

# The In-Between Space:

*An auto-ethnographic and architectural investigation into a Chinese grocery store*

Skye Ye 2025



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*An auto-ethnographic and architectural investigation into a  
Chinese grocery store*

by Skye Ye

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# Abstract

This thesis explores a different way to engage with issues of displacement and gentrification during the process of urban redevelopment by exploring what roles a Chinese grocery store plays in the local Chinese community. General lessons at a broader scale are drawn for thinking about how urban planning and city regeneration can be more responsive to both Chinese migrant histories, and more importantly contemporary Chinese spatial and cultural practices.

The research is situated in the context that Northcote town centre is planned to be completely renewed in the next fifteen years. The current shopping centre is home to some 90 businesses as well as community organisations, public facilities, and health and well-being practices. Well utilised by the local Asian community, the centre has developed as a centre for food, produce, and Asian goods. Led by Eke Panuku, the renewal project proposes to create a mixed-use neighbourhood in the current shopping centre, anchoring on community, culture, and business. However, many current businesses stakeholders who are mostly Asian migrants feel a lack of support and exclusion during planning and design processes and experience uncertainty for their businesses' future. In addition, the local Chinese community's fears of losing its current cultural character and worries that hosting small ethnic businesses may become unaffordable to them once the redevelopment project completes.

Beginning with an extensive investigation of the context of Northcote and the long history of Chinese market gardening in Aotearoa, the thesis employs an auto-ethnographic approach to study the site – Da-Hua Supermarket,

a Chinese grocery store that has served the community for years. This methodology enables the research to answer the inquiry by applying specificity and depth to the investigation, while exploring and celebrating personal experiences from different media such as vignettes, field sketches, mappings, and architectural drawings.

A collection of depictions and reflections acknowledge the importances of personal experiences by utilising architectural documentation techniques to express the relationship between personal sentiments and the spatial conditions of Da-Hua Supermarket. It is through paying close attention on daily details on a person level, as a Chinese migrant, a mum, a wife, and a researcher that some specific socio-cultural values of a long-existing Chinese grocery store of the community appear to be visible. Furthermore, the documentation also aims to emphasise ordinary details of the grocery store that reflect some very different ideas and practices from the Chinese migrant community. For example, one of the narratives in this thesis presents how food and produce is differently valued and processed in a Chinese migrant family.

To come back to the context of the Northcote town centre redevelopment, this research suggests an alternative process for authorities and city planners to consider in terms of public engagements and participation strategies. The thesis shows that iterative process of documenting and reflecting on data from a personal point of view that was based on the combination of architectural research techniques and autoethnography resulted in a better understanding of a collective cultural group. The subsequent visits, the valuing of personal experiences as well as the freedom to explore highlighted in this auto-ethnographic research address the gap between socio-cultural realities and urban planning, which is often instituted, directed and controlled .

**Key Words:** Architectural survey, autoethnography, architectural ethnography, urban planning, Chinese migrant community of Aotearoa

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# Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed

*Skye Ye*

Date: 13/02/2025

# Acknowledgement

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To my colleagues, thank you for your help, support and friendship - with you around, working at the studio was a joy. To my little family, thank you, David, for always being available to look after our young son Hayes when I needed to attend supervision meetings, classes, and workshops throughout the year. Thank you to Hayes for accompanying me to visit the project site many times.

Thank you to my parents who have supported me in all possible ways to finish the thesis. I would not have been able to make this happen without their continuous support and encouragement.

*Chapter 1*

# Introduction

This design thesis investigates potential issues of gentrification and forced displacements during processes of the urban redevelopment of the Northcote town centre, employing autoethnography as a key methodology.

Originally named Northcote Shopping Centre, Northcote town centre has experienced many changes since 1959 in terms of its demographic composition and the businesses and services that operate in the area. The 2018 census (Stats NZ–Tatauranga Aotearoa, n.d.) showed that more than 30 per cent of Northcote residents are Asian. The retail landscape in today's Northcote town centre is culturally diverse, with a variety of Asian eateries and ethnic shops providing opportunities for people to experience different ways of living. These small migrant-operated businesses are thriving in this environment and have established close relationships with the local community. However, with plans for a major town centre reformation in the next decade in place, the future of these ethnic retail shops has become uncertain. Business stakeholders of the town centre share common concerns over gentrification following a redevelopment that could potentially alter the socio-cultural and economic composition of the neighbourhood and lead to displacements.

In order to answer the question of “How might architects advocate for the Chinese migrant community in New Zealand through expanding design methodologies during processes of urban redevelopment?”, this architectural investigation examines the spatial conditions of a Chinese grocery store (Da-Hua Supermarket) in Northcote town centre. The employment of autoethnography is presented in the forms of research documentation, where information is recorded, mapped, reflected, layered, and analysed in five narratives in and around Da-Hua. The investigation has discovered that Da-Hua has great significance to the community as a provider of ethnic food and services and as a cultural exchange point between the East (Chinese) and the West (Aotearoa New Zealand). Furthermore, this research also

proposes the inclusion of a more participatory element in the planning process for urban renewal programmes to allow the voices of minority ethnic groups to be heard by expanding current design methodologies. As Patrick Geddes suggested, urban planning should represent the spirit of the city and have a social responsibility to express people's life and culture (Kuroishi, 2016). This thesis not only seeks to investigate and discover the spirit of the local Chinese community but also presents this group's cultural perspective on town centre planning. The employment of autoethnography is presented in the forms of research documentation, where information is recorded, mapped, reflected, layered, and analysed in five narratives around Da-Hua. By using autoethnography as the research methodology, the study was allowed for the discovery of opportunities and extend possibilities by connecting personal experiences to the collective Chinese culture. The study shows that, by investigating the important role a small ethnic grocery store plays in the local Chinese community, we can gain insight into the complex social system that has emerged from the relationships that were forged at the grocery store. The insights gained from this research on the system, practice and relationships of this urban community raise important issues for urban planners and developers to consider in their redevelopment plan for Northcote town centre.

Chapter Two discusses the personal contexts and explains my research motivation. Understanding who I am, what I do, and why I do is foundational for the cause of the research and the methodology employed in the study. By mapping whakapapa, a Māori approach to genealogy that captures a person's line of descent to the present day, I began to realise that my personal and cultural experiences from both China and New Zealand are valuable resources that can be used for advocating for my own ethnic community who are often overlooked in planning processes.

The contemporary context of Northcote is detailed in Chapter Three. This

chapter carefully examines both the historical and cultural backgrounds of Northcote and then discusses the current planning and developments that are likely to impact the town centre and surrounding suburbs.

Chapter Four outlines the history of Chinese market gardening in Aotearoa New Zealand. It discusses the movements of Chinese migrants and the operation of Chinese grocery businesses in the early days of Chinese migration to New Zealand. This historical examination provides relevant context for the thesis to understand the cultural connection between the Chinese migrant community and produce.

Chapter Five presents a literature review, which aims to explore what is specific about Chinese urbanism and Chinese urban culture. More specifically, this chapter investigates issues of urbanisation from other hybrid cultural spaces, such as Chinatowns in other cities, which can potentially be applied to Northcote town centre, by reviewing the relevant literature.

Chapter Six discusses the methodology applied in this thesis research. An auto-ethnographic approach is employed along with a variety of architectural methods used to research, analyse, survey, and document the architecture of Da-Hua. Architectural survey in particular is discussed in this section because it is not only a methodology used to capture the space using real scale measuring, but also an architectural outcome that is visualised and objectified through drawings. The auto-ethnographic method is used as a way to better engage with and understand what is at risk of getting lost or ignored during the process of urban renewal.

Following the description of the methodology used for the thesis, the journey of the researcher and auto-ethnographer is recorded in Chapter Seven through the form of narrative, which is a main part of this auto-ethnographic research. Various elements such as field sketches, photographs, mappings

diary entries are included in the five narratives to support the documentation of the research. The hybrid method used draws on architectural research methods and auto-ethnographic approaches. The uniqueness and divergence of Da-Hua are captured and expressed through drawings using architectural techniques and languages. These outputs are critical findings that not only highlight how important Da-Hua Supermarket is to the local Chinese community but also illustrate how expanding design methodologies can enable designers to better engage with the Chinese migrant community. Ultimately, the autoethnography becomes an architectural ethnography that reflects a collective culture as an important voice of the area that is at risk of being ignored in the urban planning process.

Finally, the thesis concludes by demonstrating that the Chinese grocery stores in Northcote town centre have added social and cultural value to Northcote and the local Chinese community. The loss of such socio-cultural economic space following the urban renewal is likely to alienate the local Chinese community. Furthermore, the thesis offers an innovative approach to urban planning by combining qualitative research methods in the form of autoethnography and established architectural approaches that can be used and adapted by other architects and designers to help them connect their planning expertise with local urban realities, particularly when working with community groups from different cultures.

## Chapter 2

# Personal Context

Who I am? What I do? Why I do?

# Pepeha

Tēnā koutou katoa,

Ko Dinghu te maunga.

Ko Xi Jiang te Awa.

No China & Aotearoa ahau. Ko Ye tōku whanau.

Ko Skye tōku ignoa.

Nō reira, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa.

I was born in a southern province of China (formerly named Canton) and moved to New Zealand during my teenage years. I share many commonalities with many early gold miners and Chinese market gardeners who have migrated a hundred years ago. Growing up, I spoke Cantonese. Although English became a more dominant language for me now after living in Aotearoa for many years, I still practice my mother tongue with my nuclear and extended family daily.

I am a mum to my one-year-old son Hayes, who was born in New Zealand. As many Chinese parents in New Zealand, I would like to do my best to create and protect an environment that is nurturing our next generation's sense of belonging to more than one origin and that allows them to affirm their cultural identities through places and everyday practices. Northcote town centre is the place we have been visiting regularly this year for Chinese grocery items as well as the Chinese children's book collection and the Mandarin wiggle and rhyme sessions at Northcote library. The town centre has really become a key place for me since becoming a parent. I am also an architectural researcher and have an interest in urban design and planning that can create a strong tie to the local community. With the redevelopment plan raising concerns around displacement and gentrification within the Chinese community, I had an urge to focus my research on my local area. I am interested in the working community within the town centre, who are mostly Chinese migrants and share the same cultural background with me. I understand some of the people have worked in the same store for more than a decade and they have developed a strong relationship with Northcote town centre. In a sense, the town centre has become a comfort zone for them by providing a space where they can use a familiar language and freely engage in Chinese cultural practices. Through conversations with this group of people, I could sense the uncertainty they have about the future.

I often see a group of elderly Chinese migrants practicing dancing and Tai-chi

in a sheltered tiled space between Northcote Library and North Art Gallery. The regular presence of cultural performance is a way the Chinese migrant community of Northcote take space and make place in the city. Raised in the same culture, it is easy for me to understand that this group is trying to replicate the urban life they used to live in China, a country where Yang Sheng (meaning life-nurtured) practices such as Tai-Chi and group singing is greatly valued by the general population (Farquhar & Zhang, 2012). Although the community of Northcote may be used to seeing Yang Cheng practices, the relationship between cultural practices and urban planning may not be evident to decision-makers who have not experienced this kind of urbanism or live locally in Northcote.

These experiences and observations have become my research motivation and have a significant weight in my thesis. Northcote town centre is characterised by an interesting mix of culture and urbanisation, and this mix is also marked by conflicts. A few years ago, I participated in Hoopla's Avondale Sunday Market project to help the primary researchers Kathy Waghorn and Nina Patel document the economic diversity of the market using photographs. This project happened as the market was at risk of being relocated or lost, due to the Avondale Racecourse land, where the market is held every Sunday, was in danger of being sold for housing development (Hoopla, 2021). The "ultra local" approach Kathy and Nina used to engage with their local community appealed to me. Therefore, in the context of Northcote town centre being revitalised, I hoped to use this thesis as an opportunity to participate in the urban-making process from a local and culturally specific perspective.

Inhabiting all perspectives above, I decided to undertake this research in Northcote town centre as both a local and researcher by adopting an auto-ethnographic approach where architectural design methodologies are expanded to include qualitative methods that involve paying attention to myself in order to better advocate for the Chinese migrant community of Northcote as a whole.



### Chapter 3

## Northcote Context

The purpose of this chapter is to develop an understanding of the context of Northcote, a suburb on the North Shore, Tamaki Makaurau Auckland. The history and cultural background of Northcote is carefully examined in the first part of the chapter, while the second section discusses the current planning and development of Northcote town centre, the site of this thesis project.

*“Since its birth as two volcanic craters, Northcote has become a multicultural centre with a great array of food outlets and established community facilities.*

*With its central location and easy connections to Auckland’s city centre, Takapuna and other North Shore beaches, the potential of Northcote is unquestioned.”*

*(Eke Panuku , 2024)*



Figure 2. Northcote Suburb Map. Northcote town centre is located centrally in the suburb, with two volcanic craters sitting at the western end of the map. Author's image

## The Historic Context of Northcote

With two volcanic craters sitting on the eastern coastline, Northcote was dominated by kauri, kahikatea, and taraire trees before human settlement. The area was known as Onewa but was renamed “Northcote” in the early 1880s in honour of Sir Stafford Northcote, chancellor of the exchequer, and later Lord Iddlesleigh.

Approximately sitting at the end of Stokes Point, Te Onewa Pā was one the earliest Māori fortresses constructed on the point to provide protections to local kaingas (Christmas, 1983). The word *Onewa* means “divided earth”. With an outstanding view towards Waitemata harbour, Onewa Pā is geographically and historically significant. Although restoration work has been done to the pā site from 2014, which has increased awareness of the pā and preserved the dedicated landscape (Damian Holmes, 2019), today, there remains little physical evidence of the once fortified village and trench.

Shortly after the signing of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, Onewa Pā was included as a part of the Mahurangi block and sold to the government with a whole purchase price of £1500 in cash. The crown ownership of Northcote land was established in 1841. This also marked the beginning of European settlements in the area. European settlement industries, including timber cutting, gum digging, strawberry growing, brick yards, soap and candle factories, and sulphur works, were established in the Northcote area (Christmas, 1983). A large section of land adjacent to today’s Northcote Shopping Centre was used for Chinese market gardening in the early 1900s (Lam et al., 2018).

The Northcote community is well established and has a rich history. Northcote attained borough status when it reached the milestone of 1000 citizens in 1908. Most of the community lived in the areas of the south of Onewa Road, which is now identified as the suburb of Northcote Point. Today, examples

of early 20th century housing are easily visible in the suburb of Northcote Point (see Figure 3 and Figure 4).



Figure 3. Northcote Hotel and Northcote Tavern. Author's own photo



20 Queen Street,  
residential



26 Queen Street,  
former shop



42 Queen Street,  
Residential

Figure 4. Heritage shops and residential houses on Queen Street, Northcote Point. Author's own photos.

Northcote has been developed further since the opening of the Auckland Harbour Bridge in 1959, especially the areas to the north of Onewa Road. Today's Northcote is culturally diverse, and many Asian families are attracted to this suburb because of the range of cultural amenities that developed as a result of historic migration patterns. Based on the 2018 Census, more than 7.5 per cent of Northcote Central residents speak Northern Chinese (Mandarin) and approximate 3 per cent people speak Yue (Cantonese) (see Figure 5). Moreover, more than 30 percent of the people from Northcote Central claim to belong to an Asian ethnic group (see Figure 6), and more than 25 percent of Northcote Central residents were born in Asian countries (see Figure 7). When comparing the demographic data of Northcote Central with that of Auckland Region (see Figures 5 - 7), it becomes evident that Northcote is home to a high concentration of Chinese migrants.

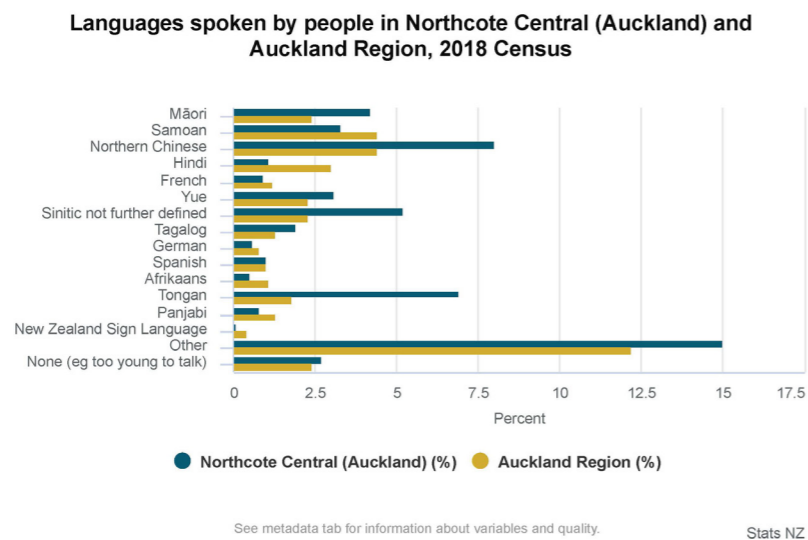


Figure 5. Language spoken by people in Northcote. (Stats NZ–Tauranga Aotearoa, n.d..)

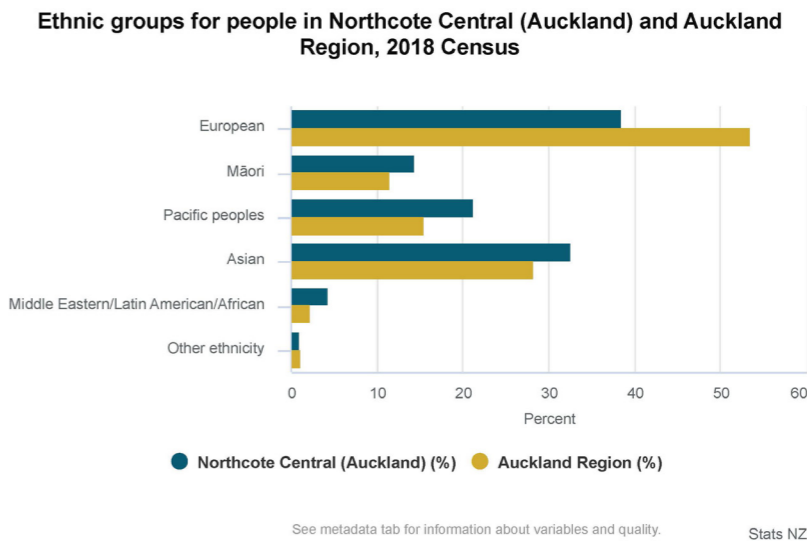


Figure 6. Ethnic groups for people in Northcote Central. (Stats NZ–Tauranga Aotearoa, n.d..)

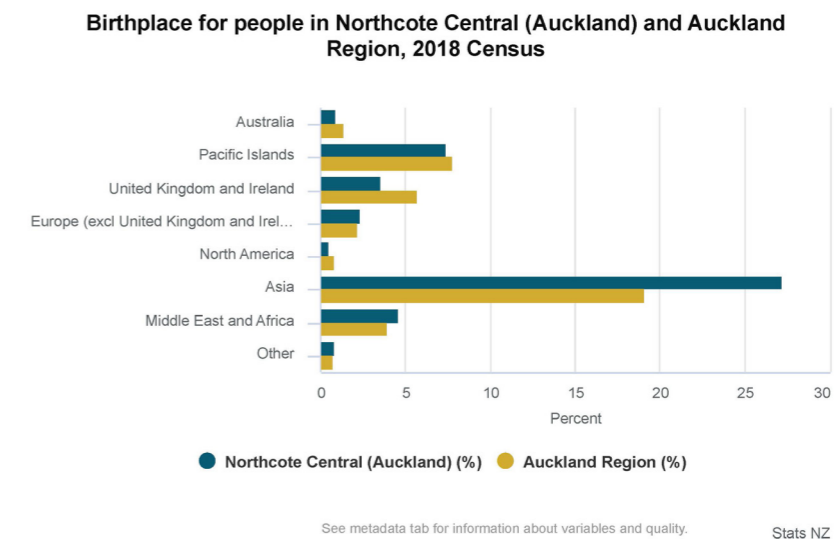


Figure 7. Birthplace for people in Northcote Central. (Stats NZ–Tauranga Aotearoa, n.d..)

## Northcote Shopping Centre and Business

Northcote Shopping Centre was opened shortly after the completion of the Harbour Bridge in 1959, and it has quickly become the centre of Northcote and its surrounding suburbs (Christmas, 1983). This type of commercial space was advertised as a modern concept of shopping mall in the 1960s that was predominantly home to many large Pākehā, or white European, businesses. However, it lost customers to competing malls in 1970s when the ideas of shopping inside a vertical building became more popular in New Zealand. With large franchises and businesses moving out, Northcote Shopping Centre opened the door for Asian supermarkets and restaurants to establish themselves and, over time revitalise the area. (Jacobs, 2022).

Today's Northcote town centre is situated in between Lake Road and College Road (See Figure 8). It offers a variety of community services such as a Citizen Advice Bureau, Plunket, community gallery, and a library. There are green spaces, such as the recently regenerated Greenslade Reserve, Cadness Reserve and Te Awataha Greenway, that residents can use for leisure purposes. Within a five to ten minutes walking distance, Kainga Ora has developed a large-scale housing project with high-rise apartments. With a growing population, the town centre will become busier and serve more people for their day-to-day needs in the future. Hence, an upgrade of town centre space is needed in preparation for / in response to the growing population.

A dominant Asian culture can be clearly observed from transect walks, which are considered an architectural tool used to identify and map the hidden relationships and social aspects within the urban environment. The photographs in Figure 9 and 10 capture the variety of ethnic food, grocery shops, souvenir shops, and health services in the area. They reflect the diversity of cultures in the current town centre that has allowed many Asian

migrants to develop a sense of place and the wider community to experience different ways of living.

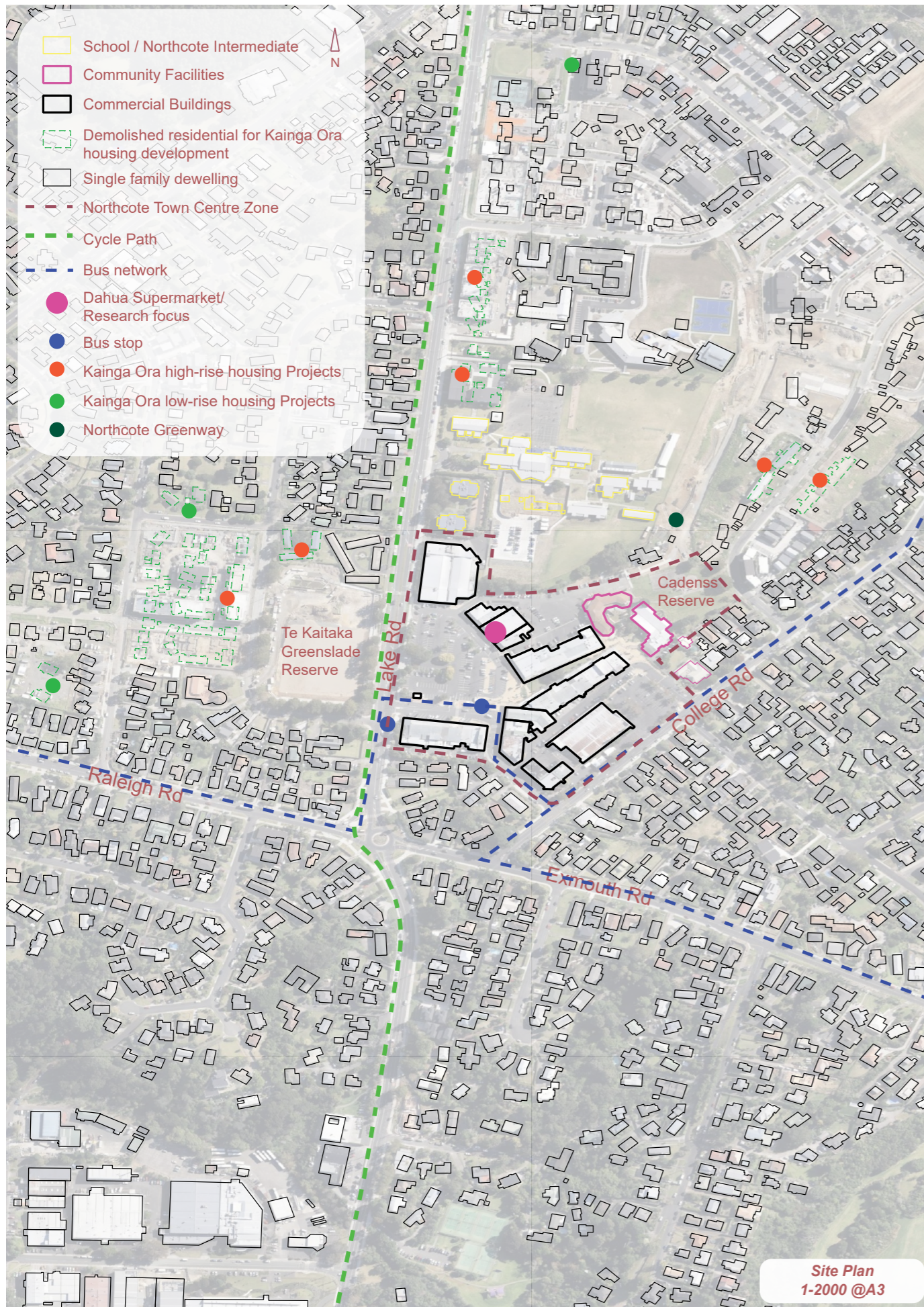


Figure 8. Northcote Site Plan. Important community facilities in and around the Northcote town centre is shown in the map.

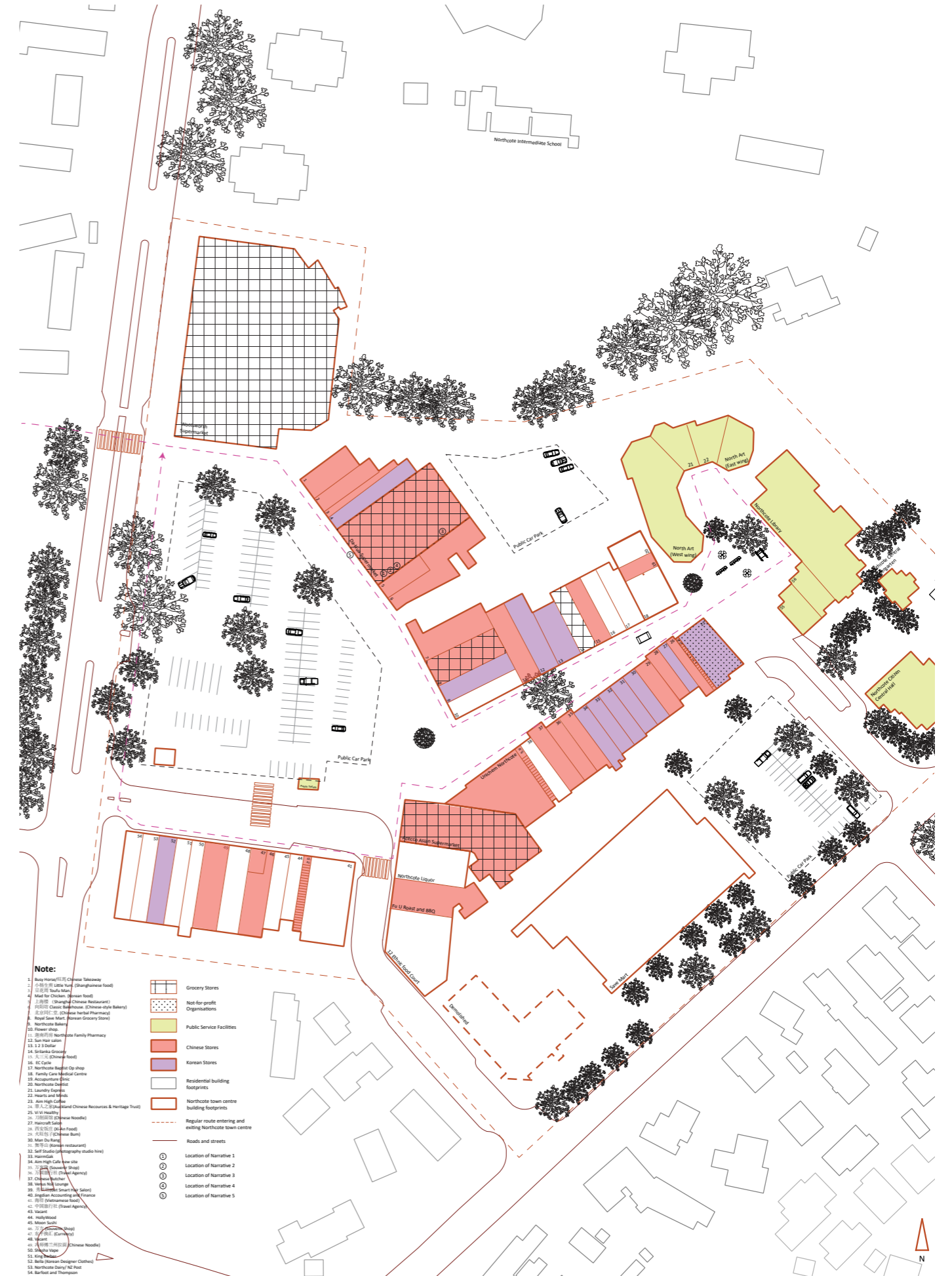


Figure 9. Northcote Site Plan with businesses directory.



Figure 10. Ethnic shops in Northcote Town Centre. Photos were taken during a transect walk exercise in July 2024. Author's own photos.

Representing member businesses in Northcote town centre, the Northcote Business Association (NBA) plays a key role in liaising and engaging with Auckland Council and other agencies to improve the area and represent the interests of local businesses. NBA acknowledges and values the importance of Asian migrant business in Northcote town centre and develops strategic plans for the business developments.

In the Northcote Strategic Plan 2017-2020 (Northcote Business Association, n. d.), existing gaps and opportunities were identified. Recommendations

were made for future work based on narrative research that involved interviewing various business owners and stakeholders in Northcote (specifically the Chinese business owners). As reflected in the key objectives of the migrant study, the Northcote Business Association realises the importance of migrant businesses to the area.

In the Northcote Strategic Plan 2020-2025 (Northcote Business Association, n. d.), NBA continues to recognise Asian businesses and the Asian community as an important part of the centre by visioning Northcote town centre as “a growing community, with a lively and welcoming heart that celebrates cultures, and where business thrives, and everyone’s needs are met” (p.1). Moreover, Northcote town centre is described as a Asia Pacific marketplace where international meets locals. The migrant business study and the importance of Chinese migrant businesses in Northcote town centre area raised by the NBA is particularly relevant to the town centre development and the thesis.

As shown in Figure 11, there is a particular route I took when visiting Northcote town centre by foot. Some stops are for me, such as Da-Hua Supermarket, Tofu shop and the coffee shop run by a Korean charity, while some features such as the artwork in the gallery, books and friends in the library and the well-cared flower garden are for Hayes. The community gallery and the public library are fortunately guaranteed a place in the future town centre. However, many other private-own small businesses who have long been a part of the business core are put into uncertainties. As this map documents one of my visits to Northcote town centre, it also reflects the importance of these small ethnic shops to the wider Chinese migrant community who not only come to Northcote for food security, but also for ethnic and culture identity.



Figure 11. Cross pathing with Northcote. An auto-ethnographic documentation of my shopping experience in Northcote town centre.

## Northcote Town Centre Revitalisation

In recent years, there have been a variety of projects around Northcote Shopping Centre aimed at regenerating the area, including an ecological infrastructure upgrade (e.g. Te Ara Awataha), green space conservations (e.g. Kauri Glen reserve upgrade), and social housing developments (e.g. purpose-built apartment homes for older Aucklanders in central Northcote location). The potential of Northcote is highlighted in Auckland Unitary Plan (AUP) where Northcote Shopping Centre is given the “town centre” status. According to AUP a town centre “is typically located on main arterial roads, which provide good public transport access. The zone should provide a wide range of activities including commercial, leisure, residential, tourist, cultural, community and civic services, having a focus for commercial activities and growth” (Auckland Council, 2024, p.1)

With rows of high-rise apartment buildings being completed by Kainga Ora adjacent to Northcote town centre, Eke Panuku and Isthmus Architect have been working together on the planning of the future town centre with a vision to turn it into “a vibrant heart” (Eke Panuku, 2019) for the growing community. The town centre redevelopment has been planned and prepared for over a decade. The process commenced with a high-level plan establishment in 2016; however, progress has been slow since, as Eke Panuku was required to purchase town centre buildings.

“Unlock Northcote” responds to the newly gained town centre status given by AUP in 2013. It describes to the public what a successful town centre development should look like and proposes that it involves setting foundational principles and criteria. The document states that Eke Panuku and collaborated developers “aims to build on the best of the key characteristics of the centre that the community value – pedestrian areas, the elms trees on Pearn Place, the alignment of key streets, a public realm with flexibility

to adapt to accommodate large community events and festivals and most importantly its human scale and activity” (Eke Panuku, 2019). (See Figure 11).

“Northcote Benchmark Master Plan” (Eke Panuku, 2019) features drawings that visualise the plans for the future town centre for the public. This document provides drawing that include details such as vegetations and a new layout of the centre structure to help people understand and hopefully to look forward to the changes (see Figure 12 and 13). The plan has a strong focus on ecological regeneration, as it includes a regenerative stormwater upgrade in an adjacent reserve and creates a new greenway at the edge of the town centre. Despite the importance and prominence of the Chinese cultural group in Northcote town centre, this group is not represented in the visualisations offered in this master plan.

Unlock Northcote  
Northcote Town Centre Benchmark Masterplan

Panuku  
Development  
Auckland  
An Auckland Council Organisation

April 2019



Figure 12. Unlock Northcote Refresh Document developed in 2022. (Eke Panuku, 2019)



Figure 13. Benchmark Masterplan developed by Isthmus. This concept drawing visualises what future Northcote will look like to the public. (Eke Panuku, 2019)

With high standards and criteria set out in the guiding document, Eke Panuku has also faced challenges as it looks for business partners to develop the 3.13ha commercial block within the town centre zone. With many other developments happening around the centre zone, the work in Northcote central will be starting from 2027 and scheduled to last for more than a decade.

Some of the current shops and eateries will remain opened during the construction to maintain a certain level of vibrancy, but community services such as library, art gallery, Citizen Advice Bureau, and Plunket will be relocated to a building nearby while a new community hub is under construction.

A community event called “Let’s come together at Te Awataha, Northcote’s new greenway”, facilitated by Kainga Ora, Northcote Development, Eke Panuku, Kaipatiki Local Board, and Auckland Council, was held in Northcote town centre on a Saturday afternoon to invite members of the public to learn more about the developments around Northcote (see Figure 14). The community event indicated Eke Panuku’s intention to include some forms of public participatory in their design process. This approach is underpinned by their engagement principles which state the regenerative agency will be open-minded to all views (Eke Panuku, n.d..). Eke Panuku references the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation framework (IAP2 International Federation, 2018) for public engagements within design processes. This framework is internationally recognised and widely used in the planning industry because it clearly communicates the different levels of public participation in five stages (Arslan & Erol, 2023).

However, at this point it is unclear which participation level Eke Panuku is aiming to achieve in this project, or whether this one-for-all industry standard framework is suitable for a non-Pākehā community like the one in Northcote. For example, many Chinese migrant come from a strictly-controlled political background and are afraid to voice their opinions at public events. This cultural group is also less likely to attend community engagement workshops, and as a result, their views and opinions may not be heard by the planning authorities.



Figure 14. Eke Panuku updating the community of the town centre development work at the 'Let's come together' event in Northcote in May 2024. Author's own photo.

In May 2024, business stakeholders of Northcote town centre have received notice confirming plans to demolish the area, indicating that a building in between Kilham Avenue and College Road is earmarked to be the first to be torn down. This news reignited uncertainty and worry about the future of existing businesses. Media has interviewed the co-director of North Art, a community art facility inside the current town centre zone. She expressed her excitement about the revitalisation of the town centre but also highlighted her worries of the gentrification of Northcote once the work is completed (Long, 2024). Gentrification broadly refers to a situation where an urban restructure investment into an area that was disinvested in the past causes the displacements of disadvantaged communities of colour (Hom, 2022). However, reminded by the former chairman of Northcote Business Association, Antony Yee, that it was Asian retail businesses who

revitalised Northcote town centre in the 1990s (Jacobs, 2022), and therefore the regenerative project should recognise the importance of Asian migrant businesses and the well-established Asian community in Northcote.

### Relation to research inquiry

The current Northcote town centre is culturally diverse and is full of its own character. While the community looks forward to the town centre regeneration, many migrant business owners are unsure of the future of their small businesses and the negative impacts potentially brought by urban redevelopment. This thesis sits in between urban redevelopment planning and the lack of support for the Chinese migrant community, including whose small businesses that are impacted by the development and the general migrant community who regularly use the space. Coming from cities with higher population density, the Chinese migrant community in New Zealand is very culturally different from either Māori or Pākehā communities and has particular ways of doing business and living life. This minority group has developed some cultural practices urban planners who have trained in the Western-centric education system may be unaware of.

The discussion presented here has identified Chinese migrants are the most vulnerable for displacement for socio-economic and cultural reasons. More importantly, this group also lacks a voice to advocate for itself and of becoming invisible in the planning process. As a result, this thesis argues that an architectural autoethnography study that sees personal experiences as opportunities can narrow the gaps between planners and the Chinese migrant community of Northcote during design processes.

The next chapter further investigates the history of Chinese market gardening in Aotearoa New Zealand, which offers insights into relevant cultural patterns and practices that characterise working-class Chinese.

## Chapter 4

# A Forgotten Past

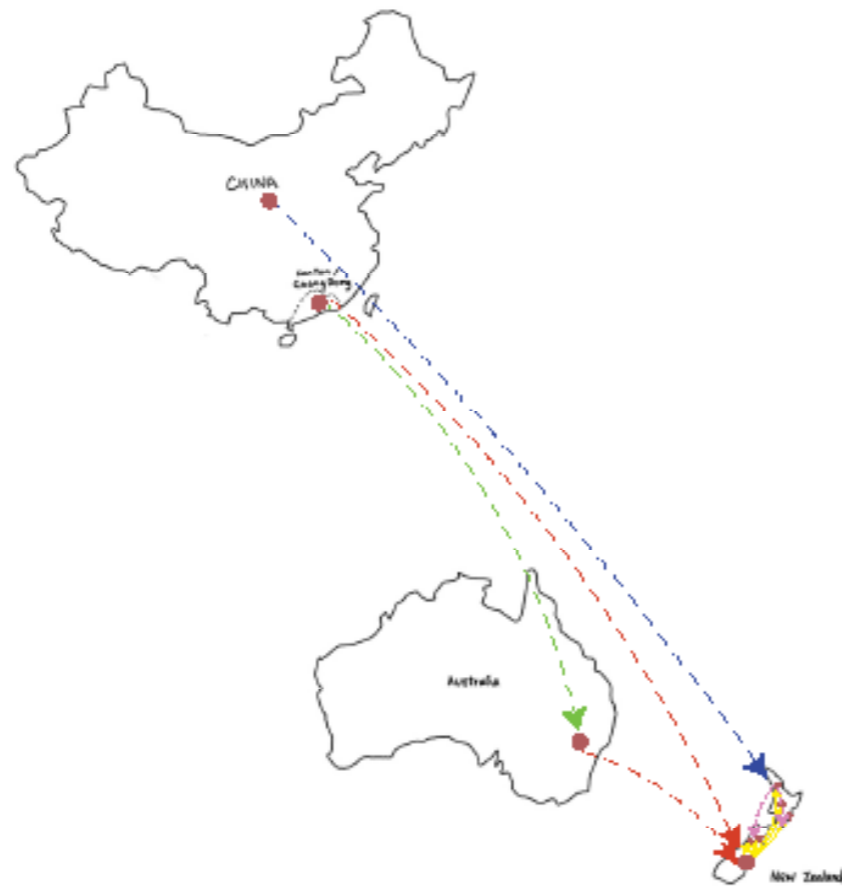
## Chinese Market Gardening

This chapter investigates New Zealand's Chinese market gardening practices that can be traced back to the Otago gold rush. This piece of history is often overlooked and erased as the country develops. The second section outlines a Chinese greengrocer business typology which early Chinese gardeners and greengrocers in NZ adhered to but that is markedly different from European practices. This chapter is foundational in setting up the context for the architectural investigation into a Chinese grocery store.

The Chinese settlement of Aotearoa began only two and a half decades after the signing of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. There are still many places where traces of early Chinese settlement can be found, with the Arrowtown Chinese Settlement from the Nineteenth century being one of them (see Figure 15). These cultural landscapes tell nuanced stories of people's movements over a period that saw wars, politics changes, economic fluctuation, and a variety of significant events (see Figure 16). As a person with Chinese heritage living in the land of long white cloud, I find it important to know the often forgotten but significant past of my ancestor. The same may apply to other NZ migrant groups who may also want to know their past and stories in Aotearoa in order to better understand the way things are in the present, and eventually create a better path for the future of their own community.



Figure 15. Arrowtown Chinese Settlement. (Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga, n.d.)



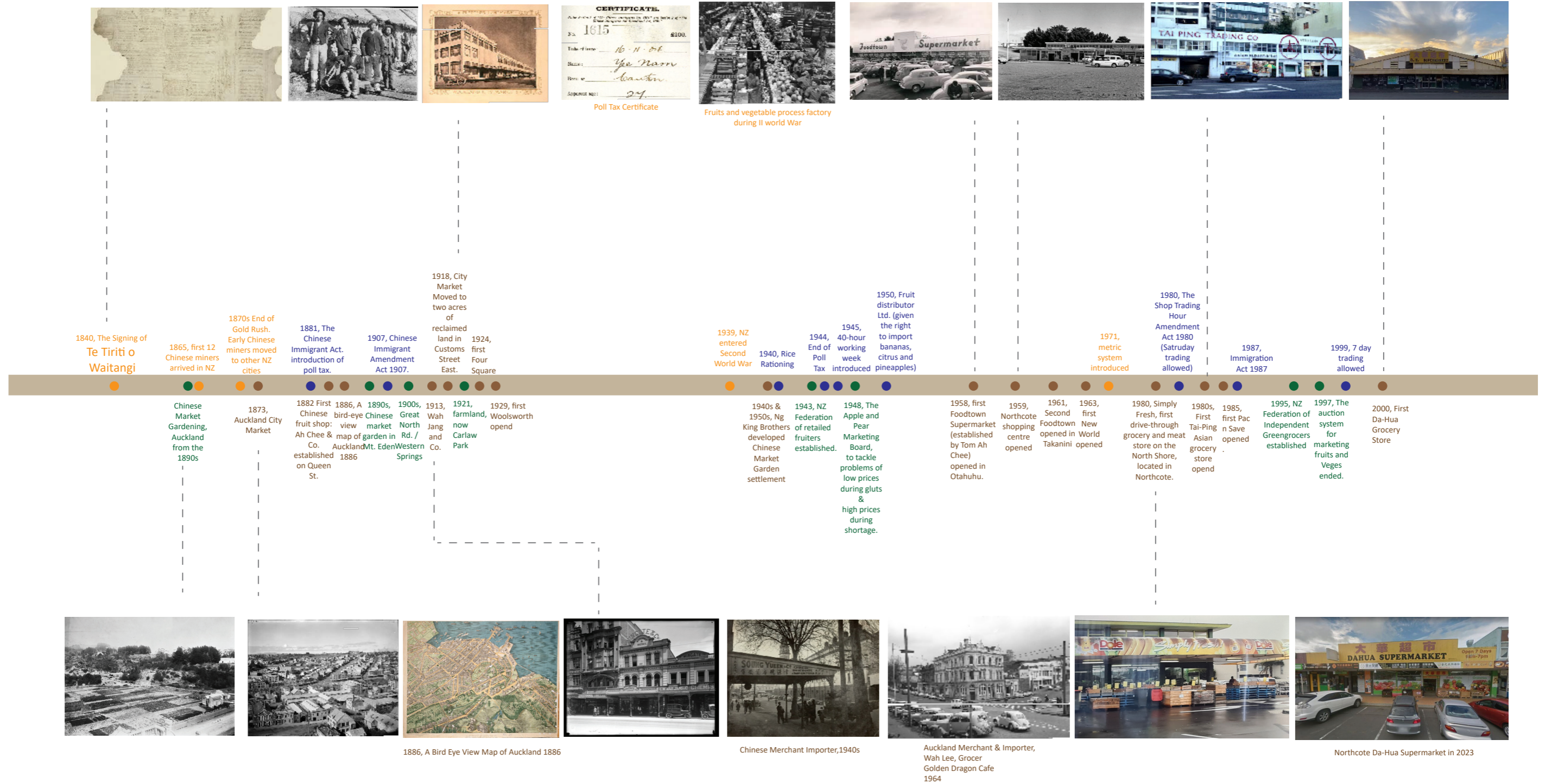
Chinese market gardening in New Zealand has a long history that has been influenced by migration policies, land policies and significant events during the years (see Figure 17). By tracing the history of market gardening, I have understood that NZ Chinese migrants were a hard-working and resilient community who strongly believe and practice many Chinese values. From market gardeners to greengrocers, hard-working Chinese migrants have developed a strong network system to provide easy-accessible Chinese greens to future generations of Chinese on NZ soil.

The development of NZ Chinese market gardening and greengrocery has not been easy, with harsh policies such as the poll tax representing particularly difficult obstacles. Considering all of these difficulties, Chinese migrants' persistence and continuous engagement in the market gardening and greengrocery fields seems even more impressive.

- Migration movement during the 1850s Australia Gold Rush
- Migration movement during the 1860s Otago Gold Rush
- Contemporary Chinese migration movement after 1987
- Early Chinese gold miners move to other parts of NZ after the Gold Rush
- Contemporary Chinese migrants move to other parts of NZ after landing in Auckland

across the Pacific Ocean during and after the Australia and New Zealand gold rush.  
Author's image.

# POLICY EVENT



# ARCHITECTURE

# MARKET GRADENING AND GREENGROCER INDUSTRY

Figure 17. Relationship mapping. Author's image. (See appendix B for historic images' references)

## From Goldminers to Market Gardeners and Greengrocers

The gold rush in California between 1848 and 1854 and second gold rush in Australia from 1851 had opened an opportunity for many Cantonese men to seek a fortune for their family through gold mining. The first twelve Chinese miners arrived in Otago, New Zealand, in December 1865, when the first Otago gold rush had already started to decline. The arrival of the twelve Cantonese men marked the beginning of Chinese migration to Aotearoa New Zealand. After the goldrush, some miners returned home to their families, while others moved to different parts of New Zealand to look for job opportunities.

Most Chinese gold miners who came to New Zealand during the gold rush were from Seyip counties of Canton, southern China (see Figure 18). Villagers from these Seyip counties lived a very similar life. People farmed fish and poultry and grew multiple crops of rice annually. All villages had ponds and paddy fields, and often the villages were surrounded by wooded hills and mountains which provide firewood for cooking. The village architecture was characterised by simple one or two storey brick dwellings clustered together. Although the land was rich and fertile, many men from the area still needed to go overseas to earn money to support their family, because of a combination of issues, such as over-population, flooding, and social and political unrest.

Chinese market gardens could be found on the West Coast of NZ as early as 1866. In the gold fields, vegetables were in demand because they could counteract scurvy. The earliest market gardeners were gold miners at the same time who initially grew their own vegetable and sold their surplus to others. Market gardeners, greengrocers, and launderers quickly became the most popular occupations taken by the early Chinese migrants who stayed



Figure 18. County distribution in Canton (today's Guangdong). (Lee, 2012)

in NZ after the gold rush (Lee, 2012) (See Figure 19). It seemed natural for these group of Chinese to continue working in the market gardening and greengrocery fields as they had the farming background from their homeland and these occupations required minimal capital investment (Lam et al., 2018). Furthermore, traditional Chinese horticultural techniques share many similarities with British farming practices widely used by NZ Pākehā. For this reason, Chinese gardeners were tolerated in New Zealand society, but they were often socially ostracised and had to endure personal attacks during the

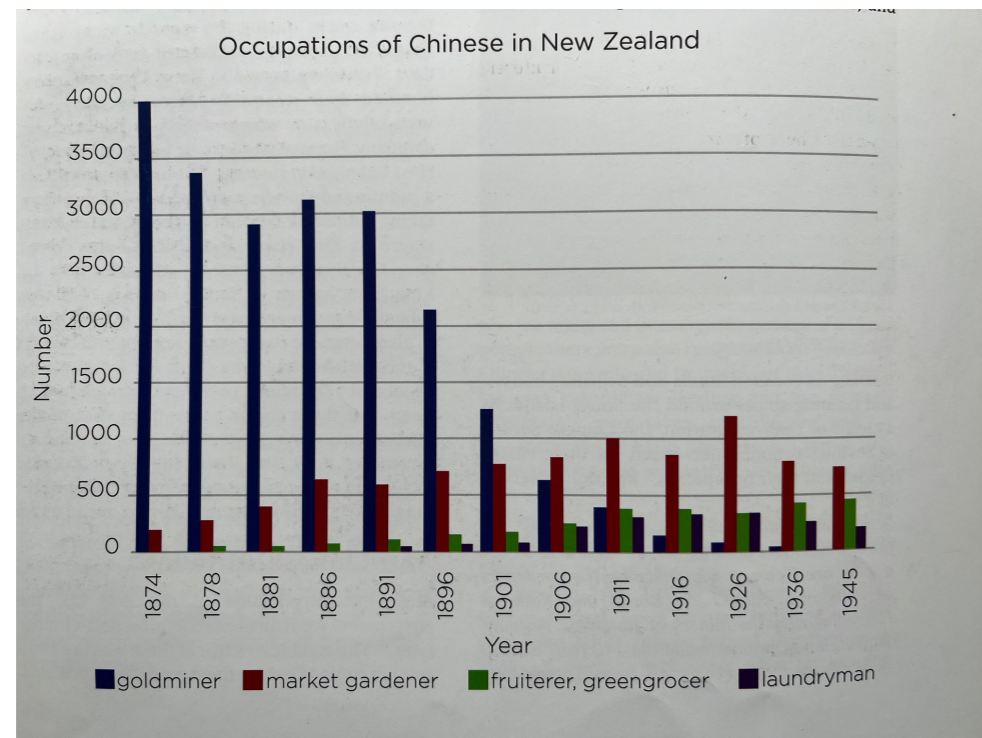


Figure 19. Occupations of Chinese in New Zealand between 1874 and 1945. From 1906, the number of market gardeners exceeded the number of goldminers in Aotearoa. (Lam et al., 2018, p. 14)

early years of settlement (Mackintosh, 2021).

The first Chinese fruit shop, named Ah Chee & Co., opened in Queen Street in 1882 and was directed by Chan Dah-Chee, a market gardener who established a 2.93-hectare market garden on a leased land next to today's Auckland Domain (Australian & Aotearoa New Zealand Environmental History Network, 2011). The number of Chinese grocery shops in the central suburbs of Tamaki Makaurau peaked between 1955 and 1965 with an average number of 115. In the North Shore area, it was documented that a large section of land between Raleigh and Exmouth Roads, close to where Northcote town centre is today, was farmed as a market garden by a

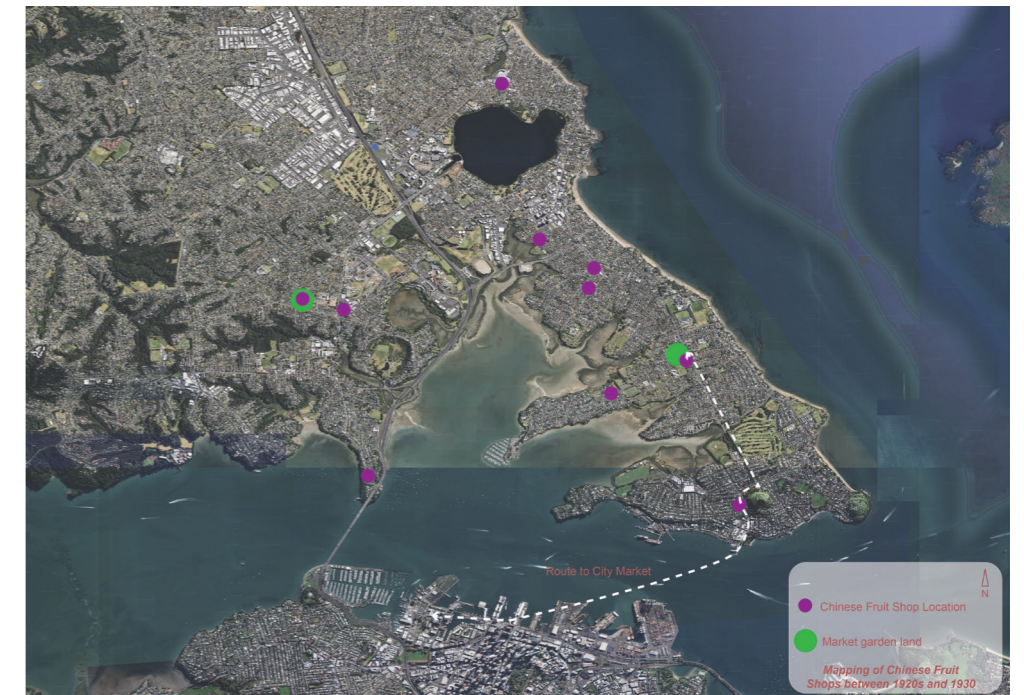


Figure 20. Chinese fruit and vegetable shops in the North Shore between 1920s and 1930s. The dash line indicates the possible route a Chinese greengrocer from Belmont, North Shore might take to bring fresh produce from the City Market back to their shop. Author's own map.

Chinese man. There were approximately ten Chinese grocery shops between 1920s to 1930 serving the lower North Shore area, including Wong Fong and J. Chong's fruit shops in Takapuna and Wong Kam's fruit and vegetable shop in Belmont (Lam et al., 2018) (see Figure 20).

## Contribution to NZ Economy

Market gardeners have supplied about 60 per cent of the vegetable consumed by the army services during the Second World War (Nightingale, 1992). The Services Vegetable Production (SVP) scheme was developed by the New Zealand government to ensure that the NZ vegetable supply would meet the demand of both the American and New Zealand forces. Under contracts negotiated with the Internal Marketing Division, Chinese market gardeners from all parts of New Zealand trebled their acreage to maximise their vegetable production. By the end of Second World War, a significant 75 per cent of all green vegetables in New Zealand were produced by Chinese market gardeners. After the Second World War, Chinese market gardeners were delighted to be able to reunite with their families from China with the government lifting the restriction of people from foreign nations living in New Zealand (Lee, 2012). The reunion with families has certainly become a milestone for many Chinese market gardeners as they finally set their root on Aotearoa soil.

## The operation models of early greengrocers - case studies of three North Shore market gardeners

In the early days, many Chinese greengrocers were also market gardeners. They often operated their greengrocer shops in conjunction with formal or informal market gardens where fresh vegetables were grown and harvested onsite and then retailed in the store. For example, Ah Chee operated a 3-hectare market garden next to the Auckland Domain (see Figure 21) and managed multiple greengrocer shops across Central Auckland at the same time. Mackintosh (2021) described the Ah Chee's family home and market garden as "the ideal home". Items founds from Ah Chee's home and garden,



Figure 21. Chinese market garden. Looking over farmland, existing Carlaw Park, 1921. (Heritage et AL., 2018)

buried under the soil of Carlaw park, suggest that Chinese immigrants lived a different life and engaged in different practices compared to European settlers. For instance, the archaeologists' belief that Ah Chee adhered to principles of Feng Shui, an ancient Eastern Asian practice, when decorating his family home, indicates that traditional beliefs continued to play an important role for this community.

The Belmont gardener and shop owner Wong Kam also had a similar business set up as Ah Chee: Kam lived and operated his greengrocer business in a building next to his two-acres market garden. Vegetables were harvested directly from the land with minimal transportation, while other additional produce was retrieved from Auckland City Market. An interesting strategy

employed in Wong Kam's business was hawking. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, a "*hawker*" is "someone who sells goods informally in public space". Wong and his family spend much of their time on the road, selling fresh fruits and vegetables door-to-door. Operating businesses through hawking was common among early Chinese market gardeners, and through this approach, the direction of grocery shopping was reversed, and people's shopping behaviours were altered. Hawking is similar to today's grocery delivery strategy that aims to meet the needs for consumers who do not have time or transportation to visit grocery store physically.

Chan Him Chong (Chong)'s greengrocery practice reflects some common values and work ethic shared by many early Chinese market gardeners. The first floor of his house was used as a shop to sell green groceries, while the domestic backyard garden was used for growing vegetables for the shop. Florence, daughter of Chong, described, "our shop was our home" (Lam et al., 2018, p. 738), suggesting that there was no certain clear boundary between commercial and domestic space in their dwelling. Although a door and a staircase vaguely separated the two different lives, stair steps were still used for dry storages and the coolest parts of the building were utilised like a cooler for storing vegetables. Thus, it was impossible to draw a line to separate the business and the domestic space in Chong's house. When examining Chan Ah Chee and the other two North Shore Chinese gardeners' practices carefully, we can see a very close interaction between work and home life, which reflects different social processes and cultural practices that were shared by many early Chinese migrants of New Zealand.

To summarise, this chapter outlined the historic background of Chinese market gardening and Chinese greengrocery practice in Aotearoa New Zealand in order to establish the relevant context for this design thesis. For more than a century, Chinese immigrants have played a key role in providing New Zealanders with healthy produce, but this industry is often

undervalued by us all. Therefore, this investigation is a reminder not only to acknowledge the important contributions this community has made to this country but also to act as an incentive to further advocate for this minority group. Chapter Two, Three and Four have provided a thorough discussion from a personal, contemporary and historical contexts for this design thesis. The next chapter begin to review available literature, discussing important hybrid spaces in relation to the Chinese community and the Chinese culture, such as Chinatowns in different cities and the issues they have encountered at times of urban restructuring.

## Chapter 5

# Literature Review

What literature discusses the specific features of Chinese urbanism?

What might we learn from this literature to support the revitalisation of Northcote town centre?

What gaps exist in this literature that my thesis can address?

Many studies have been conducted around Chinatowns in different cities that have a rich migrant history, such as Los Angeles, Toronto, or Sydney, to investigate how these communities negotiated their space during rapid urban development. Chinatowns in these cities have been a place where generations of Chinese migrants maintain their ethnic roots through the taste of food, organisation of space, and celebration of their mother tongue (Kim, 2021). Although Northcote town centre is not labelled as a Chinatown, it certainly has many of the characteristics commonly attributed to Chinatowns and, like other Chinatowns around the world, potentially faces issues of gentrification and displacements brought by urban redevelopment projects. The literature review presented in this chapter establishes an understanding of how food is considered as a critical element in studying Chinese migrant communities and examining the relationship between Chinese food and grocery practices and cultural urbanism.

## Food as a Connection

By discussing the contemporary context of Northcote and the history of Chinese market gardening in Aotearoa, the strong connection between food and the Chinese migrant community in New Zealand becomes visible. During multiple transect walks in Northcote town centre, it was discovered that a majority of migrant businesses focus on ethnic food. The retail landscape also suggests that the general Chinese community highly values food and the culture of food from their homeland. This observation is supported by an old Chinese saying from 2500 years ago “Min Yi Shi Wei Tian”, which translates as “People see food divine”. In China, food spaces are essential places for people to visit daily to obtain fresh products. Grocery shopping is a big part of people’s everyday lives as they believe they can live a healthier life by having access to fresh food (Ma, 2015). Traditional beliefs around food are generally maintained within the Chinese immigrants who live outside

China. A recurring issue encountered by Chinese immigrants that was noted in the literature are conflicts between small ethnic grocery practices and large chained supermarkets. Hom (2024) reported a regional debate was raised to discuss the future of Los Angeles Chinatown when a Walmart Neighbourhood Market opened in the area in 2013, directly threatening an existing Chinese grocery store who has served the community well. The scale of the debate illustrated that ethnic food stores can provide significant values to members of the community. This is further emphasised by Komakech and Jackson (2016), who suggested ethnic retail stores ensure access to cultural items and thereby help the community sustain their ethnic identity. Franck (2002) asserted that a food space is a “third space” where people can visit regularly, linger, and socialise. Chinese grocery stores naturally become a third space for many Chinese migrants as they seek culture familiarity within a new environment.

Secondly, theories of architecture and habitual movement suggest that cultural spatiality relates to cultural practices. Discussing the architectural condition in relation to migrants, Cairns (2004) suggested that Chinatowns are prominent examples which reflect a contemporary ethnopolis that take shape as a result of the concentration of long-term immigrants who share a similar ethnic and cultural background, through a complex process of choices and constraints. Based on the Chinese immigration patterns and demographic status, Northcote town centre can no doubt be classified as a form of Chinese concentration that has some of the features associated with an ethnopolis, such as out-of-placeness, hybridity, and celebratory. These unique characteristics can be further explained by an urban quality that is celebrated in Chinese culture. People see some kind of chaos and over crowdedness on the street as a *Re Nao*, a positive sense of hustle and bustle and a desirable quality of collective liveliness (Farquhar & Zhang, 2012), which might not be understood by city planners and designers who have been trained under the Western architecture system.

Cripps (2004) sought to explore how race and identity were embedded in architecture and adopt multicultural approach to his research. He criticised the Eurocentric focus of architecture education where histories and ideas from other civilisations, such as Asian, African, Latin American, or indigenous minority groups, are never mentioned. Although we live in a post-colonial world and are experiencing globalisation in our everyday practices, the definition and distribution of space in architecture designs still strongly reflect traditional European ideas and habits as a dominant architecture culture. Furthermore, the uniqueness of the urbanism we find in China suggests that overseas Chinese migrants have a different way of living and doing businesses. Therefore, the generic Eurocentric approach of space planning often employed by institutional agencies may not be able to fully capture the complexity and vulnerability of this small ethnic group, which may also contribute to forced displacement.

### Common Struggles

Research has also examined issues some Chinatowns have faced during phases of urban developments and redevelopments. In America, communities of colour, such as Boston Chinatowns, Los Angeles’ Little Tokyo, San Francisco’s Manila town, and Seattle’s International District, were unequally targeted for early urban renewal projects and Chinatowns in the US have experienced the threat of gentrification since late 1880s (Hom, 2022). Hom (2022) also claimed that Chinatowns in the US persist because of activists from the Chinese American community continuously advocate for themselves through political voices in order to maintain their ethnic space. While Hom’s (2022) suggestion was one possible approach to address issues of forced displacement, it did not address the problem from a spatial perspective, nor did he try to solve these issues by space planning. Interestingly, Australian

researchers who have studied Sydney Chinatown, the largest Chinatown in the southern hemisphere, described Chinatown as a place inserted by boundaries, whether in ethnic, cultural or spatial aspects (Anderson et al., 2024). As the boundary shifts due to the impact of accelerating globalisation and transnational migration patterns, it also signifies that the Australian National culture is shifting away from the predominant European culture, suggesting that we need to embrace a more inclusive urban form (Wang, 2020). Being so close to Australia and sharing many similarities, New Zealand certainly can learn from this shift towards a more culturally inclusive urbanism.

*“Urban meaning is not immanent to architecture form and space, but changes according to the social interaction of city dwellers. Conversely, people’s identity in terms of their age, gender, class and culture is partially constructed in relation to the spaces and buildings they occupy ”.*

(Borden et al., 1996, p. 12).

However, Kim (2021) criticised that, while the ethnographic study is majorly focused on migrant business owners rooted in Chinatown, the lack of voice from other individual participants who regularly purchase items from Chinatown and bring new hybrid practices into the space leads her to ask the question of “How can we map their presence in Chinatown?” The current study aims to address Kim’s criticism by using auto-ethnography as a way to capture participant’s voices. Grounded in personal experiences, auto-ethnography is an ideal research methodology to study sites that are concerned with people and culture, because of its ability to display the interwoven layers of places (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Furthermore, some spatial practices such as Estudio Cruz and Fonna Forman and Atelier Bow-wow have successfully explored the possibility of auto-ethnography in the field of architecture by connecting experiences with architectural technologies.

## Conclusion

By reviewing literature on Chinese spatiality, I have identified the following key themes and the following literature gap that this thesis seeks to address. Chinese migrant communities have a strong connection with food, and therefore, Chinese food spaces can offer a great opportunity for researchers to discover the cultural beliefs and social practices of the Chinese migrant group. I believed Da-Hua, a Chinese grocery store that opened in Northcote town centre during 1990s, is an interesting start point to gain insight into Chinese spatial practices that are relevant for the planning of the new Northcote town centre. As the redevelopment project progressed, Northcote town centre became an ideal research site to study new ways of urban making as it is the intersection where globality meets with locality from governmental policies to everyday practices.

Although there are differences between Northcote town centre and Chinatowns in other countries, we can start to think about how the Chinese migrant community, particularly those who currently run or work in small ethnic businesses in the town centre, grapple with the looming gentrification and possible forced displacement once the new mix-used town centre is completed. While the Chinese community in other countries have been studied with regard to how they cope with gentrification of their neighbourhood, little is known about the Chinese migrant community of Aotearoa. This research study aims to address this gap as it seeks to explore how the community of Chinese migrants of Northcote faces issues of gentrification and displacement, using food as a medium to gain understanding of the research background.

The next chapter discusses the methodology that was employed in this design thesis to investigate the questions outlined above. It introduces auto-ethnography that values individual experiences as a design method and provides precedent studies to support the employment of this method within the architecture discipline.

## Chapter 6

# Methodology

This chapter discusses the methodology of the thesis, which uses autoethnography and architectural research methods to study a Chinese grocery store in Northcote town centre, in order to answer the question of “what roles a Chinese grocery store can play in the local Chinese migrant community?”

*“Autoethnography is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural.”*

(Ellis & Bonchner, 2000, p. 739)

## Autoethnography as Method

Autoethnography is a research method that challenges the canonical way of doing research and representing others. It is an approach to understand cultural experiences (ethno) through describing and systematically analysing (graphy) personal experience (auto) (Ellis, 2004). Grounded in personal experiences, this methodology can deepen people's capacity to understand and sympathise with people who are different from us (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Recognising innumerable ways personal experience can influence the research process, autoethnography provides opportunities to produce meaningful, accessible, and evocative research that can resonate with readers (Ellis et al., 2011). Auto-ethnographers can decide what, where, when, and how to research and make research decisions depending on institutional requirements, resource limitations, and personal circumstance.

This methodology became favoured by many scholars in the field of social science after the postmodernism of the 1980s. Although autoethnography has rarely been discussed in architecture research, auto-ethnographic approaches have been widely adopted in the design process. For example, the writings of Le Corbusier (see Figure 22), Louis Kahn, Peter Zumthor, and Juhani Pallasmaa have presented reflections of personal nature (Paans, 2023). Since autoethnographies tend to consist of written accounts of the ethnographer's experiences, narrative ethnographies often intersect with analyses of patterns and processes (Ellis et al., 2011).

There are advantages in employing autoethnography in research in the field of architecture. First of all, auto-ethnographic texts allow a larger audience outside academic settings to access to the research (Adams et al., 2015). Secondly, the various forms of data collection, such as written vignettes, journal entries, photographs, drawings, and performances (Ellis, 2004), when combined with architectural methods can provide rich data

for researchers to reflect on. Moreover, misinterpretation is greatly reduced by ethnographers as they only present their own experiences (Ellis et al., 2011). However, there are also challenges over the level of exposures when applying autoethnography in research. Autoethnographic research is greatly dependent on researcher's honesty and willingness to self-disclose (Méndez, 2014). The exposure of a researcher's first-person perspective is particularly relevant in this thesis.

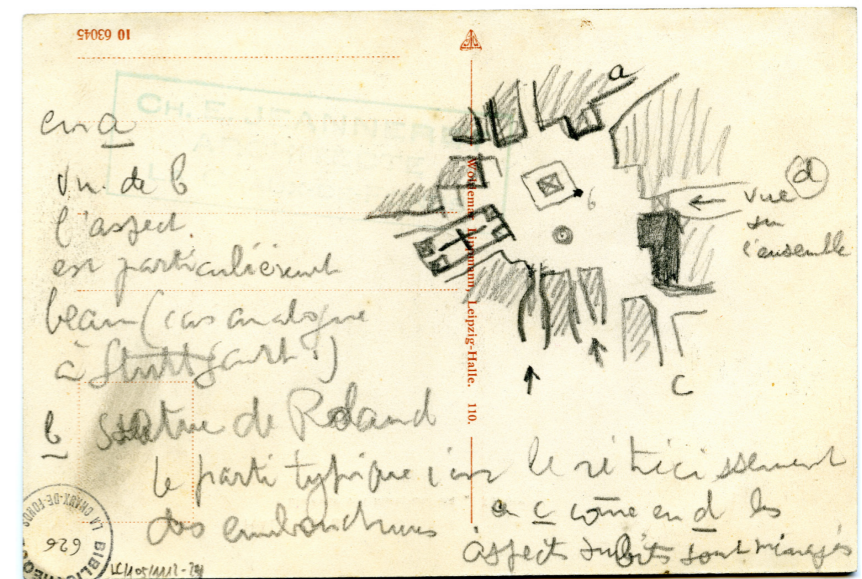


Figure 22. Writing of Le Corbusier. (Brillhart, 2018)

## Urban Survey as an Architectural Research Approach

There are many practices and individuals using auto-ethnographic techniques and field drawings to understand the surrounding environment, events, politics and economy. Japanese architect and ethnographer Kon Wajiro invented modernology, a design methodology to study the urban environment when the Town Planning and Zoning Act promulgation was introduced in Japan in 1920. Modernology is a research programme developed by Wajiro in 1923 as a response to show concerns over the rapid transformation of modern life and city. It is also a research method that can explain the objective conditions of life through creating an accurate record of the everyday life of people (Wajiro & Adriasola, 2016). Ito (1966) considered modernology as “a methodology to observe and survey the area by real scale measuring, and to visualize and objectify it in drawings in order to analyse the physical elements of architecture, lifestyle, and custom, as well as the psychological elements of history and people’s mental conditions in order to clarify and organise the existing spatial mechanism of that area” (p.3).

In modernology research, Kon used simple but defined drawings from careful observations of space conditions and behaviours of different people to create designs that captured how the local people used the space. Such design drawings deviated from authorised plans which followed a western concept that was described as forward-looking and construction orientated at that time in Japan. However, art and architectural practice Konpeito, which researched urban areas of Tokyo through architectural and landscape documentation, also argued that urban survey can only reflect a limited part of the city and the lifestyles of people, and therefore, survey results should not inform any design decisions (Kuroishi, 2016). Similarly, Kenkyujo (1971), who investigated the role of text in urban spaces such as facades, advertisements, and billboards, also criticised that modernology only

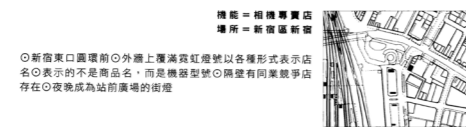
accumulates information and lacks the potential to develop this methodology further (Kenkyujo, 1971).

Wajiro’s modernology created a starting point for urban survey and provided examples of how to connect socio-cultural research methods with urban research. Konpetio and Kenkyujo’s research (1971), for instance, employed design survey to create research that featured a stronger focus on urban design and spatiality. More recently, Atelier Bow-Wow has successfully undertaken some urban research around building forms. The research methods of Atelier Bow-wow are unique as they combine different ideas and methods, such as Bernard Rudofsky’s *Architecture without Architect*; Aldo Rossi’s *Architecture of the city*; Robert Venturi, Denise Brown, and Robert Izenour’s *Learning from Las Vegas*; Wajiro Kon’s *Modernology*, and Terunobu Fujimori’s *Street Observation Society* (Kuroishi, 2016). The design and research methods of Atelier Bow- Wow are practical and specific to architecture. Publications such as “*Made in Tokyo*” and “*WindowScape-Window behaviourology*” are great examples of how new-generation Japanese architects employ observations and field drawings to analyse data of urban surveys to better understand the relationships between the people’s way of life and the urban space through visualisation. The current thesis was inspired by the daring mix of approaches and focus on people’s engagement with their surroundings of these texts.

Made in Tokyo



Figure 23. Made in Tokyo. Photo of the building. (Kaijima et al., 2001)



function: camera store + billboard  
site: Shinjuku, Shinjuku-ku  
- in front of the Shinjuku East entry/exit interchange plaza  
- neon signs wrap the external faces of the building, making various patterns by repeating shop names over and over again  
- advertising lists types of product rather than brand names  
- neighboring mall shares the same form  
- in the evening, it becomes lighting for the open space of the city

06 霓虹樓  
neon building

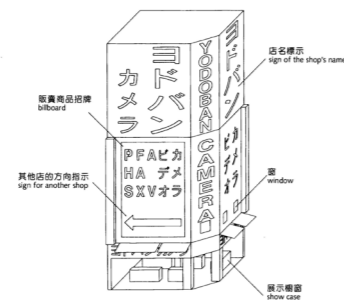


Figure 24. Made in Tokyo. Survey drawing of the building. (Kaijima et al., 2001)

In this book, Atelier Bow-Wow collected a variety of building and objects in Tokyo, Japan, whether they are good, bad, beautiful or ugly. In particular, they surveyed physical forms according to four orders, including category, structure, use and mortality. Kaijima and his colleagues viewed architecture without prejudice, and it was through this attitude they were able to discover how architecture responds to the metropolitan urban environment honestly.

Research data was collected through photographs, drawings, nicknames and text (kaijima et al., 2001). Photos and drawings are common approaches in architectural design processes. These two methods work in collaboration to picture all possible details of researched buildings and their surrounding environment. In addition, all observations in this research were taken an 'step-back' approach in order to have a full panorama view of the urban context, rather than focus on the building itself. Buildings were drawn from an axonometric view. This approach was reflected in this thesis where a Chinese grocery store and the surrounding town centre environment was examined carefully to understand the wider urban context. Furthermore, the approach of giving each researched building item a nickname has added some auto-ethnographic elements in the survey process as nicknames can directly explain the interests of the building and express researcher's personal feelings, such as fondness.

Last but not least, "Made in Tokyo" is published as a bi-lingual guidebook format to also serve as a navigation tool for foreign visitor. Instead of being limited in the academic filed, the research became easily accessible to the public. This intention shares similarities with the positive nature of autoethnography by making text available to a larger audience.

## Windowscape – window behaviourology

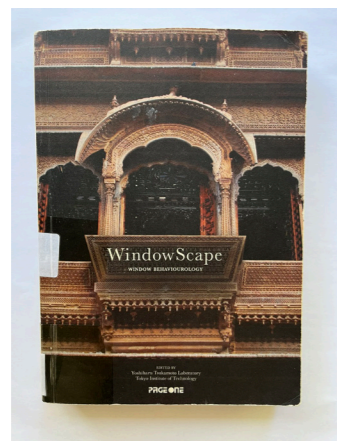


Figure 25. The book 'Window Scape' by Yoshihara Tsukamoto Laboratory and Tokyo Institute of Technology. Author's own photo.



Figure 26. An architectural documentation of a Cantonese-style restaurant in Hong Kong.

Windowscape is a publication which details a study of behaviourology around windows. Authors of the book challenge the theory of people considering windows simply as a product during the mass production era. The researchers suggest window behaviourology which shows interactions and connections between people and things can be observed if windows are studied outside a production theory.

Formatted in a consistent structure, this architectural survey uses the combination of photos, drawings, annotations and texts to offer a variety

of dimensions for readers to understand the different situations around windows. It offers a practical and poetic approach to document the liveness around boundaries. For example, the line illustration represents some crucial aspects of food culture in Hong Kong. The annotated drawing shows how the restaurant works in small space to cook food and within a small space how window is utilised as a display shelf to create a relationship with the outside environment. The simple lines, numbers, and descriptive text have not only illustrated a detail situation of a Hong Kong restaurant, but also left readers space for imaginations.

This capturing method is an important reference for this design thesis. It is both a record process and research outcome itself. The observation position in this book is different from it in 'Made in Tokyo'. The observation techniques are "zoom-in" to the research object, capturing some small details and habitations. This close observation enables researchers to discover the relationship between space and individual users. I adopt this techniques in some of the field drawings and technical drawings to gain insight into some particular research areas, such as the compartment butcher shop.

*Maidan Survey, 2014*



Figure 27. Maidan Survey, winter 2014 (BUREAU et al., 2014)



Figure 28. Maidan Survey, winter 2014 (BUREAU et al., 2014)

Maidan Survey is an architectural survey which documents the transitory architecture during the siege of Maidan Square in Kiev. The transitory architecture is recorded through a series of correspondence, images, plans, elevations, and catalogue drawings.

There is a marked contrast between precise digital drawing and the temporary, transitory architecture on Maidan Square. The clean lines in the drawing become very powerful documenting the constant changing war environment. This technique of using simple lines for documenting complicated environment is learnt in this research to record details of Da-Hua Supermarket. This precedent showcases the possibilities how survey and architectural drawing techniques can be employed in projects to engage with some wider issues in the society.

## Avondale Sunday Market Research



Figure 29. HOOPLA's installation Avondale Sunday Markets in Toro Whakaara: Responses to our built environment. (Object Space, 2022)

Hoopla's project of Avondale Sunday Market was catalysed by the idea of hostile architecture. Hostile architecture is an urban design strategy, using elements of built environment to guide behaviour in public space. This project took place since early 2000s and have collected a wide range of research materials, including photographs, time-lapse video, price data, and verbal communication with different groups. The rich data collected over the years has enabled researchers to see this urban space from social, cultural, environmental and economical perspectives. This research approach shows contrast to some "industry-standard" approaches of site analysis and public

engagement. Moreover, the Avondale Sunday Market project indicates the value of the practice, which is "working with locals where possible. Both researchers of Hoopla reside/resided in the neighbourhood where the Sunday Market is held weekly and conduct ongoing research around Te Whau River, a significant ecological and historical site, adjacent to Avondale Sunday Market.

One of the key learnings from this precedent is the approach Hoopla took to engage with community and space through various formats in order to gain a full picture an urban space holistically. The Avondale Sunday Market project showed how urban research can be an architecture expansion by providing an opportunity for architecture to connect physical buildings into a neighbourhood network during the early design and planning process.

*Perceptive Journey*



Figure 30. Exhibition of Perceptive Journey. (Brave News Alps, 2008)

This is a project which prioritise personal experiences and sensorial information to understand landscapes. This project focused on an area on the outskirts of London. The researchers found that although the project area was layered with natural, historical, industrial, post-industrial and urban elements, it remained unnoticed, unperceived by the vast majority of London's inhabitants. To respond this discovery, the researchers organised a perceptive journey inviting friends to experience the landscape in an un-

mediated way, through both inviting people to experience the places and sharing stories with the participants along the two-day walking trip.

This project has emphasised that sensorial information can only be perceived in its complexity by ourselves, for example by moving through a landscape by foot. This is one the of key learnings I took from this project to support the methodology, where experiences, feelings and thoughts generated from each visit of the project site are valued. While this precedent project only focused on one visit, this thesis expanded the scale by multiplying the number of site visit. By doing this, more information can be collected and layered in order to understand the collective values of Chinese migrant community through studying a local Chinese grocery store.

## An Adapted Method

Understanding the context of research backgrounds from previous chapters, Da-Hua Supermarket, a local Chinese grocery store, is carefully chosen as the investigation site for this thesis. An adapted method, that is a hybrid of an auto-ethnography and surveys is then applied primarily to investigate the relationship between space and the everyday practices that is personal, cultural and biased.

Firstly, the methodology of the thesis considers the accessibility offered by autoethnography to my everyday practices. It is helpful for me to develop understanding of the social and cultural values this grocery store has provided to the Northcote community. The everyday dimension is particularly relevant to my research context, as being ordinary and banal Da-Hua is the intersection between culture, architecture, aesthetics, history, process and everyday practice. Vietti (2023) also applied autoethnography to his research project to study migration and intercultural processes through a condominium space in the apartment complex that he lived in and had encountered all the interactions and social exchanges with his neighbours. Furthermore, being actively involved in the community through everyday livings has allow me to be in a comfortable position to carry out an auto-ethnographic study of this area, and the intersectionality between my gender, ethnicity, age, and identity can enable me to observe the conditions of space through a unique perspective. For example, the presence of my son during the research creates valuable opportunities for me to engage with the unique spatiality of Da-Hua and the people. The collection of auto-ethnographic experience becomes rich data for the research. This includes photos, field sketches, field notes, mapping, written vignettes and records. Secondly, the method of architectural survey contributes in connecting personal experiences with architecture. In this thesis, architectural drawing techniques such as sectional, plan and perspective drawings were applied

to record precise details. Building upon auto-ethnographic experience, technical drawings also reflect and identify collective features and cultural patterns, providing a cultural insight.

Autoethnography and architectural survey show significant contrast to each other, with one celebrating subject experience and individuality and the other focusing on documenting the objectivity of the environment. By integrating the two methods as the methodology, this thesis aims to reflect on how urban planning and city developments can become more responsive to the minority community by investigating a culturally important site with a specific approach. To this end, this auto-ethnographic research becomes ethnographic by highlighting the intent of gaining a cultural understanding (Chang, 2008).

In next chapter, the auto-ethnographic journal of this research is presented through five narratives, discussing different experiences in and out of Da-Hua Supermarket. The documentation and presentation techniques vary in different scenarios, aiming to capture a full picture of the grocery store and its surroundings environment.

## *Chapter 7*

# Auto-ethnographic Journal

This chapter documents the journey of me experiencing Da-Hua as an auto-ethnographer and architectural researcher. Highlighting the significance of personal experience, I explored the spatial conditions of Da-Hua and its surrounding urban environment through various formats, both written and verbal, tangible and non-tangible. Autoethnography is interested in the richness of personal experiences as a means to capture insights. Therefore, capturing the self-observational data that “records your actual behaviours, thoughts, and emotions as they occur in their natural context” (Chang, 2008, p.90) and self-reflective data that “results from introspection, self-analysis, and self-evaluation of who you are and what you are” (Chang, 2008, p. 95) is a significant part of this chapter.

Auto-ethnographic work is a the design-research, and that the drawings generated both in the field and after are important parts of the design outcome. Collecting auto-ethnographic data is not only a research process, but the data also forms a critical part of the thesis outcome. The collected experiences are presented and exhibited through creative artefacts, such as drawings, photographs, mappings, field sketches, and field notes. The use of diverse media within the research process captures the relationship between space (what is officially mapped) and place (that is filled with locality and subjective experiences). Furthermore, an autoethnography which traces the life of people by recording the everyday activities in Da-Hua enables a reciprocal exchange between the Chinese grocery store and the Northcote community.

This chapter consists of five narratives capturing my everyday experiences with Da-Hua from different perspectives. These narratives highlight the socio-economic importance of Da-Hua. The pram had a marked impact on the methods of information gathering used (see Figure 31) throughout the research journey to ensure the Chinese spatiality in and around Da-Hua Supermarket was well captured and documented. Being a mum brings many

changes to the way I live, and certainly the way I do grocery shopping. From the preparation before leaving the house, taking the pram out from the car, to moving the pram through different spaces, the pram has given me another lens to see the space in Northcote town centre. This is particularly important because it creates an additional layer to this research thesis. Secondly, together with my pen and sketch book, the pram also acted a mobile desk, allowing me to quickly write field notes and sketches.



Figure 31. Use the pram and clip board to document grocery journey. The clip board was tied to the pram and carried everywhere.

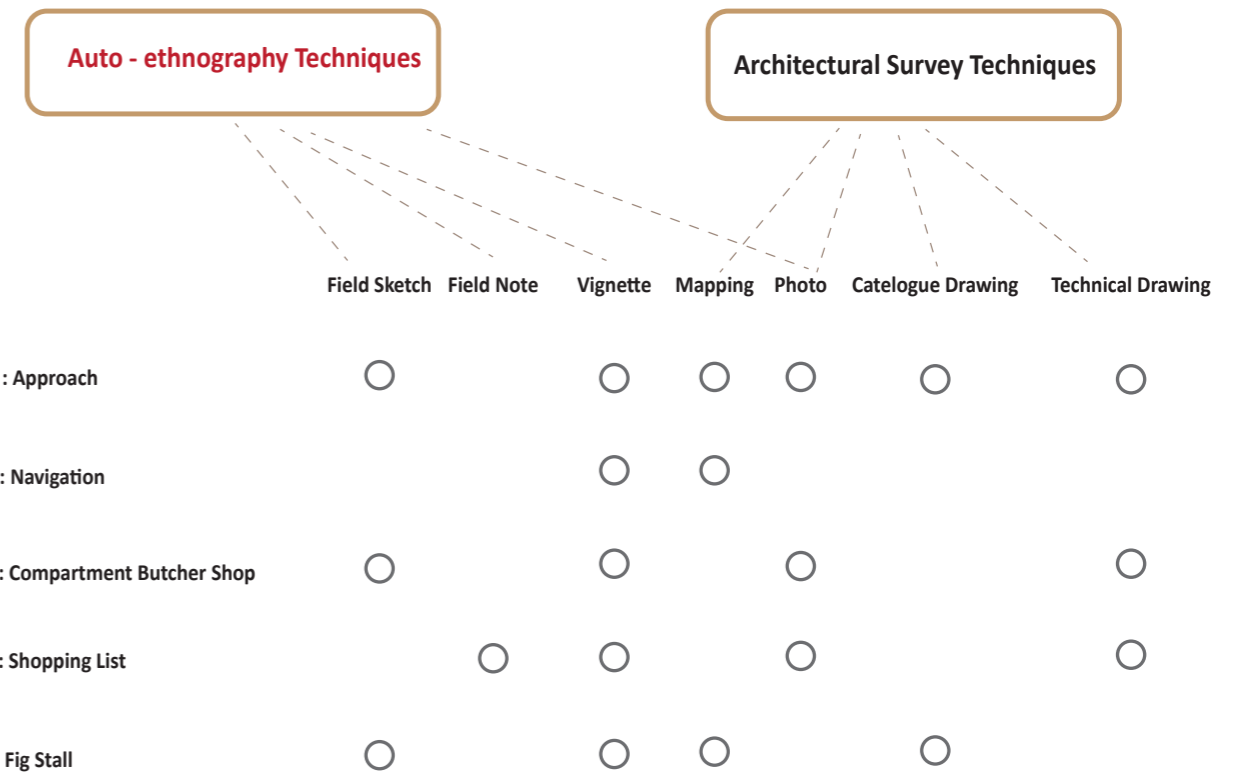


Figure 32. Analysis of research techniques in each narratives.

*Narrative #1*

*Approach*



Figure 33. Boxes, Pram and Shelf. Field Sketch.

## Pram

28/03/2024

This has become our every-day shop now. We go to Da-Hua at least twice a week, sometimes for planned grocery trips, but other times we just go in and stroll around. Checking out the stacked-up boxes in this grocery store is one important sight-seeing thing for us to do. I have Hayes with me most of the time. He will either be carried in a front pack or pushed in a pram. On the “strolling days” when we just do window-shopping in the store, we spend more time around the stacked-up boxes (see Figure 34 and 35). The boxes are same, but different. Boxes are always stacked up in the same “designated” areas. However, the products are always changing. Just like how they are shelved in a temporary condition, many products are on special or marked for a quick sale. We stop by the snack section to look for the snacks we know we like, but if we are adventurous enough, we will choose something new to try out<sup>1</sup>. They are on sale, anyway, I think.

The cluster of stacked up boxes, is a shelf for display;

1 I am not an adventurous person at all. However, my families is. They like trying new food. I feel more emotionally secured to have my family in New Zealand, and I wonder if for the first Chinese migrants, going to a Chinese food stores would feel a bit like visiting family: full of seeing, feeling, smelling, and sensing something that is familiar? Having families around means coming together for cultural celebrations , such as Chinese New Year and Mid-autumn Moon festival. On those special days, we gather at a family house and share meals together. I like to bring special Chinese snacks to share with my food-adventurous cousins, who are very good at using descriptive words to tell me how the snacks taste like in a mix of Chinese and English. Food brings our family together. Does it apply to other migrant families?

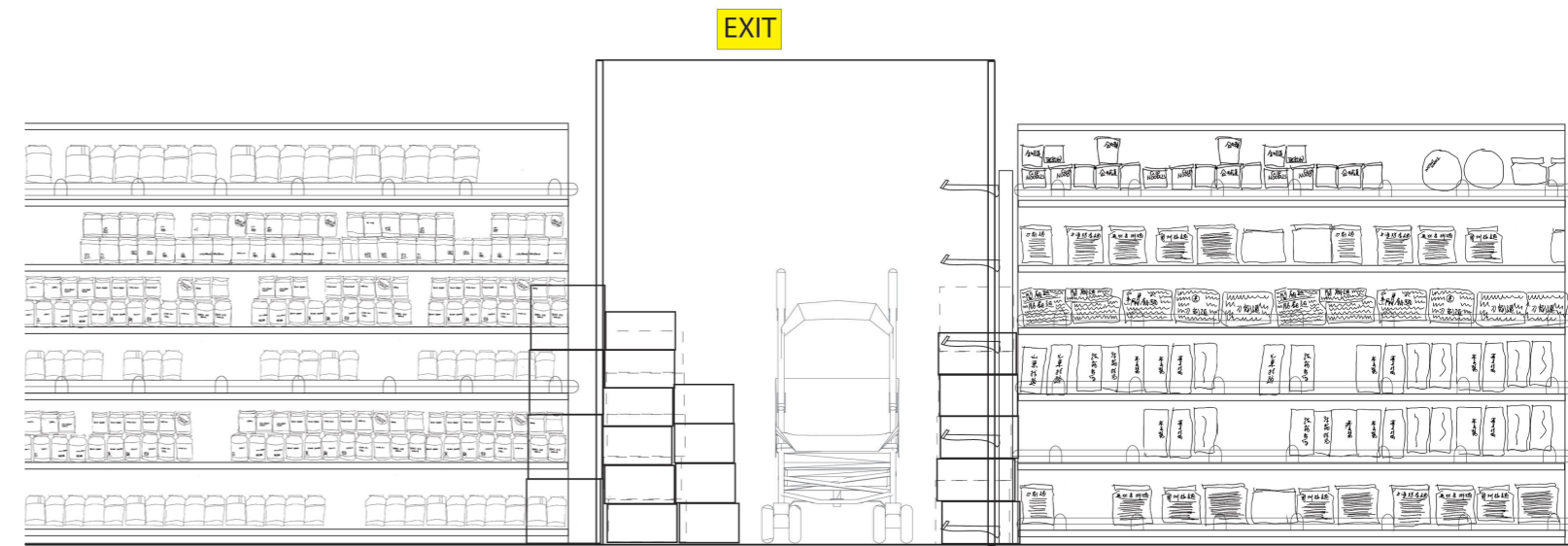


Figure 34. Passage. Sectional drawing of a passage of Da-Hua

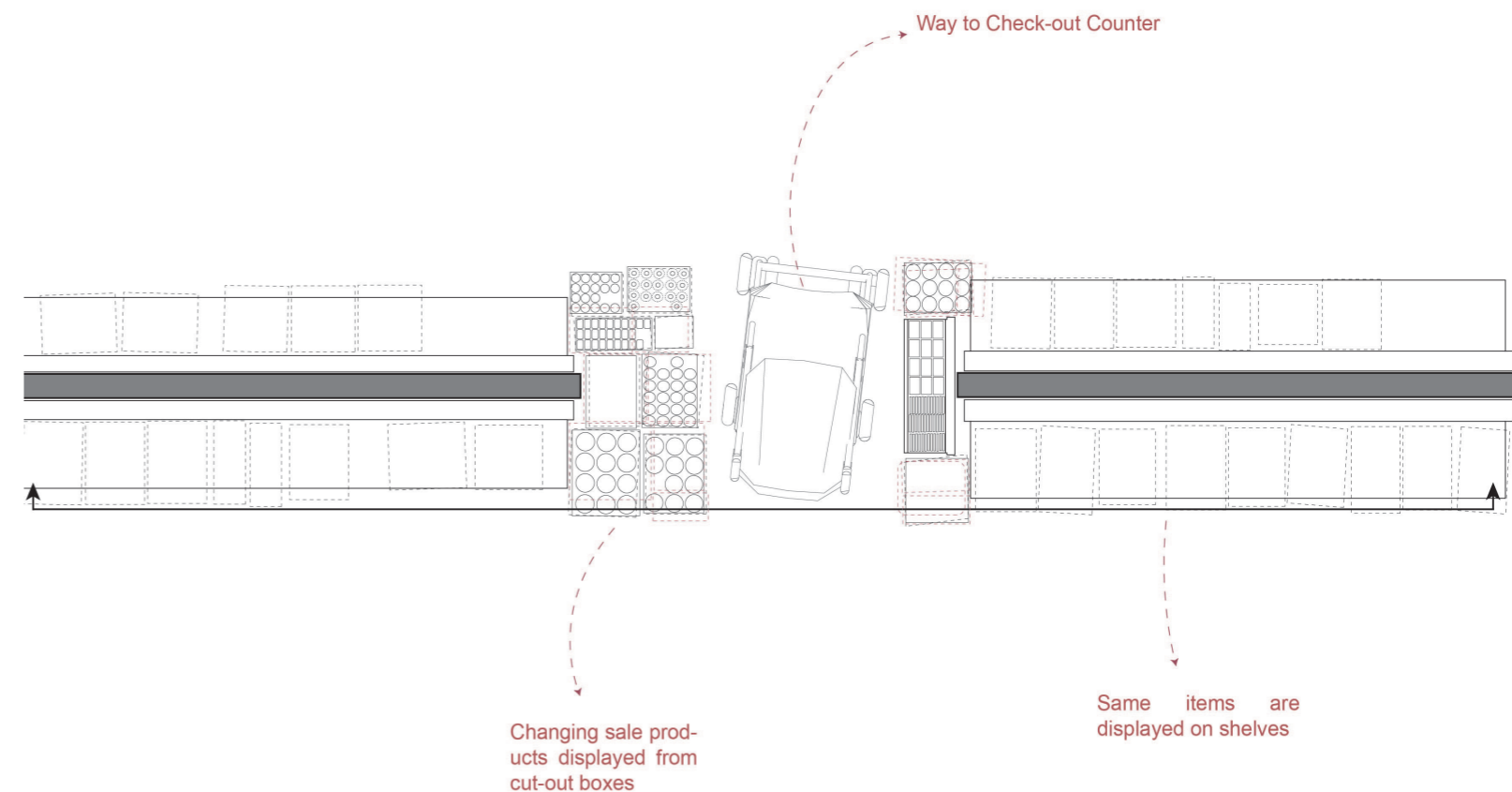


Figure 35. Passage. Plan view of a passage of Da-Hua.

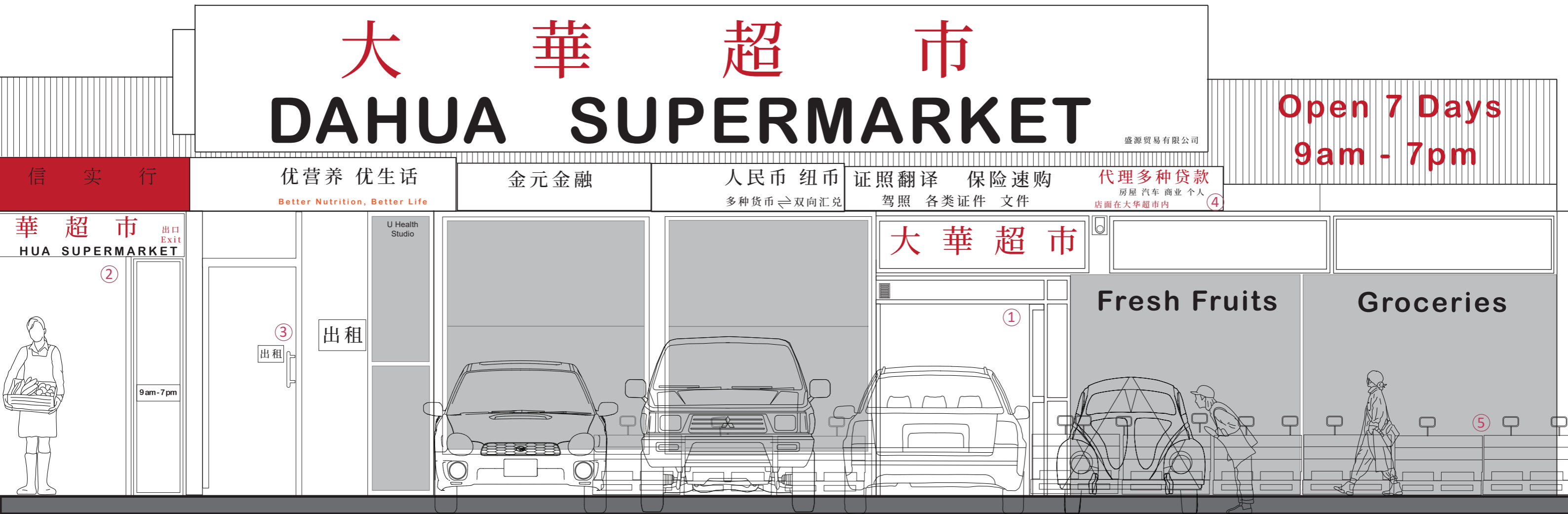
*an obstacle for my pram to get stuck or to get around;  
an informal boundary;  
a message and an invitation to the customers; and the process itself.*

11/10/2024

*It has been raining for a few days and today it finally stopped. We decided to do a stroller walk from our house to Da-Hua. Just before we crossed the road to Da-Hua, we stopped at the construction site of a Kainga Ora housing project to watch the many diggers, trucks, and a big crane. Both Hayes and I were fascinated by the big machines. Seeing a very tall crane, I assume another high-rise apartment will appear in here soon. The new residents will be so close to the new town centre, and they can even see the shops, signs, cars, and people clearly from their windows and balconies. The bright yellow and red sign of Da-Hua Supermarket stands out from many other signs. They will not miss it, but will they be intrigued by the Chinese characters on the signs? Having a few questions in mind, we continued our walk to Da-Hua through the pedestrian walkway. Normally, I arrive at Da-Hua by reversing the car into one of the carparks right in front of the shop because this is the easiest way to set up the stroller and transfer grocery items to the car after shopping. However, this backward approach of entering the town centre also means I miss many opportunities to encounter the front façade of Da-Hua. Built in 1959, Northcote town centre was set up for cars. But what are the scales for the signages? What about the colours? What are the cultural meanings of the colours?*



Figure 36. Spatial relationship between Da-Hua Supermarket and adjacent Kainga Ora construction site.



⑥

Da-Hua Supermarket- Elevation

- 1. Da-Hua Entry
- 2. Da-Hua Exit
- 3. Street-facing tenanted small store (currently on lease)
- 4. Signs in Chinese Characters
- 5. Exterior food (usually fruits and vegetables) crates
- 6. Street curb

Figure 37. Da-Hua Supermarket elevation drawing.

## Narrative Analysis

I noticed different things when I took different paths to enter both Northcote town centre and Da-Hua. When arriving on foot, the different signs attached to Da-Hua building become an interesting discovery. The signs use different media including English words, Chinese characters, and numbers to communicate with customers. The largest sign suggests the main purpose of the building while the relatively small signs communicate the embedded services offered by Da-Hua. These ethnic services in areas such as finance, tourism, health, and insurance serve the local Chinese community by removing language barriers. There is a dialogical relationship between the signs and viewers and there is a spontaneous logic behind the signs to help understand the networks and relationships within this particular urban condition. Furthermore, positioned next to the entrance of Da-Hua on the pedestrian pavement, the fruit and vegetable crate boxes are another way of signing. Through space claiming, the large wooden crates contain seasonal produces, such as apples, citrus, pumpkin or kumara, become a sensory invitation to the neighbourhood. I often observed mostly elderly shoppers taking the time to choose their produce with all their senses and engaging in conversations with each other right outside the entrance of Da-Hua. These boxes have become a piece of urban furniture, creating space for people to linger. Being more than a display tool, exterior fruit crates are also a part of the threshold architecture, encouraging a softer relationship between the grocery store and the neighbourhood. This set up is distinct from other supermarkets such as Woolworths or Pak'nSave where metal bars are placed at the entrance to control the flow of people. By blurring the boundary between the interior and the exterior space, the grocery store communicates that it trusts the community.

The second layer of the narrative emphasises the pram as the key player, as it determines how I carry out the regular grocery shopping. It is not

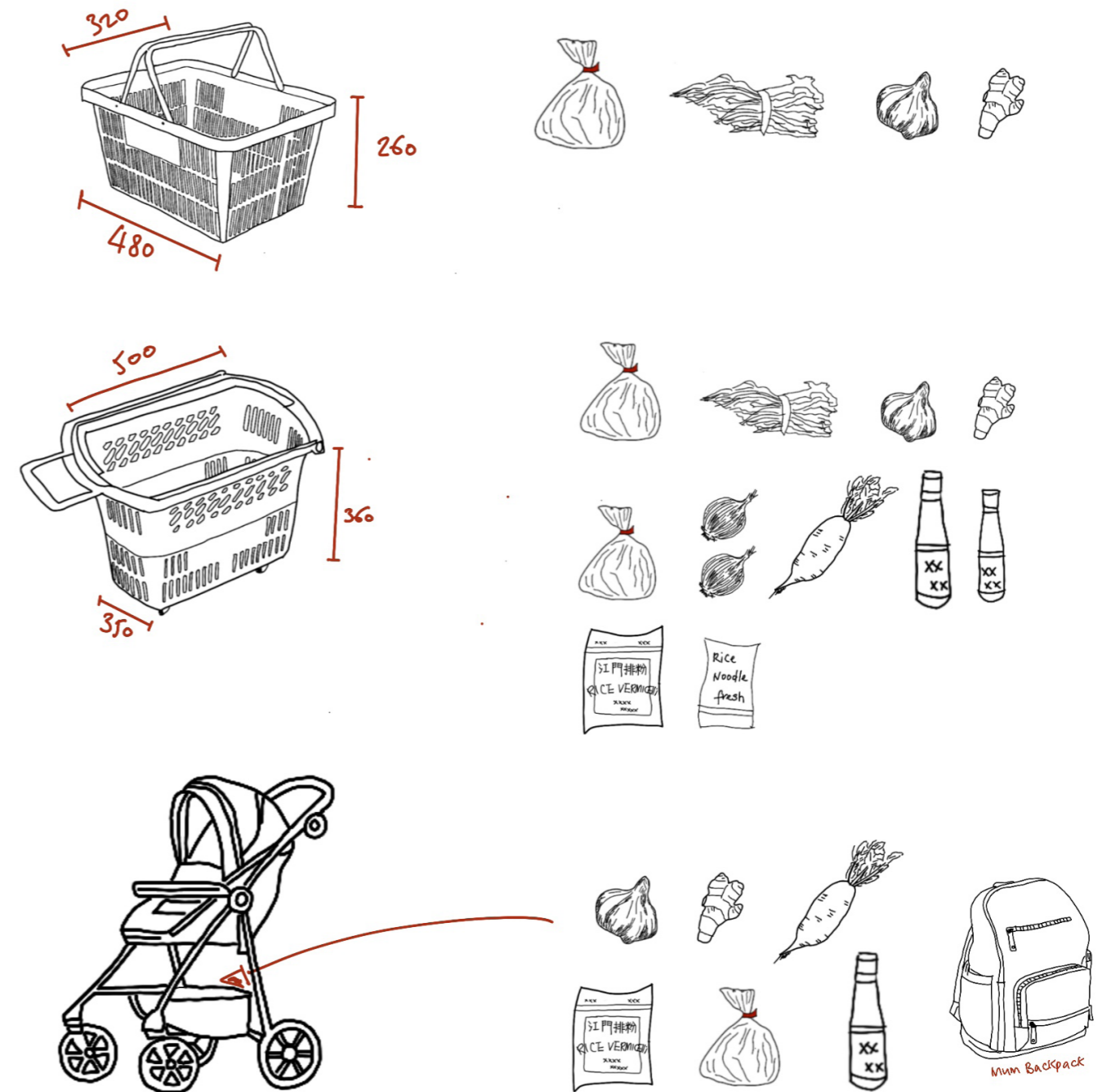


Figure 38. Catalogue Drawing of shopping baskets/ pram

very common to see parents use a stroller during grocery shopping in NZ supermarkets as they tend to utilise a shopping trolley provided by the supermarkets to be able to purchase more items in one go. However, when shopping in Da-Hua with an infant, it is necessary to take a pram as the store does not provide shopping trolleys. On one hand, it reflects Da-Hua, like many other migrant businesses, often operate in small spaces to reduce cost. Have regular trolleys like those used in other large supermarkets, means that less items can be displayed to customers within a small space. On the other hand, the limited amenity of Da-Hua has altered shoppers' shopping behaviour from large and bulk purchase to small but regular buying. This change of behaviour around grocery shopping can create a closer community through regular visits. For example, a relationship between the butcher's wife and I was formed through my regular weekly visits to the butcher shop, and she sometimes was able to predict what I was going to buy.

Narrative #2

Navigation

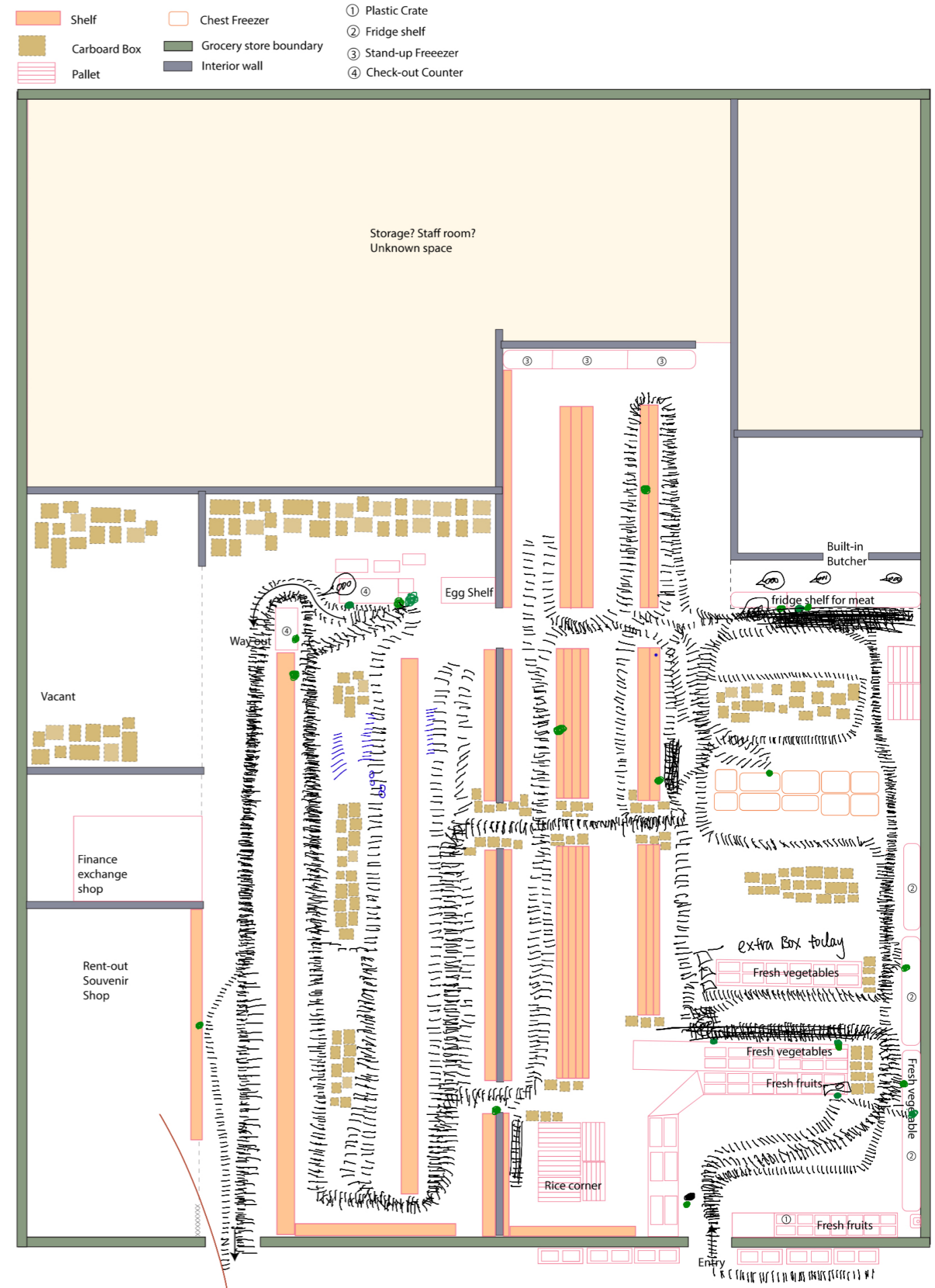


Figure 39. Analysis map of my movement trajectory record of four different days

## Navigation

11/10/2024

*Da-Hua has been in Northcote shopping centre for many years now, and I remembered this was the shop my family took me to visit a few days after I arrived in New Zealand. However, I stopped visiting Da-Hua or other Chinese grocery stores when I left home and went to university to study teaching. I became too shy to speak Mandarin or Cantonese outside my home environment, and most of my friends were not Chinese. I tried to live in a way that was the same as my university friends who were Pākehā, cooked spaghetti bolognaises although I never liked it, and pretended to be someone who is not Chinese. Many years later, reflecting on this, I realised I was totally lost in the sea of identity. My parents wouldn't know what it was like as they did not experience this in their formative years. No one in the family could help me navigate through this journey, and there was no knowledge they could pass down.*

*Although I struggle less with my cultural identity as I get older, having Hayes in my life and spending more time sensing everything in Da-Hua has certainly help me understand who I am, where I come from, and what my culture is. At the same time, I recognise the privilege I have compared to many other migrants as I moved to New Zealand from a young age and was able to learn English as a second language quickly. However, some elderly Chinese migrants who only immigrated to New Zealand to be with their adult children and grandchildren struggle with learning a new language, so they find stores such as Chinese grocery stores and Chinese restaurants that offer them a sense of attachment and security as they know they can be understood. For younger generations of Chinese migrants like Hayes who were born in New Zealand, the experiences of Chinese grocery shopping and Chinese dinning with their parent can hopefully act as an anchor should he ever struggle with his cultural identity*

*one day.<sup>1</sup>*

---

1 Members of the older generations within a family who have moved to New Zealand in adulthood tend to have an attachment to Chinese grocery stores such as Da-Hua where they can source frozen Chinese food and cooking ingredients that allow them to provide a Chinese upbringing to their children through the culture of food. For me, the ongoing struggle with my identity feels like sailing in the sea where Chinese grocery stores now feel like harbours that shelter security when I need it.

## Narrative Analysis

Narrative 2 is about navigations. While the writing reflects my personal socio-cultural navigations of Pākehā space as a Chinese migrant, movement mapping records the physical trajectory within the interior space of Da-Hua. The two navigations are more than ten years apart. By discussing them together in this narrative, the time dimension of Da-Hua is emphasised. Within the ten years I have moved cities, changed careers, and built a family; yet Da-Hua is still in the same place serving the same neighbourhood.

While I was navigating the physical space of Da-Hua, I created a floor plan of the store based on memories, photographs, tile counting, and some physical measurements. This is not a technical drawing, but it fits the purpose of trajectory mapping. During four different trips to Da-Hua, I took the floor plan with me in a clip board and used the pram as a station to record the movement as accurately as possible. In this context, I recognise the difficulties involved in multi-tasking in a busy grocery store, which may have limited my ability to accurately record data. However, mapping is still an important tool to understand movements because it reflects how I interact with the space. The manner in which people shop can be compared to the way people interact in a social space. There are certain social rules that need to be followed, and the trajectory of shoppers describes particular relationships and events in time. Within the space of the grocery store, there are many architectural elements such as walls, furniture, boxes, and shelves that frame our physical and social movements and make marks on our everyday performance. Furthermore, mappings are considered self-observational data that are collected in a natural context during an auto-ethnographic journey (Chang, 2008). Thus, I used movement maps (see Figures 40 - 43) to record my shopping trajectory across four different shopping trips to Da-Hua. As can be seen from the trajectory presented in Figure 44, some parts of the grocery store were visited repeatedly, and as a result, these areas

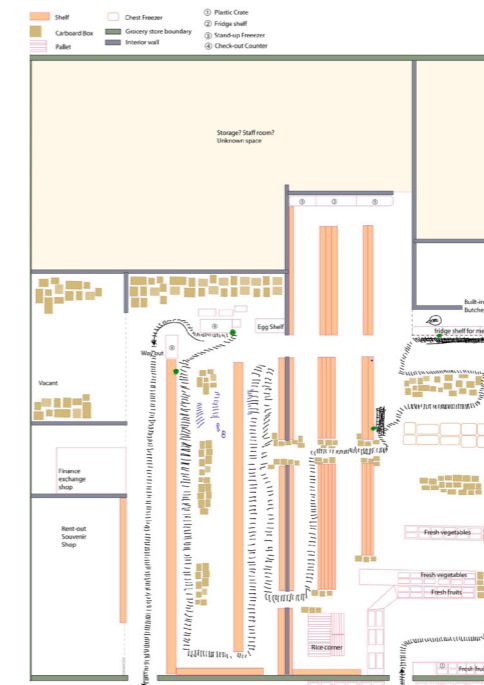


Figure 40. Movement trajectory record on 16th June 2024

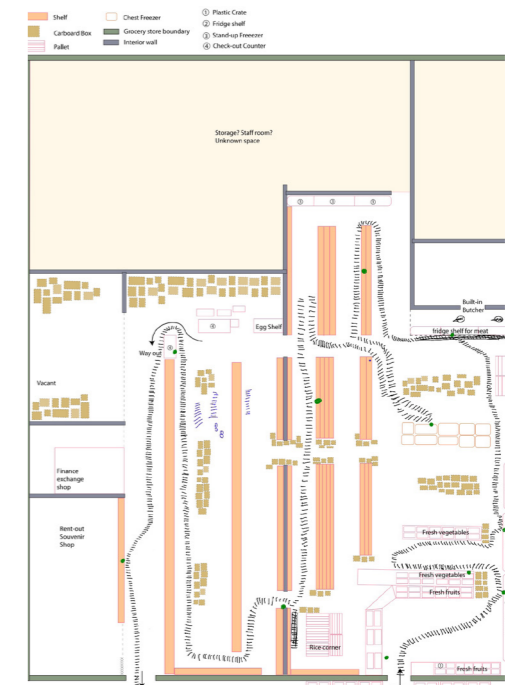


Figure 41. Movement trajectory record on 24th June 2024

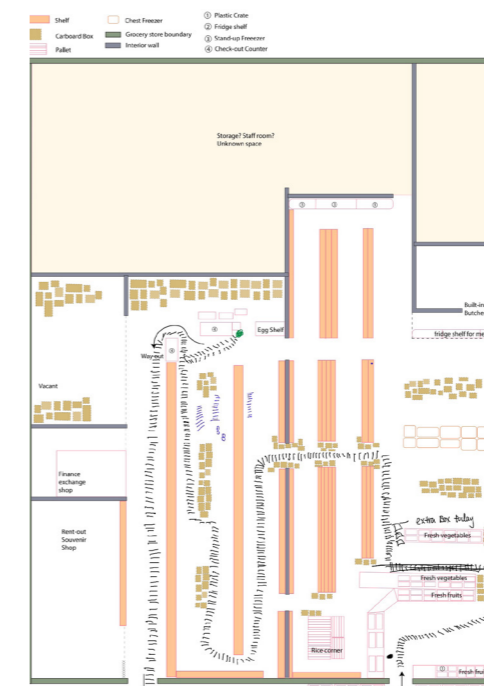


Figure 42. Movement trajectory record on 16th July 2024

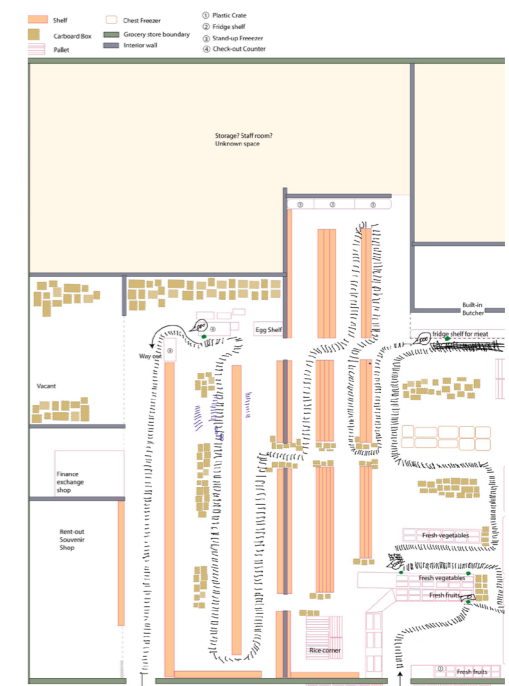


Figure 43. Movement trajectory record on 24th July 2024

were more closely examined to understand the reasons why. These areas are discussed in different narratives below.

In conclusion, this narrative presents how I navigate self and space through self-reflection and mapping exercises. While personal reflection is focused on a new Chinese migrant's navigation into Pākehā spaces, the trajectory mapping focuses on an economic space with significant Chinese connections. Although the two navigations present different topics, they are tightly connected through one place – Da-Hua Supermarket.

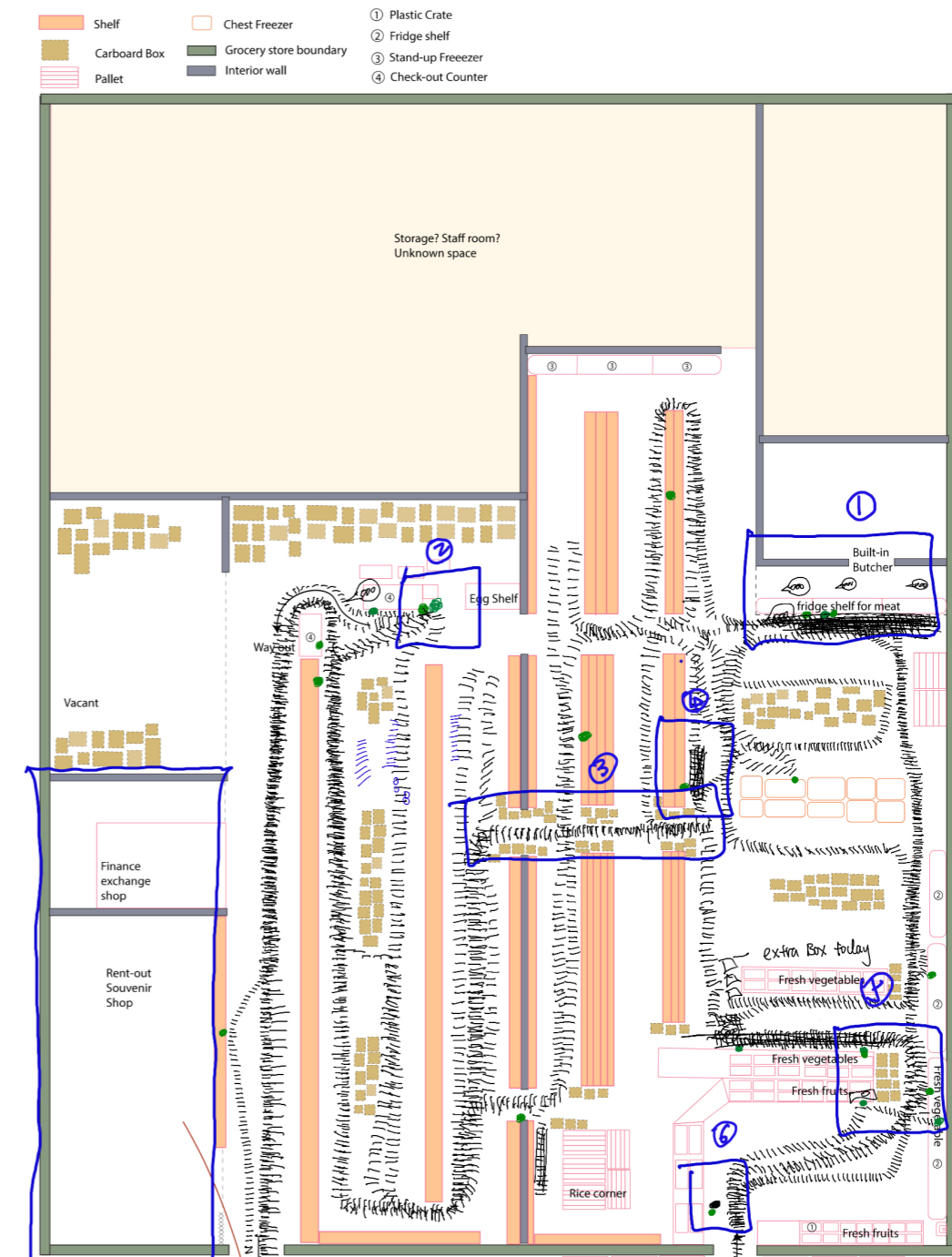


Figure 44. Analysis map of my movement trajectory record of four different days

1. Compartment Butcher Shop. Provide meat in cultural forms to customer.
2. Check-out counter. Limited amount of fresh rice noodle displaced in here.
3. Narrow passage with stacked up boxes.
4. Display shelf with Chinese cooking sauces
5. Passage with stacked up boxes, closed to entrance.
6. Entrance, where small-size shopping baskets are placed.
7. Other small tenancies/compartment stores.

*Narrative #3*

*Compartment Butcher Shop*

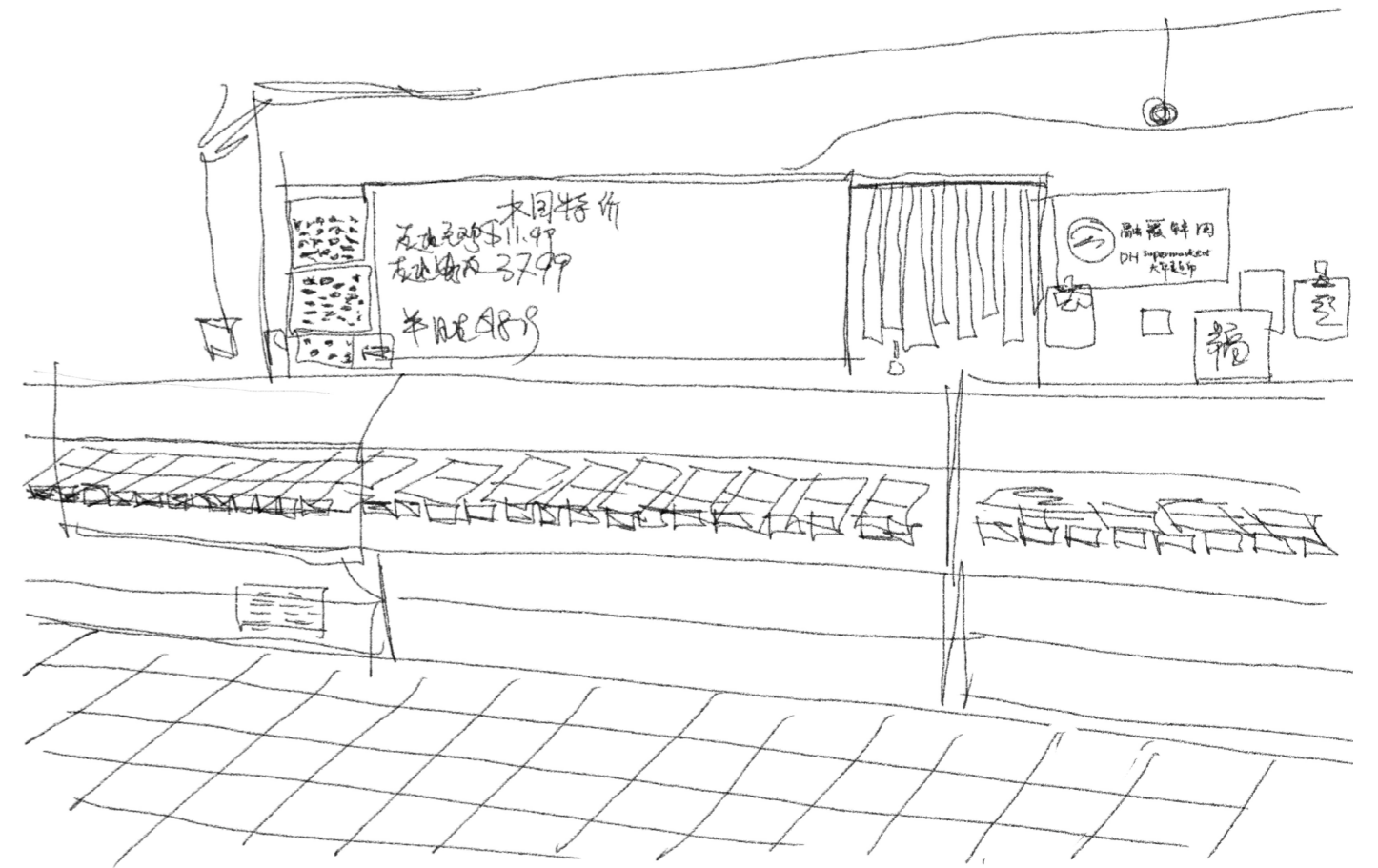


Figure 45. Compartment Chinese Butcher. Field Sketch.

## The Butcher Shop inside the Grocery Store

03/05/2024

*“Hey how can I help you today?”*

*“Em... I am not sure yet, can you give me a few minutes?”*

*The butcher lady certainly felt disappointed when I can't make up my mind to decide which meat to purchase. I could see the disappointment on her face as she took off the glove that she just put on.*

*I think I have spent too long time in front the glass; the lady went back into the back room, and soon the butcher man came to the front.*

*“What would you like to eat for dinner, little one?”*

*He opened the conversation to Hayes, while Hayes stared, stared, and stared at the man, full of curiosity.*

*I felt the pressure to make a choice quickly was lifted. “The pork ribs please” I finally made the choice.*

*“The meaty one or the ‘bone-y’ one?” He has thrown me another question.*

*“Meaty” well, of course the meaty one, I thought, because that means we get the most out of the price; this felt like the obvious choice considering the high food price we are experiencing at the moment.*

*Within minutes, he weighted and sticker-priced the pork ribs and handed them over to me. Everything was done quickly.*

*The man did not stop talking to Hayes while I glanced at two pigs hanging at the entrance of the back room.*

*“wow, is that a pig hanging over there?”*

*“Oh of course, have you not seen one? ha, your generation could be the one who have only eaten the pork but not have seen a pig running. But we are the ones who only have seen pig running but never had chance to taste the pork, back in the old days”.*



Figure 46. The hanging pig carcass in the compartment butcher. Author's own photo

## Narrative Analysis

Getting meat from the compartment butcher shop is an important part of every Chinese grocery shopping trip. This small butcher shop is physically a part of the Da-Hua Supermarket but operated under two different owners. Both the butcher and his wife work for their small business, providing a variety of meat options for private customers. The butcher is often found working in the back room, while the wife is serving customers at the front. The sectional drawing of the butcher shop reveals an interesting threshold architecture. Processes of food are unveiled as the butcher cuts the pig that is hung from the ceiling, behind a thin plastic film (see Figure 47).

The fact that customers can watch the butcher work at the backroom also becomes a celebration as customers can see that the product purchased is fresh and freshness is a critical part in Chinese cooking. An order-and-weight system is employed in the shop, where the butcher's wife will take orders and sticker price each item. This means that customers are offered the right to choose what they want and how much to take in this economic exchange. The variety of meat options differentiate this Chinese butcher shop from butcher sections of other supermarkets, such as New World or Woolworths. It specialises in cuts needed in Chinese cooking. Parts of animals such as chicken hearts and feet, pork heads, salmon bones, beef fingers, and Omasum can be found in this compartment butcher shop (see Figure 48). It reflects distinct cultural beliefs and opinions on what parts of animals are consumable. These animal parts are common items in this butcher shop, indicating local Chinese customers have high demands for using them for their daily cooking.

By offering everyday items at the shop, Chinese cooking customs are celebrated through everyday life as the ethnic community being able to access to the food they need. For example, I often need to go the butcher's

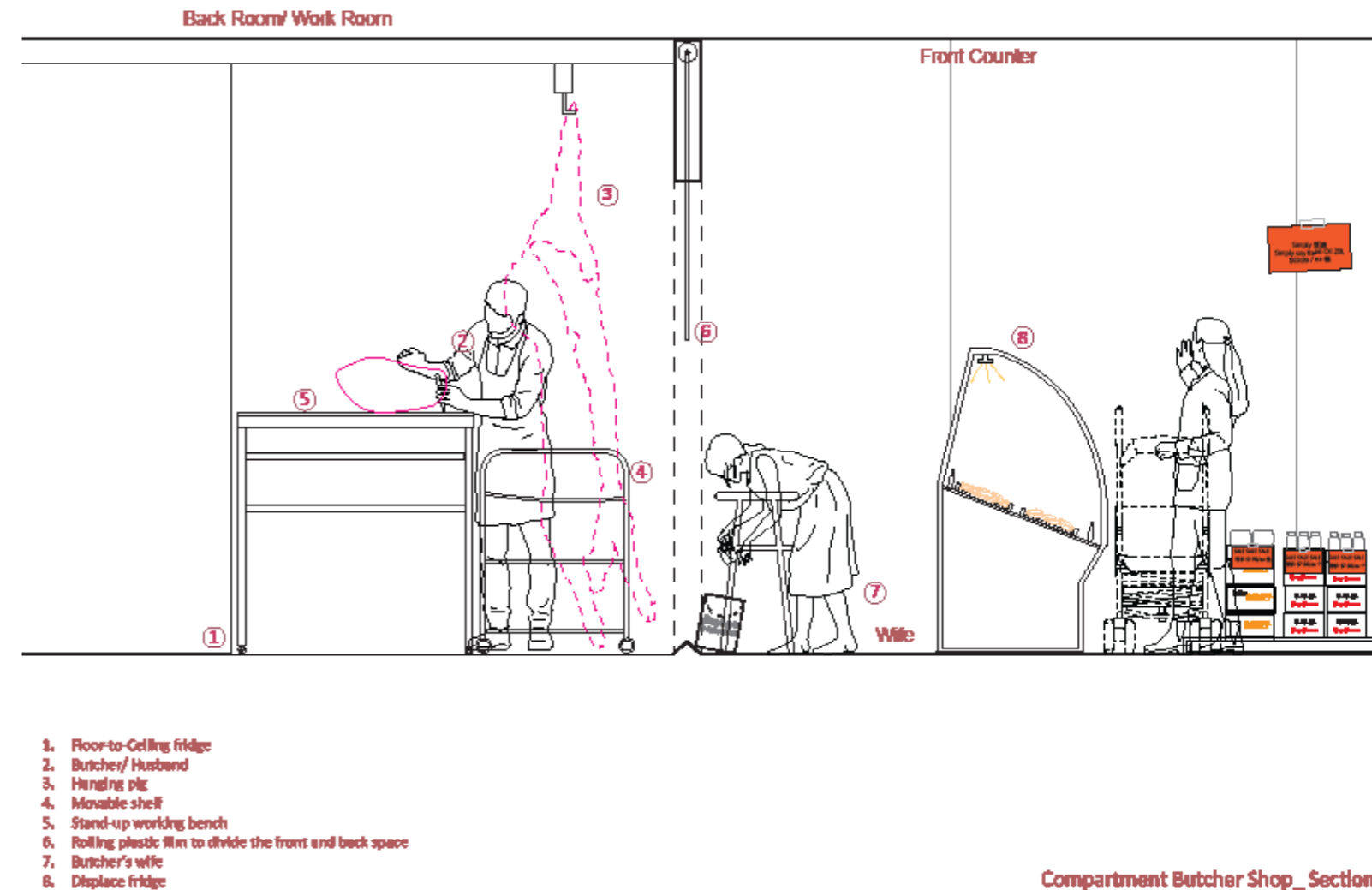
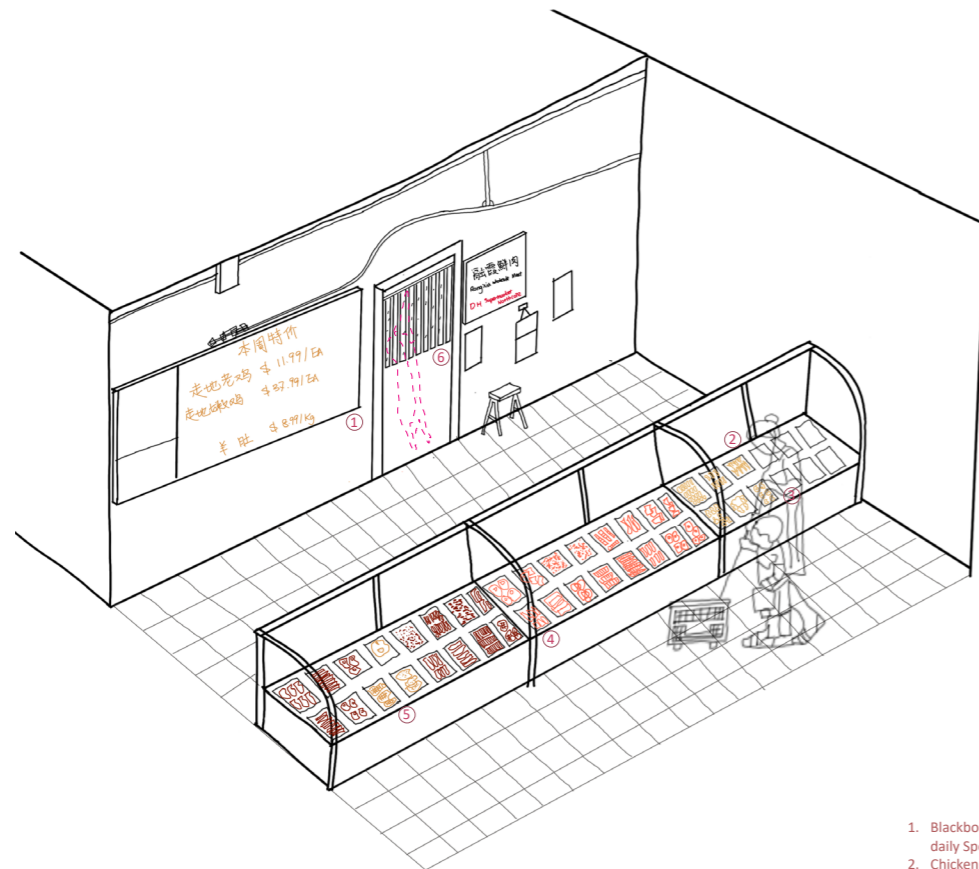


Figure 47. Sectional drawing of the compartment butcher shop in Da-Hua Supermarket.



1. Blackboard to inform daily Specials
2. Chicken Feet
3. Chicken Hearts
4. Beef Fingers
5. Beef Omasum
6. Butcher's work room at the back

**Compartment Butcher Shop**  
Axonometric Drawing

Figure 48. Compartment Butcher shop. Axonometric Drawing.

shop inside Da-Hua to specifically get this meaty part between beef ribs, named “beef fingers” to cook a Cantonese-styled braised beef with daikon radish (see Figure 47). This dish is traditionally cooked and served in cold seasons for the purpose of warming up and balancing the Yin and Yang inside our body.

Furthermore, the butcher and his wife engage with their customers by initiating conversations beyond selling and buying. For example, the butcher would ask about what kind of diet his littlest customer (Hayes) has and then sell special tiny portions to us to make baby puree. The butcher and his wife genuinely express their intention to form relationships with the local community by treating each customer with consideration and care. Reflecting on the interactions between the butcher, Hayes, and me, it seems Da-Hua and the compartment butcher play an important role in the neighbourhood in terms of maintaining and passing on cultural knowledge around food to the younger generations. In conclusion, this narrative emphasises how important the butcher shop is to the local Chinese community of Northcote by providing socio-cultural values and cross-generational functions.



Figure 49. Traditional Cantonese dish - braised beef with daikon radish.

## *Narrative #4*

### *Shopping List*

## **Shopping list**

11/10/2024

*Today I took Hayes to Marlborough Park to play and bumped into a parent Eleanor, who we knew of from a playgroup. Eleanor is a first-generation immigrant from India, who came to NZ with her parents when she was 13 years old. Evie is Eleanor's daughter, who is half NZ Pakeha and half Indian. While Evie and Hayes went off to explore the new playground, Eleanor and I were chatting about shopping as she soon needed to take Evie to shop at Pak'nSave.*

*"There will be lots of people in Pak'nSave, are you sure you want to go this afternoon?" I asked as I checked the time.*

*"It's fine, we are just going to collect them as I did a click-and-collect order last night."  
"Oh, how is the click-and-collect service? I have never done one because I love walking down the supermarket aisles."*

*"It's so good, you just need to pop your car boot open, and they will deliver your grocery to your car. I normally do the household, detergents items through a Pak'nSave online order and do my fun shopping at Asian and Indian grocery stores with Evie during the week."*

*"That is a smart way to do it. I haven't been to Pak'nSave that much after Hayes, just because of the amount of people. I do one regular shopping to get milk and bread etc. at New World which is smaller and more baby friendly. Then do several trips to the Chinese grocery store to get fresh meat and leaf vegetables."*

13/6/24 Shopping list

Mintin  
 golwe (in) chux  
~~薄荷叶~~ M  
 Compost Bag  
~~toilet paper~~  
 Nappies (sales)  
~~Ambrosia~~  
~~Popo~~  
~~饼干~~  
~~饺子皮 (green foam)~~  
~~猪肉~~ (mango) x 3  
 (daddy) (mango)  
 Salmon fillet

Library Return  
~~副食包~~

I was planning to go to Northcote as we needed some Asian stuff, such as mintin. However, the weather was terrible with the storm, we end up going to NW in Birkenhead.

Was not able to get the Asian stuff.  
 14/6/24 8-05pm

14/6/24 NW

**NEW WORLD**  
 \*\*\*\* New World Birkenhead \*\*\*\*  
 \*\*\*\* 100 HOKOIA ROAD BIRKENHEAD \*\*\*\*  
 \*\*\* Birkenhead Supermarket Limited \*\*\*  
 \*\*\* Tel: (09) 419 8610 \*\*\*

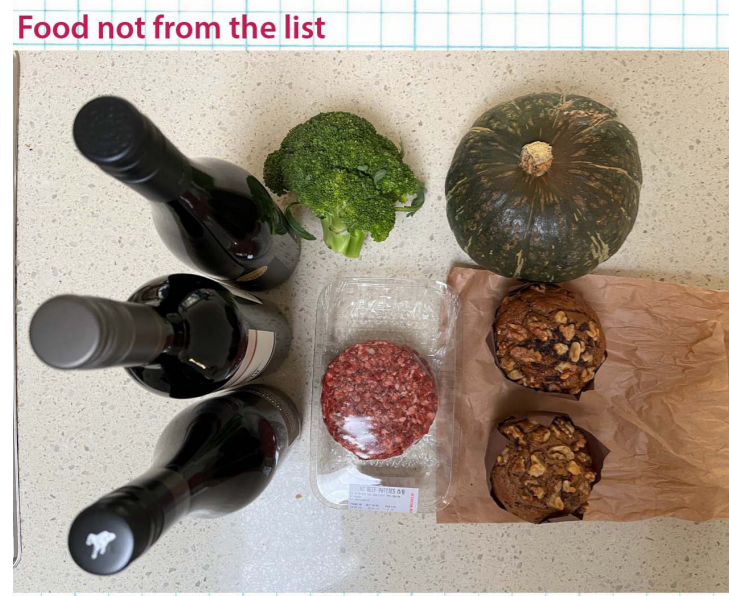
Shop online with New World  
 Visit newworld.co.nz or download the app  
 KIA KAHIA, STRESSED OR OVERWHELMED?  
 CALL OR TEXT 1737 FOR FREE KORERO

ONLY ORGANIC 6+ WILD RICE RISOTTO 120G	\$1.99
ONLY ORGANIC 8+ MANGO YOGHURT 120G	\$1.99
PALMOLIVE FOAM H/W/SR LIME/MINT RFL 1L	\$9.59
ROTA FREEZER BAGS MEDIUM 30S	\$1.69
SURGENT 1/1 LONG ROLL 12S	\$11.99
APPLES AMBROSIA 0.930 Kg @ \$5.99/Kg	\$5.57
BROCCOLI 0.470 Kg @ \$6.99/Kg	\$3.29
PUMPKIN BUTTERCUP Supervisor #13	\$3.99
HUNTAWAY RESERVE PINOT NOIR 750ML	\$19.99
OYSTER BAY HAWKES BAY MERLOT 750ML	\$18.99
RAPAHUA SPRINGS RESERVE PINOT NOIR 750ML	\$21.99
MUFFIN TEXAS LOOSE 2 @ \$2.75	\$5.50
NZ BEEF PATTIES M/B 2 @ \$2.99	\$5.98
15 BALANCE DUE	\$114.54
EFTPOS	\$114.54
*****5027 Auth Code = 092622	
SUB TOTAL	\$99.60
TOTAL GST	\$14.94
TOTAL	\$114.54
CHANGE	\$0.00

NEW WORLD BIRKENHEAD  
 100 HOKOIA ROAD  
 AUCKLAND

\*\*\*\*\*EFTPOS\*\*\*\*\*  
 TERMINAL 23706410  
 TIME 14 Jun 24 14:07  
 TRAN 283755 CREDIT  
 VISA  
 CARD ...5027  
 CONTACTLESS  
 Visa CREDIT  
 RID: A000000003  
 PIX: 1010  
 \* Cannot use any other 2 fuel discount / promotion unless otherwise specified.  
 \* See www.newworld.co.nz for a list of participating sites and Terms and Conditions

CASHIER NAME: Viona A  
 14/06/2024 14:04:47 04205 010 4052 0004



Front pack to carry Hayes, backpack to carry baby essential items, phone, keys, wallet etc.

Sketch book: where shopping list is written

Recycled paper bags for fruit and veges. The grocery store does not provide any free bags and muddy potatoes need the paper bag the most.

Shopping bag

Things I need before shopping

Things I have purchased. Missing from the photo: pork and soy sauce.

24/6/24 Shopping list (Northcote)

ginger  
 fruits / banana + persimmon  
~~potato (pink)~~  
~~菜肉包~~  
~~猪肉~~  
 orange x 2  
~~饺子皮~~  
~~饺子~~  
~~包子~~  
~~包子~~

**Tax Invoice**

DH Supermarket Northcote  
 53 Pearn Crescent  
 Northcote  
 Auckland  
 GST: 119-586-259  
 Phone: 09-4197370  
 Sales: Chen  
 Inv: 1791311  
 Date: 24-06-2024 12:49

LUCK Seafood Soy Sauce 410ml	
李锦记蒸鱼豉油 410ml	
QTY 1 @ \$6.99	\$6.99
TAIWAN BAK CHOY	
台湾小白菜	
QTY 1 @ \$1.69	\$1.69
LOOSE POTATO	
散装土豆	
0.82 kg NET @ \$2.49/kg	\$2.04
GINGER	
生姜	
0.195 kg NET @ \$9.99/kg	\$1.95
TURNIP	
白萝卜	
QTY 1 @ \$2.99	\$2.99
KUMARA RED	
红薯	
0.505 kg NET @ \$5.99/kg	\$3.02
Meat	
肉	
QTY 1 @ \$9.02	\$9.02
Meat	
肉	
QTY 1 @ \$12.51	\$12.51
Meat	
肉	
QTY 1 @ \$12.39	\$12.39
9 Items	
TOTAL:	\$52.60
EFTPOS:	\$52.60
INCLUDE TAX:	\$6.86

Thank you for your patronage

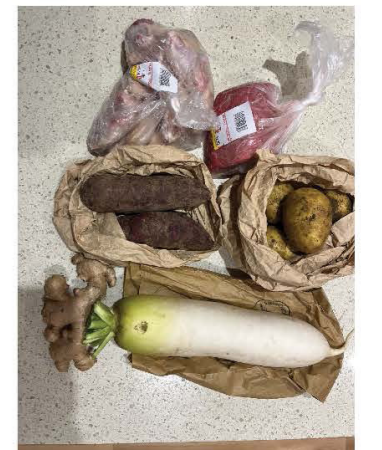


Figure 50. Self-documentation before and after grocery shopping in Da-Hua on 13th June 2024

Figure 51. Self-documentation before and after grocery shopping in Da-Hua on 24th June 2024

## Narrative Analysis

When discussing our shopping habits with a friend, I began to understand the differences between shopping experiences. American-inspired supermarkets such as Pak'nSave, New World, and Woolworths are increasingly about convenient and efficient shopping. Most of them offer click-and-collect services that allow orders to be made online in advance to avoid waiting in check-out lines. This is particularly appealing to parents who can use the service to avoid having to go shopping with their children.

While Chinese grocery stores like Da-Hua do not provide convenient services like large chain supermarkets do, it preserves ethnic practices and reaffirms ethnic identities by providing experience around special food ingredients that are often associated with traditions and emotions. People who want to be able to cook traditional meals will find ways to shop within the less organised space of Da-Hua. For example, I make use of a front pack and stroller to complete grocery shopping in Da-Hua because my weekly New World order usually cannot satisfy our family's grocery needs. I also enjoy collecting the bilingual receipts from Da-Hua as I shop. The bilingual receipt from Da-Hua captures the reality of the life of Chinese migrants in Aotearoa New Zealand as it acknowledges English as a common language while retaining written Chinese. The receipt connects shoppers to both the past and contemporary histories of Chinese migration in that the two scripts serve to help Chinese descendants who cannot read Chinese, support recent Chinese migrants who may not be fluent in English, and include those who are not Chinese but might shop at Chinese grocers.

Furthermore, in our family we cook differently depending on food sources we can access. When comparing the grocery items purchased at New World on 14th June with items purchased from Da-Hua on 24th June, it can be seen that more raw materials such as leafy vegetable were bought at Da-Hua, (see

Figures 50 and 51), while more processed food such as bakery and ready-made patties were bought at New World which required less time investment in meal preparation. The comparison again highlights the different focuses of each supermarket, with New World more geared towards providing fast and convenient food options and Da-Hua offering opportunities to customers to craft food from its rawest form. Our hybrid shopping approach reflects the diverse diet habits within a migrant household, and how experiences offered from different types of supermarkets can shape our everyday living. Therefore, while people have different needs depending on family size, food practices, prices, qualities, convenience, and accessibility, it is valuable to have a variety of options provided to the community, addressing cultural discrimination through a food perspective.

Narrative #5

Fig Stall

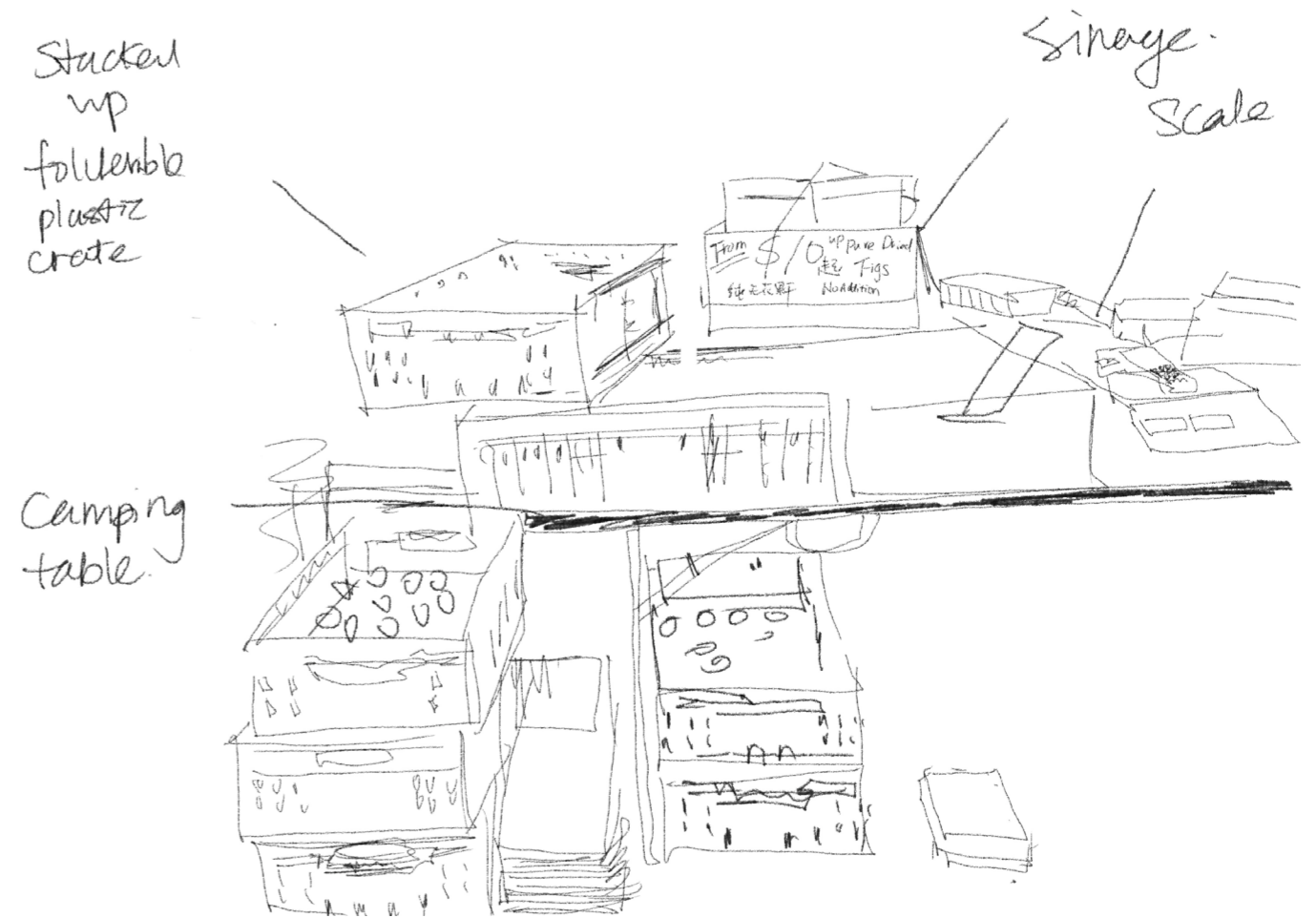


Figure 52. The fig stall setup. Field sketch.

## Fig Stall

16/04/2024

Hayes and I visited the Northcote shopping centre again as we needed to return some books to the library.

As usual, we took our time strolling around the Da-Hua grocery shop. Today, we did not have anything particular to purchase, and soon we left the store. We stopped at the fig lady for the first time. She has set up a temporary stall outside the grocery store for a while now, although she does not come every day.

There were a few crates of ripe fig on special. The redness was rushing into my eyes. They look and feel so squishy.

An elderly man was carefully picking the figs into a plastic container. With his dedication, it seemed he was only choosing the best and sweetest for his wife who was waiting at home.

After the elderly man, we also stopped and bought some figs. They were so sweet, juicy, and full of flavour.

We went back the next day to look for more figs, but the fig lady was not there. Perhaps she was busy harvesting figs from the tree of her farm in the outskirts of the city.



Figure 53. A hand-written sign by the entrance of the car park, suggesting fresh figs are available on the day.

## Narrative Analysis

This narrative documented a pop-up stall which sells seasonal figs next to the Da-Hua exit (see Figure 54). The stall has a sense of temporality and informality. The business was set up using a camping table as an economic exchange platform and collapsible plastic containers as transportation, storage, and display shelf. The collapsibility of the set up means the business is mobile and can be moved to different locations. On the stall days, car users are informed by a hand-written sign put up by the main entrance of the town centre car park, while pedestrians simply know because the lovely smell of ripen figs fills the air. When the stall becomes busy, people walking from different directions often need to slow down to negotiate the limited footpath space so that they can pass each other. The fig stall joins Da-Hua's

exterior food crate, becoming a part of the urban furniture of Northcote town centre and enabling social interactions between People. Another sign of informality can be observed from the irregular business hours as the fig stall does not operate on an everyday basis. However, business owner's contact details are embedded in a Chinese social media QR code, suggesting to Chinese shoppers that they can contact the owner to buy figs directly from the farm when the stall does not operate physically. This indicates a different social business model which is based on the foundation of a strong ethnic and social network. This fig business owner expands her business by leveraging the layering of physical and digital Chinese spaces.

The presence of this kind of temporal, informal, and culturally specific economy acknowledges current Northcote town centre as a flexible community space, providing affordable opportunities for small/seasonal businesses owners who cannot afford to maintain permanent premisses. More importantly, these kinds of community values offered by current Northcote town centre can be potentially ignored as the developed urban land value become higher after the town centre redevelopment. Looking at the current master plan for Northcote town centre, information of how the future space is arranged and organised is not visible to the public and therefore the current business users are unsure if they can continue use the town centre as a flexible, low-entry economic space for their small businesses in the future.

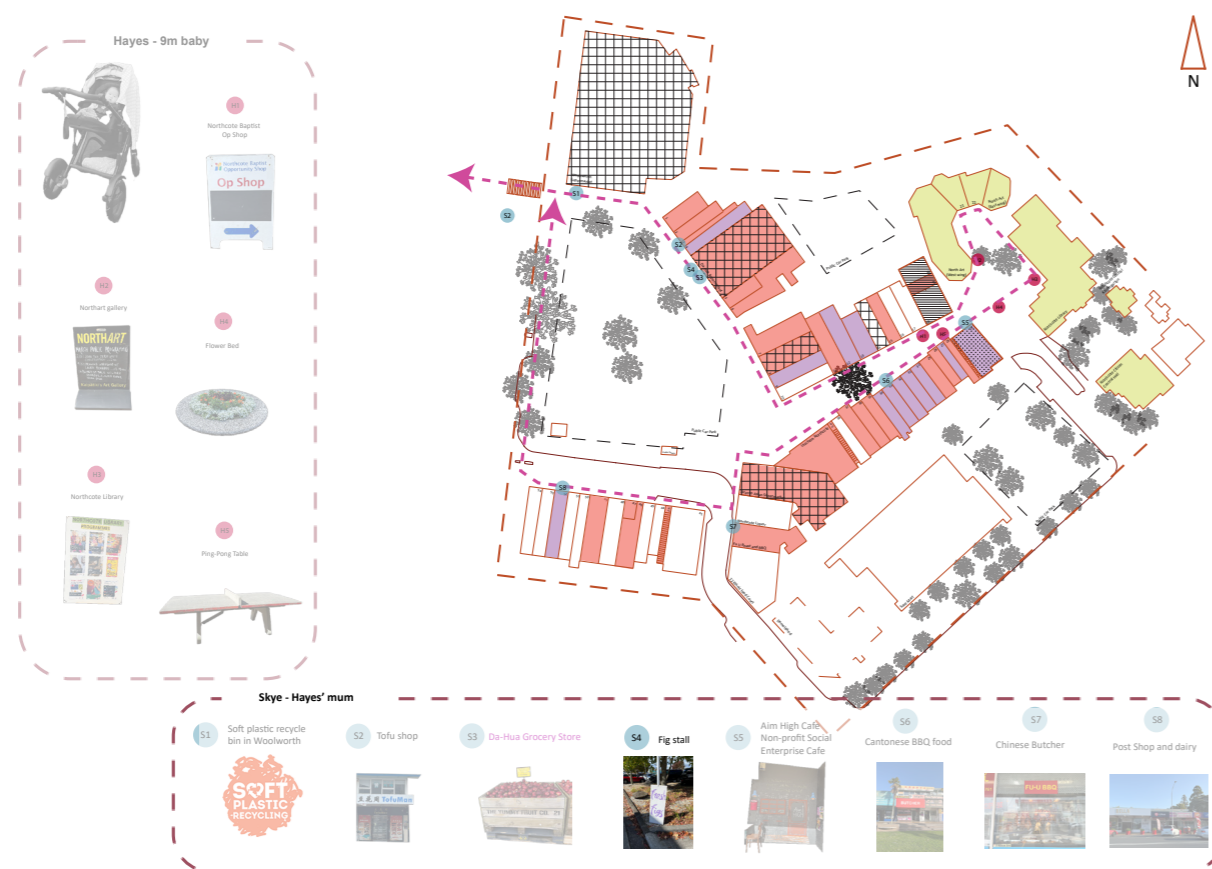


Figure 54. Fig Stall's location within Northcote town centre.

## Conclusion

This chapter illustrated the methodology of this thesis using different examples of how personal experiences can be situated to understand a place, and demonstrated how the auto-ethnographic research can be a design-research in the field of Architecture. Through exploring personal experiences within the space of market, I have found this Chinese grocery store has played an important role in Northcote Chinese migrant community. Firstly, it preserves cultural and ethnic practices by providing specific food and items which Chinese migrants need to make and share traditional Chinese meals with their family at home. Secondly, Da-Hua has formed a cross-generational relationship with many migrant families as they navigate a different life in Aotearoa, and it will continue to make an important contribution to transmitting a sense of cultural identity on second and third generation migrants. The spatiality of Da-Hua, such as the entrance and exterior food crates, was shown to be very different from other types of supermarkets like Woolworths and Pak'nSave. The special set up of Da-Hua often generates a sense of community, using food as a tool to invite people to linger within and around the space. Furthermore, it was noted that small, temporary, and informal businesses like the fig stall reflect that the current Northcote town centre is also a flexible community space, providing free or affordable opportunities for small businesses to thrive.

By zooming in on Da-Hua Supermarket, it allowed me to understand the relationship between today's life of a Chinese migrant and the history of Chinese migration as well as Chinese market gardening on New Zealand soil. Market gardening has been an important occupation to allow many Chinese migrants to make a living and connect to their past, while today, Chinese grocery stores have become key places for both new Chinese migrants and second or more generations of Chinese decedents to visit.

However, this auto-ethnographic research is more than simply exploring the importance of Chinese grocery space. By using an expanded methodology to study an important space of Chinese migrant for example, this study also suggests to planners, designers and authorities what bottom-up, cultural-specific approaches they can consider when wanting to include the needs of minority community members. Therefore, the documentation of the auto-ethnographic process is also an architectural ethnography, a term defined by Kajima and colleagues (2018) as a study that combines architecture, which involves the analysis of physical materials and enclosures, with ethnography, which is an exploration of culture and behaviours. In this thesis, the architectural ethnographic value was supported by the auto-ethnographic research where personal experience is celebrated and situated to understand the collected values shared by New Zealand Chinese migrant communities. The connections between minority communities (in this case the Chinese migrant community of Northcote) and their urban social and spatial system (Chinese grocery store and other ethnic retail stores) that may shape spontaneously and naturally as immigrants from similar ethnic backgrounds chose to live in specific parts of the city is often difficult to be perceived by the society. By reflecting on the shared values of the Chinese migrant community through the celebration of spatial experiences, this auto-ethnographic journey can articulate the complexities and diversities city planners might need to consider vis-à-vis urban redevelopment in places like Northcote. Furthermore, the expanded design methodology that is personal, biased, and experiential also represents practical approach to collect participant's feedback as a critical part of public engagement during design and planning processes.

## *Chapter 8*

# Findings and Conclusion

This chapter summarises the findings of this thesis research which have allowed me to conclude the thesis.

The thesis began with extensive research on the contemporary context of Northcote. Employing various architectural methods such as mapping, transect walks, and site analysis to gain an understanding of the current town centre, I revealed that the different ethnic retail shops and Asian eateries, including take-away shops, souvenir stores, the Asian food court, Chinese butcher, breakfast and tofu shop, and many others have made the current centre unique and full of character. Being an important part of the urban system, these places have social and cultural values to the local Chinese community and are critical in shaping the identity of the Northcote neighbourhood. In particular, regular and cumulative grocery visits to the town centre provided me with an opportunity to gain insights into the socio-cultural practices hosted inside and around Da-Hua Supermarket, which has a strong association with Chinese food, produce, and the Chinese migrant history in Aotearoa. Each of socio-spatial experiences to the Chinese grocery store was critically reflected on and layered as a key part of the auto-ethnographic journey, which captured the socio-cultural elements in addition to the spatial realities of the store and the quantifiable economic exchanges happening in the place.

However, as the town centre is set to be redeveloped in the next fifteen years, current small ethnic retail stores in Northcote town centre are facing uncertainties and exclusion. Within the line of visibility of the Northcote town centre benchmark masterplan, I believe that there is a gap for this research to inform and create a case for the inclusion of these spaces through a higher level, such as planning and economy policies. The threats of gentrification and displacements in Northcote town centre led this thesis to inquire how urban planners and architects can better acknowledge the importance of this socio-cultural economic landscape, that is central to the quality of the Northcote neighbourhood and essential to the existing and future Chinese community. More specifically, as designers, we can extend the scope of what is revealed in our top-down and controlled participatory studies of

places by expanding the current tools and modes of research we have in the architecture discipline.

The research on Chinese market gardening and Chinese greengrocers is fundamental in steering the research direction and determining the investigation site. I found that market gardening and green grocery businesses have important meanings to the Chinese communities in Aotearoa. Being part of a long history of New Zealand Chinese communities, these occupations have documented how generations of Chinese migrants have made space for their culture in a new place. They also become a critical point for connecting the East and the West, geographically and culturally, through fresh produce. While this important piece of history is clearly observed from the socio-cultural landscape in the current town centre, the upcoming town centre renewal project means that there is a risk that these spaces may be lost due to gentrification, which would mean a loss of an important connection to the past. Furthermore, future connections NZ Chinese community can make to both the original Chinese culture and the specific NZ Chinese culture will also be impacted.

With a good understanding of the current context of Northcote and the history of Chinese market gardening, I then carried out an architectural survey in Da-Hua Supermarket to document the way of life inside Da-Hua. Within the context of the town centre redevelopment, autoethnography provided an unique approach. How I experienced the space as a Chinese migrant, a mum, and a local was highlighted in order to locate the personal spatial experience in a broader social, cultural and political framework. By reflecting personal behaviours and observing urban cultural phenomena that happened within and around the space of Da-Hua Supermarket, I understood that Da-Hua Supermarket plays an important role in helping Chinese migrants adapt to a new life in New Zealand and thereby the supermarket plays a critical role in helping migrants securing a cultural

identity. Through the journey of answering why Da-Hua is important to the local Chinese migrant community, it is understood that this thesis is informed by on-the-ground studies, acknowledging and recording fragments of the everyday experience of Da-Hua from an individual perspective. In particular, Da-Hua plays a role in anchoring migrant communities through food, that is not only the product, but also stands in for various economies, services and practices that are embedded within the lives of others.

The specificity of the research provided by the method of autoethnography strongly emphasised the importance of this urban system around food and produce to the Chinese migrant community. Therefore, developing an effective plan to ensure this minority group can access important ethnic food and services over the course of the town centre redevelopment is crucial. Secondly, knowing migrant owners of small retail business are facing uncertainties and feeling excluded from decision-making processes due to various reasons, this research advocates for the use of an alternative approach to engage them during planning process, namely by expanding design methodologies to remove barriers for Chinese migrants to participate. If culturally specific and acceptable engagement approaches could be fostered, the participation of Chinese migrant communities in planning process would be greatly extended.

Auckland is a city that seeks to preserve and celebrate a multicultural identity. This research suggests that planners and policymakers should rethink the design process for the Northcote town centre redevelopment project, and consider whether it should be guided by its potential economic contributions or community building that is inclusive for working-class Asian migrant community who have made significant contributions to this place. The importance of the existing Chinese migrant communities in Tamaki Makaurau and the role they play in shaping the identity of city is emphasised. Therefore, acknowledging the significance of this community, this research provides

a culturally specific approach to extend this community's participation by expanding architectural design methodologies. The survey also captures some important realities of Northcote that urban planners might need to consider in order to eliminate disparities and promote social equity. Regardless of whether the spatial arrangement of the entire town centre or the layout of the shopping blocks is needed to be carefully examined, the different ideas and practices different culture groups uphold need to be considered. The redevelopment project was developing everyday as I carried out the research between 2024 and 2025. New information was released to the public and updated regularly by placing posters in different areas of the town centre. Reading the new information, I realised that some information can be very useful in shaping this thesis direction if I knew it in an earlier stage of the research. However, I do believe using autoethnography as a principal research methodology to engage the Chinese migrant community during design processes will help designers and authorities to better understand this minority group, and therefore activate a higher level's community participation around Northcote town centre. There are many ways of doing an auto-ethnographic research, and this thesis is only showing one possible way to employ this methodology based on my personal interests and situations.

The research inquiry of how architects can advocate for the Chinese migrant community through expanding design methodologies is being answered as the thesis concludes. By giving an example of how to use personal experience to interpret and understand a cultural space, this research suggests design agencies such as Eke Panuku should expand current design methodologies and participation strategies to be more culturally inclusive to all minority communities when designing spaces for them and with them. Finally, this thesis also opens a question for both parties to consider what level of public participation should be involved and how engagement should be carried out when public spaces are being designed.

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Figure 30. Exhibition of Perceptive Journey. (Brave News Alps, 2008).

Figure 31. xxxxxx

Figure 32. Research Techniques analysis.

Figure 33. Boxes, Pram and Shelf. Field Sketch.

Figure 34. Passage. Sectional drawing of a passage of Da-Hua.

Figure 35. Passage. Plan view of a passage of Da-Hua.

Figure 36. Spatial relationship between Da-Hua Supermarket and adjacent Kainga Ora construction site.

Figure 37. Da-Hua Supermarket elevation drawing.

Figure 38. Catalogue Drawing of shopping baskets/ pram.

Figure 39. Analysis map of my movement trajectory record of four different days.

Figure 40. Movement trajectory record on 16th June 2024.

Figure 41. Movement trajectory record on 24th June 2024.

Figure 42. Movement trajectory record on 16th July 2024.

Figure 43. Movement trajectory record on 24th July 2024.

Figure 44. Analysis map of my movement trajectory record of four different days.

Figure 45. Compartment Chinese Butcher. Field Sketch.

Figure 46. The hanging pig carcass in the compartment butcher. Author's own photo.

Figure 47. Sectional drawing of the compartment butcher shop in Da-Hua Supermarket.

Figure 48. Compartment Butcher shop. Axonometric Drawing.

Figure 49. Traditional Cantonese dish - braised beef with daikon radish.

Figure 50. Self-documentation before and after grocery shopping in Da-Hua on 13th June 2024.

Figure 51. Self-documentation before and after grocery shopping in Da-Hua on 24th June 2024.

Figure 52. The fig stall setup. Field sketch.

Figure 53. A hand-written sign by the entrance of the car park, suggesting fresh figs are available on the day.

Figure 54. Fig Stall's location within Northcote town centre.

Log Record

Activities in Northcote Town Centre (04/2024-06/2024)

Date:	Place:	Key:
4-Mar	W	Woolworth (W)
11-Mar	W	Park (P)
13-Mar	DH	Dahua (DH)
14-Mar	DH, B	Library (L)
20-Mar	W,	Butcher (B)
21-Mar	W	OP Shop ( O)
28-Mar	W, L, P, DH	Fig Lady (F)
3-Apr	W	Bakery (BK)
4-Apr	DH, F	2 Dollar Shop (2DS)
8-Apr	DH, BK	BBQ Shop ( BBQ S)
9-Apr	W, B, 2DS, BBQ S	Toufu Shop (TF)
16-Apr	F, 2DS, DH, O	Hairdresser (H)
22-Apr	L, W	Northart Gallery
29-Apr	DH	
30-Apr	W	
3-May	O, TF, L,H, DH, W	
4-May	NAG, Get Together Event*	
14-May	DH, F, TF,	
21-May	W	* Get Together Event: A event held by Eke Pauku, Kainga Ora and Auckland Council to inform and engage the public about the town centre redevelopment work
6-Jun	DH, TF	
16-Jun	DH	
17-Jun	DH	
19-Jun	DH, L	
24-Jun	DH, W,	

All data is collected from photos from Author's phone, bank transaction record and library loan record.

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