

WIND/ WATER/ ARCHITECTURE

FENGSHUI AS AN ARCHITECTURAL THEORY

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MASTER'S THESIS



THEME

INCREASING number of literate people are focusing on disincarnate and invisible matters, and the question of our species' inherent preferences is raising ever more questions of what we prefer by our nature. One cause for this phenomenon is arguably the change to modern times, which apparently has caused us to either forget or overlook certain features that have been part of our surroundings, regardless of the period our culture. However, in Europe, we are left with only a selection of demolished cities, and one book of architecture has survived from the Greco-Roman

Period. Therefore, due to the great collection of Ancient Chinese texts, that we still have and can use, we should see fengshui as a reasonable source, to question our current building habits. Therefore, this work is based on the question of: what have we possibly lost, or overlooked, during the change to modern times? Furthermore, as this thesis is aiming to find answers to this problem from fengshui, it brings the second question: could fengshui's principles be part of bringing these features back to our built environment?

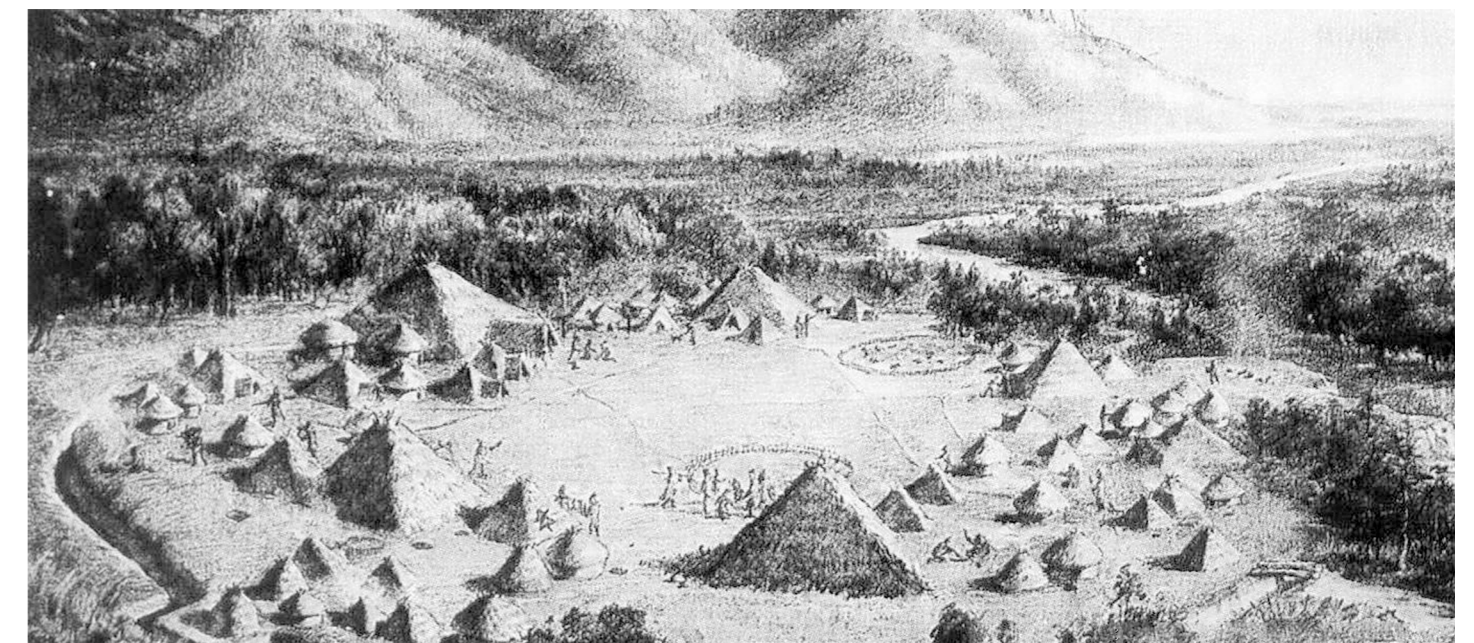


FENGSHUI

THERE is barely any doubt that fengshui has derived from the pre-historic societies of China, such as Cultures of Loess Plateau, Banpo- (ca. 6700 BCE), and Yangshao-settlements (ca. 5000-3000 BCE). These early settlements set the basic premises of fengshui, which was later developed into the knowledge of kanyu, and further to the art of fengshui by the Daoist recluse philosophers, artists, poets, and literates. Although many of the fengshui Classics from this era are focused on burial traditions, it is still clear that fengshui's pur-

pose is on comfortable living. Due to its early existence, nature has a central and mythological role in its practice. Therefore, fengshui's focus also decreases in line among the smaller scales. While this has been

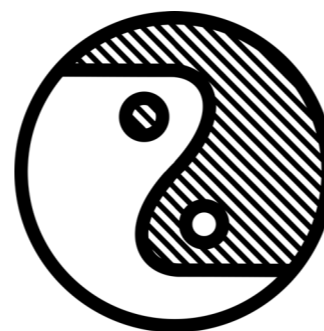
a common tradition in various cultures globally, a shift to modern architecture has caused a contrary attitude of favoring the interior of the designing.



QI

EVERYTHING in Fengshui can be derived from the qi energy and its forms. While science has not yet fully approved this theory, it should be more understood as the poetic diction of Ancient Chinese, rather than a consistent theory. Therefore, regardless of its metaphysical appearance, it does form a philosophy that is easy to grasp and follow to create a comfortable dwelling place.

The basic premise of qi is derived from the cyclic nature of the Earth; qi is an ever-moving, cyclical energy, that comes in various forms. The quantity and quality of qi straightly determine the healthiness and life fullness of a specific place or a being. However, to collect it, it needs to move slowly.



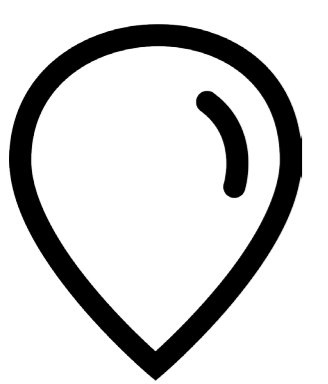
YIN-YANG & FIVE ELEMENTS

HUMANS have a tendency to set things in dualistic oppositions. In architecture, this naturally means features such as open - closed, light - dark, soft - hard, etc. In Classical Chinese literature, this is expressed by the concept of yin-yang - A theory of two cyclical energies, that are required to be in balance, for harmonious living. As modern architecture is inevitably pri-

marily masculine, with hard materials, and sharp forms, it shows the imbalance of this dualistic theory in our current built environment.

ther help architecture, especially on finding material compatibility. It is arguable that this lack of tendency to use different opposing material features is being a part of why certain modernistic architects, such as Mies van der Rohe's and Marcel Breuer's, works have been criticized for being cold and sterile.

Five elements are a further finer action of this dualistic theory, where every material (Fire, Earth, Metal, Water, and Wood) either creates or destroys each other. This theory, among the yin-yang, could fur-



WATER

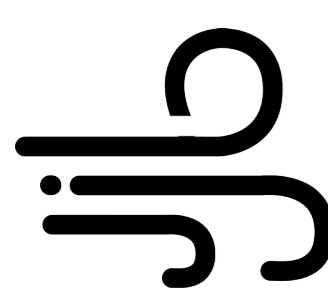
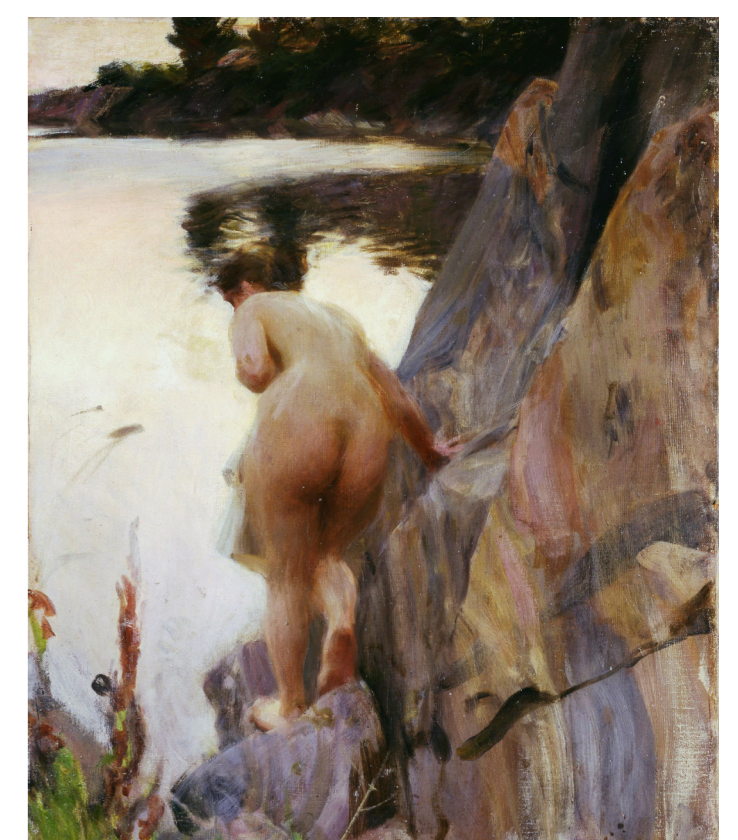
"...fengshui is, first of all, to obtain water and secondly to store from the wind."

WATER was the most vital part of fengshui, likely because of its pure necessity for settlements in ancient times and human life in general. However, even in fengshui practice, mountains and other features has become more important in the practice.

This might be the phenomenon of modern times, where water is taken for granted, and treated more as a chemical compound, than a vital part of human life.



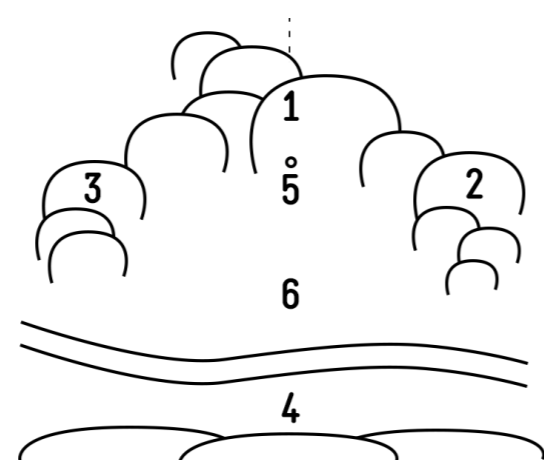
Nevertheless, we came from water, our bodies are mainly water, and Primordial water is a common substance in many cultures' historical beliefs. Slow, tranquil waters are the true symbol of peace and silence. Water has undoubtedly a feminine feel, which inevitably could counteract the masculine culture of our current built environment partly.



WIND PROTECTION

"If qi rides the wind it is scattered"

EVEN though water is an essential feature in fengshui, the much more discussed topic in the Classics is undoubtedly the protection from winds - especially the northern cold breeze. This is best visible from the demand of having mountains or other means of protection on the northern (back) side of a building. Other means of protection from wind, by e.g. vegetation, is always welcome.



ENVIRONMENT

- 1) Black Tortoise/Warrior
- 2) Azure Dragon,
- 3) White Tiger,
- 4) Red Bird
- 5) Node/Cave
- 6) Mingtang/Bright Court



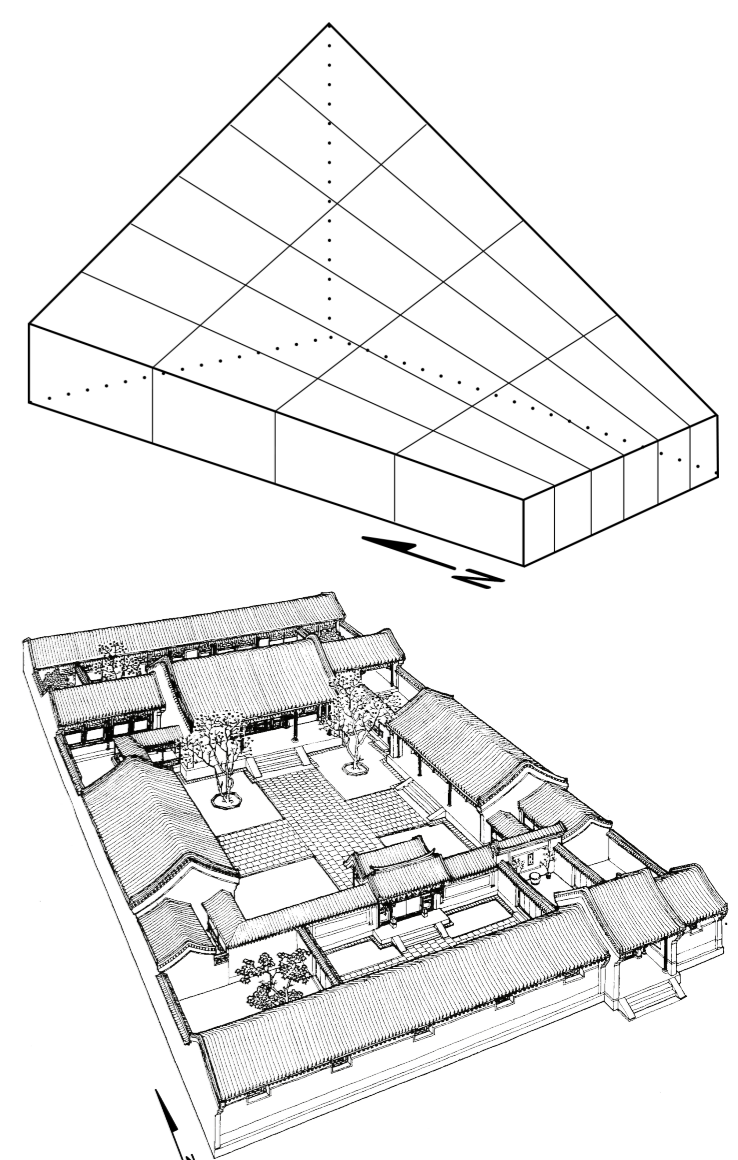
BUILDING FORMS

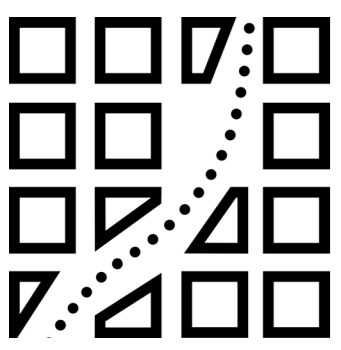
"land raises, where the qi accumulates"

THIS has presumably led to a misunderstanding in modern fengshui practice, causing competition in building heights in Chinese cities and towns. Yet, instead, classical fengshui is speaking for low architecture, to avoid an overabundance of the qi energy. Besides favoring a low scale building, the same "armchair" form setting as with mountains is preferred - the highest part placing to north-east, with an open center. How-

PRACTICE

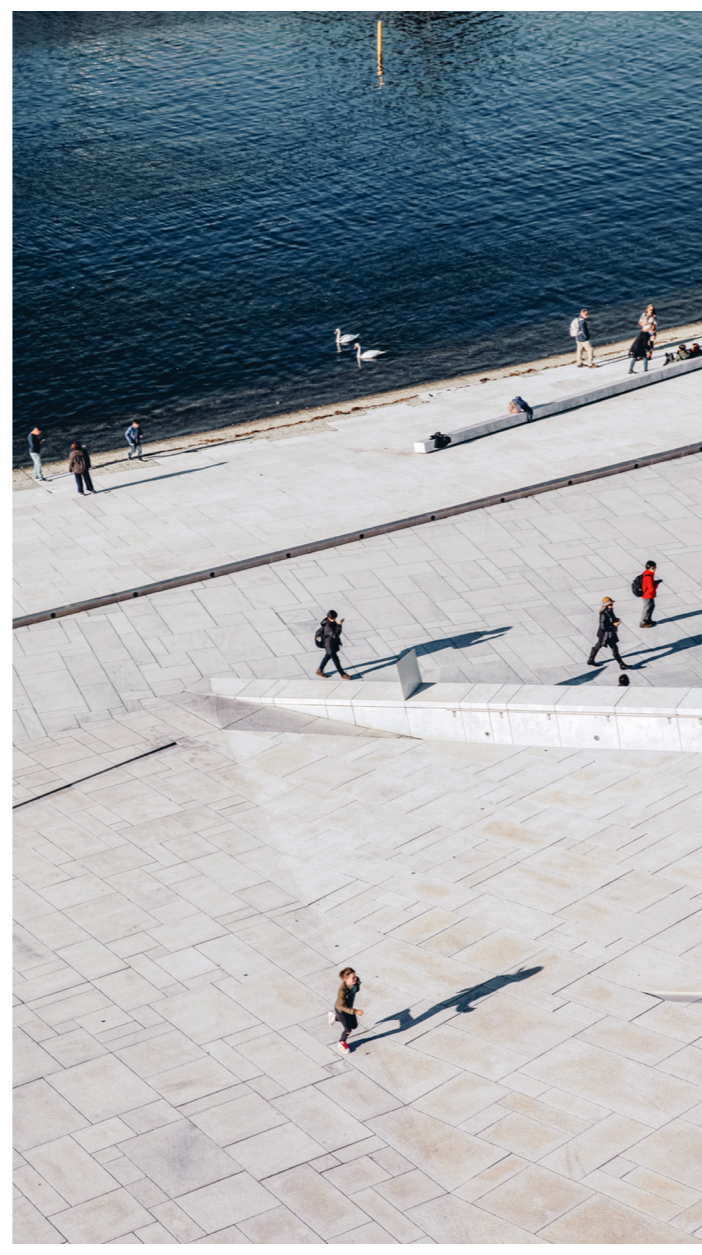
ever, this is rather limiting when it comes to architectural expression. As symbols have been a part of Chinese culture since the early settlements, it unavoidably has also become a part of judging the auspiciousness of architecture. However, while certain feelings can be driven from certain forms, this rule is still not agreed on even on some of the fengshui Classics.



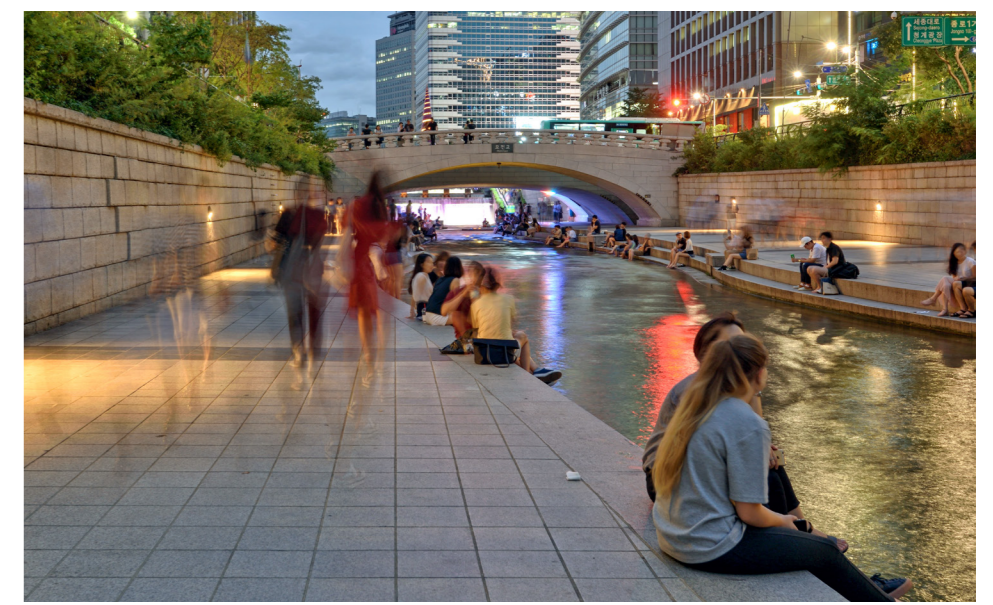


STREAMS & POOLS

THE modern city with impenetrable surfaces and a street system that completely ignores the underlying topography has led to a general ignorance towards water featured cultural identity. Rivers have been paved over, and only large roads create the borders of communities. Fengshui requires a close distance for small waters, especially near the front and sides of a building, preferably as a form of slow streams. Moreover, according to Christopher Alexander, every building project should include a plan for visible waters.



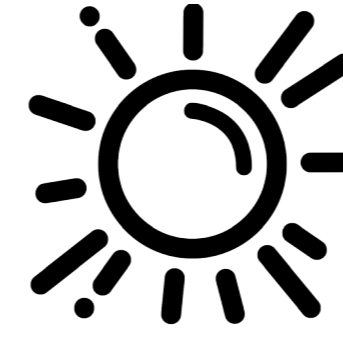
Different water-themed features can have a large variety of uses and effects. Streams can highlight the topography of the city, work as a place for leisure, and add an auditory quality. It clears the air, brings new species of birds and insects, increases air moisture, and lowers the temperature in hot climates. They can be places for swimming or playing, or just being an aesthetic features of a neighborhood. Therefore, it should seem necessary to include in all of the city fabric.



VEGETATION

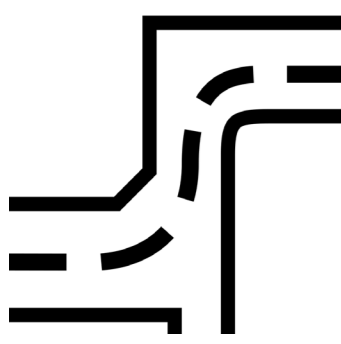
"Where [qi] comes and accumulates, stops and gathers, there will be [...] the grasses lush and the forests luxuriant"

ABUNDANT growth of vegetation – grasses, flowers, forests, and trees – is a requirement. Naturally, this was a sign of a healthy and proper site in pre-historic times, but it is still necessary today due to the biophilia effect of greenery. Humans acquire a tendency to seek connections and be near wildlife and greenery. Tall trees especially are favored in fengshui, as long as they do not cause shadow on buildings.



SUNLIGHT

Having a building to face south or southerly direction is a common requirement for fengshui, due to the mandatory positive energy of sunlight. The art of architecture is largely based on the play of light, but its proper use is still becoming overlooked. People are phototropic by nature, and therefore we need sunlight for physical and mental health. Thus, the right rooms should face south, and the north is not an adequate direction due to it being cold and insufficient.

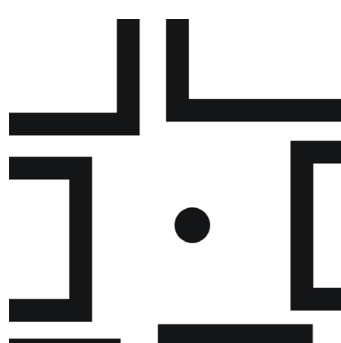


WINDING STREETS

UNDULATING streets add variety to the experience of the city. Limiting the views of pedestrians keeps the route exciting and makes it feel shorter than it is in reality. It slows the wind speeds, and enhance the auditory experience. Besides simply winding the street, also punctuation, fluctuation, and anticipation are ways to achieve this quality.

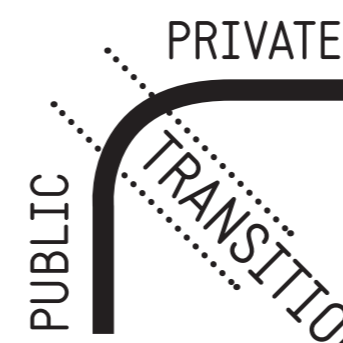


Straight streets, on the other hand, can appear endless and burdensome to use. They are easily windy and uncomfortable. They are meant for movement only, which inevitably also leads to increased vehicular traffic and driving speeds. Therefore, these linear road systems typically adds no quality for the city fabric what so ever. Unfortunately, this is the street type typically found in the commonly used grid plan.



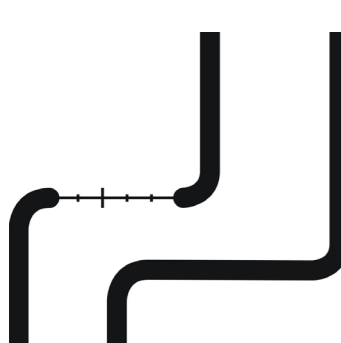
CORE & CENTER

CENTER plays a significant role in fengshui's room placement, as it determines the location of all of the other spaces in a building, accordingly with a Bagua-grid system. A core has a characteristic of a social place and location of movement – preferably a place one commonly uses when entering or exiting the building. In public facilities, this is commonly an airy lobby or a thoroughfare. Indoor market place, or a courtyard.



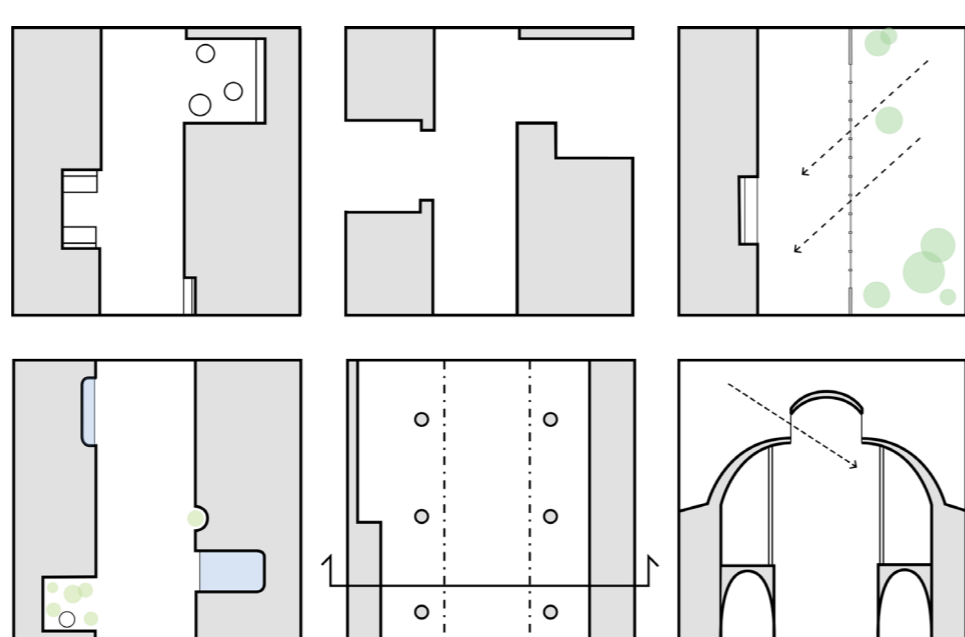
SOFT EDGES

FAVORING of soft forms can also relate to socio-economical questions, such as the turn from public to private. To ensure an active city life, there must be a social gradient of slow transformation from public to private: city street > city block > 1st floor > apartments. If the connection fails, the street becomes a mere way of movement, and thus the activities will not appear. Therefore, instead of only moving the activities inside buildings, an all-encompassing, seamless connection between the interior and exterior is required for the maximal aliveness of a city.



CORRIDORS

As with pathways, corridors are as well preferred to be winding, due to the speed of qi. While there is no physical energy to experience indoors, long straight corridor does have specific effects on human psyche. Therefore, opening and having turns in the passage is somewhat necessary.



CONTOURED FORMS

DAOIST softness is naturally derived also straight in the forms. In fengshui, corners are preferred to be rounded or with a small angle, or direct turns sharper than 90° should be avoided. However, this is understandable due to the contour bias, which causes sharp angles attracting our attention and being thought-provoking.

