**Feng Shui and the City – The private and public spaces of Chinese geomancy**

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**Chapter 1: Feng Shui and the ‘Meaning of Space’**

It is an obvious outcome of human settlement that our towns, cities and villages should come to reflect the values, beliefs, dispositions and preferences of those who make a place for themselves in the world. This reality has been noted on many occasions. Geographers, urban designers, planners and architects frequently acknowledge this fact and those with responsibility for producing the built environment, or for regulating change, are often quick to argue for closer alignment between the values we hold dear and the proper design and arrangement of places. For example, if we prize social cohesion then we plan with that in mind, avoiding physical barriers between communities and people. Likewise, if saving the planet means travelling less, then we aim – in some instances at least – to make our cities walkable or at least to make public transport accessible to as many people as possible. These are perhaps prosaic expressions of our shared, modern and secular values – and more strongly linked to desired behaviours than deeper belief. At other times, values have taken different forms, being rooted in the spiritual and totemic, but still offering practical guidance on the proper arrangement of urban and rural places.

This book examines the impact of Feng Shui on the built environment, and although this chapter introduces the deeper historic roots of this belief system, the book is mainly concerned with the here and now: the ways in which Feng Shui, at multiple scales – and particularly in the private spaces of the home and the commercial and public spaces of the city – imprints onto the arrangement of place today. It is centrally concerned with the processes that deliver that imprint, whether private or public, and whether underpinned by personal belief or by commercial rationale. It tracks a path from the *absolute* space of Feng Shui – a situation in which deeper beliefs shape the built environment – to an *abstract* space in which, to put it crudely, belief is commercialised and there is a potential loss of authenticity, as Feng Shui is cynically mobilised to placate communities facing unsettling change or as a means of harnessing development value. This all-too-simple precis of the path taken by this book is developed further in this chapter, which begins by introducing Feng Shui before examining the ways in which it has been expressed in the layout of homes and cities. We then unpack the ideas noted above – places being imprinted with cultural praxis, the transition from *absolute* to *abstract* space (borrowing heavily from Lefebvre, 1991) and the question as to whether *authenticity* is lost during that transition. This first chapter lays the necessary foundations for a further development of method, and then detailed case studies that investigate Feng Shui’s enduring impact on Chinese cities and the channels through which that impact is delivered.

**1.1 What is Feng Shui?**

Feng Shui, or Chinese geomancy, is an ancient system of thoughts underpinning the selection of favourable sites for cities, and providing a guide for the positioning of buildings, other man-made objects, and graves in a harmonious relationship with their environment (Madeddu and Zhang, 2017). It aims to ensure alignment between the needs – spiritual or otherwise - of humans, whether living or dead, and the configuration of their physical spaces (Bruun, 2017). It originated in China centuries ago and influenced every aspect of the daily life of emperors and of ordinary people: from the arrangement of the ‘dwellings for the living’ and the ‘dwellings for the dead’, to the identification of a favourable day on which to get married and even the choice of a name for a child (Xu, 1998). Feng Shui was – and remains - an integral part of the traditional Chinese way of life, which has affected ‘the way Chinese people see and treat the world’ (Feuchwang, 2003, vii).

‘Feng Shui’ - ‘wind’ and ‘water’ - is a relatively recent term, having being mentioned for the first time in the *Zang Shu* (The Book of Burial), written during The Eastern Jin dynasty (317 to 420 AD). The original Chinese name for the practices now associated with Feng Shui was ‘Kan Yu’ (meaning ‘Heaven’ and ‘Earth’). Records of its use are so old that according to Eitel (1873, 51) ‘it would not be exaggeration to say that […] the history of the leading ideas and practices of Feng Shui is the history of Chinese philosophy’.

The origins of Feng Shui are disputed: some scholars have claimed that its practice is rooted in the worship of dead ancestors and the selection of sites for their graves in ancient China (De Groot, 1897) whilst others have more recently argued that it evolved from the search, by Chinese cave dwellers, for favourable habitat, stressing that ‘house geomancy developed earlier than grave geomancy’ (Yoon, 2006, 18). However, it is generally agreed that ancient practices of Feng Shui are closely tied with cosmological observation and divination. According to Bruun (2008, 11) ‘the further we go back in Chinese history, the less Feng Shui becomes separable from general cosmology such as that contained in Daoism[[1]](#footnote-1) and expressed in imperial divination’. Divination practices in ancient China were grounded in the worship of nature and ancestors. The ancient Chinese worshiped numerous gods of nature - the gods of sun, mountains, rivers, forests, earth, and so on - as they perceived nature and the universe as animistic powers for generating *qi[[2]](#footnote-2)* - a ‘vital force’ or ‘cosmic energy’ (Lip, 1995; Adler, 2011). These ideas, and particularly the concept of *qi,* are foundational to Feng Shui: it is through the modulation of *qi* that human environments can be harmonised, and therefore conform with, or achieve, the Daoist idea of the *Dao* (the ‘Way’) – the essential interconnection of everything in the universe (Mak and So, 2015). Alongside this broad emphasis on harmony and connectivity, the worship of ancestors in ways that integrated them into this philosophy evolved into another critical aspect of Feng Shui. The spirits of ancestors were thought to bestow good fortune on their descendants, if treated with respect (Eitel, 1873). From the start of the Western Zhou Dynasty (around 1046 BC), people paid great attention to the choice and orientation of burial sites, always placing the head of the deceased towards the north (ibid.). This careful interaction with ancestor spirits, as well as other non-human beings (such as gods and ghosts), through divination, is a trait of Daoism which is repeated in Feng Shui (Bruun, 2008): the boundaries between the natural and supernatural are blurred, with adherents assuming ‘a unity and continuity between the heavens (or cosmos) – *tian*, the earth – *di*, and humans – *ren*’ (Coggins and Minor, 2018, 7). The worship of ancestors (and the respect bestowed upon them) also had a role in reproducing political order (Bruun, 2008) linking Feng Shui, in this respect, to Confucianism[[3]](#footnote-3) and its advocacy of socio-political hierarchy achieved through harmony (Weber, 1951).

The observation and interpretation of natural and astronomical phenomena also contributed to the development of Feng Shui. Inscriptions on bones and tortoise shells reveal that during the Shang Dynasty (1600 to 1046 BC), consideration was being given to cardinal directions and wind orientation (Wei, 2002) in the arrangement of farming activity on land with low agricultural productivity (Sun et al, 2014). Settlers along the Yellow River discovered, more than four millennia ago, that locations backed by the mountains to the north and facing watercourses to the south were ideally suited to farming, being protected from cold northerly winds and affording maximum sunlight for crops (Shi, 2015): floodplain soil also proved fertile and easy to turn (Mak and So, 2015). Those who followed in later periods searched for similarly ‘auspicious’ configurations of natural features in other locations (Rossbach, 1999). The same search for patterns was repeated in the wider universe of observable phenomenon: the cycles of day and night, life and death, the alternation of seasons, the movement and distribution of stars and planets all became correlated with events on earth. Observers noted the mathematical order of things (Eitel, 1873), assigning numerical value to everything[[4]](#footnote-4) (Lip, 1997) in an attempt to reveal the harmony of universal cycles (Bramble, 2003). Interpretations often differed, resulting in a divergence of different schools of thought: indeed, ‘[…] from at least the time of neo-Confucian synthesis, several interpretations of Feng Shui have competed in China, giving rise to separate *Feng Shui schools*’ (Bruun, 2008, 100). The principal concern of the *Form School* is to identify auspicious sites within a landscape with reference to key elements (or to key objects in a built environment) whilst the *Compass School* prioritises directional components of a site (alongside temporal influences) using complicated calculations to inform formulaic arrangements of space (Skinner, 1982). These schools, however, never completely ignored one another, becoming almost indistinguishable during the Qing Dynasty (1644 to 1912 AD) (Mak and So, 2015) and into the modern period as Feng Shui ‘masters’ incorporate ideas from these different schools into their practice (Yoon, 2006). Where once there was separation and distinctive approaches to making sense of the universe as a guide for planning the homes of the living and the dead, there is now an entanglement of form, flow and temporal patterns (Knapp, 2005).

Feng Shui is rooted in a mix of cosmology, the observation of astrological patterns and the analysis of land form. In earlier periods – starting from the Shang Dynasty (1600 to 1046 BC) - divination rituals and ancestor worship were the mainstays of Feng Shui practice. At first, it was just emperors, assisted by diviners, who communicated with the gods and with their ancestors when requiring advice on a variety of matters including building projects (Bruun, 2008). But this practice was soon emulated by others wishing to harness cosmic energy and win good fortune: Feng Shui became ‘increasingly popularised, siphoning down from the Royal Court to the lower echelons of Chinese society’ (ibid, 11), being ‘eventually adopted as the practice of commoners’ (ibid, 15). This ‘siphoning down’ resulted in new scales of Feng Shui practice and in a broadening of interpretation. However, the *Yi Jing* (The Book of Changes) – again, concerned with divination – remains an essential reference for Feng Shui practice, ensuring that Chinese Geomancy offers a guide to making sense of the way that space is often arranged, at a variety of scales.

**1.2 Feng Shui at urban and domestic scales**

The systematic application of Feng Shui began during the West Han dynasty (202 to 9 AD), developed in the Tang (618 to 907 AD) and Song (960 to 1279 AD) dynasties, and reached its peak in the Ming dynasty (1368 to 1644 AD) (Zhao, 2011). For China’s rulers, Feng Shui provided not only practical guidance on the siting and layout of their cities – thereby harnessing cosmic energies and laying the foundation for an enduring and stable government (Yoon, 2004) - but also offered ideological guidance on how to build and sustain social hierarchy, nurture respect for authority (from Confucianism) (Weber, 1951) and provide an accepted rationale for emperors’ decisions. For ordinary people, Feng Shui afforded ‘[…] a means of assuring a reasonable share of good fortune’ (Knapp, 1986, 110), supporting their basic aspirations: prosperity, progeny, family well-being, and the avoidance of illness and personal mishap. This broad adoption of Feng Shui ideas, across the social spectrum, contributed to the ‘exceptional beauty of positioning of farmhouses, manors, villages and cities throughout the realm of Chinese culture’ (Needham, 1962, 240). Its impact on the historical built environment can therefore be detected at a variety of scales: from the intimacy of homes, to the layout of streets, to the siting and overall morphology of cities.

*The domestic and private spaces of Feng Shui*

The impacts of Feng Shui on domestic space are evident throughout China, in both rural and urban areas, where houses reflect elements of the ‘religious and cosmological beliefs’ of their inhabitants (Knapp, 2005, 16). These impacts are so profound that, as Knapp (1999, 29) observes, ‘it is the application of Feng Shui practices by common people in determining auspicious sites for new or renovated houses that reveals most clearly the deeply rooted nature of this quest for spatial harmony’. Indeed, throughout the history of China, the majority of Feng Shui users ‘were the millions and millions of farmer households, to whom it was an integrated element in popular cosmology and religion’ (Bruun, 2008, 50) and for whom Feng Shui was such an important part of their life that ‘they often gave up even their meagre resources to gain the benefits that it might provide’ (Knapp, 1999, 29).

Generally, ‘the Chinese dwelling represents a concrete patterning of the natural features thought necessary to ensure good *feng shui*’ (Knapp, 1986, 114). In rural areas the layout of villages also reflects the influence of different Feng Shui Schools on domestic environments. In the more mountainous areas of the south and west of China, where the Form School was dominant, houses were placed according to important geographical features (including hills, water, vegetation and other buildings), allowing for variations in housing type and village layout. In villages close to Hong Kong, for example, the configuration of the surrounding environment has a greater bearing than the favoured south direction on buildings’ layout (Mak and So, 2015). In the lowlands, where the Compass School was predominant, houses were placed according to beneficial orientations: this generated ‘more orderly and predictable’ settlements, planned with a fixed layout and with ‘less improvisation’ (Bruun, 2008, 63) and where houses generally faced the ‘life-giving sun to the south’ (ibid, 64). This orientation of building towards the south was already prevalent during the Shang dynasty (1600 to 1046 BC) (Knapp, 1986). Although southerly aspect can have a more prosaic rationale (ibid.), Knapp (2005) observes that even when buildings face another direction, that direction is commonly regarded as a ‘conceptual south’ with a ‘symbolic vocabulary [reorienting] the actual compass direction to an abstract direction’.

Urban houses in China also reveal the influence of Feng Shui. In Beijing, for example, the courtyard house was once ‘the basic unit of the city’ and ‘almost everyone […], from the emperor to the common people’ resided in one (Xu, 1998, 272). Its layout was set by the Form School to the extent that it represented ‘[…] a physical embodiment of the ideal Feng Shui model of landforms’ (ibid, 273), replicating forms used in overall city layout. The design of courtyard houses was also guided by the Compass School’s strictures on orientation, resulting in a particular positioning of rooms and other features (ibid.). Feng Shui therefore shaped the traditional house type, which was used throughout China and determined the design of small and large homes, from the more substantial courtyard houses of north and northeast China to the more modest houses, with ‘sky-wells’ substituting for full courtyards, in the southern provinces (Knapp, 2005 – see also Figure 1.1 and 1.2).

**INSERT FIGURE 1.1 HERE (COURTYARD HOUSES IN PING YAO; CREDIT: ANNE ROBERTS)**

**INSERT FIGURE 1.2 HERE (GUYUAN QIGAN MANSION; CREDIT: YIPING DONG)**

The internal layout of a house, its size and the materials used for its construction were of paramount importance. There was some similarity between the arrangement of houses ‘for the dead’ and ‘for the living’ (Knapp, 2005) – both grave sites and houses sought to maximise the capture of *qi*. For houses, this meant that the entrance – gate and main hall – needed to be correctly positioned. Kitchens, on the other hand, needed to be placed at the rear of a house on or in a separate building, thereby limiting exposure to the bad energy emanating from a stove chimney (Bruun, 2008). Attention was also given to the height, length and width of a dwelling, as well as to its core elements (such as doors and windows), with carpenters taking care to place and size those elements correctly (Knapp, 2005). Even in the humblest homes, layout and design conveyed ‘significant numbers and celestial objects’ (Bramble, 2003, 10). The size of a house indicated the social position and wealth of the family – the bigger the house, the wealthier the family residing in it (Bruun, 2008) – but not only because of land and build costs: peasants ‘were […] generally restrained from constructing large dwelling’ even if they became wealthier (Knapp, 1986, 19). Social class divisions were also expressed through the use of materials, colours, shapes and the symbolic use of numbers: these were strictly regulated by the *Zhou li* (Rites of Zhou) - an ancient ritual text, written during the Zhou period (1046 to 256 BC) and considered central to Confucianism - which was interpreted as a building code. That code was rigidly followed in every dynasty in ancient China and prohibited the misuse of exceptional decorations in ordinary buildings, considering it a serious arrogation of power (Yu, 2007). Only buildings erected for the emperors, for example, could use the colours gold and yellow, a double-eave roof, dragon patterns for decoration, and the number nine. Moreover, whilst people from the middle and upper classes usually built private gardens – paying attention to their location and carefully considering the arrangement of furniture, plants, bridges and rocks – the lower class, who were less able to shape their domestic environments, often relied on the use of simple decorative objects (such as mirrors or wind chimes) to ensure the capture and effective flow of *qi* (Sun and Sun, 2007). But irrespective of the social status of occupants, the imprint of Feng Shui could be read in the domestic and private spaces of the home, revealing a powerful link that also extended to the wider planning of cities and their public spaces.

*The urban and public spaces of Feng Shui*

Chinese landscapes and cities have been so deeply influenced by Feng Shui that ‘the use of land can hardly be understood apart from it’ (Yoon, 2006, 4). Selecting an appropriate location for a city was the main task of urban planning in ancient China and Feng Shui was invariably a ‘determinative factor’ in that selection (Meyer, 1978, 139). It was inconceivable that a city’s location would not respect Feng Shui, as ignoring its principles would place in great jeopardy the rule of the emperor, the prosperity of the state, and the wellbeing of its citizens (Steinhardt, 1990; Bramble, 2003; Yu, 2007). ‘Before laying the foundation for a new city, heaven had to be consulted’ (Steinhardt, 1990, 5) to determine not only the right site but also the date for ground-breaking, alongside the ‘considerable list of [other] requirements’ that would need to be met (Bramble, 2003, 9). The more important the city, the greater the effort expended on ensuring ‘its harmonious location and arrangement’ (Meyer, 1978, 138); ‘no expense was spared to ensure that the city conformed to traditional design principles’ (Bramble, 2003, 9).

The ancient capital cities of Beijing, Nanjing, Luoyang, Xi’an, Kaifeng and Hangzhou, in particular, were carefully sited in accordance with astronomical phenomena and were therefore imbued with spiritual meaning: people living in such cities ‘could truly feel they and their nation were at one with the cosmos’ (Bramble, 2003, 28). Their locations and layouts were also set in relation to landscape features (such as mountains, hills, water courses and empty spaces). Although the application of Feng Shui principles are most visible in imperial capitals (Knapp, 1986), Mak (1998, 87) observes that ‘most of the major cities in China conform to the criteria of the ideal Feng Shui model’, being located in accordance to precise rules which follow those of the ancient settlers of the Yellow River (Figure 1.3).

**INSERT FIGURE 1.3 HERE (IDEAL FENG SHUI MODEL)**

Bruun (2008), however, disputes the rigidity of adherence to dogma, highlighting that contradiction with, or deviation from, core principles was possible. For example, the first four capitals were built in conformity with the aforementioned *Zhou li* (Rites of Zhou), which, although sharing much with Feng Shui’s ‘cosmological order’, actually pre-dates it and, in parts, contradicts it (Meyer, 1978). The *Zhou li* stipulated that cities had to be precisely oriented according to a north-south axis, with their streets arranged along a regular grid and their walls forming an exact square and having three gates on each of the eastern, southern and western sides; the location of the central palace and markets were also precisely determined along the main axes so that cities were perfectly ordered as a ‘coherent cosmological symbol’ (Bruun, 2008, 31). Although the ‘cosmologically ideal shape of the Zhou city […] sometimes was altered to a rectangle’ (Knapp, 1986, 11), this scheme was replicated in later cities as it provided a way for the emperor to ‘display his legitimized position as both ruler and guardian of traditions’ without challenging the ‘imperial past’ (Steinhardt, 1990, 4) – see Figure 1.4. It has therefore been claimed that modern analysis has, to some extent, exaggerated the impact that Feng Shui had on ancient urban planning and design. Bruun (2008, 31) suggests that, with regard to the early planning of cities ‘the application of Feng Shui may figure more in the retrospective writings of later scholars than in the original choice of a city site’, highlighting that it is ‘[…] only after Feng Shui is maturing in the Song dynasty that it is constantly applied to entire cities and the geography of China as a whole’. Knapp (1986, 12), however, points out that ‘Zhou cities were sited using divinatory measures [and] principles of geomancy, to ensure a propitious location’. Although the degree of adherence to dogma varied, Feng Shui’s principles – or broader respect for cosmological order – feature prominently in the layout of these cities.

**INSERT FIGURE 1.4 HERE (ANCIENT XI’AN – THE CITY OF CHANG’AN)**

Indeed, the evidence of its overall influence is clear. The emperor Huizong (1100 to 1125 AD), for example, built a vast complex of hills to the northeast of the city of Kaifeng, dotting it with pavilions to enhance its cosmological symbolism (Bruun, 2008). At Chang’an (the ancient Xi’an) Emperor Wen Di (581 to 604 AD) levelled a hill, created an artificial lake and built a double-towered temple to improve the city’s Feng Shui; and during the Ming Dynasty similar works were undertaken at Guangzhou (Liu, 1995; Steinhardt, 1990; Zhou and Liu 1999). The works undertaken were rarely definitive: capital and other major cities were continuously changed in accordance with astronomical cycles - with buildings demolished, repositioned and rebuilt (Lip, 1997; Tang, 2012). For example, the ancient city of Jinyang – the birthplace of seven emperors and several rebellions - was burnt and then flooded by Zhao Kuangyin (927 to 976 AD - the first Emperor of the Song Dynasty) to prevent it from falling into enemy hands and therefore gifting its good Feng Shui to new leaders (Yan, 2014). During the Ming Dynasty, the imperial capital was moved from Nanjing to Beijing, partly because the latter offered a better Feng Shui location (Lip, 1997; Mak, 1998). Beijing’s original layout had been determined by the *Zhou Li*; that layout was retained but modifications were made (e.g. to the number of city gates) to enhance its compliance with Feng Shui principles (Meyer, 1978), with the city subject, over time, to ‘the increasing influence of feng shui cosmology’ (Bruun, 2008, 33). More generally, Chinese cities continued to reflect the ideals and beliefs of society, aligning with cosmology and expressing adherence to Confucian social structure: ‘[…] despite centuries of political upheaval, cultural and social development, and natural disasters, these cities were built and rebuilt much along the same lines from ancient times to the nineteenth century’ (Wu and Gaubatz, 2013, 67 – quoted in Wu, 2015, 17-18).

Feng Shui’s influence was also felt in rural areas. There are approximately 2,500 protected villages in China (MOHURD, 2014), located and designed in compliance with Feng Shui principles. Many of them are bordered by Feng Shui forests, which were planted by villagers on the advice of Feng Shui Masters, often to compensate for landscape imperfections and particularly the absence of mountains (Coggins, 2012) (Figure 1.5). These forests have been protected by villagers for centuries, as they are ‘believed to bring prosperity, wellbeing, and good fortune’ to their communities (Coggins and Minor, 2018, 4).

**INSERT FIGURE 1.5 HERE (FENG SHUI FOREST AT BEIKENG VILLAGE; CREDIT: YIPING DONG)**

Other influences include adherence to the *bagua* concept (literally eight symbols or trigrams), whereby the design of places – sometimes entire villages - incorporates eight elements: an octagon, for example, or eight roads radiating from a central feature. Examples include the ‘Eight Trigram Field’ in Hangzhou (set out between 1127 and 1279 AD) and the ‘Eight Trigram’ villages of Licha, near Guangzhou (built between 1208 and 1224 AD), and Zhuge (Figure 1.6), in Zhejiang Province (planned and built around 1340 AD) (see Chen and Wu, 2009).

**INSERT FIGURE 1.6 HERE (ZHUGE VILLAGE; CREDIT: ALEXIS LAWRENCE)**

The arrangement of these urban and rural spaces, directed by emperors or undertaken by peasants, evidences the practical impact of cosmological observation and belief on the development of place. There is nothing unique in China’s experience. Rather, the imprint of heaven on earth, or the significance assigned to social and religious order in the layout of cities, can be observed in many civilisations at many different times. In the next part of this chapter, we expand our analysis of cultural imprints on spatial order and morphology, moving eventually to a fuller conceptualisation of this issue before shifting to the modern period and how the impact of Feng Shui, at different scales, might be interpreted today.

**1.3 Place / landscape as cultural praxis**

Chinese cities and the buildings therein clearly reveal ‘cosmology and folk beliefs in practical terms’ (Knapp, 1986, 108). The same could be said elsewhere, as built environments come to express the values, beliefs and preferences of the societies that shape and populate them. Even a cursory glimpse at urban history will show that cities are more than random assemblages of buildings and people in space, and that belief systems and shared values play an important part in the production of space. The spatial organisation of ancient Greece, for example - where a system of *poleis* of various sizes coexisted independently from one another – reflected a belief in the appropriate scale and process of democracy. Although Athens in the fifth century was bigger and wealthier than other *poleis*, it did not dominate or become the capital of a unified state. Hall (1998, 36) points out that although this system of associated and equal political centres ‘was originally the result of geography’, it became ‘the product not only of geography but also of culture’ with all Greeks, including Athenians, coming to see this spatial-political model as the ‘natural and right unit for human society’ (ibid, 37). The internal layout of the *poleis* also revealed the importance attached to the idea of democracy: when this became the way of governing the city, the *agora* ‒ the place where people met ‒ replaced the *acropolis* and its temples as the centre of Athenians’ life (ibid.). Other values were also expressed through the way Greek cities were laid out and used: in classical Greece ‘domestic affairs counted for less than political, social and religious life’ (Wycherley, 1949, 177, quoted in Hall 1998, 42): therefore prominent sites were occupied by magnificent public buildings and public spaces, whilst private dwellings were relegated to the remaining space.

According to Lefebvre (1991, 31), ancient cities had their own ‘spatial practice’ and ‘forged’ their ‘own ‒ appropriated ‒ space’. Moreover, changes in society – or in the ‘mode of production’ – generate a ‘fresh space […], a space which is planned and organized subsequently’ (ibid, 47). Medieval cities, for example, ‘clustered at the foot of a great castle or church’ (Abercrombie, 1943, 48) reflecting the dominance of landlords and ecclesiastic institutions over the rest of the population and expressing the feudal mode of production. During the Middle Ages, the centrality of religion in people’s lives was expressed through the erection of magnificent Cathedrals and austere monasteries, which remain markers of that particular social order. When the trading bourgeoisie rose to power, following the dissolution of the feudal system during the Renaissance, a new ‘spatial code’ rose to prominence which evidenced an emergent mode of production: that of ‘merchant capitalism’ (Lefebvre, 1991, 47). The Renaissance put *men* and not *God* at the centre of the universe and found expression through its own spatial language. Renaissance towns celebrated their most prominent people and organisations: their ‘streets and squares were arranged in concord to the public buildings and palaces of political leaders and institutions’ (ibid, 47). In Florence, for example, buildings were regarded ‘as the sign of a great man’ (Hall, 1998, 70) and were erected to commemorate his accomplishments. Moving forward to contemporary societies, iconic architecture and regenerated city spaces are conditioned by their own social contexts – which are determined by productive forces and capitalist values - and express the ‘agenda[s] of the politically and economically powerful’ (Jones, 2009, 2521).

Places are therefore imbued with value: the way people organise their space, plan and build their cities, and shape their landscapes is guided by a ‘sense of place’ which is influenced by socio-cultural circumstances. According to Bourdieu (2005), people who occupy similar positions in social space share a similar disposition, or *habitus*: ‘all the elements of his or her behaviours have something in common, a kind of affinity of style, like the works of the same painter’ (Bourdieu, 2005, 44). Rather than being an intrinsic part of an individual’s nature, *habitus* is ‘a set of *acquired* characteristics which are the product of social conditions’ (ibid, 45) and thus ‘the mediating link between objective social structures and individual action’. Habitus therefore represents ‘the embodiment in individual actors of systems of social norms, understandings and patterns of behaviour, which, while not wholly determining action, do ensure that individuals are more disposed to act in some ways than others’ (Painter, 2000, 242).

People’s experience of social space in their everyday life creates a predisposition towards the formulation of certain expectations about their future, which align with both their past and current position in social space (Bourdieu, 1990).  *Habitus* both influences and is influenced by social practices; as it is ‘a product of history’, it constantly changes (Bourdieu, 2005, 45). Accumulated experience affects the way individuals form knowledge and act, including in relation to the built environment.

Ultimately ‘social space tends to be translated, with more or less distortions, into physical space’ (Bourdieu, 2000, 134) with the latter coming to reflect particular social attitudes and distinctions. Hence *habitus* – an internalized set of enduring and socially-constructed values - generates distinctive spatial practices. Indeed, there is a dialectical relationship between the *habitus* and the space that people inhabit: between *habitus* and *habitat*. ‘The agent engaged in practice […] inhabits [the world] like a garment […] or a familiar habitat. He feels at home in the world because the world is also in him, in the form of habitus’ (ibid, 142–143). Archer (2005, 431) contends that ‘built environment and habitus mutually sustain each other, but neither has absolute control over the other’: rather, both can (and do) evolve to adjust to changed circumstances, continually reshaping one another. In a similar vein, Lefebvre (1991) suggests that an existing space might be used in different ways from its initial purpose, as it is constantly redefined by social relationships: ‘(social) space is a (social) product’ (Lefebvre, 1991, 26). Reflecting on Lefebvre’s extensive writings on this subject, Molotch (1993, 887) concludes that ‘space is produced and reproduced through human intentions’, and subsequently ‘constrains and influences those producing it’. Asserting the social production of space means that ‘every society […] produce a space, *its own space*” (Lefebvre, 1991, 3, emphasis added). Massey (2005, 9) reinforces this message, noting that space ‘is always in the process of being made’ and we can imagine it ‘as a simultaneity of stories so far’.

Very similar reflections can be found in earlier writings. Heidegger (1971), for example, draws attention to the intimate link between ‘dwelling’ and ‘building’. Sharr (2007, 36) observes that the philosopher avoided the use of commas in the title of his seminal work ‘Building Dwelling Thinking’, thus underscoring ‘a unity he perceived between the three notions’. ‘[T]he erecting of buildings cannot be understood adequately in terms of either architecture or engineering construction, nor in terms of a mere combination of the two’ (Heidegger, 1971, 159): rather ‘building configures physically, over time, how people measure their place in the world’ (Sharr, 2007, 2).

Below the scale of cities, buildings are the expression of an ongoing human experience; they are receptacles of collective memory and the way individuals and societies understand and inhabit the world around them. They are erected in accordance to the specificity of a place and its inhabitants, and are therefore the products of both physical and social activity; people’s daily lives are configured by the buildings they occupy, which are, in turn, produced by the beliefs and values underpinning those lives. Instead of perceiving ‘building’ as ‘a one-off event that is then followed by dwelling’, Heidegger (1971, 67) proposed that ‘building and dwelling instead remain conjoined as a single ongoing activity’. In fact, they are *the same* activity: ‘for building isn’t merely a means and a way towards dwelling – to build is in itself already to dwell’ (ibid, 146).

Moving forward, the question we wish to pose is whether this bridge from (or unity between) building and dwelling can be corrupted, whether processes can intervene to alter the extent to which place signifies the values and beliefs of those who occupy it, or Heidegger’s more precise terms, those who dwell. Again, it is Lefebvre (1991) who offers a means of understanding this unity, and scope for its corruption, in his notion of *absolute* and *abstract* space.

**1.4 From absolute to abstract space**

The previous discussion has established that space is, in essence, socially produced. Over time, it becomes part of the identity of those who occupy, shape and make it (Lefebvre, 1991). Societies, both ancient and modern, are however heterogeneous; they are composed of individuals, classes or groups whose ideas differ and who therefore use space to represent their specific value sets and beliefs. Space is thus appropriated and shaped by those individuals, classes and groups on the basis of their relative power, their ideology, and their needs. More than this, ‘groups, classes, or fractions of classes cannot constitute themselves, or recognize one another, as ‘subjects’ unless they generate (or produce) a space’ (Lefebvre, 1991, 416). Competition centred on the production of space ensues, with class interests finding spatial expression and dividing ‘between those who produce a space for *domination* versus those who produce space as an *appropriation* to serve human needs” (Molotch, 1993, 889).

In the case of appropriation, ‘occupied space gives direct expression […] to the relationships upon which social organization is founded’ (Lefebvre, 1991, 229). This occurs, for example, in ancient societies where individuals experience social norms through the organization of a space that ‘*comprehends* the entire existence’ of those societies (ibid, 240). This absolutespace is an expression of a ‘cosmic naturalness’ (ibid, 232), of the forces of nature, and, in time, it also acquires the role of ‘sacred’, ‘magical’ and ‘cosmic’ space. Absolute space ‘has a strictly symbolic existence’ (ibid, 236): it is originally and fundamentally the space of religion but, as it evolves, it also becomes the space of politics. It is therefore ‘made up of sacred or cursed locations: temples, palaces, commemorative or funerary monuments’ (ibid, 240). It extends to private spaces, but only insofar as they have religious or political status (ibid, 241). Molotch (1993, 889) adds that it is ‘space that harmonizes with the body and its scale of reach and perceptual field, rich with smells and sounds that can be apprehended through the daily round’. It is easy to frame the spaces of Feng Shui, described earlier in this chapter, as having been appropriated to serve human needs (both physical and spiritual) and therefore as absolute spaces. There is however some blurring with the notion of spaces for domination, serving a more abstract purpose.

In the case of domination, writes Molotch (1993, 88), ‘space is put to the service of some abstract purpose [including] to facilitate state power’. Abstract space may be the space of bureaucratic politics - being both ‘political’ and ‘institutional’ (Lefebvre, 1991, 285) – or an economic space, supporting the reproduction of capital (ibid, 57). It is ‘the space of the bourgeoisie and of capitalism (ibid, 57), wired into the world of business and commerce. Continuing in this vein, Stanek (2011, 151) compares the ‘use value’ of absolute space - ‘related to the need, the expectation, the wish’ – with the prioritised ‘exchange value’ of abstract space: exchange *is* the abstract purpose, which ‘implies interchangeability: the exchangeability of a good makes that good into a commodity’ (Lefebvre, 1991, 337). Therefore, the dominated space resulting from this process is a ‘product’, which contrasts to appropriated space, which is instead ‘a crafted “work”, organically emerging out of the felt needs and urges of daily life’ (Molotch, 1993, 889).

In a sense, absolute space arises from social life, divorced from commodification (but not always from property), whilst abstract space arises, later on, from economic life and the pursuit of power and profit. This abstraction is a feature of late capitalism, where exchange value is ‘expressed in terms of money. In the past one bought or rented land. Today what are bought (and, less frequently, rented) are volumes of space: rooms, floors, flats, apartments, balconies, various facilities (swimming-pools, tennis courts, parking-spaces, etc.)’ (Lefebvre, 1991, 337). Abstract space not only ‘facilitates capitalist production, distribution, and consumption’ but is itself transformed ‘into a commodity: produced, distributed, and consumed’ (Stanek, 2011, 151). In this respect, space is ‘considered analogous to other economic goods’ and becomes ‘an important part of economies’ (Molotch, 1993, 888).

The notion of a movement from absolute to abstract spaces (as contexts for human existence), but also the continuing juxtaposition of these spaces, is further captured by Lefebvre (1991) in his analysis of the extension of capitalism and its ‘conquest of space’. Capitalism and development have extended ‘their reach to space in its entirety’ (ibid, 325), laying their ‘imprint upon the total occupation of all pre-existing space and upon the production of new space’ (ibid, 326). Indeed, investment in space has become ‘an ever increasingly profitable activity’, inspiring capitalism’s ‘conquest of space – in trivial terms, in real estate speculation, capital projects (inside and outside the city), [and] the buying and sale of space […] on a worldwide scale’ (Lefebvre, 2003, 155). For Lefebvre, space is not only the place where surplus value is generated and circulated, but becomes ‘the product of social labour, the very general object of production, and consequently of the formation of surplus value’ (ibid, 159).

The notion of abstract spaces (of capital) connects strongly with broader literatures on land, the built environment (as ‘consumption fund’ for ‘capital switching’) and capital’s ‘secondary circuit’ (Harvey, 1978). That secondary circuit (a built environment through which capital flows *and* is reproduced) provides an opportunity for the ‘siphoning off of loose money set on speculation in real estate and financial assets, liquid loot yearning to become concrete in space’ (Merrifield, 2006, 83). The ultimate abstraction of space is its ‘financialisation’: the practice of holding space as collateral asset, borrowing against its anticipated exchange value, creating debt and trading that debt on the international money markets. Lefebvre’s earlier notion of abstract space therefore aligns with, and is *foundational* *to*, the broader political economy perspective on land and urban development that has come to the fore today: land as a ‘market commodity’ bestowing wealth and power ‘to some very important people’ (Molotch, 1976, 309) and thereby shaping the spatial arrangement of modern societies (Harvey, 2001).

That broader political economy requires only brief introduction here. Harvey (2001) contends that capital investment has transformed the role of cities. Their function as places for productive activity has been relegated behind their role in capital accumulation. The maturation of financial markets (and rise of complex financial instruments, including structured finance) has meant that when traditional commodity markets become saturated (and producer and investor profits decline), capital has the opportunity to ‘switch’ away from that ‘primary circuit’ (of industrial production) to a secondary circuit comprising the land and space of the built environment. From that circuit further profit can be extracted in the direct form of land rent and the indirect form of debt trading (i.e. debt held on land in the form or commercial and residential credit, which can be securitized and sold on to investors). In this way, space – and the built environment therein - becomes its own circuit of ‘production, exchange and consumption’ (Harvey, 1978, 106) and the city becomes a ‘growth machine’ delivering monetary benefit through value extraction for those well-positioned to take advantage of this new reality. Elite groups ‘increase aggregate rents and trap related wealth’ creating a class consensus (regularly agreed with municipal authorities) around the value of growth, separating the ‘capitalist’ or ‘rentier’ class from others who continue to think of the city as a place to work and live (Logan and Molotch, 1987, 50). One of the major consequences of this growing abstraction of space is that ‘city building is less and less responsive to human need and more and more driven by entrepreneurial fervour’ (Beauregard, 1994, 730), being increasingly dominated by international real estate and financial markets.

All of this becomes the lived reality of abstract space: a growth ‘boosterism’ that mobilises political actors to direct land-use decisions towards the support of powerful elites (Logan and Molotch, 1987, 65). Therefore the hallmark of that abstract space is a convergence of economy and politics: an ‘elimination of all differences’ (Lefebvre, 1979, 293) that produces repetitive, interchangeable and generically designed spaces (Stanek, 2011) that, at the same time, reinforce social homogeneity and fragmentation (Lefebvre, 1991). Social fragmentation arises from expulsion: the dogged pursuit of increased rent through additional investment, with no regard to the impact this has on those individuals and groups for whom the city remains a space for living (Logan and Molotch, 1987), but who may be displaced by rising rents.

The encroachment of abstract space ‘can be resisted by the remnants of “absolute space” that survive in the habits of “everyday life”’ (Coleman, 2015, 55). These spaces of ‘real life’ can be viewed as superior or authentic, aligning with and appropriated to meet people’s daily needs. Their authenticity is judged relative to the ‘abstracted hell laid on by planner’s schemes’ (Molotch, 1993, 890): absolute spaces are the products of time and use, standing against the ‘deformities’ created by capital. Yet the notion of authenticity is a complex one: a simple binary between ‘valued absolute spaces’ and ‘devalued abstract ones’ (ibid, 893) is difficult to draw: ‘elites may produce places to monumentalize their authority or make money [but the] masses, nevertheless, may like them enormously’ (ibid, 893). Shopping malls, entertainment parks and new apartments all find their markets within urban populations, suggesting that they meet a real need. But there is perhaps a confusion here, or a simplification, that equates ‘use value’ to authenticity (and assigns it also to absolute space) and views exchange value as something corrupting – that is profane rather than sacred, or fails to express ‘symbolic existence’. But that symbolism has historically, in the case of Feng Shiu, extended to both the power (and fortune) of rulers and the everyday lives of ordinary people. In the final part of this introduction, we use the distinction between absolute and abstract space to frame a preliminary analysis of the ‘modernisation’ of Chinese geomancy, ending with the question that we return to at the end of this book: has Feng Shui lost its authenticity – its basic connection to cosmology – through its more varied and modern use, sometimes in the ‘abstract’ setting of real estate development?

**1.5 Tracking the transition from absolute to abstract space through scales, regulation and urban development**

China has been pursuing modernization since the 1950s, firstly through an emphasis on industrial development and large cities, and subsequently through improved agricultural methods and the development of medium and smaller cities (Wu, 2015). Seventy years ago, China’s communist government imposed tight regulation on urban development whilst rural areas were given relatively free rein, with more opportunities for informality. ‘The city, in contrast to the countryside, represented the domain of the state’ (ibid, 41) and a place of increased domination and control. That control, manifest in an industrial and utilitarian ideology, resulted in a ban on the practice of Feng Shui in mainland China during the period of Mao’s leadership (1949 to 1978). The desire to eradicate ‘backwardness and superstition’ (Bruun, 2008, 118) had greatest effect in towns and cities where the state’s reach was most pervasive. In rural areas, however, a ‘steady demand for Feng Shui- related services’ remained (ibid, 47), as did the Feng Shui forests (Coggins and Minor, 2018) and the practice of laying out homes according to its principles (Knapp, 1986). Also, the new communist government was unable to exert influence over Chinese communities in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore, which continued to view Feng Shui as an important guide for the arrangement of space (Mak and So, 2015; Teather and Chow, 2000). With the departure of the Japanese and the return of its British colonial rulers, Feng Shui in Hong Kong ‘assumed the role of native Chinese religion as opposed to foreign influence and Christianity: it became an element in a Chinese identity in relation to the European elite’ (Bruun, 2008, 129).

In mainland China, although Feng Shui survived the Cultural Revolution and has continued to exert an influence on the built environment at various scales, the nature of this influence has changed over recent decades, adapting to the country’s new socio-economic realities. Following economic reform, initiated at the end of the 1970s, China has undergone an unprecedented transformation that has affected both cities and the countryside. The country’s economic revolution - which has seen China transition from a rigidly-planned to a market-oriented economy and become the second largest economy in the world - has been most visibly manifest in cities, which have grown at an astronomical rate (Wu et al, 2007). China has experienced unparalleled urbanisation: between 2000 and 2010, its overall urban population grew by 51%. By 2014, 54% of China’s population (758 million people) lived in urban areas (Chan and Wan 2017) and this is forecasted to rise to 75% by 2050 (Wu et al, 2007).

The main contributor to the growth in urban population is the massive rural to urban migration. By 2013, a third of the country’s urban inhabitants (250 million people) were rural migrants (Chan and Wan, 2017). Urbanisation has been propelled not only by China’s remarkable economic growth, but also by government policy. Since the mid-2000s, the implementation of urban-rural ‘integration plans’ has encouraged ‘the ‘merging’ of rural settlements and the demolition of smaller villages so as to free up land quotas’ (Wu, 2015, 58) and focus development in urban areas, with the consequent ‘aggressive removal of rural villages and the resettlement of farmers’ (ibid, 100). More recently, in 2012, the government announced plans to move 250 million additional rural residents into towns and cities by 2050, by offering them urban residence permits (*hukou*), turning them into urban consumers and contributors to future growth (Chan and Wan, 2017; Taylor, 2015).

These changes, alongside the wider forces of globalization and its attendant patterns of consumption, have impacted greatly on everyday economic and social life. As well as lifting 500 million people out of poverty, they have handed a new urban population an unprecedented level of economic independence, inevitably affecting its aspirations and cultural practices (Wu, 2015). Whilst rural migrants seek to orientate themselves in new urban settings, importing cultural practices from their villages, a rural-urban divide remains between the growing cities and rural areas not yet caught up in the maelstrom of urbanisation.

For Feng Shui practice, the differences arising from that divide are clear (Coggins, 2017). According to Bruun (2008, 60) ‘[…] the contrast between popular practice and intellectual thought have never been greater than in the modern period, when rural villages follow centuries-old patterns of thought while urban elites have adopted a modernistic view of life’. Whilst the appropriated spaces of Feng Shui in rural areas can be considered *absolute* (authentic representations of old beliefs and values, where the human and non-human worlds meet, expressing a bond with nature and its elemental forces), urbanisation (and the urban processes that make modern cities) brings *abstraction,* meaning either the eradication and replacement of underlying culture or its mobilisation by capitalists (and by regulatory forces) to create synthetic spaces in which property values are elevated (through synthesising cultural norms) and relocated communities, facing unsettling change, placated.

How this can happen is analysed in later chapters, but some introductory insights are provided here. The concept of *qi*, for example, which ‘[…] in rural Feng Shui tends to be as many-sided as in the philosophical tradition’ (Bruun, 2008, 59), tends to lose its connotation as a life force (that flows through wind (feng), water (shui) and earth, integrating elements of the spiritual world) and is reinvented in urban areas and processes as flows of currency and of capital that deliver individual and corporate wealth (Coggins, 2017). Likewise, Feng Shui in rural settings has remained a ‘cohesive and collective undertaking’, encompassing ‘a complex panoply of spiritual beliefs and magical practices involving supernatural forces and agents’ (Coggins and Minor, 2018, 6), conveying a sensitivity to nature that is thought to be of direct benefit to communities. This is expressed in the survival of Feng Shui forests, ‘imbued with spiritual significance’ (ibid, 9), in the ‘sacred landscapes’ of south China (Webb, 1995) and in a continued fealty to principles guiding the siting and arrangement of houses, for collective benefit (Bruun, 1996). But there is strong indication of a re-interpretation of Feng Shui knowledge for urban settings and processes: a commercialisation of individual benefit that prioritises the material over the spiritual (Madeddu and Zhang, 2017), as noted earlier by Bruun (2008) and more recently by Coggins (2017). Hence, Feng Shui *in the city* takes different forms.

There is also a juxtaposition of different Feng Shui priorities: urban growth, underpinned by migration, has brought rural values to cities. The millions of villagers who have left their ancestral communities to resettle in urban areas are ‘practitioners of an agrarian, place-specific, animist, vitalist, lineage-centric Feng Shui [but] face radically different spatial challenges in making and maintaining meaningful dwelling space in radically disenchanted landscapes’ (Coggins, 2017, 730) and when trying to recreate the absolute space of Feng Shui within their own homes. By finding small ways to overcome these challenges – through, for example, the placement of objects with symbolic meaning - the new arrivals self-identify as a social group (Feuchtwang, 1974, in Bruun, 2003). This affords some protection to traditional practice, but it must contend with a broader erasing of Feng Shui’s domestic imprint within Chinese cities, as many traditional courtyard houses are lost to development and traditional values are displaced (Lo, 2010).

A degree of protection is afforded traditional Feng Shui by the movement and mixing of population, but that mixing also results in transference of values and an ‘increasingly sanitized version of the old tradition’ arising from its ‘urban resurgence’ (Bruun, 2014, 173). A ‘Westernisation’ of Feng Shui has been observed, which prioritises the wellbeing of the living over attention to gods, ghosts and ancestors: rationalism (focused on achieving benefit for the individual) has tended to replace symbolism in the practice of Feng Shui (ibid.). The tendency of urban people in China and other Asian countries to commission – often expensive - Feng Shui experts to create comfortable living spaces (Bruun, 2014; Teather and Chow, 2000), alleviate the anxieties arising from hectic urban lives (Tsang, 2004) and generally attract good fortune (Knapp, 1999; Volodzko, 2015) is cited as evidence of this. Feng Shui has been transformed into a form of interior design, with *expensive accessories* replacing the basic need to arrange (inexpensive and simple) household objects in a way that accords with its basic principles: ‘as fashion, trickery or trustworthy truth’ the practise of Feng Shui ‘in urban interior and garden design in the rich cities of Euro-America as well as China has been added to its traditional use for the siting of graves, homes, and public buildings’ (Feuchtwang, 2003, vii).

At this domestic level, with its commercial supports, a loss of authenticity marked by a shift from Feng Shui as an absolute to an abstract space might be claimed. But whether practised by rural migrants or wealthy adherents in New York, London or Shanghai, Feng Shui remains a framework for dwelling – a means of domesticating one’s space. These remain appropriated rather than dominated spaces. Therefore the search for a fundamental shift in the purpose, and authenticity, of Feng Shui needs to happen at a different scale. Together with rural migrants, *investors in the urban housing market* are the main driver of the urban Feng Shui turn (Bruun, 2014). Whilst in ancient China the development of Feng Shui practice was steered principally by the emperors, the revival of Feng Shui in modern urban China is mainly due to lifestyle changes and commercial forces.

Since the 1980s, ‘interest […] from Chinese business has been explicit and almost universal’ (Bruun 2008, 122) with Feng Shui becoming a lucrative proposition not only for the rising number of Feng Shui masters offering their services to urbanites, but also for housing and other property developers, who increasingly use it to elevate property values and boost profit (Bond, 2008; Yau, 2012). Consumer preferences are impacting on housing choices to such a degree that ‘superior Feng Shui’ has now become a key marketing tool and claim. At a project level, the use of Feng Shui by developers suggests a new role for Chinese geomancy in the domination of space by elites for economic purposes: in this new abstract space of Feng Shui, its role is to extract maximum land rent. Does this denote a loss of authenticity, with Feng Shui mobilised cynically, or does it merely signal that space is now produced through different, commercial processes, but retains its use value and symbolic importance? The separation of producer and consumer is a common feature of modern development and urban processes, creating a divide between those who ‘make’ the built environment and those who live with and within it. But values transcend these boundaries: the environment of production, regulation of that production and consumption share values, unless we see the interests and values of elites as being entirely separate from those of wider society. Therefore, our concern in this book for the impact of Feng Shui on the contemporary built environment requires a focus on individuals (adapting space to meet need), producers (with commercial motivations but interfacing with individuals as consumers, and existing in the same cultural space) and regulators (reflecting the values of wider society).

Those values have changed in the later twentieth century. Modernity has eclipsed eastern cosmology; and Western ideas, alongside Western natural science in particular, have provided China with a new cultural referent (Chen and Nakama, 2004). As a consequence of this, ‘from an early date Chinese authorities ruled out a positive contribution from traditional Feng Shui to a modernizing society’ either culturally or scientifically (Bruun, 2014, 173). For a long time, it was identified with ignorance (Bramble, 2003) and with ‘feudal superstition’ (Bruun, 2014, 174). However, where the denigration of Feng Shui was less pronounced, Hong Kong being a case in hand, a regulatory impact may still be detected, as may the desire to avoid disruptions to good Feng Shui and the inevitable corrective costs that follow (Moore, 2010). In the mainland too, cultural influences remain, with ‘elites and bureaucrats [now] concerned with Feng Shui in ways the same people would have once attributed (at least officially) to feudal peasant notions’ (Cartier, 2002, 1516). Even the communist government sends out mixed signals: it was certainly no accident that the Beijing Summer Olympic Games began at 8pm on the 8th August – an auspicious combination of time and date, intended to guarantee the success of the games (Wu et al, 2012).

In the chapters that follow, we will track the changing impact and imprint of Feng Shui on Chinese Cities. The three agents of that impact – individuals, commercial interests and regulators – continue, in this modern period, to shape both the private and domestic spaces of Feng Shui and also its public spaces: the wider urban fabric of cities. The broader sense of transition from absolute spaces (of nature) to abstract spaces (of domination by commerce) will be used to frame the case studies, leading us to the book’s broader questions: to what extent (and how) does Feng Shui deliver a pervasive influence over Chinese cities, and is that impact today an authentic (and ‘absolute’) expression of Feng Shui’s roots or merely an abstraction, designed to exploit land value and extract ever greater profit from cities?

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1. Daoism is an ancient Chinese philosophy founded by Lao Zi (around 571 to 471 BC), which later rose to the status of religion (in 142 AD). It was developed from the Yi Jing (The book of Changes, around 800 BC) and was concerned with ‘the observation of nature and the discovery of its “Dao” or “Tao”, the way of human life, the way of nature, the way of ultimate reality’ (Mak and So, 2015, 13). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Many cultures reference the presence in the environment of a ‘supernatural electricity called “mana” by anthropologists’ (Emmons, 1992, 40). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. This philosophy, founded by Confucius (551 to 479 BC), taught people to follow a certain social order, assuming the need for hierarchical and unequal relationships between the ruler and the subjects and assigning to filial piety and respect for the elderly a key moral role. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The earliest attempt to draw a link between the universal pattern and the working of nature is documented in the *Yi Jing* (The Book of Changes), which is conventionally attributed to the first of the mythic rulers of China, Fu Xi, from the time preceding the Xia dynasty (approximately 2070 to 1600 BC). It is also claimed that the book was edited by Confucius. The foundation of this book was the theory of Yin and Yang (Mak and So, 2015) and, as Bruun (2008, 99) highlights, Feng Shui ‘is anchored in its perception of reality’. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)