx of Chinese culture directly from the homeland in many ways has strengthened practices, habits, and lifeways within these Chinatowns despite the impact of modernization and Westernization and the plurality of the larger societies. Chinatowns in Southeast Asia are the best places to taste Chinese regional cuisine, view segments and samples of traditional architecture constructed following the specifications of *feng shui*, purchase traditional household, grocery, and decorative items, clothing, food, medicines, arts and crafts including music and video, and jewelry, and observe festivities and family practices as these relate to filial piety, ancestor worship, and arranged marriages.

Statement of the Problem

This research project is a comparative study of the practices of *feng shui* among selected business establishments located in shophouses within the Chinatown districts of Singapore, Manila and Kuala Lumpur. Specifically, the project sought to provide information regarding the profile of the owners of selected business establishments located in shophouses using *feng shui* in the Chinatowns of Kuala Lumpur, Manila and Singapore which included age, gender, civil status, ethnicity, highest educational attainment, occupation, religion, and language/ dialect spoken, and the businesses of these selected establishments; the *feng shui* practices evident in these selected business establishments based on the study conducted; the differences in practices and expectations of the respondents when grouped according to their profile; the comparison among the business establishments in *feng shui* practices found the Chinatowns of Kuala Lumpur, Manila and Singapore based on their beliefs and motivation of the owners of the business establishments and the enhancements they used.

Scope and Limitation of the Study

This study focused on the use and application of *feng shui* in business establishments cutting across industry lines located in shophouses within the Chinatowns of Kuala Lumpur, Manila, and Singapore, historical entrepôts of international trade connecting the China Sea, the Indian Ocean, and the Pacific Ocean and, thus, are centers of Chinese culture in Island Southeast Asia. Shophouses are two-

storey structures found in Southeast Asia that are associated with Chinese resident traders. The ground floor of these shophouses is used for business and storage and the upper floor for residence.

The application of *feng shui* was evident in business establishments located in shophouses within these districts in relation to the elements (water, air, fire, metal and earth) and the cardinal points (north, south, east, and west) and the arrangement and configuration of the interiors of the stores conforming to the principles of geomancy and the use of luck-bearing cultural artifacts (loupau, the frog, the mirror etc.), colors, and enhancements.

Survey of Related Literature and Studies

Much has been written about Chinese culture, thought, and religion. Works on Taoism reflect the philosophy focused on the natural way, serenity, goodness and respect for living things. Taoism's influence in the development of *feng shui* and the ancient art of geomancy has not been extensively explored by scholars.

These scholarly discourses are significant and important sources of information and insights on the origins and development of *feng shui* in historical China and the exportation of this art and other related practices into Southeast Asia by Chinese traders, immigrants, and laborers who settled in the Chinatowns of Kuala Lumpur, Manila, and Singapore during the colonial period. These sources also affirm the popular use of *fengshui* to enhance success, ensure well-being, and sustain prosperity. Hence, the use and application of *feng shui* in planning cities, choosing sites for homes and business, and burial places for family members, and the use of objects to enhance the auspicious character of a location continue to prosper among people of Chinese origin or ancestry and has gained popularity worldwide. These sources show that Chinese culture, values, and the family system influence the conduct of business of a majority of Chinese immigrants worldwide. Indeed, one of the most popular aspects of Chinese culture that persists in the conduct of business today is the use and application of *feng shui*.

Da Lui (1981) presents the *Tao* as a characteristic of Chinese culture and spirituality suggesting that an "orderly society is a . . . manifestation of the *Tao*." Sarah Rossbach (1987), on the other hand, points out that human life and destiny are closely interwoven with the workings of the universe and nature. All permutations, from cosmic to atomic, resonate within man. The force that links man and his surrounding, *chi*, is essential to maintaining physical, environmental, and emotional balance. *Feng shui* harnesses, enhances environmental *chi*, and improves

the flow of *chi* within our bodies, thus positively affecting peoples' lives and destinies.

Clio Whittaker (1989) argues that there is a natural order in the world that determines the behavior of all things in existence adding that early Taoist thinkers studying the world of nature discovered essential laws and observing natural phenomena like wind or water – were led to systematic investigation, the beginning of science in China. Whittaker notes that later on, Taoism operated on a more popular level: the belief that inanimate objects had their own “spirit” or “god” gave rise to a system of worship designed to propitiate these powers which were removed from the early Taoist principles. The Taoist priest also practiced the art of *feng shui*. The *fang-shih* or masters of the Taoist arts were the doctors, diviners, magicians, and internal alchemists in the first and second centuries of China establishing the close relationship between *feng shui* to the other arts associated with Taoism such as internal alchemy and cultivating body and mind.

Researching on the traditional histories of China, Ernest J. Eitel (1995) discusses Fu Hsi, the first semi-mythical emperor of China who discovered art and science: “Looking upwards contemplated the images in the heavens, and looking downwards observed the patterns of the earth.” Fu Hsi gained insight into the laws of nature and the influence of cosmic forces on all life below and, subsequently, instituted *feng shui* to attune his subjects to the moods and rhythms of nature and provide them with security and sense of continuity.

According to Evelyn Lip (1995) in ancient times, Chinese emperors were believed to be *tianzi*, the sons of the heavens. They presided over the cyclical movement of the seasons and agriculture so that order in nature was assured following the mandate of heaven. Emperors played such vital role as political religious leaders that their imperial functions were held in palaces conceived on the grandest scales and spatial concepts. These power houses were designed and built in the most ornate fashion on sites of good *feng shui*, both scenic and serene.

Kwok Man-Ho and Joanne O'Brien (1991) note that abiding by the guidelines of *feng shui* is helpful in leading a successful life, but the most influential factor is personal conduct. The *Tao* and the art and sciences guide people. The Chinese believe that if human beings conduct their lives following the way of the universe, then good fortune will follow.

A recent publication, Yoon Hong Key's volume (2006) is one the first comprehensive canonical discourses focused on *feng shui* practices in East Asia specifically, Korea. These *feng shui* (geomancy)

practices originating in Chinese religion and philosophy, specifically Taoism, inform city planning, choices of gravesites, and auspicious location of houses and business establishments in the region enriching the disciplines of urban planning and cartography. This volume is strategic in terms of providing a template for the analysis of *feng shui* practices in other areas like Kuala Lumpur, Manila, and Singapore where Chinese immigrants and their descendants constitute a significant segment of the local population. Thus, the ocular survey of the selected establishments was made on the basis of the following accepted applications and elements used by *feng shui* practitioners.

Feng shui is used both in the home and in the business setting. More and more *feng shui* *Los* are consulted to arrange homes and businesses to capture the *Sheng Ch'i*, the good breath of the dragon. *In the household setting*. Harnessing the good *Ch'i* ensures wealth, a harmonious family, and good health (Rossbach, 1987). *In the business setting*, entrepreneurs are faced with daily choices that affect not only their own lives, but of other stakeholders as well. *Feng shui* restores clarity of mind through the arrangement and appropriate placement of man-made structures to balance physical environment composed of elements or ambient factors: space and crowding, lighting, color, temperature, furniture and environmental stress (Sundstorm, 1987). Crowding, for instance, may lead to stress which leads to less customers and less business for establishments. Ample space must be provided at entrances to offices to allow the *Sheng Ch'i* to enter without obstruction. This ensures good *feng shui* and brings much needed good luck and prosperity. Light, on the other hand, enables a person to perceive shapes and contours and recognize form and colors. A room may be made hard, the *yin* or soft, the *yang* by the manipulation of lighting. A business can have good *feng shui* when the lighting is conducive and absolutely free of glare no matter what the degree of illumination is. In *feng shui*, colors represent the balance of cool and warm shade in accordance to the principles of *yin yang*. This is the only way that an area can achieve good *feng shui*. The *yin* colors are the “cool” colors such as green, blues, and grays. The *yang* colors are “warm” colors such as red, yellow and purple. Each hue has its significance. The shades of red are said to be auspicious; the yellows are for authority; green for longevity; blue, heavenly blessing, and white, purity (Lip, 1993).

Arrangement of pieces of furniture and equipment plays a part in the conduct of business. Furniture layout and dimensioning are important aspects affecting the *feng shui* of the business establishments. The orientation of the businessman's work table should be placed to achieve balance and harmony

(Lip, 1993). The placement of furniture and the interior design of the business establishments should also consider space allocation, lighting of the environment, and temperature creating a well-harmonized work atmosphere.

Studies show that people generally prefer places and/or scenes that are “ornate, well kept, open and clear as to their use vis-à-vis places that are cluttered, or limiting.” (Nasar, 1983 in Holahan, 1986). Thus, some amount of intervention must be used to prevent discomfort and aggravation for people within this type of environment. It is also worth mentioning that *feng shui* experts believe that intensive manipulation of the environment and/or articles present in it can lead to a significant reduction in stress borne by individuals dwelling in it (Lip, 1993).

The historiography of the overseas Chinese despite their number is not as extensive in proportion to their historical roles in the economies of Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore. Moreover, the sources are largely colonial and non-indigenous. The historiography of Singapore, for instance, is subsumed under the renditions of history of Malaya and British colonial history in Southeast Asia largely authored by non-Chinese and non-Malay scholars.

The canonical work of Benedict Anderson (1965) on ethnicity and ethnic communities provides rich reflections on the impact of colonization on the existing plural societies in mainland and island southeast informed by Indianization, Sinization, Islamization, and Chinese migration. The infrastructure of the colonial economies of the competing powers carved permanent boundaries out of conflicting ethnic groups pandering on the ambitions and the insecurity of the local elites. The agenda of the colonizing powers to enhance trade and productivity with the minimum of investment necessitated the importation of Chinese labor for the tin mines of Malaya and a congenial encouragement of Chinese traders in Singapore.

Manning Nash's study (1989) complements the Anderson volume by a detailed discussion of the impact of Chinese migration on the peninsula's demographic, cultural, and political transitions. The importation of coolies from many areas in Southern China during the 19th century to provide labor for the tin mines in Malay Peninsula nurtured the steady growth of Chinese immigrants to a size that exceeded the number of Malays in the 20th century. Regional differences among them generated conflicts that evolved into “gang wars.” The emergence of the Chinese *kapitans* who brought order into Chinese communities eventually resolved these conflicts and enabled communities composed of Malay, Chinese immigrants, and British colonial government to focus

on development and maintaining socio-political order (Nash, 1989).

David Joel Steinberg's authoritative volume (1971) delves deeper into the role of the Chinese immigrant in the creation of the modern states of Malaysia from the *negeri* of the peninsula and Singapore the sparsely populated island chosen by the British as their entrepot in the trade between the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea in the early 19th century. Shying from the option of the laborious direct rule, the British relinquished local governance to the Chinese *kapitans* and to the Malay elite. The Steinberg anthology chronicles the events which led to the foundation of Malaysia's major cities including Kuala Lumpur to the initiatives of Chinese entrepreneurs: Chinese participation in governance was significant even to the British-governed Straits Settlements, particularly Singapore (1971). The expansion of British economic interests in the South China Sea during the mid-19th century included the Philippines where British merchant houses opened and collaborated with local Chinese capitalists and *mestizos* in developing domestic products (sugar, indigo, textiles, rice, etc.) for export to international markets after the end of the galleon trade.

Edgar Wickberg's canonical volume (1965) on the Chinese in Philippine life remains unsurpassed until today and focuses on the foundation and growth of the Binondo Chinatown vis-à-vis the Parians of the Spanish colonial period. The Binondo Chinatown, the first and oldest (1594) among all existing Chinatowns today, was a Spanish colonial innovation intended to segregate resident Chinese traders married to local women whose progeny is the Filipino *mestizo* vis-à-vis transient traders. Transitions in the history of this enclave show its changing demographic character depending on the shifts in Spanish colonial policy and the volatile conditions in China during the 19th and 20th centuries which increased Chinese migration to the Philippines and other parts of island Southeast Asia.

Benito Legarda's book (1999) focuses on the economic developments after the end of the galleon trade and the nearly 250 years of transshipment of goods traded by the Chinese in Manila on the vessels bound for Mexico. The galleon trade brought minimal economic development to the colony until the opening of Philippine ports to trade and the export of domestic agricultural products to international markets. Legarda documents the significant shift in the role of the Chinese in the economy from trading to capitalist-trader of a fledgling agriculture-based economy that exported sugar, indigo, rice, tobacco, abaca etc. The convergence of insight between Legarda and Steinberg is noteworthy that this shift results in

increased involvement of British merchant houses and Chinese merchants in both the agricultural and commercial aspects of the Filipino economy during the late 19th century.

The series of essays on “The Chinese in Southeast Asia” published in the journal, *Solidarity*, (1989) edited by F. Sionil Jose document the success of capitalists of Chinese origin in Southeast Asian countries rooted in their ability to maximize opportunities. Clearly, this orientation traces its origins from cultural values of industry and wise management of money regardless of contexts. In fact, the essays assert that Chinese entrepreneurs have better chances of survival vis-à-vis indigenous capitalists in Southeast Asian countries during difficult times.

Wu Li published a volume on traditional customs and practice that guides the economic success of overseas Chinese which include those conventionally regarded as feudal and superstitious (1989). In this research, he utilized the methodologies of interview and survey of selected respondents.

Strategic essays in the anthology, *Culture Matters*, edited by Lawrence Harrison and Samuel Huntington (2000) affirm the rootedness of Chinese business practices in the family system and its continuous support of the initiatives of its members cutting across generations and geographical and national lines.

These essays examine the tenacity of this family-based management of enterprise in the context of the contemporary challenges posed by crises in the Asian region and the international arena.

Research Methodology

Qualitative and quantitative methods were used in the research process and the presentation of its findings. This study draws information from archival, primary, and secondary sources focused on *feng shui* practices in city planning, site-location planning, and the configuration of the interiors used by professional practitioners helped substantially in identifying *feng shui* practices used in business establishments in the Chinatowns of Kuala Lumpur, Manila, and Singapore. The survey method validated the ocular survey and the interviews of the selected owners focused on the evidence of *feng-shui* practices within their business establishments.

The ocular survey method frequently used in descriptive research documented evidence of *feng-shui* use in the interiors of business establishments, along the main thoroughfares of the Chinatowns of Kuala Lumpur, Manila, and Singapore.

Respondents of the Study

Questionnaires were distributed to qualified respondents. A total of seventy-five (75) owners of business establishments using *feng shui* in their interiors located in shophouses in the Chinatowns of Kuala Lumpur, Manila, and Singapore, answered the written questionnaires. The researcher conducted personal interviews with seven (7) businessmen (Manila: 3, Kuala Lumpur: 2 and Singapore: 2). To supplement the information provided by the ocular survey on the interiors of the individual shophouses, the owners were requested to elaborate on the use of *feng shui* within their establishments in these interviews.

The Data Gathering Instrument

The survey questionnaire, interview and ocular survey were the main tools utilized in gathering the data needed. The questionnaire constructed was approved, verified, and validated by scholars, resource persons and *feng shui* experts before it was administered to the respondents within the Chinatown districts of the three cities. The respondents were Chinese businessmen whose stores were located in shophouses and were applying *feng shui* in their business establishments.

The demographic data of the business establishment owner respondents included the following: age, nationality, sex/gender, highest educational attainment, religion, civil status, occupation, language proficiency etc. The key informants provided the following information: length of time of the existence of the establishment, factors that determine the choice of the store's location, factors that influenced the choice of the store's merchandise, reasons for the use of *feng shui*, and the impact of the use of *feng shui* on the sustainability and profitability of the business.

Statistical Treatment of the Study

The following statistical tools were used by the researcher to ensure the validity of the quantitative data gathering process:

Percentage was applied on the profile of the respondents (age, gender, civil status, nationality, highest educational attainment, occupation, religion, language proficiency, the type of business of the selected establishments, and the enhancements used which ranged from animals to symbols of luck and colors). This method also provided information on the non-business areas where *feng shui* is used by the selected respondents cutting across the three nationalities.

Weighted mean was computed by dividing the responses with the number of cases or scores. It measured the centrality of the responses of the samples to questions pertaining to the uses, beliefs,

advantages, and motivating factors in the practice of *feng shui*.

Standard Deviation was used to measure the variability of the spread of the data in relation to the mean value. This statistical treatment was used in the study to determine if the responses to the uses, beliefs, advantages, and motivating factors in the practice of *feng shui* cutting across nationalities were homogenous or heterogeneous.

Analysis of Variance or ANOVA was used to determine whether factors of age, gender, civil status, nationality, highest educational attainment, occupation, and religion have a significant effect and/or extensive variability in the response to the uses, beliefs, advantages and motivating factors in the practice of *feng shui*. It is also a statistical procedure for testing the hypothesis equality of three or more population means. In the study, ANOVA was used in order to determine if there is a significant difference in the responses among the nationality groups.

Likert Scale assigned quantitative value to qualitative data to make it suitable for statistical analysis. This scale was used in quantifying the individual responses of establishment owners and/or managers. These tables show the respondents' degrees of agreement or disagreement with the items focused on the uses, beliefs, advantages, and motivating factors for the practice of *feng shui*.

Findings of the Study

The profile of the respondents shows that the average age of respondents cutting across nationalities was 44-55. The second largest number of respondents belonged to the ages between 56-65. The gender table shows that the respondents were dominantly male at 2/3 the total samples and 1/3 were females. Majority of the respondents were married at 76 percent and 14 percent were widowers while others were single. The ethnicity of respondents was Chinese-Filipinos, Chinese-Malaysians and Chinese-Singaporeans. The majority of the respondents were college graduates and all others had a Master's degree, master's units, and college units. Business/entrepreneurship was the occupation of the majority of the respondents and others were professionals and employees. The dominant religion among the respondents was Buddhism. The next dominant religion among the respondents was Taoism followed by Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. English was the dominant language among the respondents cutting across nationalities. The next largest language group was Mandarin followed by Hakka, Malay, Filipino, Fokine, and Cantonese. Majority of the selected business establishments in the three Chinatowns were jewelry shops followed by deli shops and drugstores. All

others were dry goods stores, restaurants, hardwires, and sellers of paper products and office supplies.

The interviews and ocular inspection show that *feng shui* was popularly used in the business establishments within the three Chinatowns as shown by the following findings: Six respondents rearranged the physical environments of their shops based on conventional *feng shui* practices; five respondents repositioned their entrance doors and hired the services of a *feng shui* master; four used *feng shui* guidelines in positioning office furniture and other fixtures and placing good luck charms, symbols, and ornaments; three used *feng shui* in choosing the new location for the business and in changing the color of the shop; two placed the statues and figurines of gods in their establishments; All others consulted the Chinese calendar, read books on *feng shui*, cleaned and removed clutter, placed *bagua*, positioned a chair with the back against a solid wall, and relocated the cash register.

The cat, the horse, the frog, and the tortoise were the most popular animal *feng shui* enhancers. The wealth bowl, the *bagua*, the bells, and the fountain are the most popular *feng shui* symbols of luck and white, yellow, orange, and green are the colors chosen by the respondents for the interiors of the business establishments.

Similar practices were evident in the results of the survey which shows that items with the highest means among the respondents displayed the strong belief that *feng shui* practices attract money and wealth and improve finances and bring good fortune.

The responses to the survey show that there is a significant difference in the uses of *feng shui* among age groups which is substantiated by interviewees' observations that the older generation tend to follow *feng shui* guidelines more seriously than the younger generation. There is also a significant difference in the use of *feng shui* among ethnic groups which can be explained by the impact of local cultures and the character of local societies on *feng shui* practices. While the use of enhancements is fundamentally the same, some ethnic groups prefer using certain animals, symbols of luck, and colors in contrast to others.

Expectations (or advantages) in using *feng shui* vary slightly based on ethnicity, occupation, and religion. This might be explained by the differences imposed by local cultures on *feng shui* practices, the amount of profitability which can be derived from the business where owners earn more money than employees or part-time managers, and the distinct orientation of Asian religions towards nature and

natural processes which is not emphasized in Christian beliefs (Protestantism and Catholicism).

There is no significant statistical difference in the responses to beliefs and motivations cutting across ethnic groups except for ethnicity. This is easily explained by the impact of individual local cultures on the responses of the samples. Majority of the respondents were users of *feng shui* because of its good effects and its importance to Chinese cultural traditions and practices. The survey, interviews, and ocular survey show that the major motivating factors in the use of *feng shui* among business establishment owners in the three Chinatowns were the positive effects of *feng shui* on business and its assertion of centuries-old Chinese traditions and practices.

The survey, Interviews, and ocular survey show that practitioners appreciated the advantage that the use of *feng shui* “wards off bad luck” which provides the opportunity to assert the value of Chinese cultural heritage in business. The survey shows that there is no significant relationship between *feng shui* beliefs and practices among owners and/or managers of business establishments located in the Chinatown districts of Manila, Kuala Lumpur, and Singapore and gender, civil status, and educational attainment.

Conclusion

This study shows that *feng shui* practices regardless of context are universal. The business establishments located in shophouses in the Chinatown districts of Manila, Kuala Lumpur, and Singapore display similar enhancements displayed in the use of animals, symbols of luck, and use of colors with little variations. The findings derived from the survey, the interviews, and the ocular inspection shows the same results with little variations regarding the use of enhancements.

The findings of the study drawn from the survey, interviews, and the ocular inspection also affirm that business establishment owners and/or managers in the Chinatown districts of Manila, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore value and cherish the centuries-old Chinese culture regardless of their ancestor’s place of origin in the homeland.

Differences in the local culture practices, contexts, and multi-cultural daily interaction within the Chinatown districts of Manila, Kuala Lumpur, and Singapore are shown by a significant relationship between ethnicity and responses to survey questions focused on *feng shui* uses, beliefs, advantages, and motivating factors.

The universality of *feng shui* practices among the respondents from the business establishments located in shophouses in the Chinatown districts of Manila,

Kuala Lumpur, and Singapore is evident in the fact that the relationship between gender, civil status, and highest educational attainment and the survey questions on *feng shui* uses, beliefs, advantages, and motivating factors is insignificant and minimally significant in the relationship between age and occupation and *feng shui* uses, beliefs, advantages, and motivating factors.

The differences, perhaps, in some beliefs, theology, and rituals and shared values that give importance to harmony, well-being, financial stability, and love for nature among Roman Catholics, Buddhists, Taoists, and Protestants among the survey respondents from the business establishments located in shophouses in the Chinatown districts of Manila, Kuala Lumpur, and Singapore explain the significant relationship between religion and the survey questions on *feng shui* focusing on uses, beliefs, advantages, and motivating factors.

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