

**Transcultural Encounters:  
A Case Study of *Fengshui* Practitioners in Vancouver**

**by  
Stephen Li**

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# Approval

**Name:** Stephen Li  
**Degree:** Master of Arts  
**Title:** Transcultural Encounters: A Case Study of  
*Fengshui* Practitioners in Vancouver  
**Program Director:** Katherine Reilly

**Yuezhi Zhao**  
Senior Supervisor  
Professor

**Katherine Reilly**  
Program Director  
Associate Professor

**Date Approved:** August 31, 2020

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## Abstract

The domination of several centuries of Western-scientific knowledge system has led critical scholars such as Boaventura de Sousa Santos to write about the possibility of a monocultural world where alternative knowledge systems would be seen as “non-existent.” This paper evaluates the adequacy of Santos’ *sociology of absences* in relation to the existence of the traditional knowledge system of *Fengshui* in Vancouver. By interviewing five *Fengshui* practitioners and tracing *Fengshui* from a rapidly modernizing China to Vancouver’s real-estate market in the era of neoliberal globalization, this paper assesses *Fengshui*’s migration in Vancouver as part and parcel of the movement of elite migrants. In doing so, this paper highlights the importance of intersectional analysis and underscores a limitation in de Sousa Santos’ framework by recognizing that certain traditional knowledge systems could be appropriated and incorporated by transnational capitalists’ economic interests and cultural sensibilities.

**Keywords:** *Fengshui*; traditional knowledge; migration; globalization; capitalism

## **Dedication**

To my mother and father who support me and love me for who I am, and to my sister, who loves Hello Kitty.

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## List of Acronyms

BC	British Columbia
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CPR	Canadian Pacific Railway
KMT	Kuomintang

# Chapter 1. Introduction

It has been widely stated that we are living in a period of economic and cultural globalization (Van Der Bly, 2007). With regards to economics, some have suggested that global capitalism has become the global status-quo (Harris, 2018). In terms of culture, it has been suggested that what can be called the science-centric outlook has become paradigmatic (Kuhn, 1962), and has also become the global norm. Having a science-centric perspective is constitutive of how people understand the workings and machinations of society as being rational and logical. Undoubtedly, while this can be said to be the norm, there have also been counter-movements.

One such practice that has both circulated in the circuits of globalization and also has been contested is that of *Fengshui*. *Fengshui* as a traditional knowledge, is one of the many different knowledge systems in the globe. Quite unlike the science-centric view of the world, *Fengshui* could be defined as the balance of life through the placement of objects and the movement of positive *Qi* (气) (Feuchtwang, 2002). It applies knowledge such as *Yin-Yang* and the Five Elements passed down for generations since imperial China, combined with the use of a compass (*bagua* 八卦), to determine the optimal site or object placement for both burial grounds and homes.

This research considers the development of *Fengshui*, a traditional knowledge system, in Vancouver, a highly-science centric society, to be an instance of economic and cultural globalization. Since the 1990s, *Fengshui* in Vancouver has increased in popularity and is seen in mass media platforms and in popular culture. *Fengshui* practitioners accompany their clients to homes or cemeteries and play a crucial role in helping them decide whether to place a bid. They are also teaching classes, hosting seminars, advising on media platforms, and purchasing advertisement spaces. In recent years, *Fengshui* has taken centre stage, mainly following waves of Chinese immigrants into the city. The role of *Fengshui* in Vancouver, as its system is not backed by the main tenets of the “scientific outlook,” seems to draw curiosity due to its mysticism deriving from traditional knowledge concepts. Similar to other practices that have migrated through the conduits of globalization, *Fengshui* has become popularized in Vancouver in many ethnic communities, with practitioners serving clients of various cultural backgrounds.

The Sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos<sup>1</sup> has raised the issue that within a Western science-centric society, sciences are hegemonic in that they have dominance in society (2006). Their basic tenets have permeated into many aspects of our society and self. Not only are sciences being taught in schools, but they have become integral to our daily lives. Despite this, traditional knowledge, such as *Fengshui*, remains culturally relevant for practitioners, clients, and also for those seeking a connection to their heritage.

For de Sousa Santos, neoliberal globalization is being globally challenged by resistant movements, thus reinventing “the left/right cleavage” (de Sousa Santos, 2006, p. ix). He confronts neoliberal globalization while reimagining the possibility of another world, one where capitalism is not presented as a global civilizational model that extends into social life. As a part of his confrontation, de Sousa Santos (2006) posits the *sociology of absences*, which recognizes and attempts to provide a platform to resist modern science as a monoculture that would deem alternative knowledge to be “non-existent,” for modern science and high culture become the single criteria of truth and aesthetic quality (p.16). Although de Sousa Santos’ conceptual framework could be applied to the *Fengshui* context, it fails to provide an intersectional analysis of class and nation, and also unnecessarily politicizes traditional knowledge. In this paper, I challenge the inadequacy of de Sousa Santos’ framework, while recognizing that the framework is applicable to some aspects of the *Fengshui* context.

Through discussions with a late *Fengshui* grandmaster in Hong Kong, I noted that there is much mysticism surrounding the knowledge, and that the traditional knowledge is rapidly being lost. My exploration was first fueled by the state of existing research on the subject of *Fengshui* in academia. Available literature focuses on urban landscape planning, interior design, and its resurgence in China. However, there is very little research conducted on the traditional knowledge system’s evolution in Vancouver influenced by practitioners and clients. Moreover, as Chen (2005) argues, *Fengshui* is considered as outdated superstition unneeded and irrelevant today, whether by governments or the general public. The stigma towards traditional knowledge contributes

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Dr. Yuezhi Zhao for her help with this project, from introducing me to de Sousa Santos and the theoretical framework, to offering me invaluable ideas and critiques of the framework. I am very grateful for her constructive comments and suggestions throughout the development of this project.

to a potential loss of the knowledge. Furthermore, the hegemonic status of western-centric conceptions of knowledge risk creating a neo-colonial condition, with the effect being the loss of traditional beliefs and knowledge (George et al., 2018, p. 228). This has particular relevance for *Fengshui*, which, as a traditional knowledge system, has values that are incompatible with those of a science-centric society. Thus, to work towards preserving this knowledge is also to work towards anti-colonialism, as *Fengshui* contributes against the hegemonic dominance of science-centric epistemologies.

I argue that the politicized aspect of de Sousa Santos' framework, along with a vague definition of global North and global South, and a lack of intersectional analysis of class and nation, are limitations in examining the traditional knowledge of *Fengshui* in Vancouver. This paper explores *Fengshui* by conducting a historical analysis of its origin and dissemination and a study on interviews with five Vancouver *Fengshui* practitioners and critical engagement with literature of the subject, while applying de Sousa Santos' *sociology of the absences*. My general aim is to examine the transnational development of *Fengshui* in science-centric Vancouver from migration by critically engaging with de Sousa Santos' framework. Discussions with *Fengshui* practitioners shed light on the development of the knowledge in Vancouver, its migration and effects, their acquisition of the knowledge, their clients' composition and expectations, and preservation of the knowledge, all of which confirm its value as a traditional knowledge system. If we apply the *sociology of absences* uncritically to a body of traditional knowledge such as *Fengshui*, we will not only unnecessarily politicize it, but also neglect the conditional flow and appropriation of knowledge in the context of migration.

## Chapter 2. Science-centric Society and *Sociology of Absences*

In the process of globalization, new global norms have been established and contested. Within Vancouver, itself being a metropolitan and science-centric society, traditional knowledge systems remain relevant. This can be seen in the practice of *Fengshui* in the city, which remains important to both practitioners and clients. According to de Sousa Santos (2006), in this context, *Fengshui* would be considered as “non-existent” under *sociology of absences*<sup>2</sup>, because modern science and high culture become the single criteria of truth and aesthetic quality (p.16). De Sousa Santos further argues that the ecology of knowledges could replace the monoculture of science, in which alternative knowledges could operate credibly in social practices. This Chapter establishes some of the theoretical frameworks I will be using throughout this study. In particular, it will describe what is a science-centric society, along with an explanation of economic and cultural globalization. Lastly, it provides an explanation of de Sousa Santos’ *sociology of absences*, paying particular attention to the way in which it is applicable to this study.

### 2.1. Science-centric Society

The Euro-centric view of history is one which sees the “Enlightenment” as a period of high culture with developments in science, technology, and math. This is confirmed by Kant’s writing on the Enlightenment and the shift in values towards positivism (Gordon, 1991; Scott, 1987). More recently, however, scholars have cast doubt on this dichotomy of Enlightenment and “Dark Ages,” and increasingly, the label of the “Dark Ages” used to describe that period of artistic and philosophical stagnation is being considered outdated and incorrect (Lamont, 2009).

Vancouver, as a city, is representative of some of these epistemic negotiations, as is demonstrated by the debates around unceded indigenous land claims. The Western, positivist and empirical, science-centric models demand that indigenous people provide evidence for their having occupied land. Following the judgement of *R. v.*

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<sup>2</sup> I would like to thank Dr. Yuezhi Zhao for introducing me to this theoretical framework and the line of thought in relation to *Fengshui* as a traditional knowledge system.

*Marshall and R. v. Bernard*, claim to aboriginal title depends on the specific facts of the aboriginal group and the relationship to the land (BC Treaty Commission, 2020). Indigenous people, whose epistemic reality is radically different from those of the Canadian State, are thus made to “clash” with Western society (Huntington, 1996). This has created a hierarchy of knowledge where written language and human settlement are seen as more authoritative than oral stories and nomadic culture (Borrows, 1996). This is not only a historical legacy, for it continues to be rearticulated in the contemporary instance of indigenous land claims. This demonstrates that the science-centric model of knowledge (re)creation occupies hegemonic status in Vancouver. However, Vancouver is more than a society of First Nations and original colonial settlers. Many migrants from the rest of the world have come to settle here. How have other traditional knowledge systems fare in Vancouver as a result of migration?

Knowledge systems are pathways for knowledge, and traditional ones “are not often considered to have equal validity to scientific studies and findings” (Maldonado et al., 2016, p. 116). Traditional knowledge systems are not documented in modern science literatures and are usually passed down through oral tradition. In that sense, they are often excluded by government agencies and Western scientists when assessing issues (Maldonado et al., 2016, p. 116). Modern science is used instead due to its privileged validity based on two fundamental premises. First, science is “based on systematic observation and controlled experimentation is a specific creation of Western-centric modernity” (de Sousa Santos, 2018, p. 5). The systematic and controlled aspects of modern science set it apart from traditional knowledge systems like *Fengshui*. Second, science has “rigor and instrumental potential,” which leads to its differences from other pathways for knowledge (de Sousa Santos, 2018, p. 5). This is relevant for *Fengshui* in Vancouver because such knowledge system is often considered inferior when contrasted to the observation and experimentation of science.

## **2.2. Making Sense of Economic and Cultural Globalization**

The migration of *Fengshui* is intertwined with the processes of globalization. While there are countless approaches to understanding the tenets of globalization (Iwabuchi, 2008; Chakravarty & Zhao, 2008), an understanding of both economic and cultural globalization is relevant to study the intersection of globalization with the traditional knowledge system of *Fengshui*.

The first area of globalization that intersects with *Fengshui* is economic globalization. Economic globalization could be seen as consisting of international trade growth and worldwide integration of markets for goods (Ekberg & Lange, 2014, p. 103). It enables countries to engage in global trade that lead to economic benefits. In turn, there is a shift of product, service, or even knowledge between regions. Capitalism is ingrained in economic globalization since this movement of tangible and intangible goods is used for the overarching purpose of capital accumulation. In the Vancouver context, this is important for *Fengshui* because it helps us understand that the flow of capital between China and Canada is linked to the migration of the dominant class, whose desires for investment profits influence the city's housing market (Ley, 2017).

The second area of globalization that intersects with *Fengshui* is cultural globalization, which is the transfer of knowledge and ideas between regions. While cultural globalization could be seen as an "imposition of one national culture onto another" (Lebovic, 2017, p. 45), it could also be recognized as the spread of a consumable culture across space. Cultural imaginaries play a role in the power dynamics of globalization because they could be influential and increase domination (Iwabuchi, 2008, p. 143). Cultural globalization, then, is the use of ideas and knowledge to increase influence on a global stage. According to Kuhn (1962), "'normal science' is firmly based upon one or more past scientific achievements" and are recounted in textbooks as collection of accepted theories (p. 10). Modern science could be seen as a form of normal science, since they share the trait of building on past scientific findings, being collected and instructed. Modern science is situated in Canada's otherwise highly science-centric society. Cultural globalization brings upon alternative knowledge systems, ideas that confront the status-quo. At the same time that scientific ideas and knowledge could spread through globalization, traditional knowledge could also migrate. In the Vancouver context, this is important for *Fengshui* because its practices are popularized in the city upon migration of the knowledge system.

### **2.3. *Sociology of Absences***

De Sousa Santos can be seen as being critical of the major trends in both economic and cultural globalization. For de Sousa Santos, "the left" is struggling for more just and truly human future society, the renouncement of violence. In order to achieve its goals, "the left" needs theoretical and analytical tools to position themselves

in relation to “the right” (2006, p. 5). The injustice that “the left” faces in relation to the rise of neoliberalism led to de Sousa Santos’s aim to reinvent “the left/right cleavage” and reimagine the possibility of another world. According to de Sousa Santos, global cognitive justice is the epistemological basis of global social justice, and that global social justice could be not achieved without global cognitive justice (as cited in Zhao, 2010, p. 281). As a part of his confrontation, de Sousa Santos (2006) raises the *sociology of absences*, which recognizes modern science as a monoculture that would deem alternative knowledge to be “non-existent”, for modern science and high culture become the single criteria of truth and aesthetic quality (p.16).

De Sousa Santos originally applies *sociology of absences* to study the World Social Forum. The framework politicizes alternative knowledge and organizations, aiming to build a just society through citizenship principle by maintaining “political democracy and economic despotism” (de Sousa Santos, 2006, p. 28). Realities, such as knowledge systems, that are suppressed are recovered as radical tools to challenge the science-centric hegemony. Here, it engages with a conception of reality where the lowest social class rises against the dominant class in the context of neoliberal capitalist globalization.

Using Santos’ *sociology of absences*, we could position *Fengshui* as a marginal or “non-existent” alternative knowledge system from the point of view of the science-centric society. However, from this point of view, it would also have its own merits to be valued. This section will now examine *sociology of absences* by providing an overview of the concept, applying it to *Fengshui*, and critiquing its inadequacies.

De Sousa Santos’ *sociology of absences* argues that what is produced as “non-existent” by science is in fact in existence and has epistemological values. According to de Sousa Santos (2006), the objective of the framework is to “transform impossible into possible objects, absent into present objects, invisible or non-credible subjects into visible and credible subjects” (p. 15). In that, he provides five modes of producing the non-existence. The five modes are: monoculture of knowledge and rigour of knowledge; monoculture of linear time; monoculture of naturalization of differences; monoculture of the universal and of the global; and monoculture of the criteria of capitalist productivity and efficiency (de Sousa Santos, 2006, pp. 16-18). These five modes demote alternative knowledge systems, or “silence” them, if they are dispensable. At the same time, they



legitimize colonialism's theoretical, analytical, and practical legacies. In other words, the monoculture of science that is introduced embraces the image of being superior and advanced. De Sousa Santos introduces five ecologies to bring diversity, promote interactions, and replace the monocultures. The ecologies are: ecology of knowledges; ecology of temporalities; ecology of recognitions; ecology of trans-scales; and ecology of productivities (de Sousa Santos, 2006, pp. 18-27). The ecologies interpret the exclusion of different knowledges from the current science-centric society by broadening the range of social reality. In sum, the *sociology of absences* aim at the introduction of diverse knowledge and practices to oppose the current hegemony.

## 2.4. China's Modernization

In a reality where alternative knowledge systems have become disqualified and some have become non-existent, social experience has gone to waste. For *Fengshui*, such social experience is the fruit of knowledge compiled since imperial China, representing a cultural heritage. According to de Sousa Santos (2018), "the dominant currents in the epistemologies of the North have focused on the privileged validity of modern science that has developed predominantly in the global North since the seventeenth century" (p. 5). In other words, de Sousa Santos argues that the lens applied to evaluate and see knowledge has been manipulated and naturalized by the "core" Western countries that promote European universalism, including science-centric knowledge. Knowledge, then, is based on the idea where there is a single type of value that scientific knowledge constructed around the global North (i.e., Germany, England, France, Russia, Italy, and the United States), even those of critical theory and social theory (de Sousa Santos, 2014, p. 40). However, it is crucial to recognize that the reality of the world exceeds the experience of the global North.

From this perspective, as China modernizes, *Fengshui* can be seen as either an outdated and obsolete knowledge system or superstitious beliefs of uneducated and oppressed peasants. For these reasons, the Nationalist government of China, and then the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), strived to issue a death sentence to *Fengshui* when initiating modernizing movements. Many of the government officials believed that modern science was the viable path to take, especially after China's defeat by Japan, and Western countries' domination since the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. As a result, the beliefs that Chinese traditional knowledge as being inferior to Western science-centric knowledge

were imprinted into the *Kuomintang* (KMT), and then the CCP, in bringing about modernization. Following *sociology of absences*, modern science and high culture become the single criteria of truth and aesthetic quality (de Sousa Santos, 2006, p. 16). Everything that is not recognized or not legitimized by this categorization becomes peripheral at best, or “non-existent” at worst. *Fengshui* would be considered “non-existent” under this logic due to its non-alignment with modern science, which in turn is labeled as superstitious and backward. Similarly, under the ecology of knowledges, *Fengshui* would challenge scientific knowledge’s dominance (de Sousa Santos, 2006, p. 19). This is achieved by recognizing alternative knowledges that could operate credibly in social practices, thus could stimulate epistemological debates between knowledges.

Although widely practiced before the KMT founded the Republic of China, *Fengshui* could be seen as an alternative knowledge system in today’s science-centric society. Following de Sousa Santos (2006), *Fengshui* belongs to a wider form of knowledge, epistemology of the South, which is a “set of epistemologies that is very distinct from the epistemology that prevailed both in capitalist and in socialist societies throughout the twentieth century” (p. xi). This form of epistemology does not mean the knowledge is actually from the geographic south. On the contrary, it is a form of knowledge and validation of knowledges from the perspective of the people who have suffered, in a systemic way, the injustice of colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy (de Sousa Santos, 2018, p. 1). This suffering could be physical or mental, bodily or spiritually, which leads to the development of a different alternative. However, this is not to deny the modernist drive of the Nationalist and Mao’s revolution that aimed to liberate the masses’ suffering have not achieved certain goals. China has achieved unprecedented success due to its turn to science, including “in such areas as manned space flight, high-performance computers, super-large-scale integrated circuits and [fifth-generation] telecommunications technology” (Wen, 2008, p. 649). Although sciences and technological development have enabled China to make significant achievements in the realm of innovations, alternative knowledge systems remain resilient in certain domains of social life.

*Fengshui* is an alternative knowledge of indigenous ethnic Chinese people that experienced suppression due to Western influences. Capitalist globalization “owes its hegemony to the credible way in which it discredits all rival knowledges, by suggesting that they are not comparable, in terms of efficiency and coherence, to the scientificity of

the market laws” (de Sousa Santos, 2006, p. 13). The practices and knowledges of *Fengshui* have its origin that is distinct from the epistemological assumptions and ontological assumptions of modern science. Epistemological assumption is defined as what counts as knowledge (de Sousa Santos, 2006, p. 13). Under the criteria of science, *Fengshui* as a traditional knowledge is deemed superstitious or a pseudo-science. Ontological assumption is defined as what it means to be human (de Sousa Santos, 2006, p. 13). For one example of this, the definition of human in *Fengshui* also differs from those of modern science. For instance, while traditional Chinese knowledge believes humans to be situated within one of the three separate and interlinked spheres (Nguyen, 2008, p. 167), science views the human body as organs and cells. The different approach to the knowledge system situates *Fengshui* as an alternative knowledge, belonging to the epistemology of the South.

*Fengshui* continues to be practiced today to help clients select homes or burial sites, but is recognized as outdated or obsolete by the Western science-centric logic. Although de Sousa Santos’ *sociology of absences* is applicable in some ways to the study of epistemology in *Fengshui* as a traditional knowledge system, it can also be criticized, or at the very least shown to have limits of application. Specifically, there are three limitations: unnecessary politicization of traditional knowledge, a vague definition of the global North and the global South, and a lack of intersectional analysis between class and nation. The rest of the paper aims to show these limitations through a case study of *Fengshui* practices in Vancouver.

## Chapter 3. The Rise of *Fengshui*

Prior to studying the migration of *Fengshui* to Vancouver and showing the limits of de Sousa Santos' framework to this knowledge, this Chapter will provide a general understanding of *Fengshui*. It will explain the foundational concepts of *Fengshui*, piecing together a general understanding of the traditional knowledge. In addition, as the Chinese population in Vancouver predominantly originate from mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, this Chapter provides a historical analysis of *Fengshui*'s origin and dissemination in terms of modern history in the Chinese society.

### 3.1. Foundational Concepts of *Fengshui*

Chinese geomancy, also known as *Fengshui*, is a part of traditional knowledge system in China. Seaman (1986) considers Chinese geomancy taking on a broader scope as it could be a conventional English translation of three different terms, *Kanyu* (堪輿), geography (地理), and *Fengshui* (風水). Teather & Chow (2000), however, situate Chinese geomancy as a system of environmentalist thinking and geography; viewing the Earth as the conduit of forces. Specifically, *Fengshui* literally means “wind-water” in Chinese, which in general applies the laws of both Heaven and Earth for harmony and balance of life through the placement of objects and the movement of positive *Qi* (气) (Octavia & Gunawan, 2014; Feuchtwang, 2002; Wong, 1996; Emmons, 1992; Rossbach, 1983; March, 1968). Feuchtwang (2002) claims that *Fengshui* is more than an ideology, as the fortunes it tells refer specifically to social life, making its practice a medium of social interaction, while also relating to Chinese natural philosophy, metaphysics, and symbolism. Despite literature using the terms geomancy and *Fengshui* interchangeable, Yoon (2006) suggests that “geomancy” should be used instead of *Fengshui* when referring to the whole East Asian region, because *Fengshui* is a term for geomancy used by the Chinese, but is called *Pungsu* (풍수) in Korea, and *Fusui* (風水) in Japan. Hence, geomancy could be seen as the umbrella that includes Chinese geomancy, which is a collective term for *Fengshui* and other Chinese sciences. *Fengshui* has many common concepts to other Chinese sciences, such as that of medicine (i.e., Acupuncture).

Within the traditional knowledge system of *Fengshui*, there are three central concepts that overlap with other Chinese field of study such as traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), which are *Qi* (气), *Yin-Yang* (阴阳), and the Five Elements (五行). *Qi* is a universal energy that is believed in many Asian cultures, as it is also known as *prana* (प्राण) in India and *ki* (気) in Japan (Henwood, 1997). It is generally believed in Chinese traditional knowledge that within the cosmos, three separate and interlinked spheres exist, known as heaven (天), earth (地), and humanity (人) (Bruun, 2011; O'Brien et al., 1998; Henwood, 1997; Seaman, 1986). *Qi* is the constant flow of energy from heaven, to earth, and into the human body, and that changes made by humankind or nature would alter its course. For example, in acupuncture, chakra balancing or shiatsu massage, such energy flow is adjusted throughout the body.

The second shared concept in Chinese traditional knowledge system is *Yin-Yang*, which are two opposite and complementary qualities. It is believed in general that *Yin* and *Yang* are ever-changing natural forces present in all lifeforms, that *Yin* represents femaleness, cold, even, stillness, and withdrawal, *yang* represents maleness, hot, odd, activity, and anger (O'Brien et al., 1998; Henwood, 1997; Lo, 1994; Rossbach, 1983; Bennett, 1978). Here, it is inferred that each quality requires the other to exist, such as night does not exist without the day, and that there is no summer without winter. Thus, balanced *Yin* and *Yang* in the *Qi* is considered good *Fengshui*.

The third foundational concept of *Fengshui* is the Five Elements, also known as *wuxing* (五行). The Five Elements are wood (木), fire (火), earth (土), metal (金), and water (水). The Five Elements are symbols and qualities that constantly overcome each other in a continuous cycle, generally believed to be creative and productive or destructive and negative (Henwood, 1997; Lo, 1994; Braswell-Means, 1990; Rossbach, 1983; Bennett, 1978). The Five Elements are said to be productive in a cycle because wood fuels fire; fire burns to ashes to become a part of earth; earth produces minerals; metal turns to liquid when heated; and water nourishes wood. On the contrary, the cycle would have a destructive relationship, when wood extracts nutrients from the earth; the earth sets boundaries to water; water extinguishes fire; fire melts metal; and metal chops wood. In that sense, the Five Elements interact and influence each other in a continuous cycle. These three foundational concepts are significant because they are applied in Chinese traditional knowledge systems, such as *Fengshui*.

### 3.2. Schools of *Fengshui*

Two schools of *Fengshui* are most recognized in China. The School of Forms (*luantou pai* 峦头派), also known as the Jiangxi School, reads the environment according to forms and outlines (Bruun, 2011). For instance, this school examines natural and man-made mountains, hills, water-courses, land forms, and configurations. Aside from that, the School of Orientations (*liqi pai* 理气派) reads the environment according to directions and positions, studies constellations on the geomantic compass (*bagua* 八卦), and examines alignment (Bruun, 2011). While the former observes the physical environment, the latter has more to do with calculations.

*Fengshui* is used by practitioners to evaluate the homes of the living (*yangzhai* 阳宅) and burial sites (*yinzhai* 阴宅). According to Yoon (2006), the first form of geomancy was “concerned with house selection only; later this idea was influenced by Chinese ideas of ancestor worship and filial piety. Subsequently it began to deal with the selection of grave sites” (p. 22). Hence, *Fengshui* could be differentiated into two different services, house geomancy and grave geomancy. Theories are applied not only to determine the most appropriate home for living beings, but also to select a burial site that would benefit future generations of a family.

Practitioners use a variety of techniques/systems for their practice. The following table builds onto the foundations introduced in *Stories and Lessons on Fengshui* (Yap, 2004), illustrating some of the techniques/systems, which could either be applying one school or combining the two. This list is not exhaustive, and contains only the common techniques.

Table 1 *Fengshui Techniques/Systems*

	<b>Name</b>	<b>Chinese Name</b>	<b>Chinese Pinyin</b>
1	Eight Characters	八卦	<i>Bagua</i>
2	Five Phases Relationships	五行	<i>Wuxing</i>
3	Time and Space Methods	玄空	<i>Xuankong</i>
4	Flying Stars School	玄空飞星	<i>Xuankong Feixing</i>
5	64 Hexagrams Method School	玄空大卦/六十四卦	<i>Xuankong Dagua/ 64 Gua</i>
6	Time and Space Water Method School	玄空水法	<i>Xuanlong Shuifa</i>
7	Purple White Flying Stars School	紫白	<i>Zibai</i>
8	Eight Mansions	八宅	<i>Bazhai</i>

9	Sanyuan Dragon Gate Eight Formation School	三元龙门八局	<i>Sanyuan Longmen Bajiu</i>
10	Major and Minor Wandering Stars	大游年/小游年	<i>Dayounian/Xiaoyounian</i>
11	Environmental Appearance and Land Formations school	三合峦头	<i>Sanhe Luantou</i>
12	Water Methods School	三合水法	<i>Sanhe Shuifa</i>
13	Mystical Doorways and Magic Armour School	奇门遁甲	<i>Qimen Dunjia</i>

As shown, *Fengshui* practitioners apply a mix of methods when reading the *Fengshui* of a home or grave. The application of each method/system and their accuracy are outside of the scope of this paper.

### 3.3. *Fengshui's* Modern History in China

The spread of *Fengshui* is embedded in larger trends of globalization, as well as local and international politics. The migration of *Fengshui* knowledge to Vancouver is through immigrants from primarily Chinese societies. Within Chinese societies, *Fengshui* is found applied from development of regions to the construction of buildings. Yoon (1980) states that geomancy has been one of the most important ideas that influenced humans' relationships with nature in East Asia, and that it has significantly influenced the location and morphology of cities, villages, houses, and graves. Such geomantic influences could be found in China.

Within China, the view towards *Fengshui* has changed ever since the KMT came to power as the Nationalist government. As both the nationalist party and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) have a negative stance towards traditional religion, *Fengshui* as a traditional practice believed to be superstitious could not escape prosecution. After China's disastrous defeat by the Japanese in 1895, the Qing dynasty fell in 1911. The new republic was established in 1912, whereby Sun Yat Sen's determination to modernize China influenced the practice of *Fengshui*.

Sun Yat-sen's education and early life significantly affected the view and treatment of *Fengshui* in China during the Nationalist's rule. Born in the Guangdong province of China, Sun had his early education in Hawaii. During 1879-83, he was believed to have attended three Christian educational institutions, including Iolani College, St. Louis College, and Oahu College, which imprinted the nineteenth-century Christian movement in his mind (Soong, 2010). The Christian influence was so great on

him in Hawaii that his brother and provider, Sun Mei, sent him back to China for rehabilitation. In addition to contacting Christianity, Sun experienced the liberty and the influences of American life (Gonschor, 2017). Hawaii was not yet an American state, but was a kingdom with a unique culture and language. Furthermore, the white men in Hawaii viewed negatively the local “superstition” (Sharman, 1968). Sun believed that in order for China to progress, the country needed to break various Chinese superstitions. The Gospel and impressions of Hawaii affected Sun’s modernization of China.

*Fengshui* was considered superstitious by the ruling elites in China, who were influenced by Western thoughts. As an elite, Sun believed that China would not progress as long as people were superstitious, because it would lead to fear and ignorance (Bruun, 2011, p. 72). Hence, he considered it necessary to remove anything that was considered as superstition. Due to Sun and the Nationalist’s push to eliminate traditional beliefs that were considered as non-scientific, many Chinese people joined in to turn against *Fengshui*. For instance, modern-educated Chinese stopped discussing “the pillars of rural society – family, ritual and popular cosmology” from intellectual debates (Bruun, 2011, p. 73). Chinese intellectuals believed that peasants and modern Chinese should be liberated from the fears raised by *Fengshui* and other traditional thoughts, and that democracy and science were the reasons behind Western civilization’s success. Such thought was augmented after World War I, when Western countries demonstrated their power. As a result, the Nationalists were “convinced that modern science was of the leading influences,” which further placed emphasis on empirical knowledge and scepticism of science (Bruun, 2011, p. 75). This period was the beginning of several following movements that not only labelled *Fengshui* as superstitious, but also suppressed it.

There were numerous movements during the Republic of China regime of the Nationalists to fight traditional beliefs. In mid-1920s, the battle cry of “Down with superstition” joined in with the fight against imperialism and warlordism, which led to temples and sacred objects either being demolished, converted into secular infrastructures, or confiscated (Bruun, 2011, p. 76). *Fengshui* was a victim of this anti-religious movement because it was considered as magic, fate, and supernatural. The “Procedure for the Abolition of the Occupations of Divination, Astrology, Physiognomy and Palmistry, Magic and Geomancy” of 1929 was followed by a decree in 1930 that ordered those who sold “superstitious merchandise” to change their job (Bruun, 2011, p.



76). Here, one could see that the late nationalist government ordered *Fengshui*, and other non-scientific knowledge at the time to be suppressed. They argued that “simple folks” were wasting a significant amount of money on worshipping and superstitious beliefs (Geisert, 1986). The irony is that this period of reform included leaders of various beliefs. Zhang Taiyan (章太炎 1869-1936) and Liang Qichao (梁启超 1873-1929) were propellants of Buddhist intellectual revival, Sun Yat-sen (孙中山 1866-1925) and other Kuomintang leaders were converted to Christians, and Kang Youwei (康有为 1858-1927) envisioned China to have a state religion with Confucian characteristics (Goossaert, 2006). These collisions of spiritual beliefs were self-serving and contributed to the superstition discourse and a religious reform within China. In sum, the Nationalist government attempted to modernize China by turning to modern science and doing away with old beliefs, as these traditional beliefs were considered obsolete and outdated.

Since it came to power in 1949 to the end of the Mao era, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) claimed *Fengshui* to be superstitious. In examining the CCP’s view of *Fengshui*, one must first examine Mao’s perspective of *Fengshui*. Brought up with a strong Buddhist influence, Mao’s writing continued Sun’s attack on rural superstition. He considered rural people to be soaked in superstition, depressed by feudal thinking, and possessed darkened minds, due to being victims to “spiritual pollution” and “dangerous ideas that polluted their minds” (Bruun, 2011, p. 83). In one of his writings from 1927, Mao stated his skepticism towards *Fengshui*:

If you believe in the Eight Characters [*bagua*], you hope for good luck; if you believe in geomancy, you hope to benefit from the location of your ancestral graves. This year within the space of a few months the local tyrants, evil gentry and corrupt officials have all toppled from their pedestals. Is it possible that until a few months ago they all had good luck and enjoyed the benefit of well-sited ancestral graves, while suddenly in the last few months their luck has turned and their ancestral graves have ceased to exert a beneficial influence? (Mao, 1965, pp.46-47).

Although Mao was critical towards *Fengshui*, he argued against it within the knowledge system. Following Bruun (2011), Mao “did not simply state that *Fengshui* did not work; he argued within the logic of the tradition itself, trying to prove its said effects wrong, something that could easily be interpreted in the way that the Communist interfered with the local *Fengshui*” (p. 83). In other words, Mao understood *Fengshui* and

had acquired the traditional Chinese knowledge, which enabled him to critique the system.

Under the rule of the CCP, several policies were passed that influenced the practicing of *Fengshui* in mainland China. In 1954, the new Constitution's Article 87 mentions citizens' freedom of speech, press, assembly, association, procession, and demonstration, whereas Article 88 states that citizens could enjoy freedom of religious belief (Constitution of the People's Republic of China, 1954). The irony here is that although the state guaranteed the freedom of religious belief, the freedom of religious worship and practice were something different. This could be seen by religious activities being prohibited outside of religious institutions. The new Constitution became a challenge for *Fengshui* practitioners because they usually practiced in public, people's homes, or cemeteries, which were considered unsuitable for "religious" practices. In 1958, there was a large crackdown on religious sects and practices. For instance, Taoism was identified with the nationalists and hence the priests were punished for being "reactionary leaders" (Bruun, 2011, p. 87). At the same time, the authorities suppressed religious practices. The suppression was conducted both physically and via propaganda. In 1958, the *People's Daily* reported the coming stop to traditional burial practices in an article that stated expenditure on funerals was a waste because graveyards were not productive (Bruun, 2011, p. 87). Thus, cremation was introduced to save space, to modernize, and to increase agricultural production on land. The authorities continued to condemn ancestor worship and the remains of millions of ancestors were dug up. Although the CCP wanted to promote modernization throughout mainland China, their power was not absolute in villages. Not only were party cadres who were sent to villages lack power, there were influential individuals in villages who gained authority not from the CCP. These three groups of individuals were: old farmers with special agricultural skills; old ladies forming the informal networks in the villages; and *Fengshui* practitioners who guarded and spread the traditional knowledge systems of the old society (Barnett, 1969). Hence, while the authorities had power in the cities, the power was not absolute in villages.

Before the Cultural Revolution, in 1965, the Socialist Education Movement (also known as Four Cleanups Movement) took place. It aimed to correct what it claimed to be unorthodox political, ideological, and economic ideas that stemmed in the rural communes after the Great Leap Forward in 1958 (Baum, 1969). The campaign

criminalized all expressions of what it considered to be feudal practices, including *Fengshui*, due to it being popular cosmology. Under the campaign, the markets could not sell incense or religious objects, and that anything “superstitious” needed to stop. *Fengshui* was classified as a custom under the Four Olds (Old customs, old culture, old habits, and old ideas), which needed to be wiped out. The Cultural Revolution started in 1966, in which Red Guards aggressively beat and abused *Fengshui* practitioners, and burned literatures. *Fengshui* practitioners were “reproached and forced to confess to have backward ideas and intentionally deluding the people” (Bruun, 2011, p. 101). Many of their homes were ransacked, and prominent practitioners were paraded through the streets, being beaten by mobs. During the Cultural Revolution, the Red Guards were radical and anti-traditional as they destroyed all material culture related to the old society, such as burning copies of the classics, almanacs, geomantic manuals, compasses, and other equipment. Furthermore, sacred old trees were chopped down, as well as pillars, tablets, gates, tombstones, statues, and anything that did not align with Communist values (Brunn, 2011, p. 101). At the time, peasants’ graves were obliterated, and their ancestor halls, shrines were demolished. *Fengshui* was criticized as being an obstruction to modern social progress. While the Red Guards continued the project on modernization, many *Fengshui* literature were destroyed.

It is worth noting that although the CCP authorities did not recognize *Fengshui* practices, they pursued an anti-*Fengshui* strategy by attacking and punishing the people for believing in it. These attacks did not only target individual people, but also were aimed at key practices that *Fengshui* practitioners thought of as important. Some peasants reported that many vicious attacks shattered their positive *Fengshui*, suggesting that the aggressors were aware of the significance (Bruun, 2011, p. 102). With the positive *Fengshui* interfered or destroyed, it was believed that the lives of the peasants consequently changed. Similarly, graves were destroyed so that the ties with the dead were severed and there could no longer be mediation between heaven and earth (Elleman & Paine, 2019). Furthermore, people of the “four stinking categories” were punished in public. They would have their ancestors’ tombs destroyed, and the bones burned as a symbol of cleansing the family lines (Bruun, 2011, p. 102). *Fengshui* became a means to break the fortune of others, as opposed to bringing good health, fortune, and prosperity. The Cultural Revolution came to an end after the death of Mao, and the official attitude toward *Fengshui* became lenient.

Despite the Chinese state's official suppression and non-promotion of *Fengshui*, the traditional knowledge has gradually gained force in Chinese society in the reform era. In a similar way to the current "heritage fever" in post-reform China whereby previously neglected villages are being capitalized on for their traditional features (Nicolai, 2017), some Chinese businesses and even officials pursue *Fengshui* if they find it "useful". Today, *Fengshui* generally continues to grow in popularity despite the historical suppression (Teather & Chow, 2000; Wong, 1996; Braswell-Means, 1990). There are various reasons behind the revival, including its relationship to modern Western science, its situation in popular culture, and the psychological assurance it brought to people.

In the Chinese context, *Fengshui* is seen as a significant aspect of Chinese lifestyle, and in general could be located from idioms and literature to architecture and entertainment (Chen, 2005; Henwood, 1997; Lo, 1994; Gwee, 1991; Braswell-Means, 1990). For example, in architecture, *Fengshui* has been applied in designing renowned buildings, such as Macao's Hotel Lisboa and Hong Kong's Bank of China Building (Lo, 1994), and the principles of *Fengshui* are seen in newspaper columns of zodiac fortune readings, similar to that of Western horoscopes.

It has also been important in the Asian business world. Many businesses in Asia hire *Fengshui* practitioners to lecture, design the interior, or decorate the surrounding for good fortune (Shen, 2019; Octavia & Gunawan, 2014; Emmons, 1992). Arguably, this could be seen as a reduction of anxiety in the capitalistic market environment (Emmons, 1992). Businesses need to compete with each other to maximize their revenues and profits, thus company higher-ups consider all strategies to increase their chances to succeed. *Fengshui* is being rearticulated in China today even under the CCP's reign. Despite the repression of this knowledge system in China, *Fengshui* has morphed as it traveled and normalized for the Western audience. In this time and day, *Fengshui* faces a revival in China despite the CCP's categorization of it being superstition.

In mainland China, *Fengshui* is not officially censored today. However, religious beliefs and cultural practices, such as burial customs and *Fengshui*, are officially restricted under the current regime (Kawaguchi, 2004). Although there are still restrictions on *Fengshui* practices, the CCP has become more tolerant (Kumar & Kumar, 2012). However, in the tradition of earlier anti-superstition campaigns outlined above,

*Fengshui* is ridiculed by some scholars within China as superstitious and nonsensical. A school of Chinese scholars criticized some government officials, academics, and corporations' belief in superstitious *Fengshui*, thus contradicting the teaching of Marxism-Leninism. These scholars condemned the seeking of "outdated customs" and the application of scientific reasoning to legitimize them (Chen, 2005), that government officials follow the practices at the cost of the people's money (Li & Gao, 2015; Wu, 2006), and that businesses idolize *Fengshui* practitioners in bringing them fortune (Shen, 2019). They argue that communists should believe in modern science instead of superstitions. According to Article 63 of the Chinese Communist Party Disciplinary Regulations (中国共产党纪律处分条例), officials who organize or participate in superstitious activities would be reviewed, have Party position removed, or be expelled from the Party (Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, 2018). It is explicitly stated within the Party's regulations that officials who support superstitions, of which *Fengshui* is an unnamed offender, would be punished. Even though regulations strive to eradicate traces of premodern and feudal beliefs to modern progresses, the Party has gradually revised their orthodox views of socialism, adopted more open policies and economic reforms, and relaxed their restrictions over *Fengshui* and other cultural activities (Teather & Chow, 2000). As a result, *Fengshui* continues to be practiced in mainland China and follows with the people upon their migration to Vancouver.

## Chapter 4. *Fengshui* in Vancouver

This chapter provides an analysis of the migration of *Fengshui* to Vancouver through interviewing five *Fengshui* practitioners in the city, examining the reason behind their interest, their learning process, their clients' demographics, *Fengshui* reading procedures and techniques, their revenue streams, and preservation methods. All five interviewees acquired the traditional knowledge from one or more masters. The knowledge itself migrated to Vancouver through the wealthy and educated elites as opposed to the early railway workers. Upon migration, the traditional knowledge system underwent modification to adjust to the modern context. Not only that the customers and practitioners are from various ethnicities, the consumption habit could be recognized as either active and passive. To preserve the traditional knowledge system, all five interviewees are engaging in various means for the knowledge to reach the public. *Fengshui*'s migration to Vancouver plays into economic and cultural globalization by the dominant class.

### 4.1. Methodology

To examine the state of *Fengshui* as a traditional knowledge in Vancouver followed by migration, I conducted a study on interviews with five Vancouver *Fengshui* practitioners and critical engagement with literature of the subject. The purpose of the interviews is to gain qualitative insight into how the practice and clients of *Fengshui* services in Vancouver have morphed following its introduction in Vancouver. Interview and ethnographic data were transcribed in which emerging themes related to characteristics of *Fengshui* upon migration were isolated and disseminated. The selection of interviewees commenced through an online search of "Vancouver *Fengshui*." The first ten *Fengshui* practitioners from the search result were invited to participate in a one-hour semi-structured interview. Of the practitioners contacted, five responded. Interviews were conducted at a mutually agreed upon location. A sufficient amount of data was culled from the interviews; thus, no participants were contacted for follow-up interviews.

### 4.1.1. Participants

Five *Fengshui* practitioners (one female and four male) of various ethnicities (including two Caucasian Canadians, one Mainland Chinese, and two Hong Kong Chinese) in Vancouver participated in this study. The five practitioners all have at least ten years providing *Fengshui* services (one has 35 years, two have 20 years, one has 16 years, and one has 10 years). Their professional preparation varied, although they all acquired *Fengshui* knowledge and theoretical foundation from one or more masters.

All five participants are current *Fengshui* practitioners and are applied pseudonyms to maintain their anonymity. They each have a different cultural and ethnic background, which demonstrate the diverse demographic in Vancouver. In addition, it reveals that *Fengshui* has been popularized upon migration, being practiced not only in the ethnic Chinese community, but also in mainstream and other ethnic communities.

### 4.1.2. Interviews

As a researcher, an open-ended interview protocol was developed. After an initial pilot interview, several modifications were made. For instance, there were background questions and experience questions, which were separated in order for the interview to focus on specific topics (e.g., acquisition of the knowledge, application of *Fengshui*, motivation behind learning, clients' demographics and expectations, procedure of providing *Fengshui* reading, differences between *Fengshui* services in Vancouver and Chinese cities, migration of *Fengshui*, and preservation of the traditional knowledge). In sum, 11 major questions were asked, accompanied by follow-up questions. The questions follow Yin's (2018) description of that in interviews, the researcher is intruding into the participants' world rather than the reverse. Hence, the questions are semi-structured open-ended for the participants to demonstrate their perspectives and moral forms (Spradley, 1979). After the trial interview, the questions were finalized with minor changes on the wording. All five interviews lasted for 45 minutes to one hour, and were transcribed for descriptive data. Each interview was conducted in English except for two that were conducted in Mandarin and Cantonese, which were recorded and transcribed into Chinese, and subsequently translated into English. These transcribed interviews' descriptive data were used for analysis.

## 4.2. Practitioners' Means of Knowledge Acquisition

*Fengshui* continues to be seen as mysterious, mystical, and mesmerizing to this day. In Vancouver, a number of *Fengshui* practitioners offers services to consumers. In this research study, the five interviewees all acquired their *Fengshui* knowledge from one or more masters, and then proceeded to become practitioners themselves. They have invested time to practice and perfect their knowledge, learning many *Fengshui* techniques and systems. These particular local practices are passed on systematically by following masters who have their own masters, forming a traceable lineage for the interviewed practitioners. *Fengshui*, thus, should be considered as credible alternatives to knowledge systems that exist globally and universally.

The interviewees expressed that they spent years learning *Fengshui* knowledge from their masters. Practitioner Llama was “exposed to the whole *Fengshui* system at a young age, when [he] was in elementary school [because his] father was a very famous *Fengshui* practitioner in the field” (“Llama”, personal communication, May 13, 2020). He started learning under his father around grade four. Recalling from his *Fengshui* knowledge acquisition experience, practitioner Llama stated, “I needed to have a grasp of *Yin-Yang* and Five Elements, heavenly stems and earthly branches, and various concepts. Next, I learned to conduct *Bazi* (八字) life calculations” (“Llama”, personal communication, May 13, 2020). Practitioner Llama told of a systematic approach and procedures to learning *Fengshui* reading, where *Yin-yang*, Five Elements and the likes are foundational concepts, and then *Bazi* (八字) life calculations are the next step. Practitioner Llama noted that “when [he] started working, [he] learned interior design and architecture at the same time, [because he] needed to review the quality of infrastructure in a heavy industry company. [He] needed to check the engineering, and was in contact with architects, interior designers, and exterior designers. [He] realized that they are very similar to *Fengshui* and *Fengshui* is actually the study of architecture, interior design, and external environment” (“Llama”, personal communication, May 13, 2020). Upon establishing the connection, he combined modern understanding of architecture with the *Fengshui* knowledge passed onto him from his father.

Practitioner Jade learned from a number of masters and established a tie between *Fengshui* with her original field of interests. She “studied Western astrology and different metaphysics from age 20 as a hobby, and [has] worked with [people with]



mental illness and drug and alcohol problems. [She has] always been someone of service, and interested in helping people” (“Jade”, personal communication, March 16, 2020). With an understanding of both Western and Chinese astrology, practitioner Jade continued to be a person of service, applying traditional Chinese knowledge to assist Western clients. As “[she] cannot read Chinese, so [she has] to rely on things [she] could find that have been translated, and [worked] with teachers [like] Raymond Lo out of Hong Kong, and Lily Chung from China, and [she] went on later to Joey Yap (a practitioner from Malaysia) and different ones” (“Jade”, personal communication, March 16, 2020). Without knowledge of the Chinese language, practitioner Jade had to rely on English-speaking masters and translated text. According to Joey Yap, Jade “[has] to study harder than a Chinese person because first of all, [she] cannot memorize the poetry. In order to learn this, [she has] to put in more effort. So [she] is more trained than most people” (“Jade”, personal communication, March 16, 2020). With the need to compare and contrast between the knowledge learned from various masters and texts to consolidate her understanding, practitioner Jade acquired a solid grasp of the *Fengshui* knowledge system.

Practitioner 007<sup>3</sup> also acquired the knowledge from a master, but it was through a formal education setting. According to him, “in 2000 in Vancouver, [he] met the lady who would become [his] teacher, who had studied at the Western School of *Fengshui*. In 2001, [he] did [his] training with her” (“007”, personal communication, March 19, 2020). With a father who is a teacher, practitioner 007 has a science-centric knowledge background that he obtained through his formal schooling. He noticed an alignment between environmental psychology and *Fengshui*, that “essentially, it is about an integrative approach to having an environment that supports [one]. There is a very strong scientific component” (“007”, personal communication, March 19, 2020). Practitioner 007 compared the lack of proven link to Mozart’s music. He stated that, “Mozart’s music is healing for 200 and some odd years before the science was there to prove it. So, something is still true even if it isn’t proven” (“007”, personal communication, March 19, 2020). While incorporating the *Fengshui* knowledge from his

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<sup>3</sup> This interviewee requested for the pseudonym of 007 due to his fondness of the James Bond franchise.

teacher into his practice, he combined environmental psychology and scientific understanding into *Fengshui*.

Practitioner Uma, like the other interviewees, also learned under a master. He recollected that “in around 1990, [he] met a master from Taiwan [and] paid 40 grand [Canadian dollars over ten years] to learn *Fengshui* and calculation from him. Every week [he] had to spend four hours with him, [where they] did lecture and practicum” (“Uma”, personal communication, March 17, 2020). Practitioner Uma only studied under one master, and they covered many subjects related to *Fengshui* over the decade. Practitioner Uma stated that, “[his] master’s name is Kong Tai Fang. Taiwan is different from other places, because they think *Fengshui* is like a special study. So they want something certified. So he is the first president of *Fengshui* [association] in Taiwan. If [one] wants to open [one’s] own office, [one] needs to be certified by a master” (“Uma”, personal communication, March 17, 2020). It appears that the regulatory system of *Fengshui* practitioners in Taiwan is more developed as opposed to Vancouver’s, because potential clients recognize certificates and prefer to see the lineage of a master. Practitioner Uma added, “From the first day I followed my master, even now every day I have to read. I have to read everything, because *Fengshui* is just like a school. There are so many schools, every school has a different teacher. Every teacher has their own theory. We have different concepts from different schools” (“Uma”, personal communication, March 17, 2020). Even though he acquired the traditional knowledge from his master, practitioner Uma continued to study through reading texts and comparing concepts with other schools’.

Identical to the previous interviewees, practitioner Star also acquired his *Fengshui* knowledge from a master. Practitioner Star recalled his experience, “at 17 years-old, before entering university, I met a monk, who became my master. At the time, he gave me advices. I felt it was magical, and became interested in Chinese fortune telling” (“Star”, personal communication, March 11, 2020). Practitioner Star suggested that *Fengshui* encompasses many subjects, and one is required to also study those in order to improve one’s *Fengshui* knowledge. He mentioned, “If one were to study *Fengshui*, simply studying ancient texts is not enough. A true *Fengshui* scholar needs to know physics, chemistry, arts, philosophy, medicine, literature, and history to study *Fengshui* and to help those in need” (“Star”, personal communication, March 11, 2020). The wide scope of knowledge systems that *Fengshui* relates to allude that it was a

philosophical system well-developed in ancient China. Practitioner Star believed that, “[his] master introduced the knowledge to [him], and [he] relies on [himself] to practice. [He] needs to apply the theories and read many books in the field which are in traditional Chinese. Many of which are ancient texts” (“Star”, personal communication, March 11, 2020). Upon acquiring foundational knowledge from his master, practitioner Star proceeded to strengthen his knowledge through self-study of texts from numerous disciplines.

All five interviewees acquired the traditional knowledge from one or more masters, and it seems that only those who study under trained practitioners could gain the inner workings of the practices. An interesting phenomenon is *Fengshui* being popularized in Vancouver upon migration. Believers of different ethnicities have learned the knowledge and establish it as a formal job, offering services to consumers. The traditional knowledge is no longer limited to those who could read ancient texts, as there are translated manuals and English-speaking instructors/masters.

### **4.3. Misconception of *Fengshui*'s Arrival**

The arrival of *Fengshui* in Vancouver has been debated, because although ethnic Chinese people came to Vancouver as early as 1788, and later during the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway, *Fengshui* did not become popularized until the late 1990s and 2000s. Rather than the belief that early Chinese immigrants brought the knowledge, it was actually the more educated and wealthy immigrants in the 1990s who introduced *Fengshui* to Vancouver. The migration of Chinese people to Vancouver is in part a response to the process of economic globalization. The first wave of immigration was predominantly motivated by the resources in Vancouver. The labourers and immigrants wanted to “strike gold” in order to send the money back to their families in China.

*Fengshui*, as a form of Chinese traditional knowledge, is thought to have arrived in Vancouver following early Chinese workers, as it is believed that Vancouver would have better *Fengshui* if those workers could set the street grid of the city (Woodvine, 2015). In reality, the early workers did not popularize *Fengshui*. According to the Royal BC Museum (2020) in Victoria, the first recorded Chinese presence in British Columbia was in 1788. A British trading post in Nootka Sound hired 50 Chinese workers (Royal BC

Museum, 2020). The workers conducted labour work at the post. From there, the first major migration of Chinese people in BC was during the gold rush on the Fraser River in 1858 (Royal BC Museum, 2020). While some gold diggers stayed in BC until they earned money to send back to China, others stayed longer in the province and formed communities. During the time, travelling across the Pacific Ocean by boat was a difficult and uncomfortable voyage (Royal BC Museum, 2020). Only those who were desperate for money and willing to perform overseas labour work would settle in Vancouver, a frontier over 10,000 km from their home country, China. Following that, in 1880s, many Chinese workers arrived in Vancouver to build the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR). These labourers engaged in dangerous work, but were only paid meager wages, worked in unsafe areas, and faced discrimination. They were more concerned with their livelihood rather than to practice *Fengshui*, and thus replaced traditional knowledge with new, applicable literacies.

The second wave of immigration is comprised of Chinese who were more educated and wealthier, while looking for investment opportunities to profit in the process of economic capitalism. Their marked increase in purchasing power and ambition for investment profits brought in the need for *Fengshui* services. Beginning in the late 1960s, the class of Chinese immigrants moving to Vancouver changed. The Canadian government in 1967 passed a new immigration act in which Chinese immigrants to Canada would receive equal treatment for the first time, and in response, immigration surged (Huang, 2006). The immigrants' demographic changed and skewed toward young men and children, who were "better educated and have emerged from the bottom of society" (p. 107). Here, one could see that the class of Chinese immigrants differed between the years 1850s – 1880s and post 1960s. The interviewed practitioners verified that it was the middle- and upper-class immigrants from mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong who introduced *Fengshui* to Vancouver, as opposed to early railway workers.

The interviewees have a consensus that *Fengshui* arrived in Vancouver and was popularized due to the educated and generally more wealthy Chinese people than the labourers who had built Canadian railways. Practitioner Llama stated, "We can say it [arrived] through immigration. It was the 1980s and there were not many people in Vancouver. Especially in Burnaby and Richmond, the number of people was limited, and same with housing" ("Llama", personal communication, May 13, 2020). He added that,

“since 1996, immigrants increased, such as Hong Kong Chinese, Taiwanese, they flocked to Vancouver and Toronto. The rich people came to Vancouver, whereas those who were more ambitious in their career headed to Toronto. Since then, the houses and cars in Vancouver increased” (“Llama”, personal communication, May 13, 2020). Following the wealthy immigrants’ purchases of houses and cars, the expectations of good *Fengshui* in housing popularized. Interviewee 007 added that when his “teacher started practicing [*Fengshui*] in 1999 or 2000 in Vancouver, nobody knew what it was. Oprah has not yet talked about it” (“007”, personal communication, March 19, 2020). In the 1999 and 2000, there was still not much awareness about *Fengshui* in Vancouver. Practitioner Uma stated that *Fengshui* might have been introduced “in 1996 when more and more Chinese people wanted to pick a good house” (“Uma”, personal communication, March 17, 2020). Interviewee Star agreed that *Fengshui* came to Vancouver with the wealthy and educated immigrants. He stated that “we can say that immigrants from Hong Kong and Taiwan value *Fengshui*, and there is a foundation... When Chinese people first arrived, including the railway workers, they had expectations of their dwellings. However, when they first came, they were poor” (“Star”, personal communication, March 11, 2020). The railway workers from 1880s knew about *Fengshui*, but they did not have the knowledge or means to practice it.

Practitioner Llama, having practiced *Fengshui* for over 35 years, recounted the early railway workers’ stories in Vancouver. He stated, “The Chinese workers were actually sold here. They were mostly poor and illiterate. Reflecting on the available literature now, they were fortunate to be alive. At that time, they simply wanted to live, and *Fengshui* was not of importance. Also in the past, racism towards the Chinese was an issue. The racism in the past can still be seen now, look at the narrow houses. Stand inside and extend your arms, the houses were that wide. Such land was sold to the Chinese to build houses. So, think about it, could *Fengshui* even be applied?” (“Llama”, personal communication, March 13, 2020). Since the early railway workers were poor and illiterate, and faced racism from citizens and the Canadian government, they lacked the knowledge and the luxury to practice *Fengshui*. Under economic globalization, they struggled in the capitalism system. Only when Chinese immigrants have money could they purchase land or renovate their homes. This is highlighted in the following wave of Chinese immigrants to Vancouver, who were educated and possessed serious purchasing power to transform the local real estate market that now serves their needs

as consumers. The practice of *Fengshui* in Vancouver was introduced in the 1990s and 2000s, followed by migration that furthered economic and cultural globalization.

#### **4.4. *Fengshui*'s Migration and Development in Vancouver**

Upon its migration, *Fengshui* has entered the realm of popular culture and its existence is recognized by more people from various backgrounds. Similar to the situation in other countries and regions, while some people claim *Fengshui* could be used to bring good health, fortune, and luck, others state that it is superstition. Regardless of its credibility and reliability, *Fengshui* is widely reported in Vancouver's mass media as it undergoes a split in practice.

*Fengshui* is a term often seen in the newspapers, with reports that describe how *Fengshui* is used by Vancouverites. The *Georgia Straight* published an article "B.C. residents seek harmony at home through *feng shui*", which stated that *Fengshui* was gaining widespread acceptance in B.C., even though the Chinese government did not promote it in where it originated (Pablo, 2008). The news story also interviewed Italo Fionda, a Vancouver real estate agent with Italian roots who controlled energy in his house by placing objects, such as mirrors (Pablo, 2008). Furthermore, the article noted that even some indigenous people applied *Fengshui* concepts in their homes. For instance, Eyoíłha Baker, a member of the Squamish Nation, incorporated *Fengshui* in her home to create a space that is warm and inviting, because "all things should be in harmony with nature" (Pablo, 2008). *Fengshui* has become a widespread knowledge system in Vancouver practiced by a number of people. In an article called "*Feng shui* a mystic force in Vancouver real estate" published by *The Globe and Mail*, journalist Gold stated how clients would appear with *Fengshui* masters to assess properties. According to Gold (2012), a *Fengshui* practitioner in Vancouver charged \$8,800 to assess commercial properties; \$3,800 to assess houses, and \$2,800 to assess apartments, until the client settles on a suitable property. Many *Fengshui* practitioners charge a great sum of money in exchange for their services to Vancouverites, which has led to clients being careful when deciding on a *Fengshui* practitioner for service. This also demonstrates members of the dominant class contributing to popularize the traditional knowledge.

In serving their clients, the *Fengshui* practitioners in Vancouver could mainly be separated into two groups, which also depicts the splitting of *Fengshui* in the region. One

of the *Fengshui* interviewees, Jade, stated that there are two forms of *Fengshui* being practiced in Vancouver, classical *Fengshui* and contemporary (or new age) *Fengshui* (“Jade”, personal communication, March 16, 2020). While classical *Fengshui* follows ancient texts such as reading the mountains, the slopes of the land in regard to formula, new age *Fengshui* is focused on energy, colours, forms, and feelings. According to interviewee 007, “[he] started using the word contemporary *Fengshui*, and not Western *Fengshui*, is that in 2003, [he] went to Japan to teach *Fengshui*, and thought that [he] cannot in good conscious, be a Westerner going to an Asian country to teach a historically Asian practice and say it is Western *Fengshui*” (“007”, personal communication, March 19, 2020). In other words, contemporary *Fengshui* is a means to differentiate from the traditional practice that closely follows the texts. Interviewee 007 stated that he “[hasn’t] followed the historical Chinese texts...[because] once [one] starts tuning in, once [one] starts to learn enough of the theory, [one’s] brain is working in a way that was working for the people who came up with these theories, and [one] starts knowing what it is to do” (“007”, personal communication, March 19, 2020). Here, it is evident that with contemporary *Fengshui*, the practitioner applies a discovery approach in coming up with theories as opposed to dogmatically following those from ancient texts.

Interviewee Llama practices classical *Fengshui*, as he has “read many ancient texts and new books” as well as books that relate to architecture, interior design, and exterior design (“Llama”, personal communication, May 13, 2020). Different from contemporary *Fengshui* practitioners, Llama and other classical *Fengshui* practitioners conduct life readings (bazi 八字) prior to providing *Fengshui* services to his clients, which is a traditional way of *Fengshui* reading procedure. Similarly, Uma is a classical *Fengshui* practitioner who also follows ancient texts and conducts life readings to complement his service. Interviewee Star also follows ancient texts for guidance, but declined to comment on the *Fengshui* reading procedure he uses. From the five practitioner interviewees, it could be seen that *Fengshui* has split into classical and contemporary forms upon its migration to Vancouver.

Classical and contemporary *Fengshui* are different in the application of traditional theories and procedures, and that there appears to be conflicts between the two sides. Practitioner 007 stated that in his early years of learning *Fengshui*, he attended a seminar of a renowned master, who “couldn’t answer basic questions, [and] was turning

her back on the audience because of her belief in compass directions” (“007”, personal communication, March 19, 2020). Another example that practitioner 007 raised is the classical belief that T-junctions are a problem for houses, due to energy travelling in a straight line directly rushing into the house. Practitioner 007 mentioned that one of his clients lives in a house at the end of a T-junction and “everything was going well for them in their lives, their relationship was solid, three kids, all three are great, everybody’s good, husband and wife are both promoted at work, no problems. Financially, everything great. Personally, everything great. Zero problem. So, obviously, the T-junction is not a problem for these people” (“007”, personal communication, March 19, 2020). Therefore, practitioner 007 questioned the accuracy of classical *Fengshui* in a modern setting, and requests adaptation to contemporary environment. By the same token, practitioner Uma practices classical *Fengshui* and labels contemporary *Fengshui* as “a joke” (“Uma”, personal communication, March 17, 2020). He provided an example of contemporary *Fengshui*, stating that “since Chinese people like red, like Chinese New Year, everything is red. That’s why red is lucky. So, make sure in your house, put more red [coloured items at home]” (“Uma”, personal communication, March 17, 2020). Both practices appear to be in conflict in various ways and could not reach a common standard.

However, all five practitioners, whether they practice classical or contemporary *Fengshui*, agree that there needs to be a certain degree of modification on ancient theories. Living in Vancouver, theories and traditional practices need to be altered to meet the current context. For instance, practitioner Llama stated, “The Rockies block out wind and sand. There is good source of water and forests. These cause Vancouver to be stable. Since the *Fengshui* leads to stability, people can be in harmony and live comfortably” (“Llama”, personal communication, May 13, 2020). Practitioner 007 also viewed the natural geography having an influence on *Fengshui*. He stated, “[Due to COVID-19], the air and water are starting to heal, it didn’t take long for nature to start coming back. People are being asked to slow down. Water flows and balances the environment, meet an obstacle, and then it reroutes itself” (“007”, personal communication, March 19, 2020). Whether it be classical or contemporary *Fengshui*, the knowledge is closely tied to the natural environment and needs to be adjusted to the modern context to be applicable.



## 4.5. Composition of Clients and their Consumption

Vancouver is a multicultural city with people of various ethnic backgrounds and upbringing. It is also a city with people of diverse social and economic status. The popularization of *Fengshui* in the city is especially worth investigating due to the wide range in ethnicity and class. This section interviews the practitioners in terms of their clients and the clients' expectations of *Fengshui* service. Although consumers of all social class could believe in *Fengshui* and seek guidance from practitioners, the elite and wealthy Vancouverites' consumption of *Fengshui* services contributes to the knowledge's revival and production.

As a Caucasian *Fengshui* practitioner, Jade's clients are "mostly Caucasians, but [she does] have some Chinese clients. Some Chinese people think [she is] associated with the fake stuff" ("Jade", personal communication, March 16, 2020). Although she has trained under a number of renowned international *Fengshui* masters, practitioner Jade often face doubts from potential Chinese clients due to her ethnicity. Practitioner Jade's clients expect her to advise on home arrangement in order to earn more money, receive good health, enjoy good marriage, and the likes ("Jade", personal communication, March 16, 2020). Although many of practitioner Jade's clients are not ethnic Chinese, they nevertheless wish for similar results as many Chinese clients. Similarly, practitioner Llama has clients of different ethnicities. He stated, "I have clients from all over the world. They come from the U.S., Europe, Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Canada. Right now, most of my clients are from mainland China" ("Llama", personal communication, May 13, 2020). Many of practitioner Llama's clients would travel to Vancouver to seek his advice. When questioned about his clients' expectations of him, practitioner Llama replied, "They want my skills to bring comfort to them, to gain what they want, comfort, wealth, good health, and happiness" ("Llama", personal communication, May 13, 2020). His clients are willing to travel long distance to receive his *Fengshui* services, which means that they have a certain level of financial might and/or social status.

By the same token, practitioner 007 serves an international audience. He stated that, "[he] started working with a Japanese promoter in 2008, and teaching workshops primarily for Japanese. Since 2008, [he has] been teaching a lot of Japanese people, and consulting with them mostly in Japan" ("007", personal communication, March 19,

2020). On top of flying to Japan to offer classes and consultation, practitioner 007 also serves clients in North America. In the Americas, he advises “primarily Caucasian clients. [He] occasionally gets Asian clients and generally the ones who are younger because they want to do *Fengshui* like their parents want them to, but they don't want to do it in the very rigid, dogmatic way that their parents want them to” (“007”, personal communication, March 19, 2020). Hence, practitioner 007's contemporary *Fengshui* methods are more attractive to younger Chinese consumers. Clients desire “overall wellness, but generally people approach [him] when they have a problem that they want to fix. There [could be] a problem financially, there [could be] a problem with work, there [could be] a problem with health, or relationship, so generally those are the themes they will approach” (“007”, personal communication, March 19, 2020). When there are challenges that clients face, they seek practitioner 007's advice and expect to see an improvement. Practitioner Uma has a slightly different demographic in terms of his clients. For him, “most of [his clients] are from mainland China. They speak Mandarin. And some of them are from India” (“Uma”, personal communication, March 17, 2020). Since many of his clients learned about him through word of mouth, his clients' demographic is scattered. Nonetheless, his clients share the common theme of desiring better health and a happier life (“Uma”, personal communication, March 17, 2020). *Fengshui* clients in Vancouver are comprised of various ethnicities, with a desire for similar benefits, such as good health, luck, relationship, fortune, comfort, and happiness.

Although some *Fengshui* practitioners are willing to share information on their clients' demographics, some are against providing the slightest information that could identify their clients. Practitioner Star stated that “[he has] clients from West Vancouver who need to sell their houses, most of them Chinese” (“Star”, personal communication, March 11, 2020). However, upon asking how he serves those clients, Star responded, “To work in this field, keeping information confidential is very important. I keep everything confidential. It is a basic rule in this field” (“Star”, personal communication, March 11, 2020). It could be seen that there is limited information that some practitioners are willing to disclose, and that they have a strict standard to maintain when offering their services to clients, equivalent to other professionals.

A noteworthy phenomenon of the interviewees' clients is that they could be either active or passive consumers. Practitioner Star stated, “Many people value *Fengshui*. Some of them automatically believe in it, whereas others passively believe in it. Potential

clients need the service. Good *Fengshui* includes having a good garden, good view, and are easier accepted by potential buyers” (“Star”, personal communication, March 11, 2020). Active consumers are those who already believe in *Fengshui* and request the service to meet their various desires. Passive consumers are those who may not be believers, but their target audience or clients believe in *Fengshui*. For instance, real estate agents or sellers could seek a *Fengshui* practitioner’s advice to decorate or renovate a home for it to meet the *Fengshui* expectations of potential buyers. As a result, this phenomenon increases the variety of clients who request *Fengshui* services.

#### **4.6. Preservation and Inheritance of *Fengshui***

*Fengshui* is a knowledge system that warrants preservation even though modern science would view it as “non-existent” due to its failure to meet the sole criteria of truth and aesthetic quality. All five interviewed practitioners are taking initiatives to preserve the traditional knowledge regardless of their school of practice or their clients’ ethnicity. They recognize the *Fengshui*’s value as an alternative knowledge that operates credibly in social practices.

Practitioner Jade states that “it is actually more important to teach about energy, and some people have a bias against that it is Chinese, [that] they think it’s old so it’s not valid. And even with young people too, if coming from Communist China, because they [do not officially support practicing *Fengshui*]” (“Jade”, personal communication, March 16, 2020). To preserve the knowledge and pass it to the next generation, Jade holds classes. She expressed that “[she] teaches as much as [she is] able to, with [her] limited Chinese, to teach it authentically. [She doesn’t] change the names. [She] always gives the pinyin, and the ways of writing it in [her] manuals” (“Jade”, personal communication, March 16, 2020). Practitioner Jade sees the importance of transmitting *Fengshui* and educating the general public not to think of it as superstitious. Practitioner Uma takes a similar approach by teaching students. However, in his classes, “most [students] don’t learn *Fengshui*, because it’s a high-level thing. Most of them, they learn how to do a life calculation. They do life calculation, because it’s easier, way easier than *Fengshui*. *Fengshui*, you need a long time, like only for learning *Fengshui* from my master, it took me five years” (“Uma”, personal communication, March 17, 2020). He also wants to pass the knowledge down by teaching lessons, with *Fengshui* learning being reserved for advanced students.

Practitioner 007 also support preserving *Fengshui* knowledge. In addition to teaching courses in Vancouver and Japanese cities, he is “very interested in writing a couple of books on it that really helps people connect with the heart of the teaching” (“007”, personal communication, March 19, 2020). He wants to inspire the general public the importance of wind and water, their essence in the environment and in people’s lives. As for practitioner Star, he turns to using the mass media to circulate the teaching of *Fengshui*. He stated, “I will [preserve *Fengshui*] through the media. I periodically write articles for media companies in Vancouver. I also get interviewed on television stations like Phoenix TV. Through seeing me on the media, people can learn about *Fengshui*, Bazi (八字) life calculations, and how to benefit from the knowledge” (“Star”, personal communication, March 11, 2020). Practitioner 007 and practitioner Star utilize various forms of media to extend their knowledge of *Fengshui* to reach a wide audience.

Practitioner Llama has been learning Chinese geomancy systems since elementary school from his father, and he takes a different approach to preserve the knowledge. He says,

“I am proactively rearranging ancient Chinese texts, be it *Bazi* (八字), *Fengshui*, *Ziwei Doushu* (紫微斗数), *Qimen Dunjia* (奇门遁甲), *I-Ching* (易经), or others. I am rearranging them so that they align with modern perspective. I am rewriting them. In the past, I used to publish things that I write. However, the issue of piracy discouraged me. I don’t want to publish now, but I didn’t give up writing. I keep writing and writing. I hope to save these for those who are interested to read and to learn. However, in terms of the management of these texts, it depends on the people receiving them. I no longer want to publish my works. I don’t want them to be pirated” (“Llama”, personal communication, May 13, 2020).

Practitioner Llama mentioned he is translating many *Fengshui* techniques from ancient texts into modern language and context, so that they are applicable today. He also suggested that digital media and the ease of replication contribute to piracy of his hard work, which discourage him from publishing them. Although practitioner Llama wants *Fengshui* and other schools of Chinese geomancy to be passed on, his passion is made difficult by technology.

The practitioners are all taking initiatives to preserve the traditional knowledge that has migrated to Vancouver. The activities include teaching classes, writing and publishing books, spreading the knowledge on mass media, and translating ancient texts

to fit the modern context. The traditional knowledge is retained, and that situated within Vancouver, the knowledge is popularized and practiced in different ethnic communities serving a range of consumers.

## Chapter 5. Applying *Sociology of Absences*

Drawing from historical analysis and interviews, it could be seen that *Fengshui* is no longer being suppressed in China, that the migration to Vancouver plays into economic and cultural globalization by the dominant class, and that *sociology of absences* is inadequate in fully explaining the migration of *Fengshui* to Vancouver. This Chapter argues the shortfalls of de Sousa Santos' framework and draws two implications from *Fengshui*'s migration to Vancouver.

In the context of the *sociology of absences*, *Fengshui* would be considered to be an alternative knowledge system considered as epistemology of the South for its previous suppression in China. Upon migration, consumers from various classes, including those of the dominant class, realize value in the knowledge. The first wave of Chinese immigrants to Vancouver were primarily the uneducated and poor, who struggled to survive under the global capitalist system. In the second wave, the Chinese people who migrated to Vancouver had a marked increase in purchasing power and ambition for profits from housing investments, which brought to the need of *Fengshui* services. Economic and cultural globalization brought upon migration of the alternative knowledge system, which led to its popularization in Vancouver.

### 5.1. Shortfalls of *Sociology of Absences*

De Sousa Santos' *sociology of absences* has limitations when being applied to *Fengshui* because it has a narrow understanding of the politics of knowledge, vaguely defines the epistemology of the North and the South, and misses an intersectional analysis that examines class and nation.

Firstly, de Sousa Santos originally applies *sociology of absences* to study the World Social Forum. In its use, the framework politicizes alternative knowledge and organizations. Specifically, the framework reflects on constructing a just society such as building on citizenship principle beyond the political realm and maintaining "political democracy and economic despotism" (de Sousa Santos, 2006, p. 28). In other words, realities that have been silenced, suppressed, marginalized, and considered "non-existent" are recognized and brought out to confront the hegemony. Also, it draws a reality where the lowest social class rises against the dominant class and is critical of

globalization. As a traditional knowledge system that is practiced in Chinese societies, *Fengshui* does not align with this particular stance of class politics. *Fengshui* clients in Chinese societies and in Vancouver are mainly of the dominant class. In this case, this form of alternate knowledge, or knowledge from the global South, is in fact applied, among many uses, to the housing market of capitalism.

Secondly, de Sousa Santos vaguely defines epistemology of the North and the South, which opens the categorization of various traditional knowledge systems to interpretation. De Sousa Santos (2006) states that neoliberal globalization is hegemony anchored in the knowledge of Western-based modern science, also known as the “global North” (p. 13). The “global North” includes Germany, England, France, Russia, Italy, and the United States (de Sousa Santos, 2014, p. 40). By the same token, the South is not geographic south, but a metaphor for “global South” countries and regions that experience “unjust suffering” caused by global capitalism and colonialism (de Sousa Santos, 2014, p. 134). Without a clarification of “unjust suffering” and categorization of the global North and the global South, traditional knowledge systems could not be rightly acknowledged as epistemology of the global South. For instance, although China is geographically located in the northern hemisphere and not a Western country, it has embraced Western-based modern science for the past half century (see Wen, 2008). As Nicolaï (2017) argues, North/South international dichotomies between countries fail to grasp intranational urban and rural divides, as well as class divisions, within nations themselves. Also, more recently as shown in the case of Vancouver, *Fengshui* as an alternative knowledge system can be understood as serving economic capitalism (i.e., the housing market), while simultaneously embodying a form of alternative cultural knowledge against the science-centric society. In that sense, the knowledge system is not of individuals experiencing “unjust suffering,” and cannot completely be categorized under epistemology of the South.

Thirdly, the *sociology of absences* lacks an intersectional analysis between nation and class. According to de Sousa Santos’ *sociology of absences*, while core countries impose their knowledge and ideals on peripheral countries, peripheral countries attempt to elevate themselves by embracing characteristics of core countries for modernization. For de Sousa Santos (2006), “as core countries specialize in globalized localisms, peripheral countries are forced to specialize in localized globalisms” (p. 34). In other words, de Sousa Santos could be seen as analyzing

underdeveloped countries and the Western counterparts. However, the missing dimension of intersectional analysis between class and nation is crucial when analyzing *Fengshui* as a traditional knowledge. Santos' theory fails to grasp economic and cultural processes in countries such as China, which may have once been peripheral in the economic global system, but nevertheless underwent radical communist revolution in conjunction with modernization. One of the by-products of this revolution was an attack of *Fengshui* as part of a larger criticism of feudal traditions. After all, in the case of *Fengshui* in Vancouver, it is the dominant class consuming the service, but according to Santos' framework, the knowledge belongs to the people of the lowest class who are either suffering or being marginalized in a science-centric society.

De Sousa Santos' view of globalization is based on local, national, and global struggles organized by social movements and NGOs, with the aim of leading to a more just society that is liberated from exclusion, oppression, and discrimination marked by capitalism and neoliberal globalization (de Sousa Santos, 2006, p. x). *Sociology of absences* is tied to the lowest social class that is struggling and resisting the dominant class. However, *Fengshui* today comes to be favoured not only by peasants in China (Bruun, 2011, p. xvii), but also by a number of educated elites and various CCP officials, as stated in Chapter 3. Here, it could be seen that *Fengshui* is tied to the dominant class, the wealthy and the powerful, as it travels from Chinese society to the West by affluent Chinese immigrants. In the context of de Sousa Santos' *sociology of absences*, the struggle would be between Chinese traditional knowledge versus Western countries' science-centric knowledge. However, within the Chinese society, there is a division of class, in which the wealthy educated elites play a significant role in the revival and migration of *Fengshui*. Hence, there requires to be an intersectional analysis of class and nation, with particular attention to the class composition of Chinese migrants who are the primary users of this knowledge. In this sense, the class dimension has been neglected through the lens that examines the suppression of knowledge from Western core countries upon peripheral countries.

The intersection between class and nation needs to be addressed when assessing *Fengshui* as an alternative knowledge system. Different regions may contain knowledge systems that warrant further examination. Zhao (2010) acknowledges the class differences situated within a rising China, where peasants from rural regions desire modernization and see relocation to cities as the means to a better life. The one-way



flow of labor and resources from the countryside to the urban areas led to the hollowing out of the rural areas and a profound urban-bias in Chinese society that threatens social stability. Zhao (2010) advocates that there needs to be a shift in the direction of research perspective from coastal and urban to inland and rural (p. 291). The differences in class within China influence both the flow of labourer and knowledge. While labourers move to cities and acquire new sets of literacies and knowledge, traditional knowledge is left behind and replaced. Such could be witnessed in the migration of the early Chinese labourers to Vancouver.

## 5.2. Two Implications following Migration to Vancouver

*Fengshui* has not only been popularized upon migrating to Vancouver, it has also spread to different ethnicities in the city and continues to be preserved. There is not an existing framework to describe *Fengshui*'s migration to Vancouver. The closest model that draws resemblance to the phenomenon is de Sousa Santos' *sociology of absences*, but even that cannot fully be applied to fully explain *Fengshui*'s migration. When applied to the case of *Fengshui* in Vancouver, the *sociology of absences* continues to neglect the complexity within class. In addition, *Fengshui* as an alternative knowledge system in Vancouver continues to be apolitical. In fact, similar to its use in Chinese societies, *Fengshui* could be used to maintain capitalism, such as serving real estate agencies. Within the many existing knowledge systems, *Fengshui* is one that is apolitical, recognized as "non-existent" by science, but is embraced by the real estate industry within Western capitalism.

According de Sousa Santos' *sociology of absences*, *Fengshui* would be considered as "non-existent" within science-centric knowledge in the West. Although *Fengshui* is seen as being split into two forms – classical and contemporary – as they are not recognized or legitimated under modern science and high culture, neither would be considered as truth and of aesthetic quality. The ecology of knowledges confronts this logic in that there is no ignorance of knowledge (de Sousa Santos, 2006). Although *Fengshui* is recognized as "non-existent" following modern science, the knowledge should not be dismissed altogether.

However, the *sociology of absences* does not recognize the complexity within class. From the perspective of class, the consumers in Vancouver who could afford

*Fengshui* service belong to the dominant class. They pay for the luxurious service that they believe could improve their needs, be it fortune, health, luck, relationship, comfort, or happiness. Although members from a lower social class also seek *Fengshui* advice, that is uncommon. From the perspective of nation, *Fengshui* is an alternative knowledge system from China, and that it is primarily Chinese people who brought the knowledge to Vancouver, which now has multi-ethnic practitioners. The *sociology of absences* lacks an intersectional analysis between class and nation that could explain the migration of *Fengshui*.

In addition, *Fengshui* continues to be an apolitical alternative knowledge system in Vancouver, which differs from the knowledge systems that de Sousa Santos attributes. The *sociology of absences* was applied to the World Social Forum, especially to critique the globalization of capitalism. The political concept refers to knowledge of the suppressed for the sake of challenging hegemony, such as the peasants' revolution knowledge from Mao's era. Though, not all alternative knowledge could be politicized. There are some alternative knowledge systems of the suppressed that could be used for capitalism. *Fengshui* became popularized in Vancouver to meet the needs of the dominant class's housing purchases. The knowledge serves both the consumers and real estate companies within Western capitalism. *Fengshui* is not utilized to challenge the hegemony of Western science in Vancouver or anywhere. Consumers seek *Fengshui* advice to lead a comfortable life, one that could fulfill their various needs.

### **5.3. Concluding Remarks**

*Fengshui* is a knowledge system that dates back to imperial China. The traditional knowledge system has its roots in China, but faced suppression when the KMT took power and set out to modernize China. After the CCP gained control, policies to modernize the country continued, followed by movements that suppressed old customs, old culture, old habits, and old ideas. The policies toward *Fengshui* eventually loosened, and it continues to be practiced in mainland China. With a rising middle class, Canada's changing immigration policies to attract economic immigrants, and/or for political reasons, Chinese immigrants began relocating to Vancouver in the 1990s. The migration of people led to the introduction of *Fengshui* into the city. Upon its migration to Vancouver, *Fengshui* has become a part of the hegemony of the transnational and multicultural elite.

From there on, *Fengshui* has spread to many ethnic communities within Vancouver. Practitioners acquired the traditional knowledge from one or more masters, and then serve clients who wish to have improved health, luck, relationship, fortune, comfort, and/or happiness. From the knowledge migration, *Fengshui* has split into classical and contemporary (or new age) *Fengshui*, in which the former follows ancient texts such as reading the mountains, the slopes of the land in regard to formula, and the latter focuses on energy, colours, forms, and feelings. Despite the differences in practice, *Fengshui* practitioners take on various initiatives to preserve the knowledge system, which include teaching lessons, publishing books, engaging in mass media, and translating ancient texts to fit the modern context. In Vancouver, the knowledge continues to be practiced and preserved. Examining *Fengshui* as a traditional knowledge system, de Sousa Santos' *sociology of absences* could be partially applied, but has inadequacy that needs to be addressed. These inadequacies include unnecessary politicization of traditional knowledge, a vague definition of the global North and the global South, and a lack of intersectional analysis between class and nation. First, the framework applies a narrow notion of politics to traditional knowledge, because it was originally meant to be applied to the World Social Forum, a political event. Second, it loosely defines the global North and the global South, enabling the categorization to be open to interpretation. Third, it lacks an intersectional analysis between class and nation, which neglects the fact that the wealthy educated elites play a significant role in the revival and migration of *Fengshui*. Some alternative knowledge systems actually reinforce capitalism, such as that of *Fengshui*. *Fengshui* differs from the science-centric knowledge of the hegemony, but could be incorporated into the real estate industry for housing needs within Western capitalism. Application of *Fengshui* knowledge enables clients to live more comfortably, by satisfying their various needs.

In sum, if we apply the *sociology of absences* uncritically to a body of traditional knowledge such as *Fengshui*, we will not only unnecessarily politicize it, but also neglect the conditional flow and appropriation of knowledge in the context of migration. Realistically, within the culture of capitalism, alternative knowledge such as *Fengshui* could be accommodated, as it does not set out to challenge the hegemony of capitalism. There are apolitical alternative knowledge systems that could be practiced and preserved.

This study has examined the traditional knowledge of *Fengshui* upon its migration to Vancouver by applying de Sousa Santos' *sociology of absences* and interviewing five *Fengshui* practitioners in Vancouver. The study has explored topics regarding acquisition of the knowledge, application of *Fengshui*, motivation behind learning, clients' demographics and expectations, procedure of providing *Fengshui* reading, and preservation of the knowledge system. To enrich the academic gap in this field, further research could be conducted on the validity and application of *Fengshui* knowledge in Vancouver, as well as the differences to those of Chinese societies.

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