Chinese Garden of Friendship and Sydney’s Chinatown: Friendship and Something Beyond at Darling Harbor

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PREFACE

Coming from an Asian upbringing, I have been very into, as an amateur, the art of *Feng Shui*, which is a Chinese philosophical system, and also have a keen interest in the development of Chinatowns and related facilities around the world. However, I had not been able to make any connection between these two subjects, until recently an introduction of *Chinese Garden of Friendship* came to my attention. After a further study of the target, the depiction of its involvement with Feng Shui, along with the unique designs, propelled me to make a trip there in April of 2018 to witness its elegance and appreciate the tranquility it entails. For this journey, of course, Sydney’s Chinatown was included in my itinerary.

As a matter of fact, when I was taking time in exploring these two iconic places, I accidentally learned the wonder of “harvesting the unexpected”! Because, as my excursion was unfolding, I realized the harmony of Feng Shui was also with Chinatown, and the symbolism of friendship between Australia and China was omnipresent at both tour sites. The following describes what these two places are about and how they interact with Feng Shui and the manifestation of friendship. Along the way, some other components about racial issues in Sydney are inevitably brought up.

DISCOVERY OF THE GARDEN
Located at the corner of Day Street and Pier Street in Sydney, The Garden was a gift from Guangdong, China, for the celebrations of bicentennial birthday of Australia, plus the sister state relationship between the people of Guangdong and the people of New South Wales. After passing a modestly-looking front gate, through the winding paths, visitors experience the amazement of natural scenery in midst of commercial district of Sydney. Undoubtedly have those waterfalls, lakes, bamboo trees, willows, numerous pavilions and the living art of Penjing made this place more distinctive than I can describe! While the listing of my highlights may not be among the most significant sights which make it as an outstanding Chinese garden outside China, I took intuition from those favors for the focuses of Feng Shui and Friendship in this essay. This explains why these characteristics are so charming to me.

**Special features**

**Dragon Wall**--At the first encounter with it, from my glimpse as a tourist, there are two dragons--brown (yang) & blue (yin)--moving in the cloud, and there is a red ball being placed in the middle of them. It is already such an exquisite artwork to view without understanding what the implication is. After reading the description of the in-depth meaning, I appreciated even more for this fabulous design!
Blue dragon represents New South Wales while brown is for Guangdong. The round red material is actually a pearl! These two dragons, playing a precious pearl together, are meant to deliver a deep message to the visitors: *Yin* meets *Yang* (It is a theory of Chinese Feng Shui), which signifies a harmonious relationship between these two states. This is the first sight of the garden I visited, but I already fell in love with this facility when passing this starting point.

**Twin Pavilions**---There are more than ten pavilions throughout the Garden, and they are all gorgeous. Why are these two selected for special introduction? And for what reason they were built together? What kind of token they represent?
As a matter of fact, the answers to these questions are almost self-explanatory if the implication of Dragon Wall is well understood. Again, friendship speaks volumes here. In the meantime, there are also floral emblems of these two states—Sydney and Guangdong, side by side, within the architecture. What a wonderful gesture they are portraying!

**Rock Forest and legendary rocks**—The Rock Forest tells the love story of *Ashima*, which is a well-known Chinese legend. Although the story was a tragedy, it is quite touching and beautiful. Around the same area, there are rocks in shapes of legendary figures such as: dragon, phoenix, and unicorn. Together they are examples of balancing opposites—softness and toughness. This phenomenon shows the principle of Taoist philosophy, from which Feng Shui is derived.

**Gurr**—It is also known as The Pavilion of Clear View, which sits at the highest point of the Garden, so, from the high standing, visitors are able to catch the best view of the Garden.

In addition to the advantage of paramount perspective and spectacular decorations, this is reportedly the place where the flow of “life force” of the Garden can be managed, because it is located in a special position to capture the “Qi” of the five elements—wood, fire, earth, metal, water—which are the basis of all the life forms, and it is also the essence of Feng Shui.
When I concluded the trip to the Garden before heading toward Chinatown on that day, I felt I was having a tranquil mind which the tour had provided me with though I was in a bustling world.

A GLANCE AT SYDNEY’S CHINATOWN

Since the 1920s, the area between Central Station and Darling Harbor has been designated as the 3rd Chinatown--after the very first one in the early 19th century in the Rocks and then moving to Market Street at Darling Harbor. Nevertheless, the social condition of this Chinatown had been considered as on “life support” until the 1970s when White Australia Policy was repealed. Ever since then, Chinese immigrants have arrived at Sydney by leaps and bounds, and, furthermore, the context of the China rise has also had pivotal influence played out in the growth of Australian economy. In this essay, I am trying to steer clear of politics, economy, and their impacts on Chinatown’s revolving development, so no details regarding these aspects are being described. My emphasis are the presentations, from my viewpoints, of Feng Shui and resulting Friendship, via the following characteristics in Chinatown.

Special features
Golden Water Mouth--Before diving into Chinatown, I did not gain much information about this sculpture. Ironically, it was the first and most impressive sight I came across when I entered Chinatown area. The moment I hit the intersection of Hay Street & Sussex Street, my eyes were immediately glued on an artwork, standing TALL on an island of the streets. Besides its huge size, my instinct that this masterpiece has connection with Feng Shui also drew me remaining there and staring at it for quite a long while. With the inscription placed in front of the sculpture, accompanies by my own literature searching, my take of this grandiose work can be summarized as follows.

It was the project of Chinese artist Li Lin, who happens to be a strong believer of Feng Shui. During her study of art in Australia, she was so touched by the stories of Chinese immigrants
during the gold rush period, so she was determined to doing something in honor of this heritage. She exercised her art expertise, and applied the theory of five elements in Feng Shui to make out the framework of her project. She ended up with using the trunk of a eucalyptus tree and doing the sculpture. Then, the leaves were covered with gold, and the sculpture was mounted on a soil ground, the location is near harbor (water). ALL of the boldfaced are Australian materials (AND elements of Feng Shui), so it is an ideal symbolism to harmonize good fortune for the people and with this urban enclave.

The invigoration of Chinatown

While Dixon Street, between Goulburn Street and Hay Street, has been claimed as Chinatown since the 1920s, this area had not lived up to the title as an ethnic enclave until probably the early 1980s. After then, Australia has made efforts to move away from white settlements. To this end, Chinatown had an advantage of being a symbol of diversity, so many measures initiated by Sydney mayor; The Chinese community; and local activists to “revitalize” this area had been in place. As a result, this district was repeatedly praised as NEW Chinatown. The following are just a fraction among what have been done.

A. Constructions of two spectacular gateways, by the donations of Chinese community at each end of Dixon Street. The words, on one of the arches, say “Towards Australia and Chinese Friendship” (also in Chinese) signify the beginning of benevolent foreign relationship. Besides this one, other three bilingual plagues on arches are worded as: “Understand virtue trust”; “Men from four seas are brothers”; “Continue the past into the future”. All of them are very poetic and supportive for goodwill between these two countries.
B. In addition to arches, more beautiful artwork, such as a circular sculpture and a pagoda as a new information kiosk, also adds efforts of the beautification to this Chinese community. Furthermore, shades from trees; widened paths; and new street lights; and the conversion of this area to a “pedestrian mall” have brought positive energy to this area. From the angle of Feng Shui, according to experts of this theory, these measures have changed “Qi flow” of this district toward its benefits.
C. Bilingual (English & Chinese) street signs of key streets such as Dixon Street, Thomas Street and Hay Street have been in words and in deed to embrace Chinatown as a part of multicultural society, as the abolishment of White Australian policy has meant to this nation.

Haymarket—a great example of cultural diversity

Haymarket is surrounded by many suburbs of Sydney. Although it includes plenty of Chinese stores and business, equal sign should not be placed between this neighborhood and Chinatown. Rather, this is a typical town of multi-cultures, because, according to Australian Census, almost 88% of its population was born outside Australia. The mixture of nationalities covers all over the world, with Thailand being the leading contributor, then China.

What has pulled its weight to make this area so popular among a variety of ethnic groups in Sydney? First of all, the great location has been credited as one of the major factors. It is situated at the southern end of the Sydney central business district, and is adjacent to Darling Harbor, so it has enjoyed the convenience of public transportation. When business oriented immigrants first arrived at this town, this advantage was definitely the first attraction to them if they are ready to start the investments.

Secondly, Feng Shui may have also played a role on their choice. Since it is near Darling Harbor, it is naturally easier to draw Qi from its surroundings, so the flow of Qi has no obstructions. Therefore, the harmony between individuals and their environment can be reached. Because there are many followers of Feng Shui among Thais and Chinese, possibly this theory have been consulted before they made decisions to settle down here and also started their business. It is certainly a factor in making this area a place highly sought after by them.

Special features

Paddy’s Markets---Situated at Hay Street, it is Sydney’s largest indoor market, with hundreds of stalls, somewhat like flea markets or street markets, in a gigantic flat ground. Though there is a tiny section for fruits, vegetables, and seafood, it is mainly for bargains of any merchandise under the sun! Although it is open only five days (Wednesday through Sunday), there are reportedly over 25000 visitors to this site per week. A running joke, regarding the nationalities of customers, goes
that inside this place it looks more like “united nations” than the real United Nations (in New York City) is.

**Market City**—Residing above Paddy’s Markets, it opens 7 days a week for business. There are over 100 retail stores for shopping, plus restaurants and food court for dining. One huge supermarket named IGA Thai Kee is worth the mentioning, because, by the origins of its merchandise, the store really shows the characteristics of cultural diversity. It carries food or groceries from all over the world and they are shelved separately, with very clear marking on each isle of the originating country. Multi-cultures are not a surprise, but this is an eye opening store layout.

**CONCLUSION**

Throughout this essay, I have embedded, here and there, my own interpretations of Feng Shui, Friendship and multiculturalism to my main subjects—Chinese Garden of Friendship and Sydney’s Chinatown. When I paid visits to the above-mentioned two places, I felt so strongly that these elements fit in the environment so well. During the process of writing, this kind of impetus was still strong. There have been countless literature centered on those two Australian places, on Feng Shui, on friendship, on cultural diversity, but my focus is to tie them all together as one entity.

**Feng Shui** is, as how I look at it, arranging the environment to make energy or “Qi” flow soothingly through the surroundings. In so doing, the surroundings are under control and what a person wants out of life is easier to be accomplished. **Friendship** involves, in a broader sense, many components of communication, understanding, love, and evolution. **Cultural diversity**, opposite to cultural assimilation in a society, has a policy that everyone can feel free and comfortable to make own choices without fear of being rejected.

I was fortunate enough to have ALL of them mixed as ingredients of a salad bowl for me to savor in a fruitful trip to Sydney, Australia.

(I am grateful to the partial funding of Hunter College Presidential grant to make this trip possible)
FURTHER READINGS

Chinese Cultural Center

Retrieved from https://cccsydney.org/


