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**Movements from Pearl Rivers:
Connections flowing between
Southern China and Aotearoa**

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Abstract

According to ancient worldviews indigenous to China, the universe and humanity evolved and diversified from one single origin, inheriting a divinely spiritual, as well as physical reality. The familial ties binding all life within the universe operate according to principles of reciprocity, harmony in diversity, and balance. These indivisible relationships continue across realms between deceased ancestors and living descendants. The role of humanity to cultivate the divine attributes reflected in the universe is aided by the advancement of arts and crafts.

Such perspectives have informed this creative research, which unravels genealogical, philosophical, cultural, and artistic connections that flow between Southern China and Aotearoa. The visual outcome of the research, *Movements from Pearl Rivers* exhibition, highlights principles which propelled the long historical evolution of Southern China and her descendants. The continuously unfolding narrative of Southern China from cosmological origins, through ancient Austronesian migrations, to the 19th century Southern Chinese global dispersal is conveyed through a site-specific installation which threads together fibres connecting this region such as mulberry paper, banana, bamboo, silk, and flax. Paper cutting scrolls, kinetic cascading cords, woven items, and the objects and stories contributed by eight diverse descendants of the 19th century Southern Chinese global dispersal reinforce a spirit of connection flowing between an ancestral homeland in Southern China and a present homeland in Aotearoa.

This research contributes to prevalent art discourses within Oceania which are learning to embrace the increasingly complex, diverse, and cross-cultural identities and relationships of this region. The conceptual framework based on elements of a Chinese cosmological worldview is offered in communication with diverse wisdom traditions in Oceania. The framework centres artistic practice on the cultivation of beautiful attributes within both the artist and their materials, for the purpose of fostering harmonious relationships. The artworks emphasise the notion of the ever-flowing spirit, underlying and connecting all beings within the universe.

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“我的上帝啊 · 一切赞美归于祢！祢是这一切之源：荣耀与威严 · 伟大与尊荣 · 统治与主权 · 至高与至善 · 敬畏与威权。” - 巴哈欧拉

“Korōria katoa, e tōku Atua, ki a Koe te Mātāpuna o te korōria katoa, o te rangatiratanga katoa, o te nui whakaharahara, o te hōnore, o te kīngitanga, o te tōminionatanga, o runga rawa, o te arotau, o te ihi, o te wehi, o te mana.” -Bahá'u'lláh

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1. Movements from Pearl Rivers

From the shores of Aotearoa, this creative research gazes across the ocean to misty islands waiting beyond the horizon. From this positioning, contemplation is centred upon a distant Pearl River Delta (珠江三角洲). This ancient ancestral site for both Austronesians¹ and Southern Chinese descendants² has evolved and transformed with her people throughout the centuries. What was once a sea of islands, and waterways, filled with canoes and sail boats, is now an urban industrialised city delta (Su & Grydehøj, 2022). Numerous rivers flowing from illustrious mountains intersect and diverge, eventually commingling in the silty estuaries which filter into the South China Sea. Her people, like her rivers, are always moving, flowing, adapting, transforming, evolving, migrating, and renewing. Her land and seascape, and the cultures and languages which it has produced, have never been stagnant or isolated. Rather, the forward movement of rivers has been quickened through the intermingling of diverse tributaries, and the tidal pull of the bountiful sea.

While this Pearl River Delta remains out of reach from these Southern shores, a spiritual intimacy exists in the hearts of her overseas descendants. Visions of an ideal homeland; a tropical sea of islands, with plentiful bounties from land and sea, of thatched homes, woven sails, and village plantations are recalled. The smell of sea spray, oyster estuaries, fire ovens and frangipani blossoms are both cherished memories of life positioned in Oceania and imagined realities in a Pearl River homeland. The waters of understanding of an ancestral homeland swell, as the river of lived experience within a real homeland environment in Oceania, converges with it. The convergence of these two rivers culminates in a sea of creative surging in which the conjoining of knowledge and experience of two homelands is raised in the creative outcome of this research project.

¹ This term literally means southern people and is used to refer to a large group of people which extend from the South China Sea, along Southeast Asia, and Oceania, who share linguistic and cultural traits and are considered part of the sea voyaging migrations which originated in ancient Southern China.

² 'Southern Chinese descendants' is used in this thesis to refer to the descendants of those who left Southern China in the 19th or early 20th century. This broad term is inclusive of the various ethnic minority groups of Southern China.

The movements flowing from these Pearl Rivers have generated continuous waves of multidirectional migrations and cultural and material exchange over thousands of years. The currents of exchange throughout the South China Sea, Southeast Asia, and Oceania, have shaped what should be seen as one coherently connected, and fluidly diverse region. Such currents and waves have reached the shores of Aotearoa, through the Austronesian expansion, through various historical trade and migration routes throughout the Asia-Pacific, and more recently, through the 19th century Southern Chinese global dispersal.

The connections flowing between Southern China and Aotearoa have not always been perceived in such a fluid or coherent way. Borders and histories have been conceptualised and described to contain people, countries, and cultures within their own respective catchments. The coherent sea of islands of the Asia-Pacific region has been divided up according to political and economic appetites, and the depth of connections across these seas has faded from prevalent perspectives (Eshraghi, 2015).

The wake of the 19th century European expansion facilitated the movements of Southern Chinese sojourners, slaves, refugees, migrants, and labourers across the seas, while simultaneously seeking to exclude and oppress them (Mckoewn, 2008). Sinophobic ideologies were propagated, and racist legislations were devised throughout the globe. The legacy of Sinophobia and corruption continues to permeate numerous aspects of international and national societies (Gao, 2022).

The turning of tides has revealed that the 19th century Southern Chinese sojourners did not set out to colonise or dominate the people, cultures, or countries within which they settled, as the “yellow peril” and “Asian invasion” ideologies propagated (Hubbard, 2008). Like the rivers from which they descend, Southern Chinese descendants overcame and side-stepped barriers of racial exclusion and oppression, through continuous cultural adaption, intermingling, and intermarriage with indigenous and other local cultures.

The Pearl River Delta and its surrounding region is a unique site of convergence for diverse rivers of ethnic, cultural, and linguistic heritages. Likewise, it is an origin for divergent migrations and trade routes. The complex heritage and circumstances of

Southern Chinese descendants make them a population, which sits outside of ordinary communities with common identity and language. Throughout the seas, they were often an ‘othered’ presence in colonial-indigenous conflicts, and resultantly their place of belonging, their story, and their points of connection, have often remained overlooked across a variety of socio-cultural settings, including the contemporary art world (Shibata, 2005; Asianometry, 2021).

The rivers and shores of the contemporary art world in Aotearoa have also been divided by this historical seascape of European expansion. The increasingly challenged legacy of white supremacy, western curation, narration, and representation of other ethnic populations within the art world has led to racial factionalising in the name of multiculturalism (White, 2008; Nagesh, 2018). The art world is not yet free from outmoded tendencies to limit artists according to ethnic categorisations, and to suppress discussion of complex cross-cultural identities and relationships. While artists are often categorised according to their ethnicities, or to certain notions of indigeneity or nativity, the complex place of diverse Southern Chinese descendants remains ambiguous.

Within this panorama of narrated divisions and borders, some art practitioners seek to reframe relationships between China and Oceania within a whakapapa genealogical framing which acknowledges ancient ancestral connection (Panoho, 2015; White, 2008; Lopesi & Rands, 2017; Ng & Gordon-Smith, 2017). A number of artists demonstrate Southern Chinese belonging, and challenge prevalent dichotomies through their own living waters of Southern Chinese-indigenous heritage. Others seek to foster harmonious relationships through cross-cultural collaborations. Some attempt to expand contemporary notions of indigeneity and multicultural heritage, and others create directly Chinese-Māori cross-cultural associations. Further work is still required to clarify the accepted belonging of diverse Southern Chinese and our cross-cultural relationships within prevalent discourses and spaces in Aotearoa, Oceania, and throughout the world.

The complex interweaving of the rivers and seas from which Southern Chinese descendants have come from has been noticeably missing from prevalent discourse. Not only has the diversity within Southern China and their shared ancestry with

Austronesians been overlooked, but so too has the diversity amongst Southern Chinese descendants of mixed ethnic, cultural, and national heritage, and the complexity of their migratory routes been under-appreciated, and at times intentionally hidden due to Sinophobic racism. Thus, it would be inadequate to attempt to include Southern Chinese within contemporary art discourse through categories such as “Chinese New Zealanders”, “Aotearoa Asian Artists”, or “Ethnic Minorities”.

The Chinese cosmological worldview, which simultaneously harmonises concepts of oneness and diversity, is relevant here, yet absent from the discussion of the Southern Chinese dispersal and the circumstances leading to our present multicultural reality. The absence of indigenous Chinese perspectives and principles along with a blurred notion of Chinese identity and culture, and historical circumstances leave room for stereotypical notions of Chinese identity to dominate mainstream views.

The Chinese worldview, with its multiple origins and paths within and out of China, converges and merges with indigenous worldviews of Oceania. When these perspectives communicate with each other, a much wider perspective becomes apparent. At these sites of convergence are concepts and principles which guide an analysis and navigation of the evolution of humanity particular to the Southern China-Aotearoa connections, the present multicultural context, and to the role and creation of artwork.

Obscured from prevalent discourse are the paths of connections which Southern Chinese descendants and Austronesians trace to an ancestral homeland, and aspects of heritage which resonate, or have unfurled from a long evolving Southern China. Narrowing views of cultural identities and fragmented histories are expanded through uncovering these connections.

The rivers and seas which connect two distant homelands are deep, expansive, and spiritually intimate. Pearl Rivers flow through the veins of her descendants, connecting them with each other, their shared ancestry, and their homelands. The rivers which carry cultural legacies from ancient pinnacles flow down into the present cultural landscape across these homelands. And while these rivers have, at times,

meandered at low levels or flooded at others, each momentary crisis washes away aspects of tradition, allowing for the regeneration of new life.

New creations, presented in the thesis exhibition *Movements from Pearl Rivers*, draw inspiration from artforms, materials, and fibres from two homelands, to convey connections between Southern China and Aotearoa. The body of artwork narrates the unfolding evolution of ancient Southern China through the 19th century global dispersal, to the shores of Aotearoa through a conceptual framework constructed from key concepts of a Chinese cosmological worldview. Diverse Southern Chinese descendants local to Manawatū, their stories and treasures, are in themselves manifestations of connections across these homelands. The complex depth of their identities and the expansiveness of their cultures are a reflection of the seas upon which their ancestors voyaged. *Movements from Pearl Rivers* seeks to reveal and strengthen connections, between Aotearoa and Southern China, descendants and ancestors, and between each other as shared descendants in Aotearoa.

There are numerous layers of connections that flow between Southern China and Aotearoa. This creative research traces threads of ancestral, philosophical, cultural, material, artistic and historical connection. The thesis will follow an unravelling evolution firstly by outlining key concepts from a Chinese cosmological worldview which construct the conceptual framework employed in this creative research. Next it will continue to unravel the ancient history of Southern China through to the 19th century Southern Chinese global dispersal. Subsequently, the prevalent tensions which obscure these connections within the contemporary art world in Aotearoa and Australasia will be revealed. Lastly, it will discuss the visual art exhibition, *Movements from Pearl Rivers* as the outcome and creative presentation of these interwoven strands of connection.

2. Conceptual Framework

The aim of this creative exploration is to unravel and reveal the connections extending from Southern China to Aotearoa. This retracing of connecting threads to Southern China has been done from the positioning of Aotearoa. This undertaking required a set of coherent concepts which could explain the relationships between diverse threads spanning across peoples, time and space.

The conceptual framework used in this creative research is constructed from key elements of philosophical perspectives found indigenous to China which are coherent with Oceanic narratives. The conceptual framework includes fundamental perspectives on the nature of humanity and the universe, and key principles which have implications for this artistic practice. This chapter will articulate the essential elements of this conceptual framework and how it shapes the methods employed for artistic practice and research.

The Evolving Oneness of Humanity and the Universe

The first, fundamental element of this conceptual framework is a view of the universe and humanity as originating from one source which is both divinely spiritual in essence as well as physical. From this one origin, various elements of life began to emerge, intermingle, multiply, diversify and evolve while remaining interconnected and inseparable. Since this original state, humanity has thus been transforming on a long evolutionary path. Essential to humanity's progress has been periods of chaos or crisis leading to new growth. When viewing history from this perspective, one sees cyclical periods of crisis and maturation as humanity learns from its growing pains.

This concept is evident in the story of Pan Gu kai tian (盘古开天), in which the world begins in a state of formless chaos³). From this chaos, a cosmic egg began to develop

³ Pangu is mentioned in numerous texts over different time periods. According to Kosa (2009), the earliest recorded mention of Pangu is in 738–839CE in a work by Chengguan 澄觀 in the Taishō Tripitaka (TaishōShinshūDaizōkyō 大正新修大藏經). The origin of the story is debated as it is widely

over thousands of years. Eventually, yin 阴 and yang 阳 reach a balanced condition allowing for Pangu to be born in a state of infinite potential. With an axe he separates yin and yang, which are each associated with heaven and earth. As Pangu grows over thousands of years, heaven and earth are pushed further apart. Eventually Pangu dies, and his various body parts become the numerous things in the universe. His eyes become the sun and moon, his body hair becomes the trees, and his blood the rivers, and so on (Chiu, 1984; Kosa, 2009; Xiaodong, 2011; Yao, 2011).

In another narrative, the Goddess Nuwa 女媧⁴, repairs a torn sky and replaces fallen pillars after a period of crisis. She also uses an axe to cut off the legs of a giant turtle named Ao to use as pillars for the sky. The Goddess sculpts humans from clay using rope. She is associated with water and is depicted as having a snake-like tail (Chiu, 1984; Chen; 2004; Schipper, et al., 2011). Elements of this story are found across Southeast Asia and amongst Austronesian cultures, further evincing historic maritime exchange (Yulo, 2020).

In the Tao Te Ching 道德经 (400 BC) the universe is described as beginning in a “formless” “murky” “dark” “void” state. It is said that “*Tao produced One, One produced Two, Two produced Three, and Three produced All things.*” All created things then move from Obscurity and travel towards Brightness, “while they are harmonised by the Breath of Vacancy”. The Tao is regarded as the “mother of all things” the “originator of heaven and earth” from which all things descend. It is the source of all potential creation, as well as the pattern and way of the universe which humanity must strive to follow. (Tzu, 2022, Chapter 42).

Numerous ancient Chinese texts discuss Heaven as a Father and Earth as a Mother of humanity and all life. This familial relationship with the universe is a foundational characteristic of Chinese worldviews. Ancient texts describe nature and humanity as being one in essence, and all living things as brothers and sisters to humanity (Chan,

sourced amongst different ethnicities in China, but this demonstrates the cultural exchange inherent in Chinese history.

⁴ Nuwa’s story is also found in numerous texts over different time periods. The cross-cultural interaction of China, Southeast Asia and Austronesia is also evident through the story of Nuwa. The term Nuwa has even been linked with the Austronesian words for Snake (Yulo, 2020).

1963; Chiu, 1984; Dainian & Zhang, 2002; Yao, 2010; Schipper, et al., 2011; Wang, 2015).

Extending from this concept of oneness is the concept of the continuous interplay of yin and yang as two opposite but complementary elements, which produce all life in the universe. Yin and yang produce qi^气, an energy, breath, or life force that is continuously present and flowing in all things. From these concepts we see that the reciprocal relationship between opposing yet complementary elements forms a foundational principle in Chinese philosophy for the generation of new life. All life is characterised by continuous evolution, transformation, and harmonious diversification (Chiu, 1984; Chan, 1963; Dainian & Zhang, 2002; Patterson, 2007; Wang, 2015).

All of these Chinese narratives and schools of thought embrace a view of the universe as originating from one source which was divine and physical in essence. They emphasise the separating of Heaven and Earth, and humanity's ancestral relationship with these two elements. Heaven and Earth also correspond to dual elements of humankind's heritage: loftiness and lowliness, spirituality and physicality, ideals and practical application.

The Role of Humanity within the Universe

The role of humanity is given context within the universe. As descendants of a divine heritage as well as of the natural world, humanity has a familial relationship with the Universe. Humankind, being endowed with unique powers and capabilities, assumes the role of harmonious cultivator of the natural environment. They are to learn from the divine attributes perceivable in the universe, and strive to cultivate these within their own selves, their communities, their arts, work, and all they do. They are to strive to live in harmony with the natural environment and with each other, and they are to rely on and turn to a Heavenly Power for the confirmation of their efforts. Aspects of this perspective on the role of humanity within the universe are found in various

cultures and philosophies indigenous to China (Yao, 2010; Tien, 2012; Tucker, 2014; Wang, 2015).

The individual's identity is viewed as a continuation of one's genealogical line and as a member of one's family. This continuation extends as a member of the community, society, humanity and the universe. The thread connects across spiritual and physical dimensions. Chinese philosophers convey that we are inseparable from each other; the pain of one member implies the pain of all, the health of the whole requires the health of each member, and when we look upon another member of the whole we see ourselves (Chiu, 1984; Ikezawa, 1994; Ko, 2006; Lakos, 2010; Yao, 2010; Chang, 2011; Tien, 2012; Lin et al., 2016).

Moral cultivation is taught in all the Chinese schools of thought, as a means to attain enlightenment, harmony, and progress. Moral cultivation includes the suppression of selfish desires, and the acquisition of spiritual discipline. Self-indulgence is quelled through one's duties to foster harmonious environments. Reaching the ideal state of enlightenment and control over one's lower nature is a goal that the individual strives towards throughout life. While striving to cultivate oneself and one's environment, harmonious relationships need to be maintained since each member is organic with each other. Relationships fraught with domination, greed, desire, or force must be restored to their natural state which is characterised by reciprocity, ceaseless giving, learning, and reflection (Chan, 1963; Schipper, et al., 2011; Tu, 1989; Ko, 2006; Yao, 2010; Chang, 2011; Tien, 2012; Wang, 2015; Lin, et al., 2016).

Filial piety is central to a Chinese approach of harmoniously cultivating the potentialities of humanity and the universe. As Heaven and Earth are viewed as cosmological parents, and the Ultimate Source (Tao) is described as the mother of all things, following their patterns guides one's efforts of inner and outer cultivation, and is also a duty of filial piety (Chiu, 1984; Ikezawa, 1994; Yao, 2010; Tsu, 2022). This brings us to our next concept.

The Relationship between Ancestors, Descendants, and the Land

Essential to this conceptual framework is a notion of the relationship between ancestors and descendants across realms. This sacred relationship is eternal. After one's soul separates from the physical body and exists in the spiritual realm, the descendants in the physical world must continue to pray for, call to mind, and bring honour to their departed ancestors. Their ancestors maintain a connection to the physical world and to the efforts of their descendants. Mysteriously, they aid in the creation of arts and crafts. A reciprocal relationship exists between ancestors in a spiritual realm and descendants in the physical world, who assist each other in their spiritual progress, perhaps like the roots of a tree hidden beneath the soil which sustain the flowering and fruiting branches, and the leaves which absorb sunlight and attract rain. This ancestral relationship has always been central to Chinese life (Lakos, 2010; Yao, 2010; Wang, 2015; Hi, 2018; Joeyczhou, 2020).

The expression of these key concepts is evident throughout China's agrarian history. Their arts and sciences, astronomy, agriculture, and marine culture all centre around this intimate relationship between the family and environment (Chan, 1963; Li, 2009). Although China is vast and diverse, generally villages were composed of clans who worked together to sustain the village through farming and fishing practices. Deceased ancestors would be buried in a place of feng shui, such as near mountains and rivers, not far from the village so that their resting places could be frequented (Baker, 1997). Feng shui (meaning wind water), is also concerned with fostering harmonious conditions through channelling the flow of qi (Wu, 2019; Paolillo, 2019). When the positioning of a home or burial ground aligned with principles of feng shui, the flow of qi through land and lineage would bring good fortune to living descendants (Chiu, 1984; Teather, 1998; Bol & Weller, 1998; Myers, 2014). Ancestral halls were communal centres for the veneration of shared ancestors. Villages and housing were designed with feng shui principles and harmony with the natural environment. Seasons were followed closely, and native plants and animals were cultivated and harvested for local needs. Chinese agricultural practices relied on ancestral and Heavenly assistance, and in turn enriched and recovered soil fertility and maintained frugality (Genpan, 2009).

Festivals and rituals to show gratitude for Heavenly and Earthly bounties are integrated in the life of villages and are still practised today (Hsu, 1948; Chang, 2011; Wang, 2015; Kuah, 1999). Leaving one's ancestral homeland was unquestionable, and at times even forbidden, but this practice has been challenged in the recent era of globalisation (Gungwu, 2003).

Humanity's role in fostering harmonious conditions amongst themselves and their environment is perceivable in Chinese ancestral veneration and ancestral land practices. The principles of filial piety and honouring ancestors within an agrarian context implied that families and clans resided together in an area over many generations (Kuah-Pearce, 2006; Hu, 2018). Villages would often have been clan-based, sharing a common ancestor. The responsibilities of ancestral land were traditionally shared and inherited collectively (Watson, 1977; Chan, 1996; Wienclaw, 2009; Hase, 2013). Traditions of praying for one's ancestors have continued into the present times in China and overseas communities around the globe, one element of culture which remains significantly strong in the face of customary cultural disintegration and assimilation (Eng, 2006; Coe & Begley, 2016; Chung & Li, 2017; Hu, 2018).

The Purpose of the Arts

"...the great achievement of the Chinese artist is to fuse the spiritual and the material"
(Cranmer-Byng, 1959, p.13)

The fundamental concepts of this conceptual framework have implications for the purpose and use of the arts, and this is evident when studying various arts and crafts of China. The artist's aim is to cultivate the divine attributes perceivable in the universe in the materials one is working with and to convey the "beauty of sublime and lofty sentiments" (Guo, 1959; Yulie & Lingwei, 2018). Artworks created with this purpose in mind can serve the people who engage with the work, reinforcing in them these 'heavenly'⁵ attributes and concepts. Art forms were developed and refined over time

⁵ In Chinese texts the term Heavenly refers to the Celestial Realms, the Sky, the Sky Father, spirituality and so on. It can be used to refer to the qualities which we can perceive in the celestial sky,

to address practical and spiritual needs. Folk crafts were linked with their agrarian lifestyle. Fine arts were based on the fine materials available to the area, and conceptually they focused on the patterns and principles observed in the natural environment. The creation of art in this way was also connecting the artist intimately with their natural environment and to a lofty meditative state (Guo, 1959; Reich, 2012; Ho, 2018; Paolillo, 2019; Wang, 2021; Chai, 2021).

The various religions, schools of thought and indigenous Chinese worldviews have shaped Chinese arts over centuries. The intermixing of arts of different ethnicities has been a major source of artistic advancement in China (Zhirong, 2020). Meditating on and creating art was valued as a path to spiritual enlightenment (Chang, 2011; Reich, 2012; Hurvitz, 1970; Birnbaum, 1981; Ho, 2018; Yulie & Lingwei, 2018). Artistic depictions of the land and natural environment emphasise a worldview of a coherent universe, alive with the movement of the qi force flowing through and sustaining the ever-changing processes of nature (Sze, 1963; Chang, 2011; Ci, 2010; Paolillo, 2019; Ma, 2020; Chai, 2021). Both ancient and contemporary authors discuss the role of the artist and the viewer of art as fostering harmony with nature and creating conditions for enlightenment (Sze, 1963; Ci, 2010; Law, 2011; Reich, 2012; Ho, 2018; Chai, 2021). Artists are highly regarded for their role in expanding human knowledge of the universe and cultivating inner and outer qualities in themselves and the materials and environment they work with (Yulie & Lingwei, 2018; Wang, 2021). When artists reach a mastered ability to convey spirit through excellent form they are said to be of the 'divine class', a 'true artist', who must have reached a spiritually exalted state while creating (Chang, 2011; Reich, 2012; Wang, 2021; Chai, 2021).

The natural materials indigenous to China are crafted intricately to extremely refined artforms which also convey the qi spirit flowing through one holistic universe. The patterns and principles observed in the natural environment are the focus of Chinese arts, and many artforms even correspond to seasons and times of the year. Art is linked to ancestral veneration, and to spiritual processes (Guo, 1959; Allan, 1991; Reich, 2012). The act of creating art is a spiritual and sacred process requiring meditation, clarity of thought, purity of heart, heavenly assistance, and which leads to spiritual

as well as the loftiness of spiritual qualities which humanity can develop which are not necessarily physical (Zhang, 2002).

cultivation (Guo, 1959; Chang, 2011; Reich, 2012; Ho, 2018; Yulie & Lingwei, 2018; Liu, 2021; Wang, 2021).

3. Method

This conceptual framework not only guides the methods employed in creating artwork, but it also frames a reading of the literature which informs new creations. This section will first articulate a method of gathering and processing information considering the conceptual framework, and then it will explain methods of artmaking.

The necessary method to unravel connections began with gathering information and analysing it according to the conceptual framework. In this case, the information required pertained to four strands: Chinese cosmology and philosophy, ancient Southern China, the 19th century global dispersal, and customary Chinese art in relation to present contemporary art discourse. Literature and art from secondary sources, interactions with Southern Chinese descendants, and experiences as a Southern Chinese descendant in Oceania are sources of information on these issues which are viewed through the conceptual framework. Weighing the information in this way enables coherent relationships to be perceived throughout what has traditionally been narrated as disjointed histories and contexts. This coherent perspective thus informs the creation of artwork and the narrative being conveyed. The information provides the visual symbols, conventions, and language to form the artwork. Translating these conceptual ideas into form produced a fifth set of data: visual outcomes. These visual outcomes were then analysed for further refinement. This process culminated in the exhibition *Movements from Pearl Rivers*. The methods of data collection and analysis will be further outlined below.

3.1 Method of gathering information

In order to identify the connections flowing between Southern China and Aotearoa, it was necessary to research across a broad range of fields. Therefore, the information gathered is grouped into the following four broad streams.

1. Ancient worldviews and culture indigenous to China

The first stream of connection flows from the body of knowledge surrounding worldviews and cultural practices indigenous to China. What were the main elements of worldviews and philosophies indigenous to China that have shaped and influenced Southern Chinese civilization over the centuries? What aspects of these worldviews and practices resonate with worldviews and practices in Oceania? How might these elements apply to a diverse, global, and transforming present-day context? What implications do these concepts have for artmaking? This information was sought from secondary sources authored by scholars of Chinese philosophy and culture. An abundance of literature on this topic was accessible in English, and coherence across sources was evident. Many of these sources reviewed ancient Chinese texts and discussed them in English. This literature ranges from recent commentaries from Chinese academics to earlier commentaries from the past century of Western scholarship. While early Western discussions of Chinese philosophy are likely to be heavily influenced by Western perspectives and assumptions, many of their commentaries included key Chinese text sources and broad discussion of central themes. It was also useful to view these texts initially, to become more familiar with Chinese text and philosophies. More recent studies of Chinese philosophy delve more deeply into discussions of other issues that go beyond the relevance to this study. This research only sought to understand key principles and concepts of Chinese philosophy, and their application in culture and art.

2. The Bai Yue and the Ancient Maritime Identity of the South China Sea

This first stream of learning linked to another body of knowledge related to the indigenous ancestors of Southern Chinese. Who were these ancestors? How do they form a genealogical link between Southern Chinese and Austronesians? What were their cultural characteristics? What artefacts connected them to Southern Chinese, Southeast Asians, and Austronesians? How did their prehistoric maritime travels relate to the Austronesian expansion, and cultural evolution in these regions? The answers to these questions were sought in secondary sources across a variety of fields. A review of literature around the archaeological, botanical, linguistic, genetic,

maritime culture, agrarian culture, anthropological, artistic, and material culture, and philosophical connections between Southern China, Southeast Asia and Oceania was conducted. Many of these sources included reviews of historical Chinese texts which reveal aspects of Southern Chinese history previously unknown to Western historians. Many of these sources discussing Austronesian ancestral connection to Southern China came from studies conducted within the last 8 years (Ko et al., 2014; Li et al., 2014; Sagart et al., 2018; Wu & Rolett, 2019; Tatte et al., 2021).

3. 19th Century Southern Chinese Dispersal

The next stream of learning flows from the 19th century Southern Chinese dispersal. The research in this area sought to uncover the circumstances surrounding this global dispersal. Who were these Southern Chinese people? Where did they come from? What was their life and local environment like? What were their beliefs and values, their cultural and artistic customs? Why did they leave? Where did they go? What happened in their new countries? What has happened over the past four or so generations amongst their descendants in their homeland as well as in their new host countries? The answers to these questions were sought from literature which was largely generated by descendants of the 19th century Southern Chinese sojourners around the globe, as well as from the descendants themselves in personal stories, and in conference forums. Various sources have contributed to a growing body of knowledge in this field. My personal experiences as a descendant of this dispersal and in interactions with others who share this heritage also gives insight into these questions. Examining this phenomenon from a global perspective provides insights into patterns that have occurred in diverse settings.

4. The Arts of China

The above streams of learning flow to another body of knowledge centred on the practical arts of China. What are the main customary artforms of Southern China? What are the characteristics, philosophies, and principles behind them? What contexts did they serve and develop within? How are these arts evolving and how does this relate to the 19th century Southern Chinese global dispersal? What aspects or principles of Chinese arts could draw inspiration for this body of work? What

connections are perceivable across the arts of Southern China and Oceania and how could these connections be highlighted within new artwork? This information was sought through examining artworks themselves, reflecting upon contextual engagement with these artforms, as well as from secondary sources that discuss various art forms of China. The artforms belong to a continuum that ranged from prehistoric art of China to contemporary arts created within a milieu of global art culture. The development and connections across art forms from Southern China through to Oceania was also observed, and present in existing research literature.

5. Visual Language to convey connections

Unravelling information from each of these strands of learning about Southern China from the positioning of Aotearoa has necessitated a research process of examining literature and art from secondary sources, viewing artworks, reflecting on interactions with Southern Chinese descendants and attending conferences. Connections were identified through a matching of researched information with lived experience in Oceania. The connections were points of convergence and resonance between knowledge and experience, information and concepts, ancestors, and descendants. All of these interconnecting streams of learning have provided the visual language, imagery, and symbols to convey the connections flowing between Southern China and Aotearoa. This background research necessarily preceded, and at times coincided with the practical artmaking and informed what was to be conveyed and how.

3.2 Method of analysis

Fostering connections through stories and experience

In searching these streams of information, connections between Southern China and Oceania were sought. The process used for identifying these connections was one of searching, observing, and listening to the stories, histories, perspectives, and expressions emerging from Southern China, whether it was in literature, film or in an artwork itself, and perceiving areas of resonance with lived experiences as a Southern Chinese descendant amongst peoples, settings, and culture indigenous to Oceania and Aotearoa. With four generations, and over 100 years of rapid global transformation distancing life in Aotearoa and ancestors in Southern China, this was a feasible and

natural process of identifying connections. While such personal experiences, memories, emotions, and feelings have not been articulated within the written component of the thesis, they have informed the reading of literature, and have influenced the spirit which underlies the artwork created for the thesis exhibition.

This method of analysis can be understood as an exchange of stories, experiences, perspectives, and expressions which, when placed in conversation with one another, highlight areas of connection. These lived experiences by Southern Chinese descendants in Aotearoa, Oceania, and around the globe, the histories of our ancestors, the artistic expressions which have emerged from Southern China, expressions of Chinese philosophy and worldview, in communication with prevalent discourses of Aotearoa, reveal a collective story, with points of shared experiences, values, and historical phenomena.

Indigenous research methodologies from around the world legitimatise the lived experiences and stories of marginalized communities as sources of knowledge (Tecun, et al, 2018; Faleolo, 2019; Mikahere-Hall, 2012; Napoli, 2019; Simmard, 2020; Kaimal & Arslanbek, 2020; Pidgeon & Fraser, 2021; Rania, et al., 2021; Smith, & Wolfgramm-Foliaki, 2022). Many of these methodologies emphasize taking care of relationships between people, placing value on face-to-face interactions, collective conversations, and cultivating research within a community as a member of the community, to serve and benefit that community. These methodologies also articulate the value of reflective storytelling and artistic expression as essential to individual and collective empowerment and confirm the importance of enabling marginalised communities to share their unique perspectives and experiences.

Movements from Pearl Rivers facilitates an exchange of stories, perspectives, expressions, and experiences so that connections may be realised and strengthened. Several methods were employed to facilitate these stories. Within the written thesis, worldviews, histories, information, and expressions are presented within the contextual discourse of the connections flowing between Southern China and Aotearoa. The artistic installation provides an immersive experience in which one can position oneself within this continuously unfolding narrative. The artworks and artistic decisions, created by a Southern Chinese descendant in Aotearoa, were

illuminated by the stories of the unfolding evolution of Southern China that unfurls to the present generation. The exhibition includes symbolic objects and stories from 8 diverse Southern Chinese descendants local to the Manawatū region. Surrounding the exhibition were numerous spaces for diverse, intergenerational groups of people to exchange stories and experiences, to discuss ideals and perspectives, to connect with their own heritage, and to perceive and strengthen connections.

The stories and objects contributed by Southern Chinese descendants to the exhibition, as well as the collective discussion spaces surrounding it, align with a community object-based storytelling methodology which seeks to enable marginalised communities to narrate their own stories within the museum context, to strengthen community bonds, and enhance their own well-being through the process of authoring their stories (Yim, 2022). These collective spaces align with methodologies which not only maintain giving voice to marginalised experiences (Rania, et al., 2021), but also emphasize the importance of exchanging these stories cross-culturally to highlight our shared experiences within our diversity.

These various methods facilitate an exchange of stories that flow along and overlap the channels of academic writing, contemporary art, and the community. While connections are uncovered through *Movements in Pearl Rivers*, they are not overtly analysed for a wider audience. Rather, it is accepted that viewers and readers will have the capacity to perceive connections for themselves, based on their own experience and stories. This approach aligns with principles of reciprocal storytelling in which people listen to each other, and advance in shared understanding (Yim, 2022), as well as a Chinese aesthetic approach to art which accepts the relationship between the intrinsic beauty of artwork which is to be appreciated by an external viewer (He, 2022).

Conceptual framework as a lens to understand information

While individuals engage with the stories surrounding *Movements from Pearl Rivers* from their own perspectives and worldviews, this research has been interpreted and guided by a clearly articulated conceptual framework. This conceptual framework constructed from key concepts from Chinese worldviews, serves as a lens through which to understand and analyse the streams of knowledge flowing through the

research and understand more clearly the connections between research and experience. The challenges and issues being discussed in prevalent discourse, when viewed through this framework, provided a viewpoint of local issues within a global perspective of an evolving humanity undergoing periods of crisis and transformation. This perspective explained diverse human relationships from a cosmological foundation and therefore transcended fragmentary views of diverse people and places. Constructing the framework from principles of Chinese philosophies, harmonises diverse schools of thought and ensures the framework's applicability in diverse contemporary contexts.

3.3 Applied method in artistic practice

Cultivating beauty within a process of learning through artmaking

The numerous connections identified from the converging streams of knowledge and experience, provided a range of visual symbology, visual language conventions, emotions, and insights to inform the creation of artwork. The practical method of generating artwork needed to follow a process of conceptual development, artmaking, and reflection to allow for learning and refinement to occur while working within an innovative medium and developing the skills needed to convey insights eloquently. The method of learning through artmaking applied here, while mostly in agreement with conceptualisations of artmaking as a process which advances through reflection, to communicate insight and knowledge (Richardson, 2011; Leavy, 2017; Butler-Kisber, 2017), goes further to embrace a more holistic understanding of learning to cultivate inner and out beauty as aligned with Chinese art philosophy.

The method of learning applied in this research is coherent with a Confucian philosophy of learning which is centred on advancing understanding and striving for excellence in order to transform and elevate the qualities of the student so that they are more capable of fostering harmonious relationships (Wang, 2021; Di & McEwan, 2016). Learning is seen as a path along which one seeks and acquires insights necessary for the transformation of qualities and elements into a more harmonious state of existence. In this case, the artist is learning through artmaking by reflecting and gaining insights that increase understanding of artistic processes. Through

artmaking, the artist and their materials transform together, become more refined, and find greater integrity. The artist applies new insights in artmaking which help to further refine the artwork. Learning through artmaking builds capacity within the artist to create harmonious artwork, and to use art to foster social harmony.

In Confucian philosophy, there is an inseparable connection between the arts, human virtue, beauty, and the Dao (Wang, 2021; Di & McEwan, 2016). Humanity develops virtues and good conduct and draws closer to the Dao through the arts (Reich, 2012). Artistic expression helps to advance consciousness and understanding along the path towards greater harmony. Art and nature provide metaphors for human virtues, and manifest beauty and perfection that motivates humanity towards moral aspirations. Virtuous conduct is understood as the “highest form of beauty” and manifestation of the Dao (Di & McEwan, 2016, p. 114). Beauty in this context is not an end in itself but serves a purpose of attracting the human heart towards spiritual aspirations and greater excellence, thereby engendering the transformation of one’s character, actions, environment, and artwork (Wang, 2021). Striving to create beauty is a central object of Chinese art philosophy (He, 2022). Ancient philosophers imply that artistic creation is a process which begins in the soul of the artist, and is gradually created as techniques are applied, eventually reaching a state in which the harmonious arrangement of elements manifests the art which was initially intuited in the soul of the artist (He, 2022; Shi, 2017). It was necessary to understand that the path towards greater heights of beauty and excellence is not instant or predefined however and must gradually advance through learning. This concept enabled the adoption of a posture of learning, which frees the artist from fear of failure, inadequacy, or paralysing despairing sentiments.

This method of learning through art-making entails meditation on processes within the universe which apply to the life of humanity. The process of learning to knot, bind, and make cords of different fibres, for example, can be a meditative exercise on characteristics of harmony, integrity, and symmetry reflected in human relationships. When fibres become entangled, this visual symbol communicates lessons about the gentle care, as opposed to hasty force, needed to create a harmonious relationship amongst the fibres as well as other elements within the universe.

Within this method, the artist articulates visions or goals that are worked towards gradually, through artmaking and experimentation. These visions gradually become sharper and clearer as the artwork is being created. This method allows room for the vision to evolve as one advances along the path of creating. It entails an attitude of trust that the path of learning through artmaking will lead to the realisation of a suitable outcome even if it is not clear from the outset what that creation will be.

Reflection has been central to this process of artmaking, as it was necessary to analyse whether the materials were being elevated, and if a harmonious relationship between forms, materials and concepts was being created. A further requirement was an analysis of whether the intended concepts or feelings were being conveyed, and what aspects of the form, material or process needed improving so that there was beauty and integrity within the artwork. The experimentation of shaping relationships between forms and materials creates new effects and communicates new ideas. The artist is then able to learn from reflection on this experience and outcome and choose the next steps for learning. This process allows the artist to try new things, glean insights and new meanings from the artwork and art process itself (Richardson, 2011).

Regular reflection also allows the artist to check whether the approaches adopted are still following the principles of the chosen conceptual framework or successfully conveying the insights from the research. A clearly articulated conceptual framework serves to guide artistic choices and approaches. The principles of customary Chinese crafts such as a preference for natural resources, resources natural to the artist and their environment, striving for a harmonious relationship with nature, expressing a meditative inner being through one's hands, and creating artwork which seeks to offer enlightenment or further harmonious relationships are among some of these principles adopted within this research.

Conceptual view of the process of creation

The conceptual framework includes an understanding of artistic creation as a spiritual process which has implications for the applied method of artistic creation. Artists must draw upon spiritual power and heavenly or ancestral assistance to achieve beautiful

creations (Guo, 1959; Reich, 2012; Wang, 2015)⁶. The artist needs to reach a meditative state of inner peace and pure intention before beginning to create. This enables the artist's heart and mind to reflect the heavenly attributes to be expressed through their hands, and through this harmony of heart, mind, and hands, endow their work with the necessary spirit (Shi, 2017). The act of creating in this way fosters a sense of harmony with the universe and the Source of the universe (Guo, 1959; Adler, 1998).

This connection with ancestral guidance in creating artwork is not unique to Chinese practice. It is a phenomenon described by many cultures around the world. In this way, relying on Divine assistance and ancestral support in the creation of artwork could be understood as an aspect of creative methodology employed in this research. This method of creating art harmonises a technical 'learning from making' process of refining artwork with a spiritual process of creating and striving to cultivate beauty.

Method of community collaboration

Community has remained at the centre of this research. The relevance of *Movements from Pearl Rivers* for the community, and its contribution to strengthening cross-cultural relationships has been of primary importance. The community discussions surrounding the exhibition were central to activating the purpose of the artwork, and a series of spaces were created for diverse groups to gather in connection with the exhibition. Therefore, the method to invite diverse Southern Chinese descendants from Manawatū to contribute their own stories and symbolic objects to the exhibition was essential to grounding *Movements from Pearl Rivers* in real lives, and in linking ancestral stories to the present generation in Aotearoa.

This approach built upon learning from a collaboration with Wai Ching Chan on the exhibition *Kāpuia ngā aho* 單絲不縷 (2022), in which we invited artists and others with Chinese heritage to similarly contribute an object which symbolised their experience as someone with Chinese heritage in Aotearoa. These objects were

⁶ Guo Xi describes how his father would seat himself, burn incense to his right and left, wash his hands, and sit as if to receive an important guest, calming his spirit and composing his thoughts before painting. When a disturbance occurred, he would leave his work until he was ready to put his whole soul into his work (Guo, 1959).

suspended from silk thread and attached to knotted harakeke. This collaborative exhibition, along with the other artworks included in appendix B have each played their part within the process of learning through artmaking that has led to the development of *Movements from Pearl Rivers*. These approaches contribute to a line of learning about bridging the gaps between customary and transcustomary art practices, urban communities, and art institutions (Yim, 2022). The method of inviting contributions by individuals to the exhibition, including the audio contribution, brings diverse stories into one conversation. The intersections of these diverse expressions illuminate areas of connection.

3.4 Tools and materials in a trans-customary context

Another dimension of the method of artmaking applied here is to do with the present global transition away from customary indigenous art practices and contexts into a global, western-influenced, contemporary art context. Chinese art traditions emphasize learning from the past to create something new (Shi, 2017). Many artists are finding ways to continue to draw upon customary heritage and values and apply them to contemporary contexts, including the diverse Southern Chinese descendants positioned in Australasia who are mentioned in Chapter 5. Artists within China too, are employing Western mediums to explore the fall of customary Chinese arts, values, and structures of an agrarian-centred life, alongside the rise of capitalism, urbanisation, modernisation, and industrialisation of China (Liu, 2021; Wang, 2015). This phenomenon is also experienced by artists across the globe, including Māori artists, and is explored in Jahnke's *Tataitanga Kaupapa Toi* paradigm (2006). Within this paradigm, the term trans-customary refers to art which retains elements of customary tribal art, such as in visual form or conceptual grounding, but utilises innovative technology, aesthetic style or materials. This paradigm also acknowledges the trans-cultural context in which art is created or presented.

In the case of *Movements from Pearl Rivers*, the artwork created was trans-customary; drawing upon Southern Chinese paper cutting, fibre knotting, and weaving arts, yet was created in Aotearoa, using a mixture of materials which were either processed in Aotearoa or pre-processed in Southern China. The artwork was also

conceptually grounded in Chinese cosmology yet is communicated within Aotearoa in conversation with a Māori worldview. Southern Chinese folk-art customarily used within a village setting, inspired the artwork in *Movements from Pearl Rivers* which was designed for the art gallery space at Te Manawa Museum of Science and Art, to communicate with a cross-cultural audience.

While paper cutting, fibre knotting, and weaving are Southern Chinese folk-arts, the context in which they were being explored and applied was in contemporary Aotearoa. The method for generating trans-customary artwork needed to allow room for material experimentation and learning. The methodological approach that best suited this was one of learning through artmaking, and it enabled exploration into how to cut pre-processed Southern Chinese paper, how to blend fibres and create Chinese knots. The Southern Chinese objects: the hat, steam pot, and fan, were woven using basic weaving conventions and capacities naturally developed under weaving teachers throughout my upbringing in Aotearoa and Oceania.

Since the aim of the applied research component is to examine the connections between Southern China and Oceania, including the complexity of being a Southern Chinese descendant of mixed heritage in Oceania, there was a deliberate methodological choice to work in a trans-customary way. There was a need to speak to the current transition away from ancestral customs, at a threshold of cross-cultural and mixed media innovation. It was necessary that the material and technical choices reflected experience with the environment in Oceania, as well as Southern Chinese heritage. The methodology needed to reflect this harmonious relationship across material culture indigenous to each place. This was a point of difference from other Chinese artists working in a trans-customary way within China, or those who centre their work within a Western-Chinese context (Liu, 2021; Wang, 2015).

The art practice adopted explores the complexities of the present transition from customary Chinese art practices within the global contemporary art context and from the positioning of Aotearoa. The present disruption in the passing down of local customary craft within a local context enables artists to consciously construct something new (Shi, 2017). The purpose of the artwork in this context is to conceptually convey connections across peoples to a diverse audience. The artwork

seeks to achieve this through employing a visual language which can speak across cultures, and more specifically, between the indigenous cultures of Southern China and Aotearoa. This aspect of the art-making process is a method of applying the principles of the conceptual framework in a trans-customary context.

3.5 Giving form to concepts

The conceptual framework guides the construction of artwork. It influences the material choices and the relationship between artist and materials. The conceptual framework also influences the content of the artwork, and visual conventions in the work. These concepts and principles enable trans-customary artwork to remain grounded in indigenous worldview.

Key principles and concepts of the conceptual framework are conveyed through visual conventions. These conventions are characteristics of Chinese art. Decisions on what visual conventions to use were made during the conceptual development process. They did not need to change during the artmaking and reflection phases as they are principles for artmaking. The essential concept of Nature as the embodiment of Heavenly Qualities serves as a foundation for these principles which have implications for artistic practice.

The Embodiment of Heavenly qualities

Across Chinese worldviews, nature is the embodiment of Heavenly qualities. Humanity is endowed with the “highest excellence” and with the capacity to reflect all these qualities. Yet it is only through striving to follow the patterns of Heaven or the principles of order underlying the universe, that humanity can reach this height of excellence in refinement (Yao, 2010). The principles apparent in the order of the cosmos are guides for human methodology and art practice (Chai, 2021; Wang, 2021). Some of these key principles and their implications for art practice are articulated here.

Harmony in diversity

Fostering harmonious relationships is one of the central principles in Chinese culture (Yao, 2010). Harmony also implies an embrace of differences and diversity. When different qualities are brought together in united balance, they create beauty. The aim of humanity is to foster harmonious relationships in every aspect of existence, whether it is between different peoples, family members, bodily organs, or lines on a paper. This principle has implications for all aspects of artistic practice. Firstly, the purpose of the artwork is to foster harmony in the universe and amongst people. The artist, conscious of this aim, can determine if the message they are conveying will lead to harmonious sentiments amongst the viewers. When selecting materials to use in the artwork, they can consider if their material processes are harmonious with the natural environment, or with people, and if their materials are harmonious with each other. This principle is also a criterion for visual refinement. The artist will reflect upon how to ensure the various visual elements of the artwork, such as line, tone, and texture embody a harmonious relationship. Dualities such as light and dark, soft and hard, intuitive and prescribed are also conventions which require harmonising in order to achieve excellence, refinement and beauty.

Refinement and Beauty

“...it is necessary to focus on the refinement (jing 精) to create a unified picture. Without refinement, the spiritual cannot be transmitted. The spiritual endows it with completeness. If this does not occur, the refinement will not shine.” (Guo Xi 郭熙 (c. 1020 – c. 1090) in Paolillo, 2019. p58)

Refinement and beauty are concepts that have been challenged in contemporary art. This has occurred as art practice has transitioned away from the customary context of the village or religious centre, and has moved into urban, modern, secular contexts (Wang, 2015). These concepts are traditionally valued in Chinese arts as the highest standards of excellence which can lead to spiritual enlightenment and respectful behaviour. Achieving refinement requires the development of artistic capacity, gradually, through purposeful practice and reflection. The purpose of refinement and

beauty is to attract the human heart, to move the spirit, and to inspire noble sentiments (Ko, 2006; Wang, 2021; K. Wang, 2021; Chai, 2021).

Conveying Spirit through Form

A consciousness that art conveys a spirit in form is described in ancient Chinese art texts (Chang, 2011; Chai, 2021) As a principle, spirit is understood as a certain energy and feeling which is intimately linked with thoughts or messages. Aware that form will reflect a certain spirit, the artist can consciously channel that spirit through mind, heart, and hands (Reich, 2012; Guo, 1959; Chai, 2021). An artist gradually builds capacity to express this spirit through a harmonious relationship between heart and hands, through developing technical skills, certain attitudes, qualities and understanding. The spirit can be observed in the visual outcome such as in the lines and shape, in the movement of the hand, and in the standard of excellence as well as in the conceptual focus of the artwork (Chang, 2011; Sze, 1963; Chai, 2021). This spirit could for example be uplifting, joyful, or solemn and gloomy. The following principles influence the spirit shaping the forms in the *Movements from Pearl Rivers* exhibition.

Movement of the spirit through the organic cosmos

This is a concept which has visual implications for artwork. The notion of the spirit animating all things is conveyed through a sense of movement. This movement could be in the movement created by the brush, the movement created by wind, the movement of light, the movement of line and form. In this exhibition, it includes movement generated by an electric force. In any case, the 'movement of the artist' observable in the material conveys this notion of the spirit. The notion that the spirit flows and permeates all life in a coherent universe is an extension of this concept which is also conveyed through visual principles. In customary Chinese arts, this conceptual aim is achieved through the inclusion and harmonising of all visual elements on one surface material or space. In paper cutting, only one sheet of paper is cut which may hold a whole landscape of imagery, demonstrating this interconnection and oneness. On shell, stone, jade, wood, root, and bone carving this convention is also apparent.

One piece of the chosen medium is carved to intricately manifest a representation of the united, harmonious universe. Bamboo weaving, embroidery, and ink painting also demonstrate vast landscapes within a single plane in often just one or two media.

Reciprocity

“Imbuing the reciprocal circulation of cosmic vibrancy with a cordial sense of belonging...bring[s] all beings under heaven into a great family. It was within this grand flourishing of human affections and intentions under blissful music that divisions were diminished.” (Wang, 2015, p, 106)

Reciprocity is another key principle of the order of the universe which applies in social relations. This principle is evident in the ceaseless generosity of the Heavens in bestowing bounties upon the earth, and in the Earth nurturing the growth of life. The nature of this reciprocity is that it nurtures growth, it ceaselessly and indiscriminately gives, and it is through this constant cooperation that life exists and develops. Underlying this reciprocity is a notion of love binding all life in the cosmos (Chiu, 1984).

This principle is evident in the reciprocal sharing between other Southern Chinese contributors to the exhibition who shared their perspectives and objects and received gifts and exchanged stories and insights. Reciprocity applies in the taking and using of materials, which require something to be given in return. It applies to one's participation in discourse, which entails listening to and learning from others, and in turn, offering one's own contribution to the collective conversation. It applies to making effort in art and receiving divine assistance.

These universal principles underlie the ‘order of the cosmos’ and are evident throughout humanity's diverse artforms. The notion of beauty and refinement, with harmonised visual conventions which balance opposing elements, is a characteristic found in many artforms around the globe. Although some of these principles seem to have faded away from contemporary art, the current stage of transition in our

globalised, multicultural, art context represents a timely opportunity to consciously articulate the concepts which guide our artistic choices as a diverse, global community.

3.6 Discussion: methods guided by the conceptual framework

Chapter 2 articulated the conceptual framework which guides the methods discussed in Chapter 3. This creative research seeks to reveal the continuity of threads across time, space, generations, and knowledge. The nature of these connecting threads could only be understood through the concepts employed in this framework. The intention in highlighting these connections is to contribute a Chinese perspective of harmony in diversity within a contemporary art discourse in Oceania fraught with fragmentation, dichotomies, categorization, and exclusion.

Chinese philosophies represent rivers of thought, which intersect, commingle, and diverge even as a delta (Martin and Zhao, 1997). These rivers of thought flow through different ethnicities, time periods, religions, and cultures. While much of ancient Chinese philosophy was written in central China, the key principles and concepts of Chinese philosophy have developed through cross-cultural exchange, where the sites of intersection reveal points of common understanding. From the positioning of Aotearoa, this research seeks, identifies, and highlights points of connection with Southern China. This conceptual framework thus offers principles for the harmonising of diverse cultures and religions, and guides engagement with literature, discourses, and artistic practice. When placed in conversation with one another, diverse streams of indigenous art continuums flow parallel, intermingle, and diverge, within a global art continuum.

A world-embracing conceptual framework was necessary to perceive the connections, patterns, and phenomena of the Southern Chinese dispersal throughout the globe, and the nature of the cross-cultural relationships today. Contemporary Southern Chinese descendants are multi-ethnic, multicultural, and inseparably linked with a multicultural environment. Central concepts of Chinese thought such as transformation, movement and intermixing are inherent in this story, yet are rather

lacking in contemporary art discourse (Hogue, et al., 2019). Such concepts are key to the identities of Southern Chinese descendants who break narrow boxes of ethnic and cultural categorizations.

Adopting an indigenous-centred framework reorients the perspective on the relationships flowing between South China and Aotearoa. An indigenous-centred framework implies that no matter where one may be located, the positioning indigenous to that place is the central context of the discourse. This research provides valuable knowledge for 'decolonizing' or 'indigenizing' the perspective of Aotearoa on her relationships extending to the Southern China Coast.

The Chinese term for crisis (Weiji危機) implies danger as well as a turning point, an opportunity, and the beginning of a new development (Tangjia, 2014). The principle that progress within the universe occurs through a dialectical process of crisis and transformation is inherent in Chinese worldviews. The drastic transformations occurring within China and the entire world in the past 200 years or so have represented a sweeping away of traditional structures, thus disrupting customary art practices. Contemporary artists are given freedom to choose and construct the framework through which to develop art. This framework is constructed using key insights from ancient Chinese philosophy, but the materials and modes being used belong to a new context. The context is far more complex than it previously would have been for an artist in Southern China.

This is the trans-customary context within which this research exists. Separated from customary art practices indigenous to Southern China, the art is created, not for functional customary village contexts of Southern China, but instead for conceptual exhibition in a diverse urban city in Aotearoa. The aim of the artwork is to contribute these perspectives of harmonious connections to discourse.

This framework allows room for the methods in action to evolve through experience. As experience is generated through artmaking, it is expected that the methods adopted evolve and become more refined. Connected to this experience in application would be a strengthened ability to discuss the conceptual framework, as applied concepts become clearer, sharpened, and defined through experience.

Within this context the creation of artwork drew upon Chinese philosophy and crafts, from a positioning of being raised and educated in Aotearoa. This approach offers an avenue for others situated in Aotearoa to allow their mixed heritages to inform their local interactions within indigenous contexts. It enables one to draw upon their own heritage to be applied within a context indigenous to Aotearoa. It enables one to harmonise and utilise the knowledge, materials, or arts they have inherited from multiple aspects of their complex identity to contribute to local discourse.

The methods applied in this research are guided by this conceptual framework. The method of gathering and analysing information has been understood as an exchange of stories and experiences. It is at the intersection of these stories and experiences that connections have been identified. The conceptual framework is a lens to understand the relationship between lived experiences as a descendant of Southern Chinese sojourners in Aotearoa retracing connections to Southern China.

The method of creating art has been one of learning through artmaking to cultivate beauty. This method has entailed clarifying within one's mind and heart a vision for what one wishes to be expressed. The artist attempts to manifest this vision through the making of the hands. The artist must then reflect on what has been created, analysing if it manifests the desired qualities, or if it must be further refined, and considers what steps to take in order to learn to reflect these qualities better. Inherent in this method is a simultaneous striving by the artist to cultivate the qualities of their own soul. The artist trusts that if they are striving to cultivate inner and outer beauty and harmony with pure intentions, that their efforts will be confirmed, even if the path of learning is long and difficult, and many lessons are needed to be learned.

This method of creating artwork also includes an understanding that one is creating artwork within a specific environment. This method of artmaking strives to serve to foster harmony across various levels, from the micro to the macro. This means that harmonious relationships are ideally fostered amongst the elements of the materials one is working with, as well as between the artwork and the environment in which it is to serve. The artistic endeavour also strives to promote harmony between the people who interact with the artwork, and the community at large.

The community is central to this method of artmaking. The art intends to uplift the spirit of a community and to foster harmony within it. This research applies a method of facilitating an exchange of stories in connection with the art exhibition. The artworks of *Movements from Pearl Rivers* each express an aspect of the unfolding narrative of Southern China that flows to Aotearoa. The objects, stories, and audio contributed by the community to the exhibition serve to communicate, resonate, and echo the narrative of these artworks.

The exchange of stories within a shared conversation is central to the aim of the *Movements from Pearl Rivers* exhibition. The method of enabling community members to contribute their stories and perspectives within the exhibition, and in facilitating collective spaces for discussion surrounding the exhibition grounds the exchange of stories in real lives. This method of fostering an exchange of stories connects an ancient narrative to the present generation, an ancestral homeland to a present day one, and shared descendants amongst each other.

Principles of the conceptual framework, such as fostering harmony in diversity and reciprocity in one's relationships have guided these interactions, as well as the creation and presentation of artworks. The concepts of transformation, continuity, connection, and movement are also embodied within the method of fostering a flow of conversations surrounding the exhibition, in which the community can narrate their own stories and share them within the present local context of the Manawatū. These concepts are also central to the artworks and the narrative within *Movements from Pearl Rivers*.

4. Unravelling Threads

This chapter traces the historical context of Southern China from ancient times until the present-day context of global dispersal of Southern Chinese descendants. This unfolding evolution of Southern China reveals the continuity of threads that trace Southern Chinese descendants to an ancient ancestry indigenous to Southern China. This exercise also reveals connections across diverse Southern Chinese descendants throughout the globe, as well as with Austronesian descendants who share a common ancestry from ancient Southern China. The chapter begins with an account of these ancient ancestors (the Bai Yue), their characteristics and material culture. The next account begins during the period of initial Northern⁷ Chinese contact with Bai Yue around 2000 years ago, and the subsequent waves of Northern migration into Southern China. The period of turmoil surrounding the 19th century Southern Chinese dispersal is then presented, followed by the subsequent circumstances which descendants of this dispersal find themselves in. These circumstances caused the further evolution of cultural and ethnic identity, the integration with diverse peoples of the world amidst a backdrop of racial prejudice and colonial divisions. The 19th century Southern Chinese dispersal is, in this way, viewed from a wide perspective (in time and space) as one thread in the long evolution of humanity. Such a perspective also reveals the continuity of an evolving people and culture from ancient Southern China.

4.1 An Ancient Coast

Bai Yue (百越) the Ancient Indigenous peoples of Southern China

The Southern Chinese Coast has an ancient history. The ancient peoples indigenous to the region were Bai Yue (百越) (Hundred Yue)⁸ as recorded by Northern Chinese during their southward expansion. These ancestors were known for their body tattoos,

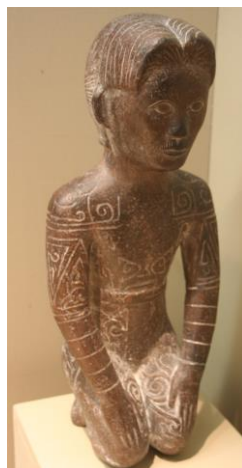
⁷ Northern is used here to refer to anyone north of Southern China, including those who came from central China.

⁸ The geographical distribution of the Bai Yue was a vast expanse that went from Shanghai to Vietnam (Milburn, 2010). It is the same term for Vietnam (Southern Yue) (Brindley, 2015). The term included numerous tribes and ethnic groups who shared cultural connection.

teeth extraction, teeth blackening, stilt houses, swordsmanship, bark-cloth and woven clothing, and an intimate relationship with rivers and sea, observed in their swimming and sailing abilities and their marine diet. The Bai Yue lived along rivers and coasts (Li, 2019) and boats were their main form of transport. They were masters of both river canoes and open sea sailing, “skilfully sailing the boat as fast as the howling wind”⁹ (Wu, 2021, p.18). Researchers suggest that it is from this masterful experience living in and on the water, that they developed seafaring technology that took them through Taiwan, Southeast Asia, and Oceania (Wu, 2021).

Figure 1

Yue Statue



Note. Discott. (2011). [A statue of a man, dating from the State of Yue]. Located in the State Museum of Zhejiang province, Hangzhou, Zhejiang, China. Wikicommons, In the public domain of Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported. Shared with permission. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Yue_statue.jpg

Numerous historical records written by Northern observers of the Bai Yue mention physical characteristics of "wearing little clothing" or "walking naked", "chiselling the forehead", "blackening the teeth", and "tattooing their bodies" (Brindley, 2015. Chap. 6). The Liji 禮記 (Book of Rites) from the Warring States period (475 BCE - 221) includes descriptions such as, "They wear their hair unbound and tattoo their bodies...There are some who eat food that has not been cooked...They carve into their

⁹ Descriptions of the Bai Yue such as this can be found in the chapter of the "Biography of the Yue Territory (越绝外传记地传)" of the History of the Lost Yue Ethnicity (Yuejueshu 越绝书).

foreheads...They wear animal and bird skins and dwell in caves” (Confucious, 王制 Wang Zhi, para. 36.). Further, “...they wear straw clothes, make use of bark weavings, weave bamboo, use marine shells as decorations, live along the rivers and seas...”¹⁰ (Wu, 2021, p.27). Accompanying these descriptions is a stone sculpture of a Bai Yue figure which provides a fascinating visual insight into these ancestors¹¹.

The Bai Yue lived in stilt houses like those found throughout Oceania and Southeast Asia, which enable livestock to live underneath and serve as a protection from snakes and flooding. It is another aspect of material culture that remains as a cultural connection across the region.

Teeth blackening is a practice of lacquering the teeth upon coming of age. It serves to protect and preserve the teeth. This practice has been done throughout Southeast Asia, extending to India and Japan and Oceania. Sometimes people link it to the chewing of Beetlenut, which is a separate practice but is another shared heritage perhaps stemming from teeth blackening culture found throughout these regions. Tooth extraction and filing is another practice present throughout these regions (Zumbroich, 2009; Zumbroich, 2011).

Based on archaeological, genetic, geographic, linguistic, cultural, and historical evidence, it is said that this same coast is an ancestral homeland of Austronesians¹². A growing body of knowledge generated across disciplines reveals the ancestral connection between the Bai Yue and Austronesians of Southeast Asia and Oceania. From the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC) people from the North and Central Plains began to move into the South. For the past 2000 years, Southern China experienced waves of wars and massacres under the Han empire. This resulted in the Bai Yue assimilating with other ethnic groups and migrating. The diverse Southern Chinese of today, their

¹⁰ Cited from “Tribute of the Yu Period” in the Book of Early History.

¹¹ Figure 1. Discott (2011). Yue Statue. A statue of a man, dating from State of Yue, located in the State Museum of Zhejiang province, Hangzhou, Zhejiang, China. Photograph. Retrieved on 28th of October, 2022 from Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Yue_statue.jpg.

¹² Austronesian is a term created by Euro-American ‘discoverers’ of the Pacific. It includes Malays, Micronesians, Polynesians and Melanesians who share common culture and heritage.

languages¹³, cultures and DNA descend from this mixed ancestral heritage (Li et al., 2007; Hashimoto, 1972; Huang, et al., 2022).

A growing body of genetic research using DNA from ancient ancestors of Southern China, Taiwan, Southeast Asia, and Oceania along with present day populations from these regions provides evidence for the ancestral connections across these peoples and their Southern Chinese origin. Their research shows common ancestry on the Southern Chinese Coast (particularly the Fujian region) for both Tai Kadai¹⁴ language and Austronesian populations between 8400-4500 years ago which branched east to Taiwan and Oceania, and west to Southeast Asia¹⁵ (Sun, et al., 2021; Yang, et al., 2020; Wu, 2021; Huang, et al., 2022).

Ancient Southern China was a centre for linguistic diversity and an origin for the Austronesian and Tai language families (Matsumara, et al., 2017; Bauer, 1996; Yue, 2015; Brindley, 2015; Chamberlain, 2016, Blench, 2021). The modern Yue languages of Southern China descend from Bai Yue languages and their assimilation with Middle Chinese from the Tang dynasty (Wu, 2021; Hashimoto, 1972). Southern Chinese ethnic minorities and language groups such as Min (Fujian), Yue (粵 Guangdong) and Hakka (客家) have been compared with Austronesian languages by linguists using a method of lexicostatistics, finding affinity amongst these Southern Chinese language groups and indigenous Taiwanese, Philippine, and Malay languages.

While ancient populations of northern and southern China did not share a common ancestry, modern Southern Chinese share an ancestral lineage with ancient ancestors in Oceania, Southeast Asia, Taiwan and southern China, as well as northern China (Huang, et al., 2022; Yang, et al., 2020; Wu, 2021). Genetic evidence shows that modern Cantonese people have a mostly northern paternal lineage and a mostly Nanyue aboriginal maternal lineage (Wen, et al., 2004; Xue, et al., 2008) as is

¹³ The Yue languages such as Cantonese and other mutually intelligible minority languages and dialects of the South descend from a mixture of old Bai Yue indigenous language and Tang Dynasty Han Chinese language. Linguists suggest that the old Yue languages are related to Kra–Dai, Hmong–Mien, Austronesian, and Austroasiatic languages.

¹⁴ Tai Kadai also known as Kra-Dai and Daic is a language family in Mainland Southeast Asia, Southern China and Northeast India.

¹⁵ This common ancestry can be traced even further North to the Yangtze River where a mixed ancestry of northern and southern Chinese is present. This dates to 9000-4500 ya (Sun, et al., 2021).

consistent with the historical colonisation of the Bai Yue by northern Chinese since the Qin Dynasty (221 to 206 BC) and the chronological settlement of islands in Southeast Asia and Oceania, as well as patterns in material culture on the Southern Chinese Coast and Austronesian related material culture (Yang, 2020).

Land and Seascape

Shell middens and maritime culture

Southern China is a coastal area with many rivers and deltas and islands surrounding the coast. The abundance of bounties which these marine environments offered to the people gave rise to a culture centred upon the sea and rivers. Shell middens left by ancient ancestors have provided insights into their way of life.

From the historical Han records¹⁶ of the Bai Yue as well as numerous shell middens found throughout the Southern China Coast, it is apparent that the Bai Yue ate marine clams, shellfish, crabs, snakes, and snails (Li, 2019; Wu, 2021). This heritage is undoubtedly still apparent in Southern Chinese culture and cuisine today.

Hundreds of sites along the Southern China Coast give evidence to an indigenous maritime culture existing 8000 years ago. Hundreds more of shell mounds and dune sites date back to 6000–3000 years ago, many of which are in the Pearl River Delta (Li, 2019; Zhao, 2019; Guangmao, 2021; Wu 2021). These sites include pottery pressed with cords and baskets, stone and shell tools and bodies buried in crouched positions. The variety of tools include knives, axes, adzes, arrows, picks, choppers, sinkers, and rings (Guangmao, 2021). This pottery culture and the stone tools are associated with the material culture found in Taiwan and Southeast Asia. The sites also provide evidence of land animals such as deers, bovines, elephants, rabbits, birds and pigs, and marine animals such as fish and wrasses (Labridae Family), sea turtles, baleen whales, common orient clams (*Meretrix lusoria*)(Genera *Cytherea* and *Arca*), oysters (*Ostrea*

¹⁶ Texts such as the “Record the Kings Meeting (王会解)” of the (Yi Zhoushu 逸周书) records and the chapter of “People Live in Five Directions (五方人民)” of the Biography of the Things and Cultures (Bowu Zhi 博物志) are quoted by scholars discussing Bai Yue peoples (Wu, 2021).

plicatula), cockle (*Arca granosa*), and small sea snails and river snails (Genera *Viviparus* and *Semisulcospira*) (Wu, 2021; Zhao, 2019; Hung, 2019).

The Bai Yue were competent seafarers, who travelled extensively before the Northern occupation of Southern China¹⁷. Comparable maritime cultures throughout Oceania, Southeast Asia and Southern China manifest an interconnected seafaring heritage (Wu, 2021). The seafaring capability of the Bai Yue is evident in archaeological evidence of settlements throughout the islands of Southern China with sites dating back to 8000 BP (Chen, et al., 2020; Wu, 2021). Evidence also shows that the Tapenkeng (大坌坑) culture (6000-5000 BP) in Taiwan likely developed through cultural dissemination and migrations from the Southern China Coast (Wu, 2021). Investigations into the ancient and contemporary types of boats from Southern China and Oceania reveal a material connection in boat craft¹⁸.

During the Tang, Song, Yuan and Ming Dynasties, the Maritime Silk Road was a prosperous and active trade route along the southeast coast of China. This was an evolutionary continuation of the seafaring inheritance of the Bai Yue people.

Celestial navigation goes hand in hand with maritime travel, and it is well-known that Austronesians settled throughout Oceania using celestial maritime navigation. Southern China also has a legacy of ancient celestial navigation which is recorded in Northern literature and is still evident in practices of seamen on the Southern China Coast. Comparative studies of Southern Chinese and Austronesian star observation

¹⁷ Comparisons of Southern Chinese canoes and Austronesian double hulled outriggers reveal insights into the development of seafaring culture from a river and coastal heritage. Ancient records in Zhou (1046-771 BC), Han (202 BC –220 AD) and Qing (1636–1911) dynasties refer to types of double-hulled canoes (Wu, 2021). Remains of double hulled canoes dating to the Song (960 - 1279AD) and Sui (581–618AD) dynasties have also been discovered as originating from Southern China. A Miao “Mother-Son Boat” used temporarily in dragon boat festivals is a double outrigger canoe with connections to the double hulled canoe of Oceania. The canoes were dug out of single or multiple trees and lashed together. Another form of river canoe found in the Mekong River which connects China and Southeast Asia attaches bundles of bamboo or reeds to the sides as floats (Wu, 2021).

¹⁸ Canoes found along the Southern China Coast provide further insight into ancient maritime cultural connections to the Austronesian expansion. One Kuahuqiao canoe found in (8200–7500 BP) in Xiaoshan (萧山) county of Zhejiang (Southeast China) had remnants of a woven bamboo sail and numerous dug-out canoes from Southern China have float, hull, boom, and woven bamboo and straw triangular sail connections with the double hulled Pacific outrigger canoes. Fishing, cargo, and bamboo rafts used until recently in Southern China also show an association with rafts found in Oceania (Wu, 2021).

and measuring methods used for maritime navigation demonstrate a close cultural connection in astronomical practices (Wu, 2021).

Subtropical Climate

Southern China has a subtropical climate. Tropical plants such as the banana tree, sugar cane, papaya, coconut, bamboo are found across Southern China, Southeast Asia and Oceania. While each plant has different origins, their longstanding distribution across the region demonstrates the nature of exchange, migration, and adaptation inherent in this region's history.

The dispersal of plants and the evolution of food culture throughout Southern China to Southeast Asia, and Oceania is another aspect of the ancient connections that flow between us (Wu, et al., 2019). Ancient food crops of Southern China included subtropical sago palms, bananas, freshwater roots and tubers, fern roots, acorns, canarium nuts and job's tears¹⁹ (Yang, et al., 2013; Public Library of Science, 2013; Hung, 2019). Peaches, berries, and fruits such as gooseberries, plums, hackberries, and grapes were gathered in ancient Southern China (Chi & Hung, 2008). Early rice cultivation emerged in the Lower Yangtze River region as early as 6700 BP, and later appeared in the Pearl River Delta region (4600 - 4000 BP) and appeared in Taiwan in 5000 - 4000 BP (Qin & Fuller, 2019).

Pigs, dogs and chickens are significant domesticated animals for these regions and have been domesticated in Southern China since ancient times²⁰ (Xiang, et al., 2017; Zhao, 2019). Using DNA, researchers have traced the animals' migrations from Southern China throughout Southeast Asia and Oceania (Larson, et al., 2007; Larson, et al., 2010; Xiang, et al., 2014; Zhang, et al., 2020; Layos; 2021). Pacific dogs possibly originated from around the Yangtze River, dispersed through mainland Southeast Asia, and then through Indonesia and to Oceania (Zhang, et al., 2020).

¹⁹ Systematic studies from excavations at the site of Xincun dating 3,350–2,470 BC. Researchers believe that a reliance on starch rich foods caused the transition to rice farming to be a slow process (Xiaoyan, et al., 2013).

²⁰ Prevalent in both northern and southern China by at least 8,000 B.P.

Characteristics and Culture

Bark Cloth and Fibre Weaving

Bark cloth beaters have been a significant artefact used to examine the Austronesian expansion out of Southern China (Cameron, 2008; Guangmao, 2021). The oldest beater discovered in Guangxi, China dates to around 8000 BP. The next oldest bark cloth beater is 1300 years younger, and was discovered in Shenzhen, Guangdong (Li, et al., 2014). Ancient stone beaters found in Southern China and the surrounding islands extending to Southeast Asia and Oceania provide evidence of Austronesian expansion, ancient material, and maritime culture of these peoples. It is said that these beaters began to travel across the ocean from Southern China by 4000 BP (Hayashi et al, 2019). The existence of bark cloth beaters across the region demonstrates cross-cultural and inter-island exchange and shared material culture (Kuo, 2019). Many beaters have been found along the coastal Guangdong area dating 6000-5000 years BP (Wu, 2021). Beaters are found in the estuary of the Pearl River Delta dating to 6000– 5000 years ago, while beaters from Southeast Asia and Oceania date to 4000-3,500 years ago. The dating and locations of the bark cloth beaters throughout the region reflect an origin of bark cloth culture in Lingnan Southern China which expanded throughout Southeast Asia and Oceania (Wu, 2021; Guangmao, 2021). The ancient records of bark cloth beating, along with the discovery of ancient bark cloth beaters, continued bark cloth culture in parts of Southern China, Southeast Asia, and Oceania, reveal the cultural and ancestral connection across the region (Wu, 2021).

Ancient literature written by northern observers of the Southern Tribes mention the use of bark cloth, woven bamboo and straw, and shell ornamentation by the indigenous peoples. This literature dates to the Tang (618-907 AD) and Song (960-1279 AD) Dynasties (Wu, 2021). Northern observational records of the peeling and beating of bark to make cloth come from their travels around Southern China, Southeast Asia, and Taiwan, demonstrating a shared material culture across the region (Wu, 2021). This bark cloth heritage continues in parts of Southern China, Southeast Asia, and Oceania (Wu, 2021).

The Paper Mulberry tree (*Broussonetia papyrifera*) is a significant tree for the region being discussed. Its migration from Southern China through Oceania and Southeast Asia is another form of evidence for human migration patterns and the evolution of material culture. The bark of the plant has been used to make bark cloth across these regions for thousands of years, with the oldest history of bark cloth production lying in Southern China. The plant is native to Southern China, Taiwan, and Japan, and is used for making paper, rope, medicine, and feeding domestic animals (Seelenfreund, 2011). Genetic studies show that one type of the Paper Mulberry was taken to Northern Taiwan (8000 and 6000 BP) and Southeast Asia (Matisoo-Smith, 2015). Another type of Paper Mulberry was taken from Southern Taiwan throughout Oceania through a cloning process in which a part of the tree is cut and replanted²¹. The Paper Mulberry in New Guinea shows ancestral connections to both the Southern Chinese and the Southern Taiwanese Paper Mulberry, demonstrating both influences from different migrations (Chang, et al., 2015). The Paper Mulberry Tree is a part of the Moraceae (Mulberry) family which has an ancient history. Another type of Mulberry tree (*Morus Alba*) has been cultivated in China for at least 4,700 years as it is the primary tree which silkworms feed from.

Before silk became popularised, hemp, ramie, and fibres spun from pineapple and banana trees were more common (Buckley, 2017). Fibre processing involved long processes. Threads were woven using a type of back-tensioned, foot-braced loom indigenous to Asia and distributed amongst Austronesian cultures. This type of loom was already well developed 4500 years ago. The oldest remnants of loom weaving in Asia are found in the Hemudu site (7000-6000 years ago). Evidence of the back-tensioned loom is found in chronological order migrating in a southwest direction from here. Types of backstrap looms are still found in parts of Southern China (such as Miao weavers from Guizhou) today and are associated with ramie and hemp fibre. The process of replacing the ground level backstrap loom for a more vertical suspension began 2500 years ago in Southern China. The evolution and chronological distribution of this weaving culture provides evidence for a Southern China origin

²¹ Predominantly male trees occur in Oceania, where the tree is pruned to keep small and has limited flowering. The Chinese Paper Mulberry type is also present in Hawaii, and it is possible that this was brought along with 19th century labourers from Southern China (Chang, et al., 2015).

which spread along the mainland towards Southeast Asia and then traversed throughout Island Southeast Asia and Oceania (Buckley, 2017).

Stone, Jade, and Pottery

Hundreds of archaeological sites found across the Southern China Coast and their islands, including Taiwan and Southeast Asia demonstrate cultural dissemination, connection, and migration. One of the main types of artefacts found in these sites are stone stepped adzes²².

The stone stepped adze has been found in Neolithic sites²³ across the Southern China Coast. These adzes eventually migrated to Southeast Asia and Oceania. Other artefacts include the stone shouldered axe, stone arrowheads, net sinkers, stamped pattern pottery, shell middens and burials in crouched positions, all of which are commonly seen in South China, Southeast Asia, and Oceania. These stone tools are a shared inheritance connecting the indigenous peoples of this region (Guangmao, 2021; Wu, 2021).

The ancient indigenous cultures of Southern China developed a unique type of stamped geometric patterned and corded pottery with round bottom and ringed foot which was different from pottery of Northern China. The "Lapita pottery"²⁴ developed during the Tapankeng culture in Taiwan is found to be linked with the pottery found on the adjacent mainland coast of Fujian²⁵. This stamped, geometric patterned, round bottom, ringed foot pottery was also found in Southeast Asia and Oceania²⁶ and belongs to one continuum of cultural development originating from the Bai Yue cultures (Wu, 2021). The Kequtou culture (6000-5000 years ago) used cowrie shells as stamps, patterns of lines and punctured dots. Tanshishan culture (5000-4000 years ago) revealed woven mat impressions in the pottery. The Guangdong area has the

²²These are found in Neolithic Taiwan, Fujian, Guangdong, Jiangxi, and Zhejiang in the southeast of the mainland (Wu, 2021).

²³This includes Neolithic Taiwan, Fujian, Guangdong, Jiangxi, and Zhejiang in the southeast of the mainland (Wu, 2021).

²⁴ American archaeologists coined the term after mishearing a New Caledonian term for 'dig a hole'.

²⁵ Fuguodun (富国墩) in Fujian.

²⁶Such as the Kalanay, Tabon, and Novaliches sites in the Philippines and Indonesia (Wu, 2021).

earliest geometric stamped patterns. These patterns evolved over time and place. There were woven patterns using red and black colour. 4000-3000 years ago, pottery had leaf, diamond spiral, and net patterns. Taiwan pottery developed 4500-2500 before present and showed the same stamped cord patterns as those on the mainland coast (Fu, 2019).

Jade Carving has been a significant aspect of material culture in Southern China, throughout Southeast Asia, and Aotearoa. Jade artefacts found throughout Southern China and Southeast Asia demonstrate early sea-based trade networks and cross-cultural dissemination (Iizuka, et al., 2007). Jade was used by the Bai Yue, and it is recorded that they used to pay tributes of jade to the Central Nation²⁷. Ancient jade culture can be traced to Hemudu culture (5500 BC to 3300 BC), where it was likely to have originated (Chen, 2002). Hemudu jade art shows visual affinity with Māori visual conventions. Panoho (2015) discusses this relationship, suggesting that they belong to shared jade genealogy.

To conclude, this account has covered some of the main characteristics of the Bai Yue, their ancient homeland, and the cultural legacy which lives on through descendants today. The next section begins with the period when northern Chinese began to record their contact with Bai Yue people during the Qin Dynasty (221 to 206 BC).

4.2 South of the Mountains

North meets South

The northern²⁸ expansion into the various Bai Yue regions began in the Qin Dynasty (221 to 206 BC). Eventually, the Han empire sent large armies and agricultural colonists to take advantage of the exotic products, the vast land, and maritime trade routes of Southern China. Guangdong was already a centre for exporting hemp and fibre-based cloth, silk, tortoise shells, pearls, and other exotic products (Hoe, 2013).

²⁷ This can be found in the section of “Tribute of the Yu Period” in the Book of Early History records, “...The barbarians on the islands pay tribute of gold, silver, copper, jade stones, ivories, skin, feather and alike to empire of Central Nation.”

²⁸ Northern is used here to refer to all migrants north of Nanyue whether they be from Central or Northern China.

One general, Zhao Tuo (born around 240 BC), declared himself as King Wu of Nanyue (Southern Yue). He was known for respecting and adopting Yue customs, allowing chieftains to continue their political traditions, and encouraging intermarriage and the harmonizing of cultures between Northern and Yue people. This kingdom was centred around Panyu and eventually expanded to include Âu Lạc Northern Vietnam (179 BC).

Nanyue was subsequently conquered by the Han dynasty (111 BC), which ruled it for the next several hundred years. During the Han dynasty (202 BC – 9 AD, 25–220 AD) Panyu remained a centre for international maritime trade. Northern Chinese immigrants increased into the Yue region due to families escaping northern wars and persecution. The Han dynasty also gradually expanded into northern Vietnam (42 AD). Wave after wave of refugees fleeing Northern war came to settle in the South, giving rise to further intermarriage, cross-cultural and linguistic evolution, and modern Northern paternal lineage and Nanyue maternal lineage ancestry.²⁹

Southern Chinese were recorded to have migrated overseas as early as the Tang dynasty (618–907). Buddhism, trade, and political chaos were several push factors for Southern Chinese migrations to Indonesia and Southeast Asia during this time (Hoe, 2013; Sen-Dou, 2017; Gungwu, 2017). In the Ming Dynasty (1368 to 1644), seamen from Southern China were already traversing as far as Africa. Macao was established as a Portuguese trading post in 1557, which increased trade between China and the Philippines (Sen, 2017). Leaders indigenous to Southern China led large-scale organised migrations into Cambodia and the Philippines. A Spanish army attacked the group in the Philippines, who fled into the mountainous regions of Luzon. Further large-scale waves of migration into Cambodia occurred in the Qing dynasty (1644–1911) led by leaders indigenous to Southern China who were reluctant to surrender to the Qing regime. They pledged loyalty to the Cambodian regime and were granted a fishing village to care for. Together with indigenous Cambodians, they transformed the village into a trade port with progressive agriculture, handicraft, and commercial industries.

²⁹ One wave of Han immigration of 0.9 million took place in the Western Jin Dynasty (AD 265–316); another occurred during the Tang Dynasty (AD 618–907); and another involving 5 million immigrants, during the Southern Song Dynasty (AD 1127–1279) (Wen, et al., 2004).

These waves of overseas migration and trade occurred despite various phases of imperial banning on overseas migration, and an overall cultural preference for staying in one's ancestral homeland (Hoe, 2013; Gungwu, 2017). This 2000-year period of Bai Yue assimilation continues all the way to the 19th century and is characterised by continuous waves of inward and outward migration, cross-cultural, ethnic, and linguistic mixing and transformation, periods of war, destruction of traditional structures, and imbalance of power.

4.3 Context Surrounding the 19th Century Dispersal

Preceding the 19th century Southern Chinese dispersal throughout the globe, the region was suffering from a period of great crisis and turmoil. The maritime trade legacy of the Southern China Coast was a centre for exporting items such as porcelain, silk, and tea to the West, in exchange for silver. With little need to buy anything from the West in return, the West's silver was depleting. The British used their East India Company³⁰ which enslaved labourers to cultivate and process mass amounts of Opium to sell to Southern China. During the 1800's they dramatically increased the quantity of their Opium sales to the region.³¹ Despite the illegalization of Opium and its trade in China, and attempts by the Chinese Emperor to call upon British authority to honour their law,³² the British continued to forcibly smuggle the drug into the country, and eventually they initiated the First (1839–1842) and Second³³ (1856–1860) Opium Wars in an attempt to maintain control over the Opium trade, which could assist in the maintenance of their global position of wealth and power. The modern technology of the European military led to Chinese defeat, and the signing of a series of 'Unequal Treaties'.³⁴ The Treaties enforced upon China a list of unequal obligations to various European powers, such as the legalisation of the opium trade, the payment of twenty-

³⁰ First established in 1600.

³¹ The British East India Company became the rulers of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa following the 1764 Battle of Buxar. The EIC was 28 million € debt because of this war and couldn't raise the silver to pay for the chinese tea. The dramatic increase in exported Opium to China was tied to these circumstances.

³² Opium was criminalised in 1729, and imports were banned in 1799. The Emperor (1810) issued an edict stating "*Opium has a harm. Opium is a poison, undermining our good customs and morality...*" (Fu, 1966, McKee, 2009). The Qing government was based far away from Southern ports and was unable to control opium smuggling and widespread addiction.

³³ The French were also involved in the Second Opium War.

³⁴ These were called 'Unequal' because China did not get any benefits.

one million dollars plus further reparations for the expenses of the wars, the ceding of Hong Kong and other areas, the expansion of European transport of cheap Chinese labourers, the establishment of five treaty ports, the opening of ten other ports to European commerce, the permission of foreign traders and missionaries to travel within China free from Chinese law, and to have “most favoured nation status”³⁵ (Fay, 1997). Southern China, and Guangdong in particular, where the Canton port³⁶ was situated, was afflicted by the devastating effects of Opium and the Opium Wars³⁷(Po, 2013).

Numerous other inner turmoils were afflicting China around this same time. One of the world’s bloodiest wars, the Taiping Revolution³⁸ (1850-1864), included massacres which wiped out 20 million people. Much of Southern China was affected, and 30 million people fled their homelands as refugees (Bickers & Jackson, 2016). Several other rebellions were also happening simultaneously around the country. Such as the Nian Rebellion (1853–1868), the Panthay Rebellion, (1855–1873) the Dungan revolt, 1862–1877), and the Red Turban Rebellion (1854–1856). These rebellions were resourced with modern weapons smuggled into the country by the English and Americans, who also supported rebels by providing pirates with British flags (Spence, 1997; Kim, 2009). The Red Turban Rebellion began in Guangdong and was led by rebels and bandits involved in organised crime. They too, sought to overthrow the Qing Dynasty and take over Southern China (Kim, 2009). These and other clan wars³⁹, their

³⁵ The Treaty of Nanking (1842) allowed British subjects to reside at Canton, Shanghai, Amoy (Xiamen), Ningpo (Ningbo) and Foochow (Fuzhou). The subsequent Treaty of Wangxia 1844, signed in the Portuguese port city Macau, further elaborated on the Treaty of Nanking, establishing international ports in these areas, which became centres for foreign trade and Western influence. The Treaty of Tientsin (1858) forced China to pay for expenses of the recent war, open 10 new ports to European commerce, legalise opium trade and grant foreign traders and missionaries rights to travel in China. Numerous other Treaties like these were signed between China and European powers.

³⁶ The Portuguese had been shipping Opium to the Canton port since the 16th century. Americans also partook of the opium trade in Canton in the 1800’s. The opium trade centred in Guangdong and Fujian. The Emperor (time) had ordered maritime customs to cut off the opium trade at the ports with little success (Fu, 1966).

³⁷ Millions of Chinese were using opium as a painkiller and for recreation by 1838. Widespread opium addiction not only weakened the local economy, but also people’s capability to work, and they suffered severe withdrawal symptoms without it (Fu, 1966; Po, 2013).

³⁸ Hong Xiuquan, the self-proclaimed brother of Jesus Christ, led this war with the intention to convert the population to his version of Christianity and to overthrow the Qing dynasty. The Taiping rebellion gained control over a significant part of Southern China.

³⁹ The Punti-Hakka (1855 and 1867) clan war was one significant war affecting the Sze Yup area, killing around one million people and causing many people to flee. This was a war between (Punti native “people of the earth” who also had Han ancestry and Hakka “guest” populations who were newer migrants). The main battlefield was in Toisan.

warlords and corrupt leadership, banditry, combined with numerous floods, typhoons, droughts, and locust plagues affecting Southern China, all contributed to famine and social unrest during this period (Hoe, 2013; Lin, et al., 2020). Often, these wars involved the destruction and burning of entire villages, necessitating farmers and peasants to flee their homelands. The Boxer Rebellion (1899 and 1901) and the First (1894 – 1895) and Second (1937–1945) Sino-Japanese wars continued the legacy of war and unrest into the 1900s. This period of strife culminated in the Xinhai Revolution (1911) which ended over two thousand years of the traditional imperial ruling system in China. The strife did not end with the Revolution, after which the Shanghai massacre (1927), the Chinese Civil War (1927 to 1937), and the Chinese Communist Revolution (1945 to 1949) culminated in the establishment of the People's Republic of China (1949).

This list of wars is by no means exhaustive, with numerous other wars occurring throughout the country, a large portion of which belonged to the Warlord Era⁴⁰ (1916 to 1928), and with numerous more following this. In 1949, the People's Republic of China was instituted, and China's borders were closed, making it difficult for overseas Chinese to return, even if they could afford to, and considering the dangerous climate, one can see why they might not want to. This period from 1839 to 1949 is known as China's 'Century of Humiliation'.

4.4 Global dispersal

The 19th century Southern Chinese sojourners left homelands within this context. Entire populations were left impoverished and traumatised, their lands and industries ruined, and their security jeopardised. The waves of war-induced migrations into Southern China also resulted in over-populated areas. This region was composed of diverse ethnic groups, and many of these went overseas in search of security, such as the Cantonese, Teochew, Hokkien, Hakka, Hainanese, Taishanese, and Fuzhou.

⁴⁰ The Warlord Era (1916-1928 with continued influence into the 1940's) gave decentralised Warlords power over their provinces and their own armies.

The experiences of sojourners and labourers throughout the world during this time vary. They were initially slaves⁴¹, and eventually left as sojourners, merchants, or labourers (Gungwu, 2017). Many who left were following their fathers or uncles and in this way kinship groups helped each other in new places (Mckeown, 2008). Largely, these were uneducated rural peasants, seamen or merchants. Some became successful businessmen, who intermarried with indigenous women, maintaining ties to Southern China, and sending children and money home (Leung-Wai, 2015). Others were slaves⁴², captured during the various wars, and sent to various continents to work on plantations (Meagher, 1975; Hoe, 2013; Yun, 2008). Others were deceived or kidnapped into labour for European colonists (Meagher, 1975; Yun, 2008; Mckeown, 2008; Hoe, 2013). This period was at the height of European global colonisation, when they were enlisting extremely cheap labour (in place of or alongside slave labour⁴³ abolished in various colonies throughout the 1800's) to build their new settlements around the globe (Mckeown, 2008; Yun, 2008; Lowe, 2015; Sen, 2017). Southern Chinese built railroads, mined gold and minerals, and worked cotton, tea, and sugarcane plantations for Europeans on every continent (Mckeown, 2008; Lowe, 2015; Sen, 2017; Yun, 2008). China was indebted to European powers through the Unequal Treaties, and the Southern Chinese needed opportunity to contribute to the prosperity of their suffering communities (Mckeown, 2008; Lowe, 2015). Large groups of Southern Chinese went to California, Canada, Australia, South Africa, Singapore, Samoa, Malaysia, Indonesia, Cambodia, Vietnam, New Zealand, Peru, Cuba, Guyana, the Caribbean, Belize, Hawaii, Fiji, Madagascar and more, to do arduous labour for European colonial settlements (Mckeown, 2008; Lutz, 2009; Lowe, 2015; Guccini & Zhang, 2021). Many died on the sea journeys, but many also died in the difficult conditions of the work and the new places they landed in (Yun, 2008). In many instances, the labourers were treated very much like slaves, with scarce pay, long arduous work, imprisonment, and flogging (Yun, 2008; Leung-Wai, 2015). In some places like Australia and the United States, Chinese arrivals were quarantined (Feng, 2017). Approximately 100,000 Chinese were detained on Angel Island, San Francisco,

⁴¹ Chinese were in some cases brought on slave ships and has a higher mortality rate than the African slave trade (Yun, 2008)

⁴² Records show European use of Chinese as slaves since the 1600s (Yun, 2008).

⁴³ In places like Cuba, Chinese coolies were cheaper to purchase than African slaves, and while they were technically imported as indentured labourers they were treated as slaves alongside African slaves (Yun, 2008).

in a cruel encampment for months on end during the period 1910-1940 (Lee, & Yung, (2010).

Besides cruel treatment from European managers, harsh living and working conditions, homes, necessities, and services which they had to make from scratch and tend to themselves without assistance, there was racial prejudice manifested in policies and interpersonal relations (Feng, 2017; Voss, 2018). Immigration contracts were such that only male workers could come, and European policies frequently opposed or attempted to ban intermarriage and maintain divisions amongst Chinese and other populations (Feng, 2017; Leung-Wai, 2015; Lowe, 2015). Such policies enabled imprisonment and fining of men and women who were married (Leung-Wai, 2015). Anti-Chinese sentiment from Europeans was and still is apparent all over the globe. Ideas of “racial impurity”, and “inferiority”, were promoted to create divisions between Chinese and indigenous or other populations (Leung-Wai, 2015; Lowe, 2015; Shibata, 2005). Other negative stereotypes and racial slurs were popularised through European propaganda, such as “coolies”, “chinamen”, “yellow peril”, “Mr Chin” and the like, and they were constantly targeted with fines and racism (Feng, 2017; Shibata, 2005). European labourers felt a sense of competition with Southern Chinese labourers who were paid less and thereby blamed Chinese for taking their jobs (Feng, 2017). They were the targets of massacres, riots, and violence⁴⁴(Feng, 2017). Repatriation occurred in numerous countries, as a way of keeping Chinese populations lower than European populations (Leung-Wai, 2015; Mckeown, 2008). In many instances, Chinese who had already started new families in their new lands were still repatriated despite pleas to allow them to stay (Mckeown, 2008; Leung-Wai, 2015; Hoe, 2013). This caused an ancestral disconnection for children who stayed in their countries while their fathers were expelled (Leung-Wai, 2015). After 1949, there were also instances of overseas Chinese who were expelled back to China by anti-communist host countries, such as Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia (Hoe, 2013).

⁴⁴ Rock Springs Massacre of 1885 in Wyoming US killed 28 Chinese, injured 15, and burned 78 Chinese homes. In 1887, 34 Chinese workers were murdered and robbed at a place called Chinese Massacre Cove in Oregon. Despite confessions, no one was punished for the crime. In 1871, anti-Chinese propaganda culminated in a massacre of 10% of the Chinese population in Los Angeles which was around 172 people in 1870. Again, no one was punished for the murders. These are merely a few examples of anti-Chinese murder throughout the globe.

Initially, sojourners maintained close connections with their homeland; they worked hard, earned little, and sent money home to their wives, children, and families (Li, & Xiao, 2013). Many home villages and families relied on the money being sent to them from overseas, which funded daily living costs and the building of hospitals and schools (Hoe, 2013). In some instances, they were able to maintain communication, trade, and travel between countries. In other cases, they could not afford to return home or would die before they had the chance. Fellow Southern Chinese would tend to the deceased and return their bones to their ancestral lands.

4.5 Buried in new lands

Gradually, it became more and more difficult for many to return to ancestral land after being disconnected for so long (Hoe, 2013). Women and children who had been left alone in villages for years were, in some cases, able to reunite with their husbands as refugees of the Japanese war (Tom, 2015; Lee, 2021). Southern Chinese families became more rooted in new lands and began to grow. Gradually, hard labour work was replaced by market gardening, storekeeping, laundering, tailoring, and restaurants (Guccini, & Zhang, 2021). The next generations grew up working in these environments (Feng, 2017). They grew up in different cultural worlds, inheriting traces of Southern Chinese heritage at home, and dominant culture modes in society (Lou, 1988; Lee, 2013; Li & Xiao, 2013). Many of these children grew up hard-working, educated and were able to achieve greater prosperity than their parents. Over the generations, descendants' ties to dialect groupings, ancestral homeland, and traditional occupations loosened (Lou, 1988; Lutz, 2009; Hoe, 2013). Many descendants are raised immersed in the cultures of their birthlands, and their ties to Southern China represent one biological thread of many ethnic inheritances, rather than cultural or social connections (Lee, 2013; Shibata, 2005; Li & Xiao, 2013).

Despite Southern Chinese families being rooted in new lands now for many generations, and in some cases several hundred years, racial prejudice and exclusion continues for Southern Chinese. This prejudice has heightened throughout the world with new waves of 21st century Chinese migrations and the COVID-19 pandemic (2019). A number of scholars identify this phenomenon, as differences between the old and new Chinese, and the inability of the new Chinese to assimilate to indigenous

cultures as naturally as the old Chinese (Shibata, 2005; Leung-Wai, 2015; Ng, 2017; Guccini, & Zhang, 2021). The popularisation of political prejudice towards China often influences the treatment of overseas Chinese (Mckeown, 2008). The identity as diasporic Chinese is often falsely perceived as culturally homogenous (Guccini & Zhang, 2021). Colonial depicting and narration of Chinese as a homogenous group as distinct from other ethnicities, has reinforced these stereotypes for generations (Kay & Khaild, 2020).

It is still difficult for people to accept that Chinese descendants, mixed or not, may not be closely tied to China, instead seeing themselves as belonging to their birth countries and may themselves be culturally and linguistically diverse (Mckeown, 2008). Issues of Chinese-ness and belonging are frequently brought up within discourses. They are visible in terms of looks but invisible in terms of identity, history, and place in societies (Shibata, 2005). Western-defined ethnic boundaries create heterogeneous groupings which appear to not overlap, yet these boundaries are regularly crossed by Chinese descendants. The possibly traumatic psychological effects of this intergenerational racism have been ignored (Yee, 2003). It is possible that Chinese descendants have had to navigate this racism through a variety of strategies which suppress their own identities to survive.

European facilitation of Chinese populations into colonised countries around the globe often intentionally narrated divisions between Chinese and every other population. The Chinese were welcomed merely as free slaves, but they were not included in society. They often became invisible or othered amid indigenous-colonial conflicts. Sometimes they would be asked to choose whether to mark their identity as either “Black” or “White” or would be excluded from stores and spaces which were either exclusively Black or White (Shibata, 2005; Asianometry, 2021).

Outside of European intervention however, Southern Chinese, and indigenous populations formed their own relationships, characterised by collaboration and mutual support. Chinese in Samoa often intermarried, assimilated into Samoan culture, and felt little racism from Samoans (Leung-Wai, 2013). Chinese who were suffering from racial attacks in Otago were supported by Māori from Parihaka who were taken to Dunedin as prisoners following their peaceful resistance to colonial

invasion in 1881. These prisoners from Parihaka came and sat peacefully between the Chinese miners and the European attackers during the assault (Jackson, 2018). Chinese market gardeners collaborated closely with indigenous peoples, and shared food with them (Jackson, 2018; The University of British Columbia, 2016; Leung-Wai, 2013). The resonating story of hapū from Te Rarawa and Te Roroa iwi who had found and cared for the bones washed ashore from the 1902 SS Ventnor shipwreck, and which carried the bones of 499 gold miners who were to be returned to ancestral land in Southern China, is another example of mutual support across peoples, and ancestors. Descendants of these groups did not know about this burying of the bones until 100 years later, when they were able to unite, accord proper respect, and construct a site of memorial for this significant event (Piper & Xia, 2021). Chinese intermarried with First Nations women in all the Americas, as well as with African Americans (Shibata, 2005). Southern Chinese have, for a long time, intermarried, and collaborated with Southeast Asian peoples (Lee, 2013). In Canada, Chinese gardeners leased land from First Nation families (Ling, 2018). A growing number of contemporary academic works highlight Southern Chinese indigenous relations which have been under acknowledged and erased throughout history. Works such as *The Dragon and the Taniwha* (2009), *Jade Taniwha* (2007), *Cedar and Bamboo* (2008), *1788* (2008), *Peeking into the Pink Houses at Musqueam A Migration Story* (2015), *All our Fathers Relations* (2016), *Tales of Time - Dragons in Paradise* (2018), *Eating Pork'n'Puha with Chopsticks* (2007) are the results of contemporary cross-cultural collaborations between Southern Chinese and indigenous peoples in their respective countries which highlight Chinese-indigenous intermarriages, cultural affinity, mutual reciprocity, and mutual support in the face of European colonial racial oppression and prejudice. Stories such as these portray a spirit of self-sacrificing courage and support, which overcomes the anti-Asian sentiment that continues to be propagated today and influences diverse populations in Aotearoa (Jackson, 2018).

4.6 An Ancient Continuity

Maritime legacy

This same coast which has ancestral connection for Austronesians is the same coast from which the 19th century sojourners came from. Several seaports of Southern China

were inherited from the Bai Yue capitals and the South China sea routes developed upon the base of indigenous seafaring from mainland southeast of China, across Taiwan Strait to the Philippines, and into Southeast Asia and Oceania⁴⁵ (Wu, 2019; Wu 2021). The people indigenous to this coast have always had a life centred upon the sea. Some live their entire lives in the sea⁴⁶, while most depend upon it for food and overseas trade (Chen, 2002). The Southern Chinese were navigators of junk ships along the maritime Silk Road⁴⁷ in the Tang (618 to 907 AD) and Song (960-1276 AD) dynasties. For thousands of years, their ports and trade routes linked communities across the world, facilitating the dissemination and exchange of not only goods, but also technology, sciences, culture, and religion (Wu, 2021). The past few hundred years have seen increasingly diverse exchanges. The integration of diverse cultures within this region since ancient times also enabled the advancement and development of their maritime heritage.

This is a continuous story which cannot be fragmented; a heritage built upon the ancient Bai Yue maritime culture. This maritime culture has advanced and evolved over thousands of years, through cross-cultural exchange and intermarriage (Chen, 2002). The travel, migration and exchange has never ceased throughout this history, despite imperial policies to ban maritime travel. The global interdependence of today evolved from this maritime trade history which developed through a culture of social reciprocity and interdependence (Ma, 2017; Rolett, 2019)

The 19th century Southern Chinese descend from both the indigenous Bai Yue and northern heritages. Their travels overseas throughout the globe echo their ancestors'. Their adaptability and intermarriage, collaboration with indigenous peoples, their dedication to family and the honouring of ancestors, and their tendency to work with the local soil and sea, and the resources around them, to live frugally, and to reciprocate and exchange - are key characteristics of this inheritance. The telling of this 19th century Southern Chinese story and dispersal throughout the globe must therefore be kept within this long evolutionary context and heritage.

⁴⁵ This is evident from archaeological studies which reveal sea routes from neolithic times (W, 2021).

⁴⁶ The Dan (蜆) people are descendants of Bai Yue and are born and live on the water in boat homes. They dive for pearls and food (Wu, 2021).

⁴⁷ The Maritime Silk Road facilitated the trade of silk, porcelain and spices between Asia, Africa and Europe.

The village

The customary lineage-based villages of Southern China manifest a continual link to ancient collective life. Village life, agriculture, and culture, centred upon an indigenous relationship with the environment and seasons, has evolved from ancient times. Aspects of customary architecture have continued to live on, particularly in places where modernisation has not completely replaced customary structures. The architecture of Southern China is said to have evolved from Bai Yue and northern cultural fusions. Characteristics of the stilt houses referred to by the Han records of the Bai Yue can still be found in many rural areas of Southern China, Southeast Asia, and Oceania.

The communal ancestral home is a significant cultural symbol shared across these regions which continues to exist in contemporary times. It places importance on shared genealogy, on genealogical connection, on ancestral honouring and continued relationship, and on the community identity united by shared ancestry and familial relationship. It creates a sacred and spiritual context for community gathering. Ancestral homes from Southern China maintain a cultural inheritance from Bai Yue ancestry. Initial migrants around the globe created new ancestral homes or 'joss houses' which could be used for collective prayer, as a community centre, or even hospital (Kay & Khalid, 2020).

The centrality of reliance on ancestral and divine assistance within many cultures indigenous to these regions is said to trace continuity to Bai Yue culture and indigenous narratives. Several sea gods and goddesses are significant in Southern China such as the Mother Ancestor (Matsu 妈祖), Dragon Mother (Longmu 龙母)⁴⁸, and Waterfront Lady (Lingshui Furen 临水夫人), "Yangyu God" (演屿神) and "Nagong God" (拿公神). The Dragon Mother is associated with Bai Yue cultural veneration of snake totems. These are said to originate from indigenous Bai Yue culture and remain significant for maritime culture in Southern China (Wu, 2021).

⁴⁸ The Dragon Mother (Longmu) is a water goddess in Southern China significant in Guangdong and the Pearl River Delta for various ethnicities (Wu 2021).

Numerous other aspects of culture and characteristics of the Bai Yue seem to live on in Southern Chinese descendants and Austronesian descendants. Certain plants, animals, and materials have maintained importance over thousands of years throughout the migrations and evolution of people and cultures. Even aspects of language have maintained threads of connection.

4.7 Revealed Connections

The unravelling of threads from ancient Southern China to the present global dispersal of Southern Chinese descendants reveal various strands of connection. The same Coast which Austronesians trace ancestry to and in which most archaeological sites are sourced from is the same coast that sourced most of 19th century sojourners. This ancestral homeland, and this ancestry is shared by Austronesians and Southern Chinese descendants. Aspects of cultures, languages, and identities across these regions trace their inheritance to this ancestral legacy.

The unfoldment of circumstances surrounding the Southern Chinese global dispersal reveals the role of European colonial expansion in facilitating this movement and in influencing global and ethnic divisions, power imbalances amongst groups of people, and their relationships amongst each other. Common patterns of Western colonisation, displacement of populations, modernisation of customary villages, loss of indigenous languages and culture are seen across Southern Chinese descendants and other indigenous populations throughout the world.

European Sinophobic propaganda has continuously propagated negative stereotypes of 'Chinese', homogenising diverse people in attempts to sustain divisions between Chinese and other populations, and maintain their own position of power. Southern Chinese have sought constructive ways to respond to enduring racial prejudice for hundreds of years, demonstrating their commitment to mutual reciprocity, collaboration, and intermarriage with indigenous populations and their adaptability to indigenous customs and climates in the lands where they have come to place their roots around the world.

This narrative of the Southern Chinese dispersal, when placed within this ancient continuum of time and situated within a global context, enables the continuity of

cultural, genealogical, social, historical, and material threads to be traced. Patterns and principles of progress, transformation, evolution, integration, and movement can be perceived. Such a perspective is necessary for overcoming narrow categorisations of people and their relationships with each other. Emphasising the evolving nature of human groups through processes of integration, intermarriage and migration overcomes prevalent tendencies to view populations and their arts, culture, and languages as fixed, unchanging, and isolated. The legacy of intercultural and interethnic exchange and collaboration in the maritime centres of Southern China has, in fact, continued throughout the generations who seem distinguished by an inclination for cross-cultural exchange, evolution, and adaptability.

The complexity of Southern Chinese identities challenges narrow dichotomies, as they often simultaneously embrace notions of indigeneity and diaspora, sustaining aspects of cultural custom and yet also adapting and evolving. Many of these descendants embrace multicultural and multi-ethnic realities which blanket categorisations such as 'Chinese' or 'migrant' cannot adequately represent. Stereotypical images of Chinese have been shaped by colonial propaganda for generations, and racial prejudice and exclusion has contributed to the loss of culture and languages amongst various Southern Chinese groups. Their place within colonial-indigenous or black-white tensions and contexts is obscured and erased. Knowledge of these historical circumstances of Southern China are largely unknown by Southern Chinese and host-country populations alike, and the legacy of competitive anti-Chinese propaganda continues to frame Chinese as 'job, home, and land takers' (Brunnersum, 2019). This widely influential propaganda has engendered interpersonal racial prejudice towards Chinese-looking individuals.

This history reveals however, that Southern Chinese did not have colonial interests, and that their dispersal was not supported by the Chinese Empire or the result of a systematic scheme of collective conquest. They did not come with ideologies of superiority or domination, but rather were content with opportunities to provide humble services in exchange for the right to earn a living and support their families. The corrupted systems which have oppressed indigenous populations and caused extremes of wealth and poverty, have not been designed or directly advanced by Southern Chinese, who find themselves, like other populations, entangled within

colonial systems and structures based on unceded lands of diverse indigenous populations and the hard labour of groups such as themselves.

Numerous efforts of Southern Chinese demonstrate mutual reciprocity with indigenous populations, and a desire to support them in their aspirations and in restoring justice. Southern Chinese around the globe often intermarried with indigenous peoples and collaborated with them. Frequently they adjusted culturally to new lands, learning their languages and customs. They were able to adapt and remain in tropical climates because of their subtropical heritage even after Western settlements ended. While certain aspects of cultural heritage such as food customs and ancestral honouring have continued over the generations, language and cultural practices have frequently been lost amidst the necessity for using the languages and customs of new lands.

The narration of this story in this creative practice overlooks these competitive narratives and focuses on a spiritual identity manifested in human relationships with their environment and with each other. The lens of the conceptual framework looks beyond the 'Chinese' stereotypes and national borders, and into the hearts of the generations of people who maintain a spiritual connection with the natural environment and with ancestors despite waves of colonisation, and vast distances of separation. The outward disrupted connection with ancestral land and seascapes cannot sever spiritual longing and communication between the heart, its environment, and the community of people surrounding it. So many of the Southern Chinese descendants have continued their love of the soil in new lands or express their relationship with their natural environment in other diverse ways.

This unravelling of the history of Southern China has ultimately provided symbols, images, and metaphors for the narration of this story through visual art. Key images of connection, such as certain plants, animals, and material culture have been uncovered in this process. An indigenous relationship with the environment is central to this story. The people of Southern China developed through an intimate relationship with the seasons, the plants, and the wildlife, and manifested an ease and gracefulness interacting with these various aspects of the environment. The notion of the village has also been at the heart of the story, at times tragically disrupted and destroyed, and at

other times, at the centre of progress and advancement of cultural identity. Within the village, each member has a role and a place, a sense of belonging, not based on ethnicity, but as a contributing member of the collective.

The events of the past two hundred years have caused the disruption of villages, and relationships with each other and the environment. Descendants of the Southern China dispersal, like many others in the world, are displaced from homelands, and have integrated with local communities, despite racial prejudice which seeks to exclude them from a sense of belonging and pigeonholing which attempts to deprive them of a strong sense of identity.

Ancient Southern China offers other lessons in this regard. Continually, her people have moved, progressed, evolved, intermarried, exchanged, and traded across cultures. Periods of ebb and flow, of crisis and progress, disintegration and integration have always been a part of the natural order propelling development forward. These principles are conveyed through blended fibres which continuously carry treasures along lines of ascent and descent in *Movements from Pearl Rivers*. This strand of ancestral connection underpins and flows throughout the story and artworks of the Southern Chinese dispersal as narrated in *Movements from Pearl Rivers*.

5. Weaving tensions and achieving balanced integrity

Several Māori art scholars, Chinese Māori artists, and Chinese artists in Aotearoa have sought to highlight connections between Southern China and Aotearoa. If one were to look beyond these shores, one would find that similar efforts have been made by diverse Southern Chinese descendants and indigenous peoples around the world. Examples of approaches and frameworks which others use to highlight connections will be reviewed in this section. These efforts have been made in the context of the contemporary art world in Aotearoa which is situated within the wider context of Australasia. Certain sites of discourse become powerful channels for the flow and exchange of ideas and values. A few key sites of discourse from 2018-2022, and the prevalent ideas being discussed in those spaces, will be analysed in this section, to reveal insights into assumptions, patterns, and gaps underlying popular discourse which may cause connections to be overlooked or excluded.

5.1 The centrality of whakapapa in the Southern China-Aotearoa connection

The relationship between Southern China, Southeast Asia and Oceania to Aotearoa has been positioned within a whakapapa (ancestral lineage) framework (Panoho, 2015; White, 2008). Within this framing, Southern China is acknowledged as an ancient ancestral homeland for Austronesians, from which they dispersed to Taiwan and Southeast Asia, and throughout Oceania thousands of years ago. The ancestral connection with Southern China has been associated with the Polynesian notion of Hawaiki (homeland), and the concept of matapuna (the origin source of all culture) (Panoho, 2015). The acceptance of this ancestral link has implications for how people indigenous to these regions relate to each other and the landscapes today. A whakapapa framing is useful for contextualising spiritually meaningful relationships between peoples which have for various reasons, become divided throughout the

course of history (Panoho, 2015; White, 2008). It has implications not only for Māori, but also for other Oceanic and Asian peoples.

This framing has been used within contemporary art contexts and exhibitions (Lopesi & Rands, 2017; Panoho, 2015; White, 2008). The perspective of the Southern China-Aotearoa relationship within a whakapapa framework, reorients a Euro-centric perspective of New Zealand and other divided countries, towards a genealogical and historically connected region (White, 2008). The discourse draws upon scientific research on the Austronesian migrations from the Southern China Coast (Anderson, 2008; Panoho, 2015). Developments within this framework are still scarce, with only a few examples from which to draw.

From the positioning of the South Pacific, our connection to and understanding of the northern countries has been limited by distance and Western framing, and the popularisation of the 'Out of Taiwan' theory of Austronesian expansion which overlooks the preceding connection to the Southern China Coast (Panoho, 2015). Another aspect of the discourse, which is often overlooked, is the centrality of the South China Sea and the legacy of the Bai Yue maritime routes in cross-cultural exchange throughout Asia, Oceania, and Europe in pre-colonial times (Wu, 2019; Panoho, 2015). These trade routes remained significant factors in the European expansion era and became a basis for the facilitation of a global network which resulted in shifts of people, goods, and ideologies while maintaining Euro-American control (Ballantyne & Moloughney, 2008).

This whakapapa framework of the connections between Southern China and Aotearoa establishes ancestral and familial relationships between the peoples of these areas and the places along the journey between the two regions. It acknowledges the continuity of relationships across time, place, culture, and people. These two points (Southern China and Aotearoa) mark the beginning and ending of the Austronesian cycle of journeying (Panoho, 2015). What this framing also does is position present day Southern Chinese and Austronesians together as related descendants of a common ancient ancestry. The Southern Chinese, their genes, cultures, and languages descend from an amalgamation of Han and Bai Yue heritage, while the Austronesians descend from the Bai Yue (Wen, et al., 2004; Xue, et al., 2008; Li, et al., 2007; Sun, et al., 2021;

Yang, et al., 2020; Wu, 2021; Huang, et al., 2022). This obscured connection could be as spiritually meaningful as reconnecting with a long-lost cousin, and might explain for some, the affinity that people feel across cultures.

Not only have genealogical connections been acknowledged, but aesthetic, artistic, and cultural connections have been articulated as well (Panoho, 2015). The genealogy of jade carving can be traced back to the Bai Yue Hemudu culture (5500 BC to 3300 BC). Its material culture of adze, axes, disks, three fingered forms, and spiral engravings are spiritually significant objects linked with cosmological worldviews and ceremonial practices, connecting cultures across Southeast Asia and Oceania (Panoho, 2015). Across cultures, these ancestral objects have a sacred, spiritual potency which communicate connections with the past (Panoho, 2015).

Another key aspect of material culture within this continuum from Southern China to Oceania is found in ancient pottery, which Panoho's text (2015) suggests "is still a living artform". A continuity of techniques, motifs, and design structures within Oceanic art stemming from this ancient pottery remain present, creating a contemporary identification with an ancient legacy originating in Southern China. Within an ancestral lineage framework, this employment of shared visual language represents conversations between ancestors and descendants across time and space.

While various categorizations in the contemporary art world can be described in terms which are either too narrow, too exclusive, or irrelevant for Southern Chinese, this whakapapa framework could be embraced by Southern Chinese descendants who sit at any point of the continuum from Southern China to Aotearoa whether that be relative to their location, their cultural grounding, artistic practice, or ethnic ties.

5.2 Seeking a balanced centre for cross-cultural diversity

The Maui Dynasty exhibition (2008) used a Māori whakapapa framework of the Asia-Pacific region to address the prevalent compartmentalisation of cultures (such as

Māori, Pacific, Asian, indigenous/non-indigenous) in the New Zealand Art world, which hinders artists from discussing the multiplicity of cultural lineages from which they descend, as well as the complexities of cross-cultural dialogues occurring across cultures. The curator of the exhibition, Anna-Marie White, laments the tainting of the “otherwise positive impacts of cultural diversity in New Zealand art” by “issues of racial prejudice, cultural stereotyping, and accusations of appropriation within the context of cultural ownership”. These issues continue to resonate over a decade later.

The 2020 *Talanoa Mau* conference stimulated collective investigation and discussion on “questions about how to be a human in today’s world, the current state of our cultures and the arts, and our practices of everyday life.” (Ponifasio, 2020). The conference discussions were aimed at our collective analysis of “dominant cultural frames”, to assist us in consciously regenerating our local cultural practices alongside our shared humanity, in order to strengthen the integrity of our essential relationships currently fraught with crisis (Ponifasio, 2020). The notions of ‘*Talanoa Mau*’ conveyed a process of meaningful discussion which advances shared understanding. The multidisciplinary conference included “culture makers” from diverse fields, ethnicities, and backgrounds, including its youngest participant, Ruby Judson who was 13 years old at the time, and whose collaborative efforts with her peers challenged racial prejudice by highlighting diverse human qualities.

The inclusion of Pākeha speakers (5 out of 31 speakers, not including those with mixed European and other heritages) came as a surprise, and sparked criticism (Thompson Carr, 2020). Pākeha inclusion was an intentional strategy for curator Salā Lemi Ponifasio to highlight the approaches of Pākeha who seek to learn from and collaborate with indigenous peoples, and are dedicated to aligning themselves with their aspirations for self-determination and empowerment. Ponifasio’s art practice, centres on “indigenous cultural recovery, language and knowledge, thought and narratives that have been silenced or excluded” (Ponifasio, n.d.), and his dance company *Mau* has focused on *Mau Wahine* (Māori women’s worldview through art and relationships), *Mau Mapuche* (collaborating with indigenous Mapuche artists and communities in Chile), and Kanaky artists in New Caledonia across a variety of indigenous and colonial contexts (Ponifasio, n.d.). Ponifasio’s background experience in creating culturally empowering spaces for Māori and Oceanic communities

informed his intention to address certain tensions within the New Zealand contemporary art world. *Talanoa Mau* was intended to be a safe cross-cultural space in which even Pākeha contributions could be embraced. His call for a ‘rallying together’ to ‘truthfully reflect on our identity’ and to ‘offer new visions’ of a “kinder, better world” was related to these cross-cultural tensions (Ponifasio, 2020).

The conference was chaired and closely supported by Te Ahukaramu Charles Royal, who has articulated his own experience in moving beyond ‘anxieties’ of ‘cultural knowledge and identity’ in a ‘resistance’ to ‘colonisation’, towards utilising an ‘inexhaustible’ ‘creativity’ which ‘transcends ethnic pride’ and stems from a harmonious relationship with the natural environment. His articulations of indigenous worldviews embrace a view of humanity’s indigenous relationship with the natural environment, allowing room for Westerners to tap into this creative potential as well (Royal, 2014).

I believe the criticism of the inclusion of Pākeha who seek to align themselves with indigenous aspirations at the conference was precisely the type of tension that Ponifasio sought to stimulate analysis on, and represented the landscape of “racial prejudice, cultural stereotyping, and accusations of appropriation” which have tainted the “otherwise positive impacts of cultural diversity in New Zealand art” referred to by White (2008). While White also included examples of Pākeha artists who explore the way Oceanic cultures influence their own identity, she also sought to challenge the Euro-centrism of a New Zealand identity.

The approaches of Ponifasio, Royal and White demonstrate their commitment to indigenous empowerment simultaneously through cross-cultural collaboration. Their decentralisation of European domination does not reciprocate racial prejudice by excluding Pākeha altogether but calls for ‘kind’ and ‘sincere’ relationships. They are aware of the European origins and perspectives of New Zealand galleries and museums, and their role in powerfully broadcasting messages throughout society about our identities, and the way that dominant ideologies can influence us. This requires the careful analysis of frameworks, methods, and practices, and conscious creative advancement of culture to embrace our diverse, cross-cultural collective identity (Ponifasio, 2020; White, 2008; Royal, 2014).

This landscape of tension between Western and indigenous artists often leaves Southern Chinese heritage invisible or placed in the ‘other’ box. Often though, Southern Chinese descendants seek these places of cross-cultural overlap, resonance, inclusion, and harmony. A review of some of these artists will follow.

5.3 “Asia-Pacific”

Growing critique of the way the Asia-Pacific region has been defined by Euro-American economic and government interests reveals the shared desire for a redefinition of our relationships across divisive borders and ethnicities. The recommended redefinition of our region must enable us to perceive and articulate our shared identity within a kinship lineage and within the context of a flow and intermingling of rivers and seas (Hau’ofa, 2008; Lopesi & Rands, 2017; White, 2008; Gordon-Smith & Ng, 2017; Panoho, 2015; Eshraghi, 2015). The discourse cautions artists to be aware of the various curatorial agendas of Western art institutions convening international triennials and the like, with the power to propagate and define the Asia-Pacific region, her peoples, cultures, and the relationships between them (Lopesi & Rands, 2017; White, 2008; Gordon-Smith & Ng, 2017; Panoho, 2015; Eshraghi, 2015). Some attempts to use other terms, such as Oceania (Hau’ofa, 2008) Moananui, or the Great Ocean (Eshraghi, 2015), seek to embrace Oceanic peoples without political and nationalistic borders. Whether these terms refer to the Pacific as it is commonly defined today remains unclear. Perhaps, like the Ocean, it is permissible for these terms to flow and extend to different shores at different times or contexts.

Lana Lopesi who also shares Southern Chinese heritage, curated an exhibition entitled *Lei-pā* (2017) which sought to identify connections between Asia and Oceania through the plantation site as a place of food, labour, and the forming of relationships. *Lei-pā* includes Chinese, Pasefika, and Chinese-Pasefika artists (Lopesi & Rands, 2017). The exhibition acknowledges the historical context of Southern Chinese initially brought to Oceania as labourers for colonial settlers, and who developed relationships with indigenous people outside of Western intervention. When colonial powers stopped

indentured labour in islands such as Samoa, Fiji, and Hawaii in the early 1900s, some were forced to return even after having formed families, while others remained. Food is explored as a signifier of the relationships between Southern Chinese and indigenous populations who learned from Southern Chinese cuisine and adopted them into local diets and delicacies. Ioana Gordon-Smith and Emma Ng feature in *Lei-pā*, as they explore similar connections through their *Asia Pacific Century* (2017) exhibitions. Inspired by *The Maui Dynasty*, the *Asia Pacific Century* project sought to position Asian and Pacific peoples together in conversations to counter a Eurocentric lens of New Zealand identity and to shift an economic-centred conversation about Asia to lived friendship and reciprocal relationships.

The Asia-Pacific Triennial deserves mention here since it has brought together artists of this region since the 1990's. While hosted by a powerful Western art institution (The Queensland Art Gallery) located in a powerful Western-dominated country (Australia), the Triennial's curatorial board appears to have been cross-culturally collaborative, consciously seeking "to review colonial viewpoints" learning "to understand that cultural interaction, adaptation, and change have taken place in the region for centuries, so that Western "influence" may come to be seen as insignificant in the future", and "about the continuing relevance of religion, spirituality, and tradition, especially for indigenous peoples" (Turner, 2000). The Triennial exposes a diverse range of customary and contemporary artistic expressions from the Asia Pacific region to a wide audience without imposing any theme. Their articulated aims are to build friendships in the region which cross political divides, and they have articulated their consciousness to not dominate the discourse from a European Australian positioning, but to collaborate as an equal partner to provide a platform for the region's artists. The Triennial gives insight into how artists across the region "interact with their communities" and "the role contemporary art can play in social transformation" (Turner, 2000).

The 9th Asia Pacific Triennial (2018) included 80 artists from over 30 countries (Stanhope, 2018). Like the previous examples mentioned, artists in the Triennial decentred Western thought by offering indigenous worldviews and artistic practices. Artists also explored the complexities of transcultural identities, connections, and histories, and drew upon their own systems of knowledge, practice, and values to

contribute to discussion of contemporary challenges (McDougall, 2018). Their contributions overcome imposed borders and notions of homogeneity or static culture, instead highlighting cross-cultural identities, journeys, exchanges, and change (Nagesh, 2018). The Triennial thus becomes a site of repositioning and redefining, and presents mediums, arts, and artists often overlooked, yet essential to the development of the region (Bernal, 2018).

While there was inclusion from mainland Chinese artists in the Triennial, there was an absence, at least explicitly, of overseas Southern Chinese descendants who have belonged within this region for generations. What would be the unique cultural contribution of an overseas Southern Chinese descendant who has, for example, been raised in Oceania? Would they be categorised as mainland Chinese or assigned to their country of upbringing? Would they be given the freedom to define themselves, and transcend prevalent notions of identity? If they do not assert customary Chinese culture in their art, would it be acceptable that they demonstrate their complex cross-cultural heritage? The place of overseas Southern Chinese descendants remains ambiguous and erased, even within spaces such as the 9th Asia Pacific Triennial.

5.4 The need for new language which encompasses the growing complexity of our identities

The work of Dr Leuli Eshraghi, who also shares ancestral connection to Southern China through the Southern Chinese dispersal to Samoa, explores the growing complexities and contradictions of contemporary indigenous artists and identities and their cross-cultural relationships. *Wansolwara - One Salt Water* (2020), *Transits and Returns* (2019), and *The Commute* (2018) are among some of the exhibitions through which he and others have explored the way artists maintain ancestral, cultural and community connections while living away from ancestral land, often in urbanised, transnational, and cross-cultural contexts (Hogue, et al., 2019). These efforts reflect a collective aspiration to foster meaningful cross-cultural connections amongst diverse, diasporic, and indigenous peoples (Eshraghi, 2019).

The re-centring of indigenous perspectives and voices in the artworld was also a focus of *Nirin*, the 2020 Sydney Biennale. For the first time, the Biennale was led by First Nations artists. *Nirin*, meaning "edge", in Wiradjuri, was employed with the intention of bringing those on the edges and margins into the centre. Even those with indigenous heritage can have complex identities which place them on the margins of their own communities. The creative capacity of artists to "imagine futures of transformation for re-setting the world" is associated with sovereignty, and the exhibition seeks to "gather forces of integrity" to dismantle dominant cultural frames (Andrews, 2020). While there were artists included in the exhibition with mixed Southern Chinese heritage, this was not a point of discussion in their artwork but was basically an invisible aspect of their ethnic identities.

Another significant event of this period was the *Toi Tu Toi Ora* (2020) exhibition of Māori art in Aotearoa. The overarching framework for the exhibition was based on Māori cosmological origin narratives. The exhibition also centralises Māori voices and aspirations, confirming the continued relevance, creative potential, and centrality of indigenous knowledge and perspectives within Aotearoa (Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki, 2021). Along with this achievement was the establishment of the Māori art journal *Ate* in 2019, which also seeks to centralise Māori voices, and allow for Māori to determine and tell their own stories. Māori artists employ a variety of customary, trans-customary and non-customary approaches to creative practice.

These major exhibitions and events reflect a widespread desire of marginalised communities to see themselves and their families reflected in the art world, and to see diverse artists creating artwork, which is not centred on combating colonialism, but is focused on creative progress (Burchmore, 2020). Marginalised communities are in themselves, however, complex, diverse, evolving, collaborating, and intermixing in ways which challenge segregated and siloed notions of identities. 'Asian' is one such term among many, which carries with it certain narrow associations to define the most diverse population on the planet.

At the Aotearoa Asian Arts Hui 2018, artists of Asian descent rallied together for the first time, to discuss their collective identity and positioning in Aotearoa, and the challenges they have faced (Chanwai-Earle, 2018). While Asian artists also feel

marginalised, excluded, misunderstood, categorised, and pressured to make ‘Asian’ artwork in a Euro-centric art world, they are also extremely diverse, not comprising one traditional community. The term ‘Asia’, often mis-associated with a certain type of urban east-Asian looking typecast, is still used to categorise diverse artists in Aotearoa. Artists in this category have experienced more financial support when their work explicitly or typically reflects ‘Asian’ content (AAAH, 2018). Asian artists also acknowledge an imbalance of power and presence in the contemporary art world and discourse. This includes the art education sector, which lacks Asian representation amongst staff, but also in pedagogies which can embrace our increasingly complex identities, and the continued relevance and centrality of spirituality and religion for many (Sleigh, 2018).

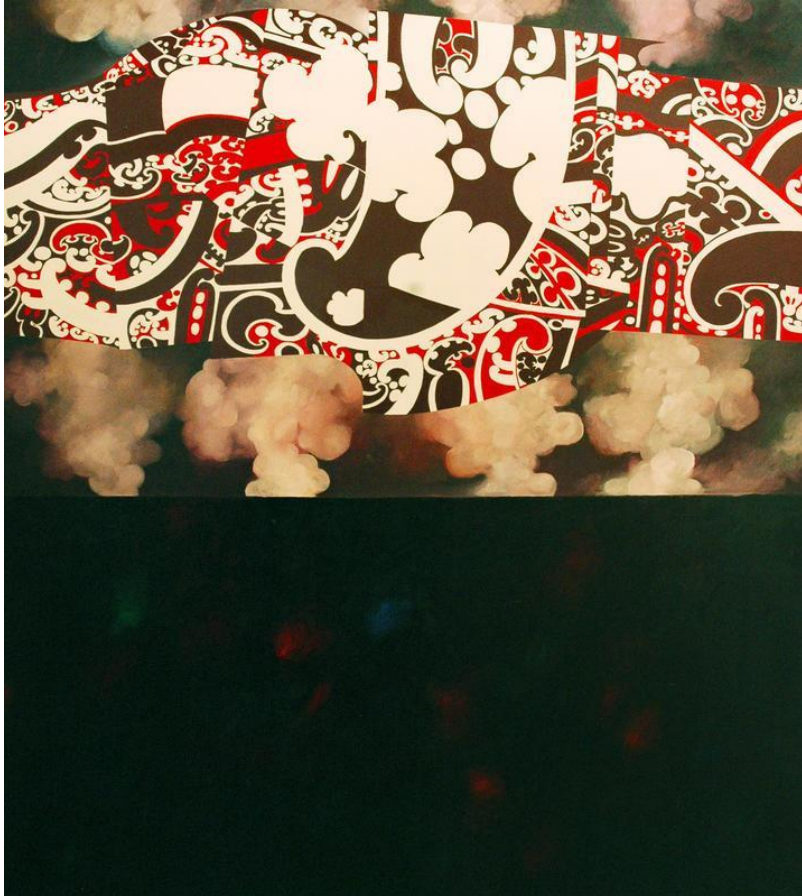
There is a need for language to evolve along with these identities, as terms such as diasporic, hybrid, transnational, hyphenated (Sleigh, 2018), still do not satisfactorily reflect our true underlying identities. Perceptions of Asians have been written and ‘othered’ by Western narratives, but many Asians desire to have a direct relationship with Māori, the indigenous population, and to narrate their own stories within this context. Such a context should be free from ‘Asian’ stereotypes, and one that grounds identity within relationships between family, village, friends, and the natural environment. A few Southern Chinese artists narrate this indigenous-centred relationship through their work.

5.5 Southern Chinese artists drawing indigenous-centred connections

Artists with both Māori and Southern Chinese ancestry are in a good position to convey the connections across people and place (Panoho, 2015). Dr Buck Nin, Dion Hitchens, Simon Kaan, Shane Hansen, and Ruth Woodbury are among some of these artists. Their artistic practices take inspiration from both Māori and Chinese worldviews, concepts, principles and aesthetic and technical practices (Panoho, 2015; White, 2008). The way that their heritage informs their work has already been reviewed by numerous authors, therefore the following section is merely a brief acknowledgment of the harmony that they demonstrate across cultures.

Figure 2

Bold Fire, Whale Bay



Note. Nin, B. (1976). *Bold Fire, Whale Bay*. [Oil on board. 1390 x 1235mm].
Collection of Waikato Museum Te Whare Taonga o Waikato.
<https://collection.waikatomuseum.org.nz/objects/1328/bold-fire-whale-bay>.
Reprinted with permission.

Dr Buck Nin's paintings employ organic and intricate forms which resonate with both Māori and Chinese aesthetics, and reference the life and soul, the spiritual energy and forces permeating the natural environment.

Figure 3

Thread My Bones



Note. Woodbury, R. & Cowper, K. (2023). *Thread My Bones*. [Mixed medium sculpture]. Sky Pirates, Morningside, Auckland: New Zealand. Courtesy of Ruth Woodbury.

Ruth Woodbury is a tohunga raranga who descends from Ngati Korokoro, Te Pouka, Ngati Wharara, Te Hikutu, Southern Chinese and European ancestries. She perceives connections across weaving arts that are indigenous to Aotearoa and Southern China. As an educator, she seeks to help the younger generation amongst her whānau and community to learn about the wholeness and inseparability of their mixed ancestry. Through Māori crafts such as manu aute, tukutuku, kakahu, and raranga, she naturally perceives and weaves connections across cultural affinities. Her tūrangawaewae in the Hokianga is a significant place for Southern Chinese-Māori connection, as many intermarriages took place in this region, and as the memorial for the SS Ventnor Shipwreck has been placed there in this region of 'ancestral return'. In her collaborative project with Kade Cowper to produce *Thread My Bones*, Woodbury utilises silk and muka fibres.

Figure 4

White Heron Kotuku



Note. Hitchens, D. (2005). *White Heron Kotuku*. [Sculpture with aluminium. 300 x 300 x 300 cm off the ground]. Mayfair Place, Glen Innes, Auckland: New Zealand. (Collection of Auckland City Council.) Reprinted with artist's permission.

Dion Hitchens has made a range of kinetic art which also reflects notions of mauri and qi flowing throughout the universe. He draws inspiration from Buddhist and Māori philosophy and is committed to materials natural and environmentally sustainable. In doing so, he demonstrates the harmony and coherence amongst philosophical concepts that are important across cultures. Several of his works feature the Kotuku heron, an animal with spiritual significance across both cultures.

Figure 5

Paua and Chopsticks



Note. Kaan,S. (2018). *Paua and Chopsticks*. [Digital print]. Eat My Culture. AAAH2018. <https://thebigidea.nz/events/220353-aaah2018-presents-eat-my-culture>. Reprinted with artist's permission.

The artwork of Simon Kaan likewise emulates a harmonising of Chinese and Māori philosophical concepts and artistic conventions. In this digital image, which is quite different from his usual printmaking images, he refers to the cultural overlaps of kai in general and discusses the hybridity of food in Aotearoa. It also highlights a shared importance of paua across Chinese and Māori cultures.

Figure 6

Shane Hansen's contribution to Kāpuia Ngā Aho 單絲不綫



Note. Hansen, S. (2022). *Kāpuia Ngā Aho 單絲不綫*. [Hansen's object contribution]. Photograph commissioned by The Physics Room.

Shane Hansen explicitly depicts Chinese-Māori people in some of his works. His contribution to the exhibition *Kāpuia Ngā Aho* (2022) was a tiny copper wok. On the reverse it declares: “My Goong Goong was choice! He shared his culture with love, humour, and pride, teaching and sharing his yummy KAI.” On the front of the wok is a woman with a Māori moko kauae saying “Choice!” in Chinese characters.

These Māori-Chinese artists naturally reveal a harmony between Māori and Chinese philosophy and aesthetics. They perceive the coherence and depth of Māori and Chinese identities and cultures in ways that others may overlook or tend to fragment and dichotomise.

Figure 7

Searching for Tiki Hands



Note. Ngan, G. (1973). *Searching for Tiki Hands*. Private Collection, Auckland Ex Collection of Artist's Estate Cordy's. [Painting].

<https://auctions.internationalartcentre.co.nz/lots/view/4-42LJY9/guy-ngan-1926-2017-searching-for-tiki-hands>. Reprinted with permission.

Several other Aotearoa artists with Southern Chinese heritage also explore connections across cultures or peoples in unique ways. Guy Ngan 顏國 錯 (1926 – 2017), born in Aotearoa with Southern Chinese heritage, explored Chinese-Māori connections in his work. Ngan was aware of the ancient ancestral connections between Māori and Southern Chinese, and the aesthetic, cultural, and material relatedness across artforms. His own work referenced some of these similarities such as the three-fingered hand, characteristic of Māori carving, which is also an ancient form found in Southern Chinese carvings (*Tiki Hands Generations*, 2005). He also referenced other resonating forms such as taiaha (*Reserve Bank mural*, 1972) and voyaging anchor stones (Ngan, 2010). Anchor stones are objects of ancient archaeology revealing

insights into Bai Yue culture, and the bi disks and jade lingling-o rings (2000 BCE to 500 CE) are part of the maritime trade routes of the South China sea and reflect cosmological worldview and celestial navigation. The Bai Yue were known for their fine swords and weaponry. This work (Figure 7) alludes to a search for the ancient ancestral connection between Māori and the Bai Yue people, and connections found in archaeological sites which reveal the ancient tiki hand form found in Hemudu culture and red ochre pottery.

Figure 8

what can i give you in return...(長長久久)



Note. Chan, W. C. (2018). *what can i give you in return...(長長久久)*. [Mop string, cotton fibre from Whangateau, cotton seed from Whangateau]. photographed by Sam Harnett). As part of the exhibition: The River Remains; ake tonu atu at Artspace. <https://hellowaiching.wixsite.com/waiching/what-can-i-give-you-in-return>. Reprinted with artist's Permission.

Artist Wai Ching Chan employs Chinese knotting as a language to discuss relationships between people, particularly between tauwi and tangata whenua in Aotearoa. Her knotted cords are 'letters', which communicate her wishes for harmonious relationships in Aotearoa from her positioning as tauwi. Her gesture in *what can i give you in return...*(長長久久) reflects the principle of reciprocal generosity needed in a strong relationship and which is characteristic of both Chinese and Māori cultures. She uses fibre intentionally, to discuss the fibre's relationship to place, and our relationship with it.

A Temple, a Commons, and a Cave exhibition (2018) also set out to bring together artists with links throughout the Asia-Pacific in collective cross-cultural discourse. The artists use the arts as a language to translate across cultures. In *Pātai / 問題*, Wai Ching Chan collaborated with artist Arapeta Ashton (Ngāti Mahuta, Ngāti Maniapoto, Ngāti Whanaunga, Ngāti Porou, and Muriwhenua decent) using muka to discuss their friendship. Wai has also questioned the cultural boxing which the New Zealand contemporary art world has placed on her (Hancock, 2022).

Figure 9

Korari Ink Study II



Note. Lowe, K. (2020). *Korari Ink Study II*. [Ink on mulberry paper]. Silence of the Brush, Ilam Campus Gallery, School of Fine Arts, University of Canterbury, Christchurch. Reprinted with artist's permission.

Figure 10

Jade Taotie Mask



Note. Lowe, L. (2018). *Jade Taotie Mask*.. [Relief print and woodblock]. Te Waipounamu Waters of Greenstone. Tentoonstelling, Grafisch Werk uit Nieuw-Zeeland, Foundation Veerle Rooms and Vriendenkring, Antwerp, Belgium. Reprinted with artist's permission.

Artist Kim Lowe is also a descendant of 19th century Southern Chinese sojourners. Her ancestors came to Southland from Guangzhou and through Australia, and Cuba, the ancestral land of her great-grandmother. She also has European heritage, and her partner and children affiliate with Kāi Tahu and Kāti Mamoe. Kim's work is inspired by Chinese philosophy, aesthetics, and mediums, and she discusses her multicultural reality in Te Wai Pounamu. A typically 'Chinese' or 'European' box would not adequately embrace the fullness of her mixed heritage and cultural upbringing. In this work, Kim draws inspiration from Chinese calligraphy, to give form to the seed pods of the harakeke plant which is indigenous to Aotearoa. Her works draw inspiration

from Chinese arts to explore her reality in Te Wai Pounamu. These works highlight similarities of ancient Chinese and Māori forms.

Figure 11

Tui's Welcome Speech



Note. Lee, K. A. (2008). *Tui's Welcome Speech*. In *Home made: picturing Chinese settlement in New Zealand*. [Digital book]. Reprinted with artist's permission.

Dr Kerry Ann Lee has Toishan Cantonese Chinese heritage, and her work references Chinese aesthetics and objects, particularly those found in Chinese shops and restaurants in Aotearoa. Her thesis (Lee, 2008) explores Cantonese Chinese history in a European-centred New Zealand context. Her artist book welcomes the viewer with a Māori welcome speech and this iconic papercut of the double happiness Chinese character with tui birds, in front of a New Zealand shore. It is an image which welcomes harmonious prosperity and coexistence across peoples in Aotearoa.

Figure 12

Traditional Culture



Note. Wing, J. (2012). *Traditional Culture*. [Digital C Type Print. 29.7 x 42 cm.]. <https://artatrium.com.au/jason-wing/>. Reprinted with artist's permission.

Australian examples also include First Nation-Chinese descendants. *Yiban Yiban – Yellah Fellah* (2014) was an exhibition exploring artists with Chinese-First Nation heritage. Gary Lee, Sandra Hill and Jason Wing. Gary Lee attempted to reveal the diversity of Chinese men through photography to counter the prevalent perception that ‘all Chinese look the same’ (O’Riordan, 2014). Sandra Hill uses paintings and photographs to heal from the trauma of being a part of the Stolen Generation. Her paintings reveal the disgusting oppression which white foster carers placed on the Stolen Generations who, like her, her mother, and grandmother, were used as domestic helpers for white families. Jason Wing is inspired by and explores his complex cross-cultural identity. Figure 10, entitled “*Traditional Culture*” highlights the temporal, changing nature of culture. His

work and identity challenges stereotypes and fragmented perceptions of relationships in the universe.

Figure 13

From Art to Life



Note. Bulunbulun, J. & Zhou, X. (2009). *From Art to Life*. [ink, synthetic polymer and ochre on rice paper and canvas]. © Johnny Bulun Bulun / Licensed by Viscopy, 2018. <https://www.diggins.com.au/artworks/two-worlds-copy-11/>. Reprinted with artist's permission.

Another example of cross-cultural collaboration is between Zhou Xiaoping and First Nations artist Johnny Bulunbulun. While Zhou is from a different diasporic wave from central China, his work provides another example of Chinese-indigenous collaboration (Sengmany, 2006). Their collaborations reflect a mutual reciprocity, respect, and harmony in diversity. Zhou spent time living with Johnny's family in his country in Arnhem Land. Their strengths reinforce each other. There was criticism from Anglosaxon art critics of this cross-cultural collaboration (Bradley, 2012). However, the sincerity and honesty of the friendship and collaborative work allows this to be successful. Zhou saw the resonance across the role of art which takes

inspiration from nature across cultures. Their collaborative works harmonise their contrasting artistic heritages.

5.6 Discussion

Artists of Southern Chinese heritage demonstrate the capacity and tendency to emphasise harmonious coherence across multiple cultures, artistic practices, philosophical worldviews, and ethnic identities. The spiritual perspective of humanity and the natural environment embedded in indigenous worldviews continues to permeate contemporary artwork by descendants. The interconnectedness between ancestors and descendants and all of existence is particularly emphasised in their artworks. These artists are not however, speaking amongst themselves, as if they comprise a collective community. Rather, they work within their own diverse communities, promote the empowerment and inclusion of indigenous and other marginalised peoples, while simultaneously emphasising the oneness and harmony of diverse cultures and ethnic identities. The artists discussed here work within Aotearoa and Australia, countries dominated by European culture, and their artistic contributions (and identities themselves) challenge racial factionalising and dichotomies, presenting the natural harmonising of contrasting heritages.

Within the prevalent framings of diverse artists in Aotearoa, whether it be within a 'whakapapa' framing, 'indigenous', 'ethnic migrant', 'Asian' or 'Chinese' framing, the place of Southern Chinese within such categories remains ambiguous and 'erased'. While the whakapapa framing has been used to contextualise the relationships between Austronesians and Asians in a broad sense, or between Māori and China in another, the significance that the ancestral origins of Austronesians is the same ancestral homeland of 19th century Southern Chinese descendants has not been articulated. The relationship between Austronesians and Southern Chinese descendants of a shared ancient ancestry has also been overlooked. The implications for the acceptance of these associations would presumably be significant, given the importance placed on whakapapa, genealogy, and ancestral land across both peoples. If such clarifications were made, then the place of Southern Chinese within a whakapapa framing would be acknowledged.

Other prevalent framings cannot adequately represent the complexities of Southern Chinese identity. Placing artists of Southern Chinese descent within 'Chinese' or 'Asian' categories reinforces the homogenising of diverse people into stereotypes and does not assist them in breaking free from these narrow perspectives. Labelling such artists as an 'ethnic minority' or 'ethnic migrant' also does not do justice to their long intergenerational relationships with local landscapes and communities.

Exposing and exploring the diversity of Southern Chinese descendants, however, has also been overlooked, and would reveal the breadth and depth of their identities, realities, and circumstances. It would also establish connections between an otherwise non-existent community of diverse Southern Chinese descendants. While other ethnic populations often share language, culture, and religion, and maintain a sense of collectivity, the Southern Chinese descendants usually no longer have such communities, with many having lost touch with language and cultural practices and belonging to diverse religions. The Southern Chinese descendants in Aotearoa descend from diverse countries, languages, and cultures prior to their arrival here, with other cultures or ethnicities playing a more dominant role in their lives. Exposing this diversity amongst descendants will help break stereotypes and reveal living connections and patterns shared across peoples.

While Southern Chinese artists draw upon Chinese philosophy and create associations between Chinese and Māori worldviews and interpersonal relationships, scholarship on the history of Southern Chinese gold miners, market gardeners, refugees and Māori-Chinese intermarriages in Aotearoa, does not seem to be illuminated by spiritual concepts from a worldview indigenous to China, nor has the whakapapa connection been drawn upon in such conversations. Southern Chinese descendants who have been deprived of education around their ancestry and culture, as well as a public in Aotearoa, would benefit from learning about the unfolding Southern Chinese narrative illuminated by a Chinese worldview, and from an ancient whakapapa, which has remained hidden from dominant narratives. The unfolding story of the global Southern Chinese dispersal, illuminated by Chinese cosmological perspectives and the notion of continuous genealogical connection, reveals more about the spiritual identity of Southern Chinese descendants, their relationships with others and their environment.

Concepts from Chinese cosmology and philosophy resonate strongly with Māori and other worldviews indigenous to Oceania, and these timeless concepts are relevant for how we perceive the essential relationships with each other and the natural environment. This indigenised centre for cross-cultural relationships enables a harmony in diversity amongst diverse people. These concepts, such as the gradual evolution of humanity from one same spiritual and physical origin, the role of humanity to cultivate harmony in diversity, and sustained connection between ancestors in a spiritual realm and descendants operating in a physical world, also help expand narrow prevalent framings, and offer principles for the resolution of present tensions within a multicultural art world.

6. Conveying Connections

6.1 Form as the embodiment of the Spirit

In Chinese art, it is understood that forms are the embodiment of spirit (Hu, 2016). This spirit can be understood as the sentiments, feelings or spiritual forces inspiring the artist, as well as the spiritual qualities inherent in the subject (Lu, 2006; Din, n.d.). This notion of the spirit flows through the environment, interacts with the heart, mind, and hands of the artist, and produces forms (Reich, 2012). The artist consciously channels this spirit through meditation and purification of heart. This spirit can be felt by the observer of the artwork. While this is a spiritual phenomenon, its existence can be reflected in the outward physical form and perceived by the observers of the artwork. Conveying this spirit is the aim of Chinese art. Art is valued by its ability to convey this spirit rather than by its ability to mimic realistic form (Shi, 2017; Reich, 2012; Yulie & Lingwei, 2018; Liu, 2021).

Central to the notion of the spirit is constant flow, motion, and movement. It is associated with vitality, life essence and vapour. The spirit animates all life, and causes growth, and transformation. This notion of the spirit has implications for our perspective of the 19th century Southern Chinese global dispersal. The emphasis on the spirit counteracts prevalent emphasis on ethnicities, nationalities, political identities, and preoccupation with outward circumstances. A spiritual perspective of this story centralises universal spiritual capacities, principles and conditions which underlie all existence and flow throughout all borders.

The artworks in *Movements from Pearl Rivers* embody a spirit which flows between ancient Southern China and present-day Aotearoa. The timeless connection between descendants and ancestors is an underlying thread throughout all the artworks. The inseparable ties which flow from this origin continue to bind all of humanity and all beings together. This ancient lineage flows through to descendants through their objects and through woven heritage. This flow is not stagnant, it is a spirit permeating all life, animating existence, and propelling progress.

Figure 14

Cascading red cords



Note. Ma'auga. T. (2023). *Movements from Pearl Rivers*. [Detail of cascading cords]. Courtesy of Te Manawa Museum of Science and Art.

Portraying laws of the universe is a central aim of Chinese art. These laws and patterns of the universe are guides for human endeavour and spiritual cultivation (Yulie & Lingwei, 2018). The following section will articulate how the artworks in *Movements from Pearl Rivers* convey this notion of the spirit with its associated underlying concepts and laws of the universe. The inspiration from Chinese artforms will also be articulated. This section will end with a brief reflection on the exhibition *Movements from Pearl Rivers*.

The spirit as light

Light plays a significant role in various Chinese art forms such as in lanterns and shadow puppetry. Light is associated with the bounties of spiritual power and understanding. Light and shadow are complementary (yet opposing) realities and are a metaphor for the spiritual and physical aspects of reality and human identity. The duality of finite and infinite emphasised in Chinese art (Lu, 2006) also relates to the infinite potential of light and the finite limitations of shadow. The spirit is comparable to a light which shines through any form, whether it be lanterns, paper cuttings, latticework, or shadow puppets.

Various Chinese artforms use the interplay of light and shadow. Chinese lanterns are a major craft in Southern China, often used during festivals and associated with ancestral veneration, the offering of prayers, and the bringing of blessings (Li, 2018). Lanterns are made from simple materials such as paper and bamboo. Images are created which allow light to shine through silhouette shapes. Light is often associated with the spirit, with spiritual illumination and understanding, and shadow can be associated with the material dimension of existence or with physical death. Shadow puppets are another Chinese art form which creates intricate images through silhouette and light, and in which forms are brought to life through movement and light.

In *Movements from Pearl Rivers*, light shines through each work to create shadows. This accentuates the spiritual reality and forces flowing and operating beneath the physical reality, the universe, and the unfolding history of humanity. The accentuation of shadows alludes to the importance of looking beyond the outward form, to an inner reality, including in the reading of the historical narrative of the Southern Chinese-Aotearoa relationship.

Figure 15

Paper cutting scrolls detail



Note. Ma'auga. T. (2023). *Movements from Pearl Rivers*. [Paper cutting detail]. Courtesy of Te Manawa Museum of Science and Art.

The spirit as space

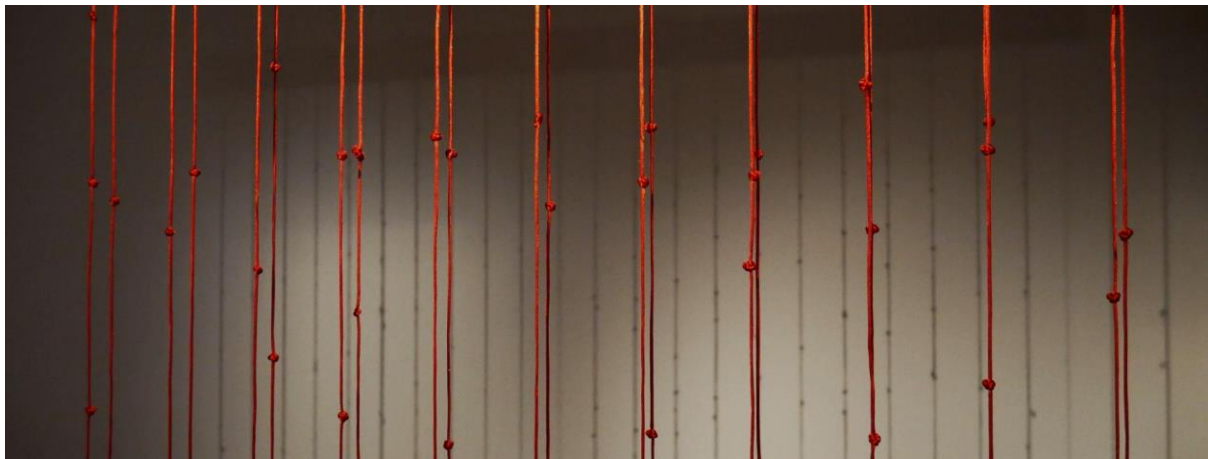
Many Chinese arts involve the juxtaposition of line and space to create form. Whether it be a paper cutting, a stone carving, or an ink painting, various Chinese art forms demonstrate the reciprocation between negative and positive space, employing the convention of generating forms from a single material. This duality also alludes to the relationship between spirit and body. The simplicity of the mediums and colours enable the viewer to focus on the philosophical truths and essence of the subject being conveyed through the work (Din, n.d.).

Each of the artworks in *Movements from Pearl Rivers* utilises space to convey the notion of the spirit. The empty space of the paper cuttings allows for the light to shine through, and to illuminate the red colour, alluding to the reflective relationship

between physical and spiritual reality. Within the cascading cords the space between lines enables moving shadows to be projected onto the wall and floor. This alludes to the spiritual forces which are flowing and operating throughout the universe. The space between the objects contributed by Southern Chinese descendants enables a wandering of the eye in an organic flowing manner. This is reflective of the diversity of the journeys and stories which have occurred across the sea between ancestors and descendants. The patterns of the woven objects manifest the orderliness and perfection of a united space. Strands are woven so tightly that there is little space between them, they have become one in form. The way that strands are collectively positioned and relating with one and another creates a new, patterned space. The spotlight shines upon each woven object to highlight the ancestral heritage of each craft object which is usually regarded as an ordinary, and functional object.

Figure 16

Red cascading cords detail



Note. Ma'auga. T. (2023). *Movements from Pearl Rivers*. [Detail of red cascading cords]. Courtesy of the artist.

The space between all the artworks is arranged in relation to each other to create a sense of balance, harmony, and symmetry. The papercut scrolls are suspended in line with the cascading cords. Their arrangement reflects a relationship and an underlying law of ascent and descent between Heaven and Earth. The room carries the spirit of the ancestral hall in its emphasis on ancestral connection and guidance. The items on the wall from which one enters relate more directly to recent ancestors, while the rear

and side walls reflect an ancestral, ever-flowing spirit which is unfurling and guiding the evolution of humanity. This arrangement reflects the relationship between us as living descendants and our ancestors who interact with us through a spiritual reality.

Figure 17

Gallery space of Movements from Pearl Rivers exhibition



Note. Ma'auga. T. (2023). *Movements from Pearl Rivers*. [Photo of gallery space from the back wall]. Courtesy of the artist.

The spirit in motion

Spirit is often conveyed through a sense of movement. This sense of movement could be generated by brush strokes, the characteristics of lines, or the rhythms of patterns. In some Chinese arts, actual kinetic movement is generated. There is a type of Chinese lantern which rotates because of the heat generated by the flame. This lantern allows silhouette images to rotate and move throughout the space. Another type of lantern is lifted into the air through the heat of the flame. Other lanterns are made to float on

water. These lanterns combine light, silhouette, fibre, and movement to create a symbolic gesture of prayer.

In the works created for *Movements from Pearl Rivers*, the movement of cords is generated by the invisible forces of electricity and gravity. Like the spirit, these forces animate the movement of form. The movement of lines made by the cords follow a pattern of descent and ascent. This is a basic pattern of the universe. The continuous interplay of descending and ascending elements between the celestial realm and Earth is the cause of various forms of life. This pattern is reflected in the social progress of humanity as well, which continuously rises and falls through periods of integration and disintegration.

The paper cuttings in *Movements from Pearl Rivers* are left hanging freely, so that the 'breath' or the breeze can cause movement in them, and so that shadows can be projected through the silhouette shapes. The gesture of the scrolls implies a sense of movement and unfurling, and they are placed vertically, in conversation with the cascading cords and the relationship between Heaven and Earth.

Figure 18

Paper cutting scrolls



Note. Ma'auga. T. (2023). *Movements from Pearl Rivers*. [Paper cutting scrolls suspended in the gallery]. Courtesy of the artist.

The transforming spirit

According to the Yijing philosophy of change, the cosmos is one organism characterised by continuity, wholeness, and dynamism (Hon, 2019). All members are an organic part of this whole universe. It is understood that our spiritual and physical realities, our inner conditions, and outward circumstances, have an organic relationship. Change is a central characteristic of all life within the universe. Periods of disintegration and integration are understood as natural elements of progress not only within the natural universe but also in the life of humanity. Humanity is on a long evolutionary journey propelled by these movements of ebb and flow, learning, and maturation in correspondence with the cosmic forces and cycles in the universe.

The change and evolution of the universe is generated by a constant flow and movement of the spirit, by human effort, by divine confirmation, and by periods of ascent and descent. These concepts underpin all artistic elements in *Movements from Pearl Rivers*; the cascading and descending cords, the paper cuttings, the woven items, and the objects contributed by Southern Chinese descendants.

Figure 19

Jade and pearls on silk and cotton



Note. Ma'auga. T. (2023). *Movements from Pearl Rivers*. [Detail of silk and cotton cords]. Courtesy of the artist.

The oneness of the spirit

In many Chinese artforms, images of the natural universe are intricately carved out of a single paper, stone, shell, bone, or wood. At other times such images are sophisticatedly woven out of tiny fibres, or intricately embroidered. Much of Chinese arts involve exquisite detail and refinement. This convention of carving the wholeness of the universe out of a single material emphasises the oneness of the universe, and the unity of all beings.

Figure 20

Stone carving



Note. Ma'auga. T. (2023). *Movements from Pearl Rivers*. [Carved stone from contributor]. Courtesy of the artist.

The artworks in *Movements from Pearl Rivers* draw upon this convention. The paper cuttings were carved out of a single paper, which for practical presentation, was divided into six scrolls. The cords which cascade were twisted from fibres to create individual, long, cords joined into a loop around a rotating rod. The objects contributed by Southern Chinese descendants are placed together on the same wall in relation to each other, to present them as descendants of a shared ancestry. The woven objects in themselves manifest the creation of a whole object from the interweaving of tiny individual strands. The exhibition space is a site-specific installation of a body of works.

The spirit of the artist

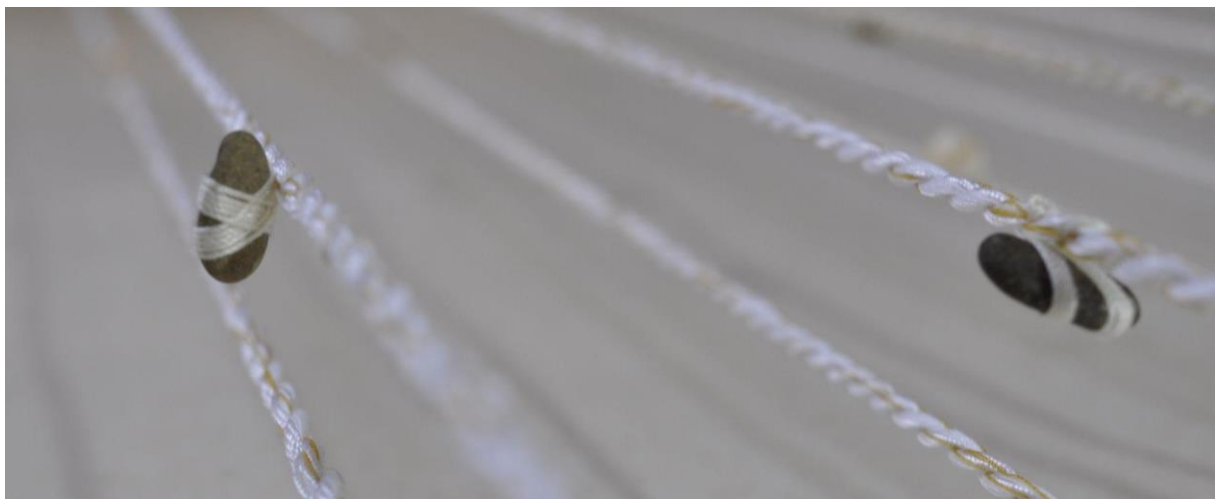
The movement of the spirit is also shown through the presence of the hand made. The artist becomes like a hollow reed for an inspired spirit to flow through, enabling the

formation of patterns and creations. From a spiritual perspective, one can look at a woven fan, and perceive the spirit which caused the artist to take such care in preparing, arranging, and weaving strands into a new form. One could likewise look at the cords, and the careful attention to twisting and knotting fibres and objects and perceive a spirit of reflection which motivated the creation of the forms. In the paper cuttings, one could perceive the gesture of the hand and the knife, and an intimate meditation upon the subject by the artist.

This notion of the spirit is conveyed in handmade objects of *Movements from Pearl Rivers*, as well as in the objects contributed by Southern Chinese descendants and their voice, shared in their written statements.

Figure 21

Stones on silk and cotton cords detail



Note. Ma'auga. T. (2023). *Movements from Pearl Rivers*. [Pebbles on silk and cotton cord detail]. Courtesy of the artist.

Conveying the spirit through paper cutting

Paper cutting, paper making, and illumination of paper belong to an ancient Chinese heritage which had its own unique development in Southern China (Huang, 2014). Paper cutting is a folk art, often created by women, and it requires simple materials easily available in the home. Paper and bark cloth are often made from bark, straw, or rice. Paper cuttings are usually created for seasonal festivals, and are associated with

prayers, ancestral veneration, and burial customs. Paper cuttings can be placed on windows allowing the light to shine through images and words. Cuttings tend to portray animals, nature, and characters which are symbolic of prosperity, hopes, and values. The various images are cut from a single paper, demonstrating the interconnectedness and oneness of reality.

While the paper cuttings in *Movements from Pearl Rivers* draw inspiration from customary Southern Chinese paper cutting, the symbolism, style and techniques used are not customary. Rather, they have been developed independently, in Aotearoa, communicating within a local discourse and visual language. This has been a conscious decision, but also a necessary one, since the opportunity to learn customary folk paper cutting from Southern China has rarely been possible for overseas descendants.

Figure 22

Paper cutting segment



Note. Ma'auga. T. (2023). *Movements from Pearl Rivers*. [Paper cutting detail]. Courtesy of the artist.

Conveying the spirit through scrolls

Chinese calligraphy and paintings customarily come in the form of a scroll (Sze, 1963). The paper scroll convention dates to the Han dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE), which evolved from bamboo pole inscriptions traditionally sewn together with hemp, silk, or leather. Chinese characters are traditionally read from top to bottom, right to left. The vertical scrolls associate the upper part with heaven and the lower section with earth.

Horizontal style scrolls were used for viewing portions of a painting on a table, unrolling a portion at a time and then storing it away again. Hanging vertical scrolls are also intended for temporary display with the ability to roll up and store the scroll away after a time. Like the evolution of humanity, scrolls gradually unravel or unfold to reveal a process of change. Throughout this evolution, old ways become rolled up as new ones simultaneously roll out.

Figure 23

Paper cutting scrolls



Note. Ma'auga. T. (2023). *Movements from Pearl Rivers*. [Paper cutting scrolls suspended from bamboo]. Courtesy of the artist.

In *Movements from Pearl Rivers*, the paper cuttings have been suspended from a singular bamboo pole because they belong to the same unfolding piece of paper and story. They have been separated into two sets of three for practical presentation within the exhibition space. They unravel from above the height of the viewer and extend to the floor. These cuttings have not been placed on silk or paper but have been left free

to allow the light to shine through them and create shadows. The images wind around the bamboo at the top and at the bottom to indicate an infinite process of growth.

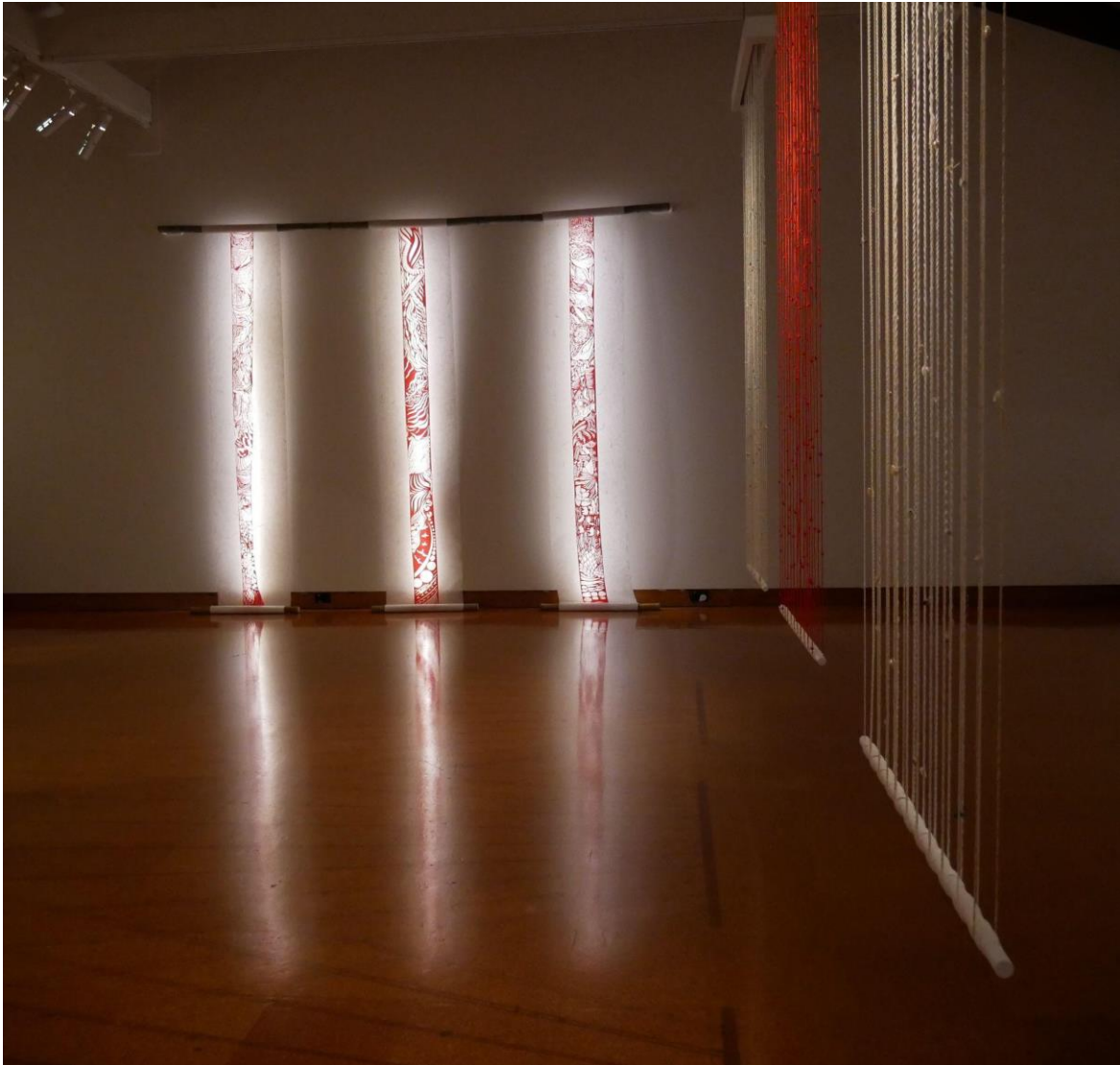
Conveying the spirit through cords

Since ancient times, people in China were making and knotting cords to mark genealogy, record history, and communicate (Yang, 2018). Weaving material culture shaped Chinese language and worldview of the cosmos and can be used as a symbol for the relationships within space (Pankenier, 2015). Chinese knotting evolved to become an intangible heritage which includes intricate mnemonic knots for adorning clothing, objects, and places, offering hopes, blessings, and symbolising aspirations. Knots and cords speak of strong relationships, intermarriage, love, friendship, and reciprocity. Cords, nets, lashing, knots, and weaving are central to the material culture connecting ancient and present Southern China and Aotearoa. Southern China maritime culture relies heavily on this fibre tradition. Among the main traditional fibre sources in Southern China were banana, hibiscus, ramie, coconut coir, windmill palm coir, sugar palm fibre, and other bast and leaf fibres (Buckley, 2017; Zhai, 2014; Manguin, 1993).

Cords are used in *Movements from Pearl Rivers* to convey connections within the universe, within genealogical lines, within the continuous movement of people, culture, and generations. The notion of weaving upon a loom with threads is alluded to in the cascading cords suspended in space. The loom, which is normally used horizontally in the backstrap type, is turned vertically, to discuss a relationship between Heaven and Earth, processes of ascent and descent, and migration. The processes used to create the cords for this sculpture involved threading long spools of thread around rods. This process is like the process of preparing threads for these backstrap looms common to some parts of Southern China, Southeast Asia, and Oceania. This material culture is also present in the imagery within the paper cuttings.

Figure 24

Cascading cords



Note. Ma'auga. T. (2023). *Movements from Pearl Rivers*. [Cascading cords in gallery space]. Courtesy of the artist.

Conveying the spirit through weaving

Fibre weaving such as bamboo and straw are widespread in Southern China and reveal cultural connection with Austronesian fibre weaving. Small Chinese objects such as hats, fans and steam pots are some of the objects which are commonly found in Aotearoa and Oceania. Southern China also has bamboo and reed mats, sails, and walls with close associations to weaving from Southeast Asia, Oceania, and Aotearoa (Li, & Chandhasa, 2022; Liu, et al., 2018; Wu, 2021). Fibre processing, and thread weaving on looms is an ancient Chinese artform, which connects Southern China to Southeast Asia and Oceania (Buckley, 2017). This is an artform normally led by women, who create clothing and objects of adornment, protection, and love for their family. Any type of weaving involves numerous strands becoming inseparably integrated, reflecting beautiful patterns. In this way too, weaving becomes a metaphor and guide for our relationships within the universe as aligned with a Chinese view of the universe (Pankenier, 2015).

An overseas Southern Chinese descendant is more likely to have experience weaving with local communities where they live and using materials indigenous to the land they are in, than materials and processes indigenous to Southern China. Descendants situated in Oceania, often have little interaction with customary artforms of China, except through various objects found in homes or Chinese businesses. Descendants become familiar with some of these objects over the years in these settings.

The bamboo steam pot, for example, has been an object which many descendants grow up using at Southern Chinese yum cha restaurants or at home. The object reveals a weaving material culture from Southern China, where yum cha cuisine originates. Another object is the Chinese conical woven hat. This hat, and others like it, can easily be obtained at any Chinese dollar store, and are commonly used in Oceania and Southeast Asia as it protects the body well, when working in the sun or rain. It reveals a weaving material culture as well as a rural working culture from Southern China. Another object is the Chinese hand-woven fan. These fans look very similar to the ones found in Oceania, and they are very useful in tropical climates. While China, her languages, and people have been inaccessible to many overseas descendants, these art

objects have been a source of education and connection, and a transmission of spirit, in themselves.

Figure 25

Southern Chinese conical hat



Note. Ma'auga. T. (2023). *Movements from Pearl Rivers*. [Woven from harakeke]. Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 26

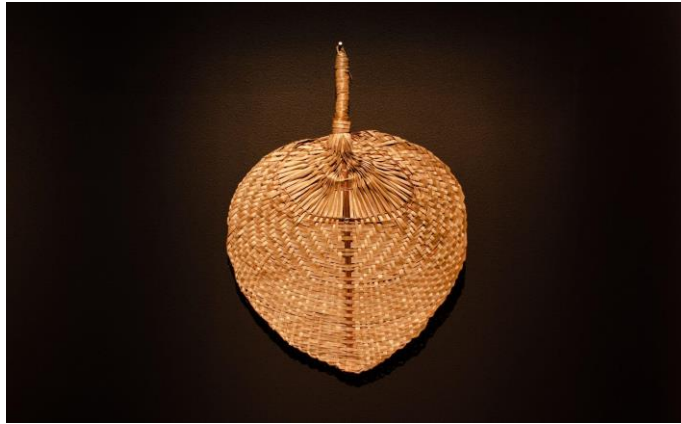
Southern Chinese Steam Basket



Note. Ma'auga. T. (2023). *Movements from Pearl Rivers*. [Woven from harakeke, with kiekie and pīngao strands]. Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 27

Southern Chinese Fan



Note. Ma'auga. T. (2023). *Movements from Pearl Rivers*. [Woven from harakeke].
Courtesy of the artist.

These three objects: the hat, the steam pot and the fan have been woven from harakeke and placed with *Movements from Pearl Rivers* to highlight the interweaving of cultures, peoples, and places which has occurred through an ancient weaving heritage as well as a more recent line of descent.

Figure 28

Woven series



Note. Ma'auga. T. (2023). *Movements from Pearl Rivers*. [Woven series]. Image
courtesy of Te Manawa Museum of Science and Art.

The spirit through colour and material

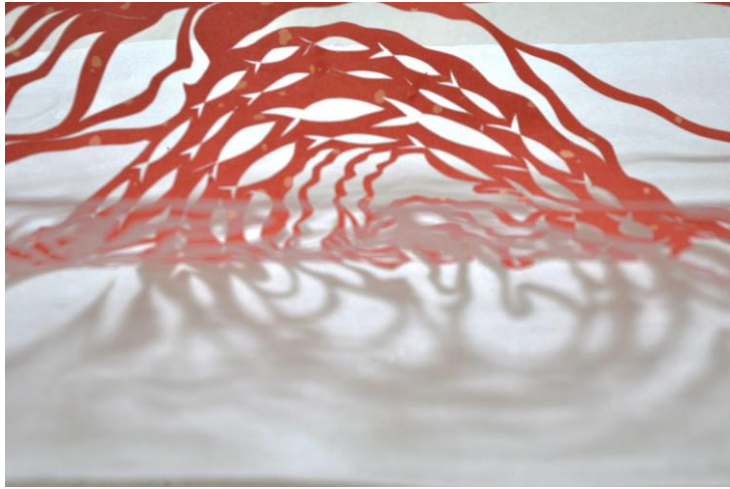
In Chinese culture, white is associated with the spirit and with death. Red is associated with prosperity, fertility and vitality. These colours are employed in *Movements from Pearl Rivers* to reference these cultural connotations, and to emphasise the coherent relationship between the spiritual and physical dimensions of humanity's evolution. The natural green and browns of the bamboo and harakeke are to ground the narrative in terms of place, and our relationship with the Earth.

The materials chosen for the artworks all demonstrate significance and connection within this story. The papers used are made from the Paper Mulberry tree and from rice. Two very significant plants of these regions. The Paper Mulberry tree has an ancient origin in Southern China and migrated throughout Southeast Asia and Oceania. It has been used since ancient times for making bark cloth, as well as paper, throughout these regions. Rice has a less ancient history in these regions, but the cultivation of rice has become a central practice in many parts of these regions, and rice has become a staple food alongside taro and tubers. Both mulberry and rice paper have a history in China of being used for calligraphy, and communication of knowledge. Rice paper is an easily accessible and cheap resource from China and is often the type of paper used for paper cutting and lantern making.

The cuttings were carved from rice paper, and they overlay mulberry paper to demonstrate recent and ancient ancestry. Rice paper is more practical for cutting as it is thin and cheap. Mulberry paper has been placed beneath the rice paper cuttings as a protection when rolling up, but also references this ancient and shared heritage.

Figure 29

Paper cutting detail fish

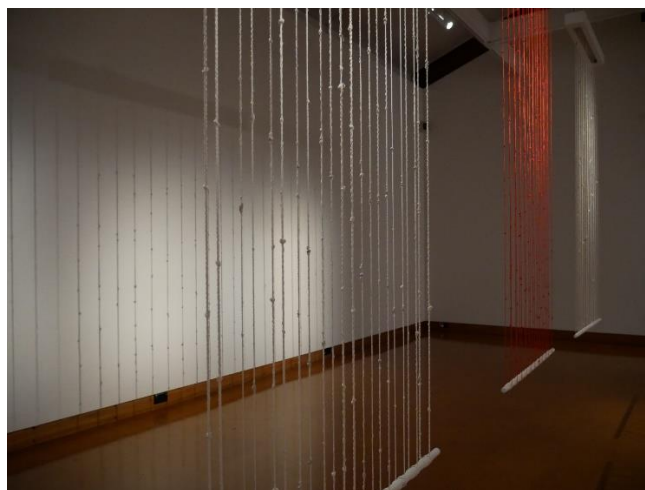


Note. Ma'auga. T. (2023). *Movements from Pearl Rivers*. [Paper cutting detail]. Courtesy of the artist.

The cascading cords carry with them a number of materials which have played their own important roles in the historical movements flowing from Southern China. Jade, cowrie shells, clay beads, pearls, and river stones are all significant to this story which spans from the rivers of one coast, across seas, to the rivers of another.

Figure 30

Clay beads on bamboo and banana fibre cords



Note. Ma'auga. T. (2023). *Movements from Pearl Rivers*. [Bamboo and banana cascading cords]. Courtesy of the artist.

The fibres used to make the cords were a range of fibres relevant to Southern China. They included silk, banana fibre, bamboo, cotton, and nylon Chinese knotting fibre. Each fibre has a unique heritage within Southern China.

Spirit through sound

Ancient Chinese philosophers conceptualise music making as an act of harmonising oneself with one's environment and the cosmos (Park, 2015; Mazur; 2015). The central concepts of harmony and beauty in Chinese philosophy find their source in music. It is regarded as a tool for self-cultivation which can uplift human emotions and stimulate cognitive perception. Employing music within the immersive installation was therefore a key feature of *Movements from Pearl Rivers*. It was decided that the sound most appropriate within the exhibition to communicate, resonate, and echo the artworks, would come through a bamboo flute.

The bamboo flute has been in China since ancient times (Yang, 2021; Zhu & Rodloytuk, 2022), and the sound which it produces carries the ancestral breath of this heritage. The sound of the breath, whether through flute or whistling, has had an association with healing, meditation, communication with the spiritual realm, and of harmony with the winds of cosmic order (Brindley, 2012). The bamboo flute and the bamboo nose flute in particular, represent another connection across Southern China, Southeast Asia, and Oceania as this is a customary instrument found across these regions (Mu, 1997; CGTN, 2021; Provine, et al., 2017; Blench, 2004; Sengaroun, n.d.; Vietnamnet Global, 2019; Hsu, 2020). The playing of this instrument has been treated reverently across cultures, and is associated with prayer, ancestral veneration, and other forms of communication. The use and production of the instrument is similarly suffering from the forces of modernisation which been threatening its preservation.

The bamboo flute audio chosen for this exhibition were a series of recordings produced by musician Saia Tu'itahi. Saia's research into the fangufangu bamboo nose flute of Tonga includes the construction of his own fangufangu flutes from bamboo grown in Aotearoa, and the synthesis of hip hop and fangufangu music. His research similarly

explores the harmonising of the multicultural and intergenerational aspects of his identity.

The bamboo of Saia's fangufangu, while grown in Aotearoa, and a different species from the kofe bamboo of Tonga, carries the breath, and shapes the sound, which are heard in these recordings. It conveys the sound of this whenua, in Aotearoa, as well as an ancestral breath that has migrated across Southeast Asia and Oceania from Southern China. When placed within the *Movements from Pearl Rivers* exhibition, these elements speak to the central concepts of movement, migration, ancient ancestral connection, and the flow of a spirit.

When asked why he was happy for his recordings to be played in the background of the exhibition, Saia replied:

Theres a couple of reasons. Firstly understanding the kaupapa that the music was going to be used for aligns well with the fangufangu. The bamboo in Oceania would have arrived from Asia and along with it the bamboo nose flute so the music is a great audible representation of those connections that your exhibition is attempting to draw. Secondly relationships is something I've been reflecting on recently and how its probably the most valuable thing people of Oceania have. From a historical perspective, strong relationships would've assisted people migrating and settling in the Pacific. And I think its through our shared relationship ... that it gives me joy to be able to help out when you reach out. (Tu'itahi, S. personal communication, 7 June 2023)

The spirit through symbols

A number of symbols of connection were used in the paper cuttings and cascading threads. Many of these were creatures, plants, and material culture that have been significant for Southern China and Austronesian countries.

In portraying these symbols, achieving realism was not important. Rather, the task of carving out symbols involved calling to mind certain memories and a sense of spirit associated with these symbols within the context of this Southern Chinese-Aotearoa narrative. While these memories and experiences of connection have imbued the artwork with a certain spirit, they have not been articulated in writing this thesis. Each symbol has personal connections and wider cross-cultural connections. To elaborate on each symbol would transgress the limits of this writing, and perhaps belabour unnecessary detail. It is more important to simply acknowledge that all of the images in the papercut scrolls have a significant reason for their inclusion, and that they play their own role in the connections across these regions. A few of these symbols which fall into the categories of plant, animal, and material culture will be articulated as an example.

Animals

The paper cuttings include a diversity of symbols of connection. The animals indigenous to these regions find their own special place within cosmological narratives. Their presence or movement is often associated with spiritual phenomena or messages from the spiritual realm. Many of these animals have an ancient history, tied with migration across the South China Sea and Oceania. Because Southern China falls within the same tropical zone as Southeast Asia and Oceania, there are many animals and plants that have an important shared history here. The ocean is central to the connection across Southern China and Aotearoa. It is integral to the culture and life of the peoples of both places. The account of animal symbols will thus begin with a few examples of animals of the sea which have been incorporated into the paper cuttings. The following list is not exhaustive and does not cover all of the creatures and

symbols of connection included in the paper cuttings but offers an example of the types of symbols included and their reasons for inclusion.

Animals of the Sea

The turtle is one of these, as some species traverse from the South China Sea to Oceania and Aotearoa. The turtle has been an important animal in Southern China and Oceania since ancient times. It is linked with cosmological narratives, with the shape of the turtle associated with the shape of the universe (Allan, 1991). In the story of Nuwa, the legs of the turtle were used as pillars to hold up the round heaven. It has also been a symbol for the Chinese sojourner (*haiguī*) in Chinese vocabulary as they travel great distances. The turtle maintains an important place in Oceania.

Figure 31

Paper cutting segment with shadow



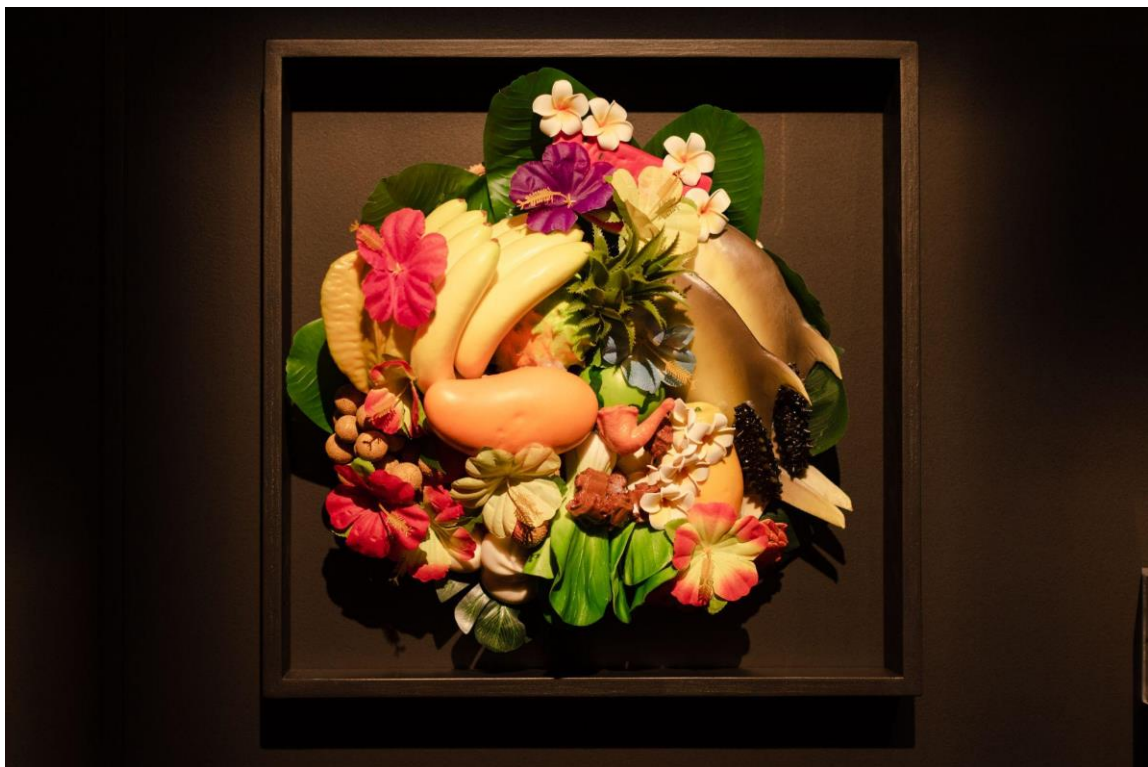
Note. Ma'auga. T. (2023). *Movements from Pearl Rivers*. [Paper cutting detail]. Courtesy of the artist.

Along with turtles, whales migrate throughout the South China Sea and Oceania. Some species can be found in Southern China and Aotearoa, such as the Ginkgo-toothed beaked whale (Rosso, et al., 2021). They are often associated with migration narratives, and as helpers of humanity.

Numerous other creatures are delicacies in Southern Chinese cuisine and Oceania. The sea cucumber has been a prized cuisine item for Southern Chinese and is found in tropical reefs. In Oceania they have a plentiful presence, and it is well known locally that Chinese love to eat these. Fish are very important in Southern China, Southeast Asia and Oceania. They are a central part of the diet. Fish heads and fisheyes are the most valued part of the fish across cultures. Dried fish is also cherished throughout these regions. The sea cucumber, fish and crab are included in the food platter object offered by the Mckenzie-Joe family.

Figure 32

Food Platter object contribution



Note: Ma'auga. T. (2023). Movements from Pearl Rivers. [Food platter connecting Southern China and Oceania. Object contributed by the Mckenzie-Joe whānau]. Courtesy of Te Manawa Museum of Science and Art.

Amphibians

Amphibians such as lizards, frogs and snakes are significant throughout these regions as well, and they are often incorporated into cosmological narratives. The Chinese crocodile lizard (*Shinisaurus crocodilurus*) from Southern China features in the papercuts. Snakes are another significant animal across these regions. The snake is linked with cosmological narratives in Southern China and Southeast Asia (Yulo, 2020). They also have a major presence in Chinese cuisine, tracing back to the ancient Bai Yue (Wu, 2021).

Figure 33

Paper cutting segment animals



Note. Ma'auga. T. (2023). *Movements from Pearl Rivers*. [Detail of paper cutting].
Courtesy of the artist.

Animals of the sky

Bats, albatross, and herons are also significant across these regions. The Frigate bird (*Fregata minor*) is found throughout South China, Southeast Asia, and Oceania (Birdfinding.info, 2021). The Bar-tailed Godwits migrate between Southern China and Aotearoa (Royal Netherlands Institute for Sea Research, 2022). These animals are used as symbols of migration and ancient spiritual connection between people and place. The heron has spiritual value in both Māori and Chinese cultures and is often a subject in Chinese artwork. The bat is a significant animal across regions and plays an important role in the natural ecosystems and the migration of seeds. Bats are also a common subject in Chinese art and are associated with longevity, prosperity, and happiness. Each animal has their own story, narratives, and cultural value.

Figure 34

Paper cutting segment



Note. Ma'auga. T. (2023). *Movements from Pearl Rivers*. [Detail of paper cutting]. Courtesy of the artist.

Plants

Certain fruits and plants, such as the papaya, banana, taro, sugarcane, sago, and paper mulberry, have themselves had a long evolutionary history which evolved in

conjunction with their environment (Zheng et al., 2014; Wu, et al., 2019; Wu, 2021; Deng, et al., 2022). This concept runs throughout my artworks. Key subtropical and tropical foods have shared importance across these regions and have been included in the paper cuttings. The types and amounts of food with a shared historical importance across Southern China to Oceania are too numerous to recount. A few have been mentioned here, to show the ideas behind the visual inclusion of certain types of plants in my paper cuttings. Each plant has its own evolution, and its own migration story relevant to this narrative.

Figure 35

Paper cutting segment



Note. Ma'auga. T. (2023). *Movements from Pearl Rivers*. [Detail of paper cutting].
Courtesy of the artist.

Material culture

Shells have been incorporated into the cascading threads, conveying the travel of material culture and the importance of shells in cultural and monetary exchange in this region. Cowrie Shells are a significant artefact that demonstrate the exchange of culture and value from Oceania into China. These shells fascinatingly became significant in ancient inland, mountainous regions of China, likely through cultural exchange through the Indochina peninsula (Yang, 2011). The shells were found in abundance in graves throughout these regions, in the mouths of skeletons. They were stamped into bronze sculptures and replicated through bronze casts and carvings. Historians believe they were associated with monetary and cultural value. The gifting of cowrie shells continues to be an important practice in Oceania. Some of these gifted shells have been placed within the cascading threads to acknowledge this connection and this history of the cowrie shell as a valuable object of cross-cultural exchange and gifting.

Figure 36

Silk and cotton cascading cords in gallery



Note. Ma'auga. T. (2023). *Movements from Pearl Rivers*. [Detail of cowrie shells and pearls on cords]. Courtesy of the artist.

Oyster shells which are one of the main shells of the Pearl River Delta, are significant to Southern Chinese. In Guangzhou, Guangdong, and Fujian, entire houses are walled with oyster shells, and oyster shells are used to decorate windows (Wang & Tong, 2013; Tang, & Ji, 2022). The internationally renowned oyster sauce originated in this region (Watson, 2022). In the past, some villages in the Pearl River Delta centred their community life around oyster farming. Oysters are also significant throughout Oceania, and these shells are incorporated into the sculptures. Mother of Pearl Shell is another significant shell across these regions. In Southern China, the shell is ornately carved for ornamental objects, and inlaid onto pictures and objects. The shell is also used throughout Oceania as an inlay and for jewellery. This shell is also included in the sculptures for this reason. Such shells are the environment which generates pearls.

Figure 37

Carved mother of pearl shell in tree root



Note. Ma'auga. T. (2023). *Movements from Pearl Rivers*. [Carved shell offered by a contributor]. Courtesy of the artist.

Pearls are used in the sculpture because they reference the Pearl River Delta (珠江三角洲), a significant ancestral site for Austronesians and Southern Chinese. Pearls are also valued across cultures as a beautiful treasure of exchange, and a symbol for purity which has been obtained through crisis. Pearl is a common name amongst Southern Chinese descendants, and in that way the pearl is a symbol of the hopes, sufferings, sadness, and journey of mothers from the Pearl River Delta.

Figure 38

Pearl and jade on silk and cotton cords detail



Note. Ma'auga. T. (2023). *Movements from Pearl Rivers*. [Detail of pearl and jade on silk and cotton cords]. Courtesy of the artist.

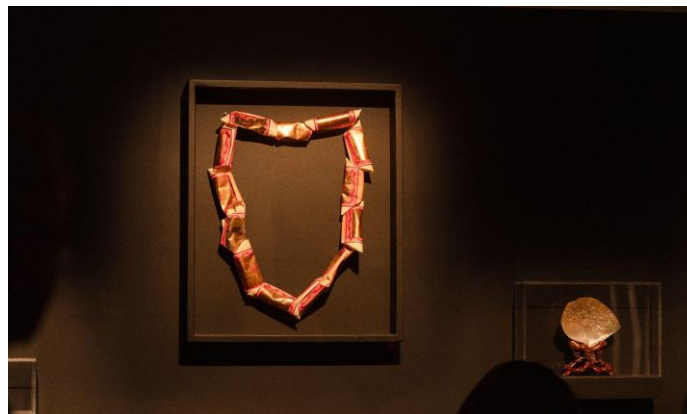
All of these symbols are significant aspects of ancestral heritage which connect us across these regions and have been incorporated into the image bank of the paper cuttings.

An ancestral spirit

Ancestral connection is the central theme in all the work in *Movements from Pearl Rivers*. The cascading cords and notched rods reference ancient Chinese knotting and rods used for recording genealogical connection. The mixing of fibres in these cords also refers to our ancestral movements and transformations over time, through migration, intermarriage, and war. The long paper cut scrolls refer to lineage, our gradual evolution from cosmological origins, and our kinship relationship with the natural environment. The contributions from descendants of Southern Chinese highlights their connection with their Southern Chinese ancestry, with each other, and with the local community in Manawatū, Aotearoa. The woven hat, steam pot, and fan are objects which are familiar to Southern Chinese descendants in Aotearoa, which connect Southern China with Oceania. By weaving them from harakeke, a connection is acknowledged between Southern Chinese ancestry and descendants living in Aotearoa. The woven items are personal objects and allude to the notion of an ancestor.

Figure 39

Paper money garland made by contributor



Note. Ma’auga. T. (2023). *Movements from Pearl Rivers*. [Paper money garland made by a contributor]. Image courtesy of Te Manawa Museum of Science and Art.

6.2 A collective spirit

One element of the exhibition was connecting with diverse Southern Chinese descendants local to the Manawatū region. This was an essential aspect of the exhibition in order to link the cosmological, historical, and spiritual narrative with the lives of the present generation. I happened to meet many of these people naturally as neighbours and acquaintances meet. During such encounters we would make Southern Chinese connections and share our complex stories. For almost all these friends, the Southern Chinese ancestry was simultaneously distant and intimate, perceivable and invisible, disconnected, yet rooted.

The reasons for this sense of disconnection are numerous and justified. Sheer distance across places and generations is one reason. It has also been necessary for Southern Chinese around the globe to quieten their ethnic heritage amidst Sinophobic racism and ignorance. Southern Chinese ancestors left their homelands in traumatic war-torn conditions, and much of the past was not conveyed to descendants. The Anglicizing of Chinese names also resulted in intergenerational name change and disconnection with ancestral names, or knowledge of ancestral villages. Subsequent loss of language and assimilation into dominant local cultures during a time which preceded high-speed communication and travel also furthered the disconnection with ancestral homelands.

Despite the disconnection that overseas descendants may feel with Southern China, they themselves represent a living connection. The complex diversity of descendants, the multiplicity of their heritages, and the differences in the way they maintain a connection to Southern Chinese culture and to their local environment, must be accepted as the reality of what it means to be an overseas Southern Chinese descendant today. This complexity, diversity, and adaptability are characteristics and strengths of overseas Southern Chinese descendants. The ability to harmonise perspectives and to perceive oneness across diversity in the face of racism is another characteristic capacity of overseas Southern Chinese descendants. This is also a feature of constructive resilience in the face of oppression (Tavernaro-Haidarian, 2018).

Movements from Pearl Rivers brought together eight diverse descendants of Southern Chinese ancestry and highlighted their diversity and commonality. The bringing to the

surface of shared heritage was an act of strengthening connections that flow between Southern China and Aotearoa, between descendants and ancestors, and between each other. The objects and statements offered by these contributors are attached in the appendix of this thesis.

Figure 40

Object contributions by descendants of Southern China



Note. Ma'auga. T. (2023). *Movements from Pearl Rivers*. [Object contributions by descendants of Southern China]. Courtesy of the artist.

Activating the artwork through conversation

A significant component of the artwork has been the conversations which surround both the making and exhibiting of the work. At the opening of *Movements from Pearl Rivers*, public acknowledgment was made of the Chinese support of the construction of the Rangitaane marae; Te Hotumanawa, and stories were given surrounding the

Chinese lions and paintings situated at that marae. Connections between artistic culture and genealogy of Māori and Southern Chinese were also acknowledged; connecting the Manawatū river to the rivers which flow from Southern China. A sharing of stories by several Southern Chinese descendants who contributed to the exhibition with other local residents also enabled a space for fostering connections and for unheard stories to be told. Further, residents with Oceanic and Southern Chinese ancestries discussed their heritage and found that the exhibition renewed a sense of pride in their Southern Chinese identity. Following one of these spaces, one of the contributors offered an additional object, a hand-embroidered wedding dowry, to be placed above the doorway of the exhibition. She arranged for this, along with a sign to be installed, directly with the curator of the museum. This demonstrated a spirit of generosity, thoughtfulness, and a sense of ownership over the exhibition. I was touched that she would thoughtfully offer such a treasure, and that she could take initiative to embrace this space as hers. These are a few examples of the conversations surrounding the artwork which will continue to arise in connection to the exhibition.

Conversations served to strengthen connections, highlighting the role of art in fostering harmonious relationships as well as the inseparable relationship between art and conversation. With the temporal nature of site-specific installation within a gallery space, there is a need for spaces to be created for collective conversation to occur alongside the artwork. Literature and online spaces are a wider-reaching alternative to in-person community spaces. It is coherent with the conceptual framework based on Chinese worldview to consider the organic interconnectedness of local and global conversations.

The conceptual framework and background research embedded the creation of artwork with a spiritual foundation and purpose. The result of this creative research was thus the creation of an art installation conducive to spiritual contemplation. The exhibition revealed insights into the role of arts in promoting collective conversation within the community, and in provoking spiritually uplifting sentiments. The art installation created a spiritual atmosphere reflective of the orientation through which it was created.

While the exhibition *Movements from Pearl Rivers* is the culmination of this research project, it represents a point along an endless journey of learning, and a small contribution to the rivers of discourse flowing through the world. While I was striving for excellence in my artwork, I was also learning according to my current capacity and time. There is an honesty in exhibiting my work, including its imperfections, which speaks to the nature of this research as a journey to unravel distant connections.

7. Conclusion

This research aimed to unravel and retrace the connecting threads between Southern China and Aotearoa. Threads of connection between philosophical worldviews, ancestry, history, culture, material, and arts were conveyed through this creative study. The exhibition *Movements from Pearl Rivers* contributes to the strengthening of connections between Aotearoa and Southern China, between descendants and ancestors, and between one another. Highlighting such connections has implications for the way that cross-cultural relationships, identities, and art practices in Aotearoa can be framed in new, more widely embracing, and coherent ways.

Constructing a conceptual framework from a Chinese cosmological worldview to use as a guide for creating artwork and a lens for reading literature was a necessary approach to identifying connections between Southern China and Aotearoa. The Chinese cosmological worldview has been absent or quiet in both overseas Southern Chinese and contemporary art discourses but also has numerous concepts and principles to offer a framing of cross-cultural relationships. A return to a Chinese worldview to guide an approach to artmaking, was also necessary in order to narrate the Southern China-Aotearoa story, and to place two perspectives positioned from two homelands into conversation with each other.

While many of the connections were unknown at the outset, there was a trust that numerous threads could be traced between Southern China and Aotearoa. It was astounding, in many instances, how closely connected or resonating some cosmological narratives, worldviews, arts, culture, materials, histories and DNA can be across the seas. The stories of Southern Chinese descendants in Manawatū revealed complex migration routes and intermarriages that were rather obscured at the outset. These stories also revealed connections amongst descendants who were not necessarily associated with each other previously.

The methodology employed enabled the creation of artwork which highlighted notions of the spirit, and the spiritual processes underlying the narrative of the unfolding evolution of Southern China leading to the global dispersal which reached Aotearoa.

The small sample of stories of diverse Southern Chinese descendants provided a glimpse of the shared complexity amongst each person's heritages and histories. This area has potential for further exploration. There is plenty of space for diverse descendants to share their perspectives of cross-cultural connections, to uncover their complex heritages and histories, and to articulate their experiences as overseas descendants. This sharing would lead to the unravelling of patterns and tensions amongst a diverse, global population.

Artwork in Aotearoa inspired by the arts of Southern China also provides a large canvas for further exploration. Numerous connections have been revealed across artistic cultures, and artists can bring fresh creativity to ancestral customs. Further research into the relationship between weaving practices across countries could also be explored. Furthermore, such cross-cultural resonances could be a central positioning for cross-cultural collaboration and artistic exploration in this way. The art education sector in Aotearoa could give more consideration into helping students connect more with their ancestral art forms.

Given the revealed complexities of Southern Chinese descendants and their diverse heritages, the contemporary art world should consider how all people can be included within an indigenous-centred discourse. The solution must go beyond labelling artists within narrowing ethnic categories. Diverse peoples can find their own resonating heritages within an indigenous-centred art world. Their artwork and collaborations can, in this positioning, directly frame harmonious relationships between peoples and cultures. Further cross-cultural collaboration which draws upon respective indigenous heritages will bring to light further potentialities.

By tracing the layers of connections flowing between Southern China and Aotearoa, this creative research has revealed points of resonance, and conveyed a continuously evolving narrative in *Movements from Pearl Rivers*. This highlighting of connections, concepts, and principles contributes to a broadened perspective on Southern Chinese descendants, their place in Aotearoa, and how cross-cultural relationships and perspectives can be harmonised. *Movements from Pearl Rivers* enabled Southern Chinese descendants to belong alongside others within a continuum of the unfolding evolution from one cosmological origin, through ancient Southern China, and waves of ocean voyages leading to the present landscape in Aotearoa. Through the framing adopted, Southern Chinese descendants are justifiably different, intermixed, and evolved from their ancestral homeland. Narrow and divisive categorisations of people are challenged by the widening perspective of connections and diversities illuminated in this research.

From the shores of Aotearoa, we may gaze across the sea to misty islands. Visions of homeland traverse the seascapes of memory, aspiration, and present reality. Homelands exist in multiple places at once. In the artist, homeland exists in the longings of the human heart, expressed through the creations of hands. We all must create new visions of homelands, together. Through our own positionings we view the

same horizon, and through conversation we gain a broadened, shared perspective of our shared ocean.

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