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This thesis is submitted to Auckland University of Technology in partial fulfillment of the degree of Master of Design.

Man Wa Cheung  
Bachelor of Design, Auckland University of Technology, (2021)

## Title

Using nostalgic illustration (懷舊藝術) and poetry to stimulate a sense of cultural connection.

## Abstract

This practice-led, artistic project asks,

How might poetry and illustration that engages with the Chinese phenomenon of 懷舊藝術 (nostalgic art) be employed to suggest a sense of cultural belonging?

Drawing inspiration from the work of 熬路 Ao Liu, in the study, I design a distinctive, poetic travelogue titled 忘歸 (*The Melancholic Traveller*). Reflecting on '日常生活' (engagement with the everyday), the project demonstrates how one might engage a particular form of contemporary Chinese illustration, poetry and traditional book design to awaken nostalgic desires and elevate a sense of cultural connection for a diasporic Chinese readership.

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Finally, I extend my appreciation to the School of Art and Design at Auckland University of Technology for the research grant that enabled me to travel to Guangdong Province and Macau to undertake fieldwork for the project.

## Table of Images

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1. See <https://fairuse.stanford.edu/overview/fair-use/what-is-fair-use/>

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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 stated 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.

Man Wa Cheung  
22nd May 2023

## Intellectual Property Declaration

I retain copyright in all images and creative work produced and presented as part of this thesis, apart from the following images that are the intellectual property of others listed below in the order in which they appear in this exegesis:

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Man Wa Cheung  
22nd May 2023

### **Ethics approval and Consents**

This research was an artistic inquiry that did not involve animal or human participants or materials, personal information, clinical trials, or a solicited response from an audience. Accordingly, the study did not require ethical approval.

## CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

### AN ORIENTING QUESTION

This book carries culture and memory. As its pages turn under my fingers, they are like leaves of water; delicate ... blue ... my touch, a ripple of inquiry. If I listen, I can hear the whisper of a story ... images and text unfolding in ancient form.

My touch is resonant with nostalgia.

This project is a response to a question:

How might poetry and illustration that engages with the Chinese phenomenon of 懷舊藝術 (nostalgic art) be employed to suggest a sense of cultural belonging?

## RATIONALE AND SIGNIFICANCE

The book 忘歸 (*The Melancholic Traveller*) that forms the practice at the heart of this thesis, is a response to diasporic disconnection. According to the Annual Report on Chinese International Migration (Wong & Miao, 2020), Wang noted that Chinese migrants were estimated to be almost 272 million globally. According to the most recently available census data, of the Chinese population living in New Zealand, 73.3% were born overseas (Statistics New Zealand, 2018). For diverse reasons, many of these migrants do not return to their home country.

A Chinese word for home is ‘家’. This is more than a physical location. ‘家’ is something that is passed down from generation to generation, and this is why generations that are diasporic can remain innately connected. Zeng and Xu (2021) suggest that people with high levels of nostalgia not only identify more strongly with being Chinese but they evidence a more pronounced sense of happiness when they return home.

The rationale underpinning the study is that design might contribute something poetic and delicately affirming to a sense of cultural disconnection, through an engagement with 懷舊藝術 (nostalgic Chinese art).

The project is significant for three reasons:

First, it demonstrates how a designed voice that combines image, text and bookbinding, might speak to the concept of ‘家’ (home), through its engagement with 懷舊藝術 (nostalgic Chinese art).

Second, it demonstrates how the lost, traditional craft of 龍鱗裝 (dragon scale binding) might be employed as a contemporary vehicle for poetic, nostalgic storytelling.

Finally, the study demonstrates a novel connection between European cyanotype printing, the distinctive blue (qing) of Chinese porcelain design, and recording ‘the everyday’.

## SIGNIFICANT TERMS USED IN THE STUDY

This thesis draws on two cultures and languages, but it presents itself in English. Therefore, it is useful at the outset to briefly discuss five significant terms:

懷舊藝術 (nostalgic art),  
 龍鱗裝 (dragon scale binding),  
 日常生活 (engagement with the everyday),  
 Cyanotype illustration,  
 Travelogue.

### 懷舊藝術 (Nostalgic art)

The study addresses, through cyanotype illustration and book design, the Chinese principle of 懷舊藝術. This is a difficult concept to translate but it may be broadly understood as a form of nostalgia. However, the English translation requires expanding to embrace a certain kind of poetic, sensory recollection. Liu (2006) notes that nostalgia, especially imagined nostalgia, became a discernible feature in Chinese art and illustration of the 1990s and, through its employment, artists have been able to “fashion a dialogic role between commodity and cultural critique” (p. 311). As an artform 懷舊藝術 can provide a viewer with a feeling of ‘returning home’, that in this study is explored through 日常生活 (engagement with the everyday). These features I suggest can constitute an imagined nostalgia because, as Wang, notes, Chinese people are profoundly connected to local traditions and it is only after leaving one’s hometown that we realise that there is no ‘home,’ only a ‘flavour’ of home (Wang, 2022).





Figure 1.1. An example of 龍鱗裝 (traditional dragon scale binding). This is a test work I created using digitally collaged scenes from ancient paintings (August, 2022).

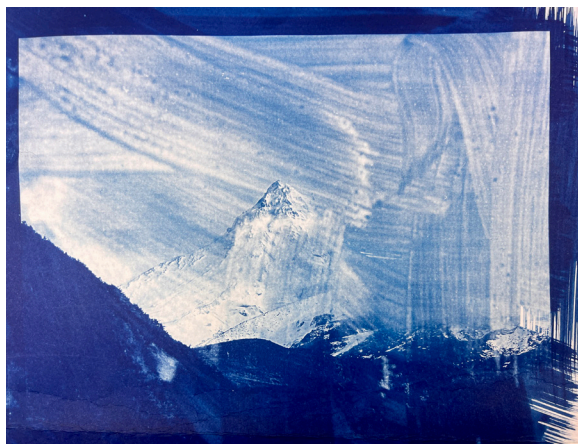


Figure 1.2. An early experiment with cyanotype photographic printing completed in September 2022, evidencing the distinctive brush texture and Prussian blue colouration. The image was taken from Mount Ngāuruhoe.

### 龍鱗裝 (dragon scale binding)

龍鱗裝 is a complex form of book design and binding that originated during the Tang Dynasty.<sup>2</sup> Dragon scale formatting was invented to enable easy access to content while provoking an elevated sense of beauty and elegance. In this form of book binding, a long piece of paper is employed as a foundation and pages are pasted on to it in chronological order. When one rolls the paper up, it becomes a single hand scroll. However, when it is unfurled, the pages tilt up, fluttering beneath one's fingers.<sup>3</sup> Zhang (2022) argues that such book binding is an external expression of a human ideological system and is resonant with cultural connotation.

### ‘日常生活’ (engagement with the everyday)

The basic necessities of life is a term I use to describe the culture of the ordinary. In other words, rather than understanding culture through artforms like Chinese opera, Chinese watercolour painting or Chinese ceramics, we might understand culture as an expression of the poetics inherent in the ordinary lives of ordinary people. In the thesis, this concept underpins both my illustrations and poetry.

### Cyanotype illustration and the nature of blue

The cyanotype is a distinctive kind of photographic print. Its technique was invented by Sir John Herschel in 1842. These prints did not require a darkroom because the process used ultraviolet light from the sun and iron salt solutions instead of silver salt. An initial image was created by combining ferric ammonium citrate potassium ferricyanide to create an iron-rich sensitiser solution. This was brushed evenly over paper and as the chemicals reacted to light, they turned Prussian Blue. Water was then used to wash away the sensitiser solution and the blue darkened as the print dried (Figure 1.2).

2. The technique was lost under the Manchu occupation in the late 17th century, but it was later recovered through the study of preserved artefacts.

3. An illustration of the function and aesthetic of dragon binding can be viewed at: <https://www.facebook.com/chinaplusnews/videos/dragon-scale-bookbinding-a-technique-used-by-chinas-elite-1000-years-ago/310007737760536/>

The distinctive blue (*qing*) of these prints has a long history of meaning in Chinese culture. Qing can represent immortality, advancement, health, prosperity, and harmony. During the Tang dynasty (618-907) the colour became a significant feature of Chinese ceramics; its distinctive hue came from rare cobalt ores imported from Persia at the time. Later in the Qing dynasty (1644-1911) diverse types of cobalt ore and methods of application were used to create the distinctive shades of blue that featured on blue-and-white porcelain ware.

### Travelogue

Traditionally, a travelogue was a book, journal, portfolio, diary or episodic essay constructed by a writer to record the unfolding nature of a journey. Online, such documents may take the form of blogs, podcasts or narrated slide shows. Christensen (2023, para. 1) describes a travelogue as “a single person’s account of a trip, journey,” and history provides many examples of such accounts, including Marco Polo’s experiences of China during the Mongol Ascendancy and James Cook’s diaries recording his journeys in the South Pacific.

The word travelogue comes from the Greek monos (alone) and logos (speech, or word). Wilson (1973) observes that travelogues, while offering sequential observations, normally do not contain a dominant storyline plot or narrative arc. In this thesis my travelogue, 忘歸 (*The Melancholic Traveller*), records an extraordinary period in Chinese history when I returned to my homeland during lockdowns that took effect on November 14, 2022, as part of the Chinese government’s response to increasing rates of Covid infection in the country’s major cities.<sup>4</sup>

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4. These occurred after almost three years of attempting to eliminate Covid 19 through mass lockdowns, vigorous contact tracing programs and international travel bans.]

## THE NATURE OF THE PROJECT

The project, 忘歸 (*The Melancholic Traveller*), is presented as a single sequential book that was created using 龍鱗裝 (dragon scale binding). The work constitutes a travelogue that combines reflective thinking through cyanotype illustration, poetry and book design. The artefact seeks to touch the essence of nostalgia and longing for a distinctive Chinese world.

As a contemporary application of dragon scale binding, the artefact can be rolled into a single scroll or laid out and encountered through sequential pages.

## THE STRUCTURE OF THE EXEGESIS

The exegesis is structured into five chapters. Chapter One comprises this introduction. Chapter Two introduces my background and the origins and influences on the project. In Chapter Three I offer a review of knowledge impacting on the study, specifically a consideration of Chinese diaspora, nostalgic Chinese art, and the travelogue as an illustrated literary form. Chapter Four discusses the research design developed for the project. Chapter Five offers a critical commentary on the exhibited work and the ideas underpinning it. The exegesis is then concluded with a consideration of contributions to the field, a discussion of potential further research and a closing reflection on the project and its impact on me as a designer. Having now introduced the thesis, it is useful to consider my relationship to the research question.

## CHAPTER TWO POSITIONING THE RESEARCHER



Figure 2.1. Cyanotype treatment of a photograph of my mother and me near at the seaside in Macau (2001).

### THE SENSORY NATURE OF MEMORY

I have a vivid childhood recollection of a certain scene (Figure 2.1). It was in Macau, my homeland; a region that blends Chinese and Western culture. One day my mother brought me into a little street where a gathering was taking place. In the light breeze there were wafts of incense and the aroma of vendors' food. They mingled with the sounds of people, motorbikes and singing voices. From a distance the music of a traditional Chinese opera drew me in. As I approached, I watched on a stage as the performers moved like water; fluid and graceful, connecting the present with times long passed. I dragged my mother with me and



Figure 2.2 The Macau tower, photographed from Sai Van lake, which is close to my home. (January, 2023).

I stood there transfixed, experiencing the distinctive clothing and delicate music. Today, I still find traditional things fascinating; flickers of times past positioned tenuously in the present ... they engender in me, a deep sense of nostalgia.

I believe that memories are shaped by our senses. I remember how the streets of Macau transformed at night into a city that never sleeps. I recall how the bright lights emanating from the tall hotels brushed the limits of the buildings. When I was a child, my parents would take me for a stroll to the lake after supper. I would wonder at the lights on the distant banks reflecting in the water, the caress of a small wind, and the sight of people fishing along the shoreline.

During important festivals, the government would organise a celebration around the ‘西灣湖’ (Sai Van lake), where fireworks would light up the sky and food vendors would set up their wares (Figure 2.2). The atmosphere was jubilant. I would rush downstairs to watch the pyrotechnics because I could hear the deafening boom of explosions outside my house. These are things I remember; sensory fragments that are the essence of nostalgia.

I have lived in Macau, Guangzhou, and Auckland, and each place has a distinct sensory palette. Even the aroma of my home is unique. I can smell the stove, wood and new grass in Auckland. In Guangzhou, I recall the aroma of Osmanthus blossoms and various cuisines. In Macao, I recall the fragrant thread of incense, almond cakes and warm, slightly salty sea water. They trigger reminiscence. When I smell or taste something in a different country, it creates familiarity. It is this feeling that I chose to position inside the question that drives this thesis.

## JOURNEYS TO THE PRESENT

My academic and professional journey into design was against my parents' wishes. My family wanted me to pursue business or accounting, but I have always found the role of illustration in connecting the present with the past, fascinating. Before I turned 15, I attended school in Macau. As a child I would seek out ancient Chinese history books in the school library. I was captivated by the allure of what had passed. When I came to New Zealand, at the age of 15, I began high school by seeking out this new country's history. But the resonance I encountered was different. The power of traditional Chinese illustration had a poetic tone; its use of space and delicacy went beyond the linear and the instructional. As I began to pursue painting, I experienced a dissolving of time. In this state I was suspended in reflection ... yet when a work was completed, I would experience a feeling of accomplishment. After three years studying in high school, I enrolled in a Fine Arts degree at Auckland University of Technology.



Figure 2.3 Illustration from the book *Wabi Tapu Land* that I created as part of the final project in the Bachelor of Visual Communication design degree (October, 2021).

However, within six months, I realised that the orientation of the programme was not what I was seeking. As a thinker, culturally shaped by the poetics of the senses, I was less interested in abstraction and contemporary Western approaches to conceptual art. Instead, I gravitated towards forms of spatial and pictorial stylisation that I encountered in Chinese illustration and composition. Accordingly, I changed my trajectory to the study of Visual Communication Design (Figure 2.3).

Even though I was living in a new nation, a portion of my heart belonged to Chinese history. I yearned for the beauty and splendour of a world I could no longer access. As I studied with other Chinese students who I perceived to be similar, I realised that some had not been born in China. They constituted a diverse diaspora; some connected through stories and traditional cuisine, some through the memories of their parents; but in these people there remained a sense of belonging and nostalgia.

Accordingly, I began to wonder as a designer and illustrator, how might I create a print artefact that might assist in bridging a divide. I wondered how, in a practice-led thesis, I might incorporate the resonance of my history books, the distinctive spatial and cultural references of my homeland and the sensory nostalgia of wandering down a street and watching opera with my mother.

## CHAPTER THREE

### REVIEW OF RELATED KNOWLEDGE

In this chapter I offer a review of knowledge relating to three discourses that contextualise the project. They are: Chinese diaspora, 懷舊藝術 (nostalgic Chinese art) and the travelogue as a form of picture book.

#### CHINESE DIASPORA

The term diaspora is Greek in origin. It comes from diaspeirein meaning ‘dispersed’, and it combines two words, dia ‘across’ and speirein ‘scattered’.<sup>5</sup> Although in 1869 the word was used in reference to the dispersal of Jews, in contemporary use a diaspora describes a population that is scattered across regions that are not physically their geographic place of origin.

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5. Diaspora, Online Etymology Dictionary. <https://www.etymonline.com/word/diaspora>



For the Chinese diaspora, one's sense of identity is often shaped by concepts like '家鄉' (the homeland) and such notions are often more fluid than fixed. Thus, Li (2014, p. 205) observes that, "the definition of diaspora emphasizes an orientation to, and especially a collective memory of, the homeland."

The Chinese diaspora has adapted to diverse languages, religions and cultures but in the process, Chinese immigrants also often try to recreate the culture of their country through festivals, food and daily rituals. Wong (2003) and Davidson, (2008, p. 11) note that immigrant communities will use their "memory of place to construct imaginatively their new lived world" and this enables them "to foster and create a sense of order, familiarity and control."

However, I would suggest that second generation Chinese diaspora have a weaker concept of homeland than first generation immigrants. This said, studies by Romanowski (2022) and Khun Eng and Davidson's (2008) suggest that when second generation diasporic Chinese identify with and develop proficiency in both Chinese and the language of the country in which they are living, it helps to strengthen the formation of their Chinese identity.

### 懷舊藝術 (NOSTALGIC CHINESE ART)

In 1997, Dai Jinhua and Judy Chen noted an emerging wave of nostalgia in contemporary Chinese art. This phenomenon they suggested represented history and culture as "presence in absentia" (p. 160). In 2006, Liu also observed this occurrence, proposing that nostalgia enables Chinese artists to construct "a dialogic role between commodity and cultural critique" (p. 311). Liu argued that traditional culture is not rejected or bypassed by nostalgic art, but it is actively employed in order to "give full play to more emancipatory and enlightening potentialities" (ibid.). Thus, Liu suggests that contemporary Chinese nostalgic art is not concerned with:

... helplessly pining away at the loss of the indigenous or the familiar or expressing discontent through backward gazing at one's past or one's home. [Instead, it] deals with present realities, addresses current concerns, and it functions in the role of self-fashioning and assuages decisions about the future. (2006, pp. 311-312)

Liu's thinking may be compared to Adamson, who, 20 years earlier, suggested that while engaged in the act of remembering, "viewers can embark on a critical and emancipatory mode in order to "seek not the most accurate or the 'best' interpretation [of the past], but the one most 'powerful', for the purpose of illuminating our projects for the future" (1985, pp. 233-234).

Jinhua and Chen suggest that nostalgic art might provide a way for the Chinese diaspora to move beyond what Huppertz (2009) called "a confused and frenzied reality" (pp. 159-160). In finding a nostalgic replacement for the frenzied, I suggest that nostalgic art can enable one to immerse oneself in feelings of 'returning home' even though this is in absentia.

In the thesis project, my illustrations and poetry draw on an interpretation of the past through nostalgic considerations of basic daily life. I use these everyday foci as a means of reawakening 'presence in absentia' in my audience. As an extension of this, my artwork utilises a design format that, while presenting a contemporary narrative, refers through book construction to a traditional mode of reading and viewing.

Contextualising the contemporary nature of the thesis inquiry is the work of four Chinese painters who engage with some form of nostalgia in their work: (Li Huayi), 熬路 (Ao Liu), 于正 (Yu Zheng) and 吳冠中 (Wu Guanzhong).

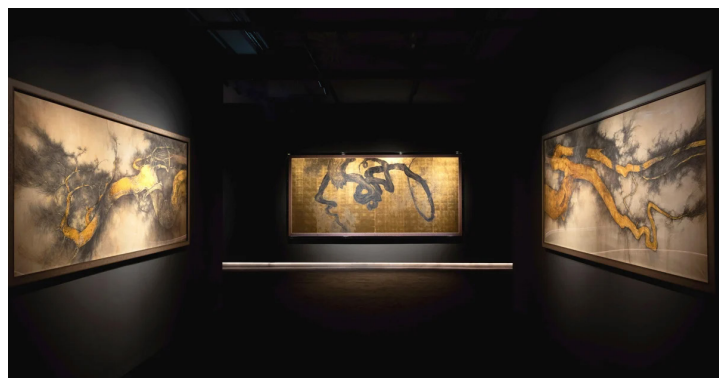


Figure 3.1. Paintings from the exhibition, *Infinities between Ink and Gold: recent works of Li Huayi*. © Kwa Fung Hin Art Gallery, Hong Kong (2021).

### Li Huayi

Li Huayi's work rose to prominence in the early 1990s. His paintings feature large mountain compositions that recall the monumental landscapes of the Northern Song Dynasty (Figure 3.1). In the first decade of this century, he made significant pilgrimages to a variety of mountains including the Huangshan in Anhui, Lushan in Jiangxi, Wuyishan in Fujian, Zhangjiajie in Hunan, and Huashan in Shanxi. Li Huayi describes his nostalgic landscapes as a form of poetic resonance. He says "... the energy inside your chest is being released as a painting. In China we say: outside we learn from nature, but inside we create from our hearts" (2022, para. 1).

Li Huayi's recent work integrates gold foil with sophisticated ink brushwork on silk. Although living in the San Francisco, Li Huayi draws inspiration from the Northern Song dynasty master painters like Li Cheng (919–967), Fan Kuan (ca. 950-1032) and Guo Xi (ca.1020-1090). His work may be interpreted as a carrier of the spirit of traditional Chinese literati painting because, rather than representing the external appearance of the physical world, his work gives visual 'voice' to the painter's temperament, reflecting his nostalgic connection to knowledge, belief and cultural aesthetics.



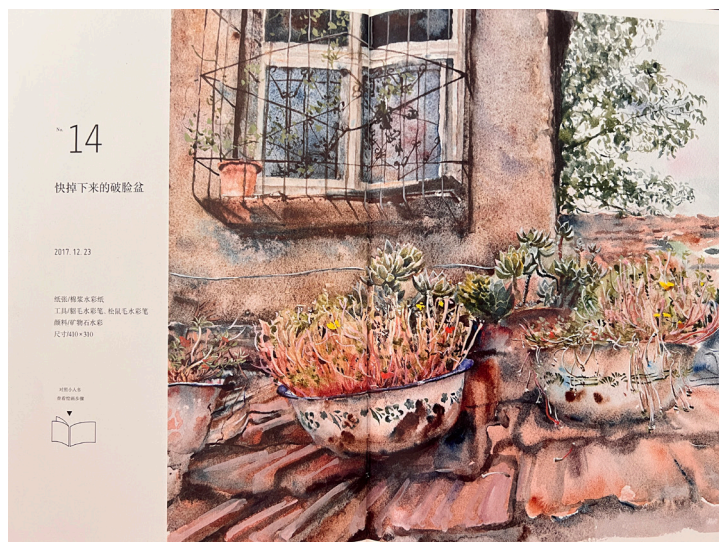


Figure 3.2. No.14. *Falling Broken Washbasin*. From *Nooks in Watercolor*. ©. Ao Liu (2017)

### 熬路 Ao Liu

Ao Liu is a publisher and watercolour painter. His book *Nooks in Watercolor* shares his experience through paintings he creates while walking. In this intimate, illustrated travelogue, he records different places he encounters. He says:

‘選擇畫這些角落也是選擇與過去對話的一種方式。拾起時間碎片，用水彩把生活做舊，讓自己暫時回到那個物質匱乏，精神富足的純真年代。’

Choosing to draw these nooks is a way of choosing the quality of past conversations, picking up the fragments of time, using watercolor to make life old, allowing myself to go back to a time of material deprivation and spiritual abundance. (Ao Liu, 2018, book no 2: p. 2. Translated by the researcher)

At the base of Ao Liu's method is a diary inside which he creates watercolour records of places and stories. The first two chapters of *Nooks in Watercolor*, contain his wash paintings, and in the third he uses clay sculpture to create expressions of memory. Ao Liu's illustrations are delicate and intimate. They depict the ordinary, everyday of living. He is not concerned with majestic landscapes or formal subject matter; instead in works like *Falling Broken Washbasin* (Figure 3.2) we see a sense of light, life and familiarity. Here, old washbasins full of plants teeter on domestic tiles. We encounter a 'little corner' of the world that speaks for a greater idea.

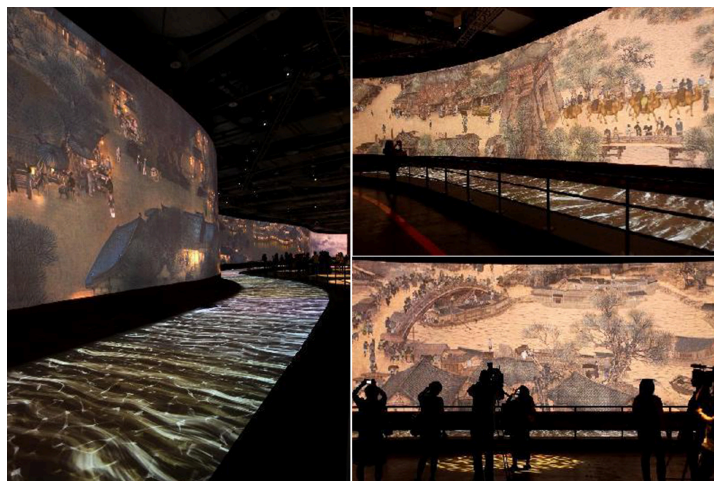


Figure 3.3 Yu Zheng's, *Along the River During the Qingming Festival* (2010). From the New Zealand Exhibition at the Sir Noel Robinson Conference Centre Auckland (June, 2022). © Yu Zheng. The panorama can be viewed as a dynamic construction at: <https://www.eventfinda.co.nz/2022/a-moving-masterpiece/auckland/manukau-city>

### 于正 Yu Zheng

Unlike Ao Liu, Yu Zheng's work is often dramatic in scale and digital in execution. Yu Zheng was the lead designer of an exhibition displayed in the China Pavilion at the 2010 Shanghai World Expo. His famous work *Along the River During the Qingming Festival* created a dynamic version of the traditional painting *清明上河圖* (*Qingming Shanghe Tu*)<sup>6</sup>. Employing contemporary technologies, Yu Zheng and his team created a dramatic multimedia revisiting of Zhang Zeduan's painting, formatted as a 128-metre long and 6.5-metre high installation that utilised 12 projectors (Figure 3.3). The work presented the life of Song Dynasty people in four-minute cycles, featuring two minutes of daytime scenes and two minutes of night-time activity. The imagery was accompanied by music and sound. The complex panorama featured 6,000 characters, each of whom had its own story line. For example, in the river, men could be seen hurriedly furling the sails in order to cross the bottom of the bridge. Viewers encountered streets that were crowded during the day, but at night the space became much less populated, and the daytime drinking establishments were now decorated with lanterns. Although more majestic than Ao Liu's illustrations, the work also places emphasis on the everyday; on commerce, food, temple fairs and architecture (CCTV, 2010; Liu 2011).

Yu Zheng's work is a vibrant revisiting of a world that no longer exists. It draws the imagined into the present as a nostalgic and dramatic construction of a historical time that no viewer seeing the work has ever experienced.

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6. The original work that this digital artwork interprets was painted by the Song dynasty painter Zhang Zeduan. It was a five-metre long handscroll (24.8 x 528.7cm) that vividly captured people's daily life inside the landscape of the capital city, Bianjing.



Figure 3.4. Wu Guanzhong, *Twin Shadows* (1981). ©. Hong Kong Museum of Art

### 吴冠中 Wu Guanzhong

Wu Guanzhong is a highly regarded Chinese artist who studied in Paris. Much of his work is distinguished by sparing, loose brushstrokes and a sophisticated application of Chinese inks that he uses to depict his Jiangsu birthplace.

Although associated with the development of abstract art within the Chinese tradition, many of his paintings explored relationships between old buildings and the spaces they occupy. In these works, one encounters his formal poetics of restraint and a sense of suspended time (Figure 3.4). Here we encounter a delicate nostalgia that is neither sentimental nor heavy. Instead, he is preoccupied with the ordinary in a manner that lifts his work beyond what was either politically or artistically sanctioned, into a state of formal beauty.<sup>7</sup>

William Langley describes Wu Guanzhong as:

... setting himself apart from his contemporaries with his lack of concern about the ‘Chineseness’ or nationalism of his art. And yet, in doing so, Wu created a new face for Chinese art, one that was not confined by the labelling and quarrelling of art theorists, nor the nationalist concerns of guohua painters. (2019, para. 30)

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7. Langley (2019) notes that although Wu always saw himself as an essentially ‘Chinese painter’ the ‘New China’ of the middle decades of last century, “was resistant to Wu’s synthesis of East and West, and of his increasingly abstract works. While he was allowed to teach, Wu was repeatedly demoted, and his posts became increasingly obscure” (para. 19).

## THE PICTURE BOOK AND TRAVELOGUE

Because 忘歸 (*The Melancholic Traveller*) utilises imagery and poetry as central devices for communicating nostalgia, the final part of this review considers the nature and potentials of picture books, with an emphasis on illustrated travelogues.

The picture book is a diverse media form that has many applications. Such books can deal with complex themes (Osborn, 2001; Hilbun-Schwartz, 2018), they can be useful for teaching reading to young children (Lewis, 2001; Pantaleo, 2004), they can be used to develop literacy in older children (Wolfenbarger and Sipe, 2007; Hilbun-Schwartz, 2018; Osborn, 2001) they can make content easier for teenagers who are attempting to learn a second language (Lee, 2015) and because of their complexity, they can leave a significant and lasting impression on mature readers (Osborn, 2001).

In 1998 Hearne compiled a selection of what were considered at the time to be exemplary Western, children's picture books. These had common features including clearly focused imaginative illustrations, uncluttered page design, rapid-action journeys, and regular left to right linear movement across the page. The books exemplified what Hearne (1998, as cited in Goldstone, 2001) and Stoodt, Amspaugh and Hunt (1996), described as a form of naivete.

### Direction and convention

However, the illustrated travelogue that forms the creative focus of this thesis does not pursue left to right linear movement. Instead, it follows the ancient Chinese convention of writing in columns, right to left.<sup>8</sup> Bergen and Chan Lau (2012) note that although in the People's Republic of China, modern texts are read (as with English) left to right, top to bottom, this convention is not universal throughout the Chinese speaking world and, in Taiwan, characters are normally written top to bottom and then right to left. When I was growing up in Macau

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8. I adopt this design convention because text direction in my work refers to a nostalgic past.

some books used left to right direction, but some books followed the traditional right to left order.

Written text in my picture book is bilingual (it uses English and Chinese to poetically reflect on the same experiences). My decision to use dual voices aligns with research that observes that bilingual picture books can promote readers' biliteracy and deepen their cultural understandings (Aldeman, n. d.; Bialystok, 2011). This said, Huang and Chen's (2016) study of English/Chinese bilingual children's picture books found that there are often variations in English and Chinese text quality, and the Chinese text is often depicted as being subordinate in status. To address this, considerable care is taken with translation in my work. The respectful valuing of cultural voices in bilingual picture books is important because it proposes that "language is a house of being" and language may be conceived as a "home" (Heidegger, 1978, p. 217). Both Aldeman (n. d.) and Louie and Sierschynski (2015) argue that biliteralism can cause readers to feel that both languages are essential, and this can encourage them to accept and cultivate traditional languages. As an extension of this, Cummins (2001) argues that bilingual picture books can prevent readers from losing their traditional language skills and assist them in shaping a dynamic identity for themselves.

### Relationships between image and text in illustrated travelogues

A variety of writers have described relationships between image and text in picture books. Cech (1984, p. 118) defines the dynamic as a "duet", Pullman (1989, p. 167) describes the relationship as a "counterpoint", Sipe (1998, p. 97) uses the word "synergy" and Schwarcz (1982, p. 15), in discussing how text and the illustrations take turns in telling a story, uses the description "alternate progress".

The travelogue as a media form has a long history and numerous authors have combined image and text in their accounts of journeys. However, four in particular demonstrate design features that serve to contextualise my project.





Figure 3.5. Nile Delta, detail of the Holy Land. Published in Bernhard von Breydenbach's *Peregrinatio in Terram Sanctam* (Mainz, 1486). BSB München: 2 Inc.c.a. 1725, fol. 131r. urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb00051697-6. © [BSB München].



Figure 3.6. Miniature from *The Travels of Marco Polo*, Chapter CXXIII and CXXIV, originally published circa. 1298-1299. Livre des merveilles fol. 58r. The Khan at war, Faksimile UB Graz Sig.: ©. HB 15 210/P 778.

### Paul Walther von Guglingen

Paul Walther von Guglingen's late medieval illustrated Jerusalem is an early medieval travelogue. In this work von Guglingen uses maps, charts and detailed depictions of flora and fauna instead of sketching the conventional sacred Christian shrines of his contemporaries (Ritsema van Eck, 2017). The artist's images are interlaced with personal experiences and reflections on travelling. In these ornate, linear, monochromatic works, text and image are closely intertwined (almost decoratively) and emphasis is placed on non-religious aspects of his late medieval pilgrimage experience.

What I find interesting about his work is the way type has a harmonic 'voice' that combines with the illustrative style, so writing and imagery are experienced as an integrated unit (Figure 3.5).

### Rustichello da Pisa/Marco Polo

Preceding von Guglingen's work was a travelogue that documented the journeys of the merchant Marco Polo (who travelled to Asia via the Silk Road, arriving in China in 1275). The Book of the *Marvels of the World* (or *The Travels of Marco Polo*) served for centuries as a significant cultural exchange for both the East and the West. The book was written by Rustichello da Pisa, who recorded accounts that Marco Polo shared with him while they were imprisoned together in Genoa. The travelogue had many editions in numerous languages and the illustrations are unattributed because the book was reproduced by hand long before the invention of printing. Consequently, professional scribes or amateurs made many free translations and adaptations, and illustrations were created from both individual imaginations and descriptions within the text (Figure 3.6).

Graphically, this work is of interest because it offers depictions of China between 1271 and 1295. However, it is also significant because I am interested in how image and text are integrated on the page. Like von Guglingen's work, image and text are constructed as a unified conversation, but the element of colour creates greater demarcations between what is written and what is illustrated. This caused me to think about the potential of using a very restrained palette in my travelogue.



Figure 3.7. Inhabitants of the Great Wilds from *Guideways through Mountains and Seas*. Although early versions of the travelogue were accompanied by illustrations, these were redrawn over the centuries. Strassberg (1994) suggests that the images shown in this figure probably date from the early part of the twentieth century.

*Guideways through Mountains and Seas*

China has a very complex history of travel writing. Strassberg (1994) notes that the earliest existing Chinese anthology purely devoted to travel accounts is a manuscript handwritten in the 14th century<sup>9</sup>. Although he discusses subsequent illustrated accounts and travel diaries from the Tang and Sung dynasties, it is *Guideways through Mountains and Seas* (Shan-hai ching, ca. 320 B.C.–A.D. 200) that has become famous both as a historical guidebook for travellers and a description of mythical lands. In this work, physical and non-physical realms are populated with fantastic beings. The travelogue records local valuable and everyday objects, natural features and regional gods (along with descriptions of how they might be honoured). The text and illustrations take the reader through mountains and territories that are linked by a single road.

The travelogue is distinctive because it categorises objects and geographical features in a way that Strassberg suggests creates “a rhythmic repetition, an illusion of control over nature in which the danger of the unexpected is absent and unseen spirits can be managed” (1994, p. 17). This pursuit of harmony is an interesting feature because, Strassberg notes, “compared to their Western counterparts, Chinese travel writers described remarkably few irrational, terrifying landscapes, bizarre or grotesque experiences, or journeys of unremitting physical suffering” (ibid).

What I find interesting about this work is both its concern with the everyday and the harmonious way that a single image speaks to the text and space that accompanies it. There is no excess of information in the design and aesthetic harmony is attained through restraint (Figure 3.7).

9. Although this contains a table of contents from an earlier collection dated 1243.

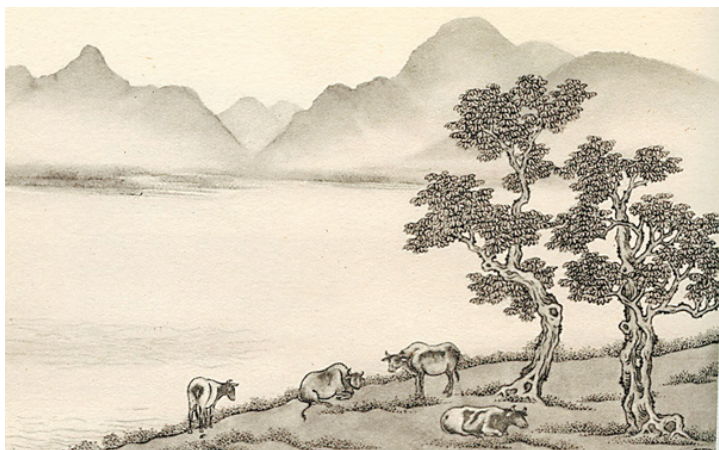


Figure 3.8 Cows in Derwentwater, 1937, ink on paper. Reproduced in *The Silent Traveller: A Chinese Artist in Lakeland*. © Chiang Yee.

10. Wu (2012) proposes that Chiang's pen name 啞行者 'Ya Xing Zhe' was inspired by Confucian traditions of scholarly retreat. This was a practice she says that was "associated with many of China's best-known painters and literati [...]. In adopting this pen name Chiang clearly identified himself with this tradition, further enhancing the image that he cultivated for himself, as a modern literatus" (para. 69).

11. These are generally supported by English translations.

### Chiang Yee

Chiang Yee (1903-1977) was a Chinese calligrapher, painter, author and poet who travelled to Britain in 1933 and lived and worked there until 1955. During this period, he created a series of illustrated travelogues using the pen name 'Yaxingzhe' or 'Silent Traveller'.<sup>10</sup>

Chiang Yee's travelogues document his life in Oxford and London during the Second World War, as well as describing his travels to Dublin, Edinburgh, the Lake District, and the Yorkshire Dales (Figure 3.8). His books integrate ink and watercolour paintings, sketches and poetry. Wu (2012) notes that Chiang Yee was among the first Chinese writers to write books in English in the first half of the 20th century.

Wu (2012, para. 35) suggests that:

... the appeal of the Silent Traveller books lies not only in their unfamiliar aesthetic beauty, but also in their novel approach to recording Chiang's particular experiences of Britain, from the point of view of a homesick Easterner.

Chiang's poems in these travelogues appear in both Chinese and English and many of his illustrations are accompanied by poetry written in Chinese script.<sup>11</sup> This integration of illustration and written poetry has deep roots in traditional Chinese practice. Chiang's prose also has clear poetic qualities and often he draws the reader's attention to details of the everyday. For example, in describing a boat trip he took in the morning in the Lake District, he writes:

Next I came to the boats' landing stage; looking across to the other side as far as I could see, the mountain ranges stood out clearly against the blue sky and even the beams of sunlight could be separately counted. The morning smoke was steadily puffing up from the chimney of some house hidden in the mass of trees and only a roof might be hazily discerned through the mist. (Chiang, 1937, p. 32)



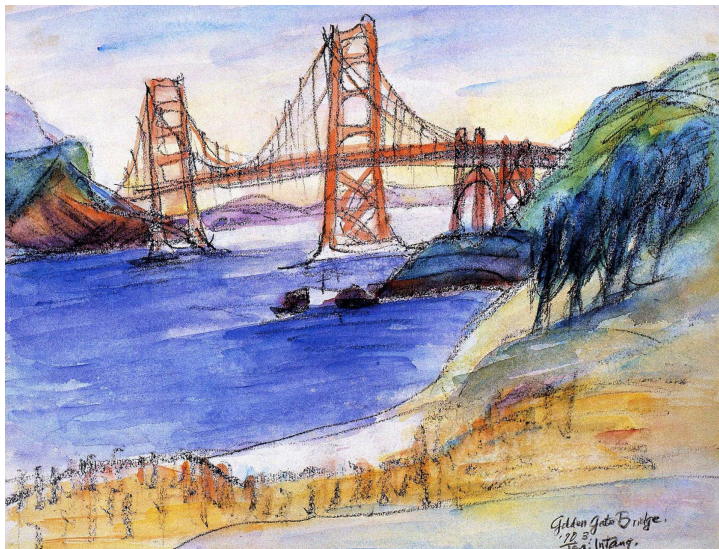


Figure 3.9. *The Golden Gate Bridge*, Cai Yantang 《金門大橋》蔡蔭棠, watercolour, 30 x 41 cm, 1970. From *Travelogue, Landscape and Painting: The Case of the Painter Tsai Yum Tong* 遊記、風景與繪畫——以畫家蔡蔭棠為例, 2022/11/11, arthistorystroll, <https://arthistorystrolls.com/2022/11/11/遊記、風景與繪畫——以畫家蔡蔭棠為例/> © Century Art Association.

### Cai Yantang

A more contemporary travelogue by the artist Cai Yantang 蔡蔭棠 (1909-1998) documents his nine-month journey through Japan and the United States, between December 1969 and September 1970. Yantang's heavily illustrated and poetic accounts include *The Old Master's Car: Trivia from Travels in America* (1970), and *Sketches of my American Tour* (1971). Like Chiang Yee's travelogues, in these works, the author offers descriptions, both poetically and pictorially of the worlds he encounters. Thus, when comparing his written description:

... 金門大橋的朱紅色從遠方出現，隨其雄姿之迫近越覺莊麗 ...  
 ... The vermilion colour of the Golden Gate Bridge appears from a distance, growing more majestic as it approaches ...

... with his illustration (Figure 3.9) we encounter an abundance of colour, that blends with distorted perspective, realised in restrained language or confident Chinese brushstroke work.

What I find interesting about Cai Yantang's work is the poetics with which he approaches what he encounters and the richness of his language which is very different to the quiet restraint of Chiang Yee's work. However, both authors maintain a distinctive 'Chineseness' in the way they depict experiences and environments outside of their own country.

While contemporary, his work often references traditional Chinese painting and calligraphy. This produces a unique artistic style where the use of traditional brushes and ink on rice paper expresses a unique Zen-like understanding of the natural world and human nature. This echoes classical Chinese poetry and philosophical thought. It is this quality that I refer to as 'Chineseness'.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESEARCH DESIGN

#### OVERVIEW

The primary focus of the study is Chinese identity and how nostalgic art might be linked with ‘日常生活’ (engagement with the everyday) in a travelogue. Initially, illustration experimentation served as an entry point into the study. This included sketching as a means of visualising concepts related to Chinese cultural objects and environments. The study involved a six week field study in Guangzhou and Macau, during which I recorded in poetry and illustrations, the nature of a constrained and intimate world. This was shaped by my experience of being geographically confined inside a newly implemented government Covid 19 influenza lockdown. During this time, I created a travelogue of a small world that eventually increased in size as travel sanctions were gradually lifted.



Figure 4.1a. A 'drawn collage' of old paper and a broken plate, (December 2022).



Figure 4.1b. A watercolour reflection on praying for good luck in the Chinese New Year, (January 2023)

## METHODOLOGY

Methodologically the study may be understood as a practice-led inquiry (Hamilton & Jaaniste, 2009; Ings, 2014; Nelson, 2004) that draws on autobiographical experience and ethnographic reflection. This reflection happened largely through iterative practice including illustration, photography, digital image building and watercolour painting (using a brush and ink). Field work involved recording small, everyday objects and environments, supplemented with poetic responses to what I was encountering.

## METHODS

### Sketching/ Drawing

This method enabled me to concentrate on composition and detail. Drawing preceded and sometimes accompanied my field work. I drew and painted using my tablet.

Michael (2020, p. 270) suggests that drawing can constitute a form of ethnographic inquiry where the method constitutes an analysis. She says such a method, "rather than being a process of deconstruction, is constantly bringing knowledge into being." As such, she proposes drawing as a form of "sociomaterial research" (ibid.) As a method, drawing enabled me to enter new zones of observation and creative thought. Michael proposes that such drawing constitutes a "vocabulary of lines, shapes and composition [that] can show relations incommensurate with word-based categorisations and depict the combined social and material constituents of a practice" (ibid. p. 283).

However, in field work drawing often took too long, and my actions could sometimes attract attention, so I was less able to capture fleeting moments. As a result I tended to use the method as a way of thinking about everyday objects and considering how these might be composed in poetic ways (Figures 4.1a & 4.1b).

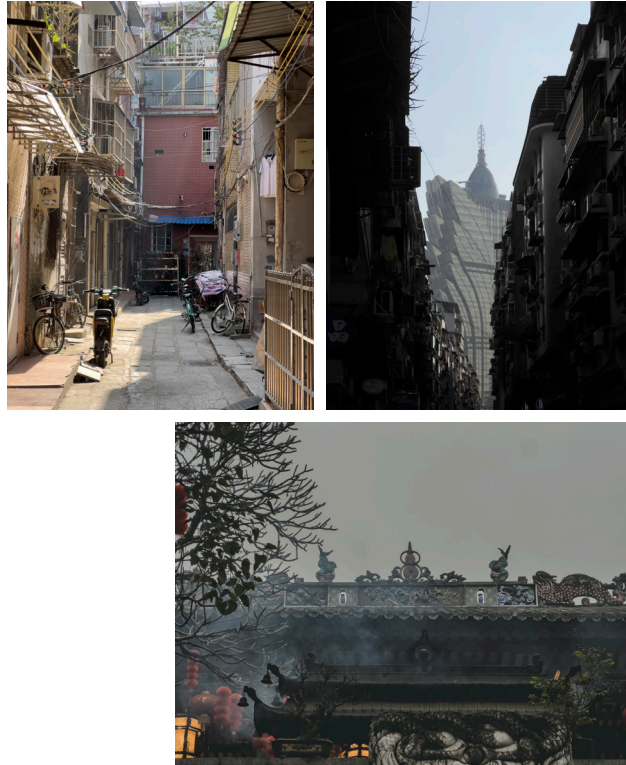


Figure 4.2. Examples of photographic field work between December, 2022 and February, 2023.

### Field work

I conducted field work in Guangdong Province and Macau over a six week period during December, 2022 and January, 2023. The field trip was focused on recording nuances of contemporary ‘日常生活’ (engagement with the everyday) including environments and objects. Newbury (2001, p. 7) argues that journals used in recording location experiences constitute “a self-reflexive and media literate chronicle of the researcher’s entry into, engagement with and departure from the field.” He observes that in Art and Design research, the process of collating field notes as image and text records does not “generally attempt to present the process of research in the linear fashion that is typical of research paper writing” (ibid., p. 1).

When I arrived in China on 14 November, my intended plans of a physical journey across wide expanses were thwarted and I immediately found myself in lockdown. I was confined in Macau by myself. Because travel was extremely limited and people were encouraged to not leave the confines of their homes, I had to rethink my study. Accordingly, I applied the idea of a travelogue to my enforced isolation. Having considered this approach, I recorded dates, places, feelings and poetic responses to what I was encountering. My poetic writing was stored in journals and sketch books, and my photographic records were saved on my hard drive. Generally, my field work was photographic (Figure 4.2). Recording environments and details photographically enabled me to perceive the world with reflective clarity. I was able to do this because I would normally take several recordings of the same object or environment then consider them quietly upon my return to enforced isolation.<sup>12</sup>

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12. Photographic recording was an advantage during the lockdown. The whole city was uncannily empty. Because there were tight regulations on how far one could travel, most of my recordings were taken inside or in close proximity to my apartment.



Figure 4.3. Three cyanotype illustrations that demonstrate a spectrum of potential from the poetically peaceful, to the detailed, to the melancholic (January, 2023).

### Cyanotype illustration

The process of cyanotype photography is reliant on sunshine. However, I was working in an apartment in China where there was no direct sunlight. As a result, a significant amount of information from my field work was being lost when it was cloudy. Although I wanted to use cyanotype photography as a method of illustration, because of its aesthetic restraint and delicacy, I was facing challenges when trying to create details. To address the limitations of my constrained environment I developed a hybrid illustration system where I combined cyanotype's physical blue brushwork tanning and digital photography to achieve higher levels of detail than what could normally be attained with a conventional cyanotype. In this process I combined negatives, multiple exposures, colour grading and experiments with contrast, to create records of experience that touched a kind of observant melancholy (Figure 4.3).

### Poetic response

Because 日常生活 (my engagement with the everyday) is experienced as poetic, what I record in imagery and what I record in words generally have a similar tone. This is because for me, the poetic image and poetic text are intimately related. Arihia Latham (2021) suggest that poetic responses to an image have the potential to reveal stories that are buried beneath the pictorial surface. However, the relationship between lyricism, the pictorial and Chinese poetry is a feature that runs back for centuries in Chinese culture. In fact, Wang (2017, p. 17) says that lyricism was integral to ancient Chinese literature. He notes:

Chinese sages have realized that the main emotion cannot be expressed truly and vividly only by simple language in Pre-Qin period. Moreover, language cannot express our thought completely, so we need to utilize specific images. ‘Image’ in ancient poems has long remained at the level of “natural scenery”; everything rises and falls, so nothing fails to affect people’s feeling and inspiration.

Thus, my poems are a form of imagery. As a method they are used to record diverse senses; sound ... scent and subtle experiences like memory or realisation. A poem is not separate from the cyanotype but accompanies it as a parallel experience. Let us consider two examples (Figure 4.4).

Structurally these poems are dated so we can understand them as part of the chronology of a travelogue. Although like Classical Chinese poetry, my writing is intense and related to images, it is also concise and concerned with common things (Jiang, 2021). However, it deviates from the five most common forms of Classical Chinese poetry (Shi 詩, Ci 詞, Ge 歌, Qu 曲, and Fu 賦) because they are not created in couplets (Shi and Fu), they are not associated with performance (Ge and Qu), and they are not created using patterns of syllables and tonal patterns (Ci). The poems may be thought of as moments recorded in time, shaped in conversation with a cyanotype, as nostalgic observations of the ordinary, that is also extraordinary.



Guangzhou 25/11  
 The city remains in lockdown.  
 I hear the marking of time ...  
 In the sound of my grandmother's clock.  
 Tick ... tick ... tick ...

Figure 4.4. Examples (above and overleaf on p. 47), of poems I wrote in response to 日常生活 (my engagement with the everyday), (November, 2022; January, 2023).





13/01 Macau  
This place called the Hallucination,  
Its dimly illuminated alleyways invite,  
people passing  
to sit,  
and listen,  
to the stories of Patio Da Ilusao

### Prototyping

Prototyping was the fifth method employed in the study that I used after I returned from the field trip. While overviewing and selecting cyanotype illustrations and their accompanying poems, I began developing prototypes of books using 龍鱗裝 (dragon scale binding). Here, I experimented with nuances within the illustrations (Figure 4.5).



Figure 4.5. Street view in Macau. In a series of experiments, I began experimenting with colour accents within the illustrations, drawing attention to elements by artificially increasing their intensity or highlighting their hue. However, this tended to break the quiet poetics of the illustration, fragmenting its sense of contemplative ‘wholeness’ and nostalgia, because it produced internal distraction within the work (January,2023)

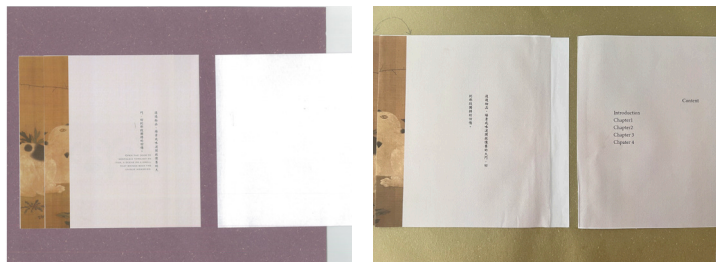


Figure 4.6. Prototypes of single page and double page spreads ( Septemeber,2022)

I also experimented with potential layouts, that used space and bilingual text in a restrained and elegant manner (Figure 4.6).

These prototypes were used to develop and refine a bound travelogue where space was a dominant element in the design, and I could experiment with bringing bilingual poetry and illustrations into harmony with each other. I was seeking a certain quietness and delicacy that would relate to paper I brought back from China and the physical process of turning pages beneath one's fingers.

Thus, design prototyping was an iterative method that involved trialing, failing and adapting as well as exhibiting and proving (Koskinen & Frens, 2017). While I sometimes used physical mock-ups to consider weight and scale in relation to book binding,<sup>13</sup> spatial compositions on the page were generally experimented with using high-fidelity digital proposals.

13. During my investigation, I prototyped two distinct approaches to securing dragon scales together. The first trialed a binding system with a single page and the second involved binding with two pages. The single-page bindings were lighter, but the double page bindings enabled me to feature material on both the left and right side of the page.

## SUMMARY

In this chapter I have discussed a practice-led research design that drew on embodied, poetic experience and ethnographic reflection. In implementing this I employed five methods.

Sketching was used to think through potential compositions as poetic expressions of the everyday. This method preceded but also bled into fieldwork that was shaped by the constraints of government regulations upon my entry into China. In an isolated and restrained environment, I recorded my responses to an unpopulated world by taking photographs and writing poetry about the everyday environments and objects I encountered. As the world began to open, I recorded the re-establishment of human life in the city around me.

The confines of enforced isolation and the subsequent paucity of available resources also forced me to adapt my initial proposal of creating photographic cyanotypes. With no access to strong light and chemicals, I developed a novel form of imagery that I describe as cyanotype illustration. Through this hybrid approach to documenting field work, I attempted to give voice to a peaceful, observant melancholy that spoke to both delicacy and nostalgia. The chronologically dated poems and cyanotype illustrations resourced a travelogue that upon my return to New Zealand, was developed through a series of prototypes that enabled iterative refinement through physical and high-fidelity digital mock-ups.

Having now discussed the research design behind the project, in Chapter Five I will discuss the artefact that is a physical outcome of the inquiry and its relationship to ideas raised in the exegesis.

## CHAPTER FIVE CRITICAL COMMENTARY

### THE NATURE OF NOSTALGIA

In Tugo Cheng's photographic series *City Patterns*, he depicts his sentimental attachment to the city of Hong Kong. He observes, "People will move, photos will move, but buildings will stay ... at least for a while" (2017, pp. 28-33). Cheng's photography seeks to capture an essence of Chinese culture by celebrating the contemporary. Conversely, my work pursues a delicate nostalgia, seeking a voice for the sentimentality in my heart during my encounters with everyday life.

Etymologically, the word nostalgia is a combination of the Greek word νόστος (nóstos), meaning 'homecoming', and a Homeric word, ἄλγος (álgos), meaning 'pain' (Matei, 2017). The 'pain' I feel contains a delicate, melancholic beauty that expresses a longing for what can no longer be captured in an enduring way but can be sensed in moments.



Wildschut, Sedikides and Routledge (2008) note that in the West by the early 19th century, the word nostalgia had become regarded as a form of melancholia or depression and this framing was promoted throughout the 20th century by scholars like Frost (1938), who described it as an “immigrant psychosis” and Fodor (1950), who claimed it was a “mentally repressive compulsive disorder”. However, in the later part of the 20th century sociologists like Fred Davis (1979) began to frame nostalgia in a more positive light, noting that people tended increasingly to associate it with words like warm, old times, childhood and yearning, rather than pain and homesickness.

While etymologically nostalgia means a painful homecoming, more recently it has been described as “the suffering evoked by the desire to return to one’s place of origin” (Wildschut et al., 2008, para. 1). To me, nostalgia is a form of beauty; a bridge between two worlds, that I traverse using a combination of cyanotype aesthetics from the West and dragon scale book design from the East. Drawn together through the handmade and the digital, through bilingual poetry and the potentials of the travelogue, nostalgia reaches into embodied experience and outwards into communication. The use of nostalgia as a positive device in my project aligns with Wildschut et al’s research that found nostalgia can serve four functions.

First, it generates positive affect. Second, nostalgia maintains and enhances positive self-regard. Third, nostalgia strengthens social bonds. Finally, nostalgia imbues life with meaning, which facilitates coping with existential threat (Wildschut et al., 2008, para. 16).

Wildschut et al. also propose that “nostalgia constitutes an important mechanism through which individuals achieve positive self-regard” (ibid. para. 18), and it “is a deeply social emotion [that] contributes to a sense of safety and secure attachment” (ibid., para 19).



Figure 5.1. Cyanotype illustration showing brushworked framing integrated with a monochromatic photograph (January, 2022). Here detail is recorded at a level not normally achievable in a traditional cyanotype. By importing contemporary, digital methods I was able to subtly, fine-tune tonal emphases in the compositions. However, I avoided using any digital editing tools, so the final illustration remained a physically authentic record of what I encountered.

## CYANOTYPE ILLUSTRATION AS A HYBRID

The cyanotype illustrations in *The Melancholic Traveller* are hybrids. They are not coloured photographs and they are not paintings. I combine the fluidity of 寫意 (spontaneous, freestyle Chinese brushwork) and the distinctive blue (*qing*) of Chinese porcelain painting. Using simple, slow brushstrokes I layer emotions and my state of mind into a work. This allows the viewer to encounter a more profound sense of meaning and poetry. Blue (*Qing*) has gradually become a signifier of traditional Chinese culture. It produces a quiet ‘indifference’ that Bao (2023) suggest alludes to a character that is subtle and unassuming.

In my work, the evocative combination of photography and brushwork creates references across time. We gain a sense of nostalgia through the monochromatic colour scheme so that photographic recordings from the field concentrate on form without unnecessary colour accents or distraction. These hybrid images have a sense of timelessness; a feeling that while *The Melancholic Traveller* might be a contemporary travelogue, it could also be a travel diary from the 1930s or 1950s. The distinctive blue in the illustrations suggests melancholy, and the blending of hand-rendered brushwork alludes to ancient traditions in Chinese travelogue painting, but instead of brushwork creating details inside the illustration, it encases the image, forcing our attention to the deliberately illustrated nature of a contemporary, digitally composed image (Figure 5.1).



Figure 5.2. Experiments, left to right using rice paper, off-white 180gsm stock and 80gsm Dowling paper. I photographed the scene in Yunfu (January, 2023).

## PAPER

While I was in China, I bought different kinds of paper because I knew I would be unable to purchase the textures I was seeking in New Zealand. I was seeking paper that would take a print but also would suggest a feeling of nostalgia and quietness. I selected three different papers: an off-white 180gsm stock, traditional rice paper, and 80gsm Dowling paper (Figure 5.2). My preference was for the rice paper because printing on it preserved an original texture that helped to reinforce in a tactile manner, a nostalgic sense of Chineseness.

## THE TRAVELOGUE'S TITLE

I gave considerable thought to the title of my travelogue and I only made a decision in the closing weeks of my creative journey. In English, *The Melancholic Traveller* alludes to Chiang Yee's *Silent Traveller*. This is because my book is a contribution to a literary and artistic form that he made famous in the West in the 1940s. However, the Chinese title is not a direct translation of this. '忘歸', (wàng guī) contains two words that can be separated. 忘 means to forget and 歸 means to return. This title suggests both nostalgia and diaspora. It contains a gentle melancholy and alludes to a journey back to something that has become frail or forgotten. Lyrically, it is a deeper title but, given that the book is a cultural bridge, I believe that the two names might bilingually bring different dimensions to the title.



Figure 5.3. Lotus flowers growing at the Macau Government Headquarters in autumn (November, 2022).

## THE JOURNEY

The images and poems I created were gatherings from a journey that began with five days of mandatory hotel isolation, followed by three days quarantined in my apartment, then a train journey to my grandmother's house in Guangzhou. After the 4th of December the gates were opened and I travelled to Shunde with my friend. However, within a few days I contracted Covid and I had to re-enter isolation. When I recovered I began journeying back and forth between Guangzhou and Macau, wearing masks and practising careful social distancing.

On my first day in isolation in Macau, when I walked for 30 minutes to have my Covid test, I passed a pool of lotus flowers. In the tension and loneliness, they seemed so nostalgic and they became the first cyanotype illustration I created (Figure 5.3). This is significant, not only because the lotus is Macau's symbol, but it also relates to a very old Chinese saying:

‘出淤泥而不染濯清漣而不妖’ (愛蓮說, 周敦頤).

The lotus springs from mud, and yet it stays pure and untainted. It bathes in water and yet does not appear bewitching. (*The Language of Flowers*, Zhou Dunyi, circa. 1063)<sup>14</sup>

The lotus flower (蓮花, lián huā, 荷花, hé huā) is an everyday plant from my childhood. It grows out of common mud, but it is pure and unstained. It symbolises honesty, goodness, beauty and purity, and it changes through each season. The flower was like a beginning point for the travelogue, something fragile yet strong, beautiful and changing ... yet also eternal.

14. This is an elegant piece of prose from the Song Dynasty.



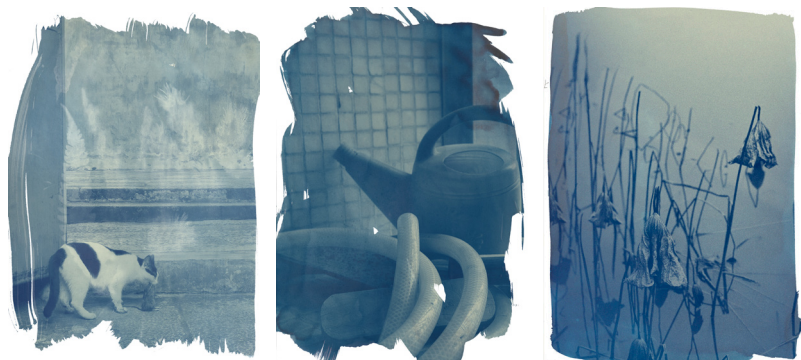


Figure 5.4. Examples of the familiar, everyday in my illustrations (November, 2022 to February, 2023).

## TIME AND NOSTALGIA

The Melancholic Traveller is a suspension in, and communication of time. When I gather imagery in the field and process it, I dwell in moments where I can preserve happiness. In the images I also try to preserve what the eye cannot see. When walking through the old town sections of Guangzhou, Macau and Shunde, I smelt the preparation of food and I heard the calling of small business owners and the sounds of Chinese opera playing on televisions in the houses of local people. I felt like everybody was busy and for a time I was unnoticed, both inside and outside of the world. The details of these cities were not records of modern China. They were not the sweeping motorways and high-rise buildings. In these spaces that were resonant with nostalgia, I recorded time unobtrusively. The photographs I took were not ‘snaps’; they were immersions in time where I sought a feeling in the everyday that was not confined to a date or topical event.

## NOSTALGIA AND THE POETICS OF THE EVERYDAY

The concept of 日常生活 (engagement with the everyday) as a way of understanding deeper ideas has a very long history in Chinese thought. It is a fundamental focus of attention in the travelogues of Ao Liu and Chiang Yee, and it can be traced back to Shan-hai ching’s *Guideways through Mountains and Seas*. In my work the everyday is the focus of nostalgic immersion because it suggests a ‘flavour’ of home (Wang, 2022), while containing in its smallness “the mysterious presence of absence” (Seltzer, 2010, para. 9). The familiar everyday permeates all of my work but it is explicit in illustrations like *A Cat catching a Rat in Shunde’s Old Village*; *A Watering Appliance in the Corner of my Balcony*; and *Remnants of Lotus Leaves Reflected in a Lake* (Figure 5.4).

Like nostalgia, the everyday for me is affirmative and I am reminded that Batcho (1995, 1998) and Davis (1977, 1979) describe nostalgia

as “positive”. Kaplan also described nostalgia as a “joyous” experience that gives rise to “an expansive state of mind [and] a feeling of elation” (1987, p. 466). If, as Seltzer suggests, we all live “in exile from the past” (2010, para. 6), then *The Melancholic Traveller* employs nostalgia as a connection to the everyday, relating to positivity through its delicate and poetic design.

### THE NATURE OF SILENCE

When a photograph is made into a cyanotype illustration, the process takes considerable time to complete. The finished image is delicate, finely tuned and melancholic. The brush strokes across the paper demarcate the image from the space surrounding it, so the shades of blue speak as a delicate voice. When combined with poetry, each page of the travelogue suggests a silent, observant nature.

When I work, I am always alone in my studio at night, thinking and creating slowly, feeling the emptiness of time passing ... quietly. This stillness enables me to dwell in memory, so my travelogue is both a recording and a time dwelling with what has been recorded.

In this silence, light and dark are in love. The travelogue continues the ancient Chinese tradition of a quiet encounter where the recorder practises gentle observation. Here I am not concerned with drama and conflict. Rather, like the ancient Chinese travelogue artists, I tell a story in moments of quiet thinking and feeling. The final illustrations are created as a relationship between light and darkness, where both can create details or dissolve a line. Objects feel like thoughts, either in high contrast or as the merging of forms.

### DRAGON SCALE BINDING

Dragon scale binding is a very difficult technique to master. There is no complete tutorial available to use as a guide, so progress occurred through observation and experimentation. Problems I encountered included misprints and paper size mismatches. Nevertheless, I eventually mastered the technique. By turning the travelogue’s pages with my fingers, feeling the rice-paper on my hands, I felt as if I was touching the historical memory of ancient books, and decisions I made regarding paper type and weight resulted in the book’s pages falling slowly from my touch, as delicately as the shadows of fallen leaves.

### SUMMARY

In this chapter I have considered my travelogue in relation to recent theories on nostalgia. I have also discussed my cyanotype illustrations as a form of hybrid and clarified both my choice of paper in the final book and its bilingual title. I then summarised my travel journey in China before discussing underlying features of my work, including the relationship of nostalgia to time, the poetics of the everyday and the nature of silence.



## CHAPTER SIX

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

#### INTRODUCTION

This thesis employed artistic practice to address the question:

How might poetry and illustration that engages with the Chinese phenomenon of 懷舊藝術 (nostalgic art) be employed to suggest a sense of cultural belonging?

Drawing inspiration from the work of 熬路 Ao Liu, I used poetry and designed a form of hybrid illustration that was born out of limitations imposed when I found myself in imposed isolation in China. Reconceiving a traditional Chinese travelogue as something that responded to both confinement and journeys through old parts of local cities, I reflected on ‘日常生活’ (engagement with the everyday), demonstrating how one might use book design to awaken nostalgic desires and elevate a poetic sense of cultural connection.

Although in the West nostalgia has been regarded throughout centuries as a psychological ailment, recent writing aligns it more closely with Chinese thinking, where nostalgia is considered as a form of positive engagement. Indeed, Wildschut et al., suggest that “the study of nostalgia has an exciting and promising future” and as a part of the fabric of everyday life it “may be uniquely positioned to offer integrative insights across such important areas as memory, emotion, the self and relationships” (2008, para. 25).

In this work I drew on Chinese and Western conventions to create a delicate bridge. Here ideas like the value of the everyday to speak for deeper ideas, the travelogue as a delicate recording, and poetic sensibility as a form of scholarship, all have their roots in Chinese conventions. Writing this exegesis has been a challenge for me because I think in Chinese, so I have sought some assistance in refining the translation of my thinking into English. This challenge has also impacted on my poetry, so that what is written in English in the travelogue might be usefully understood as an approximation.

#### CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE FIELD

This study artistically considers the Chinese concept of home (‘家’) as something deeper than a physical location. While my designed artefact can’t claim to rectify a sense of cultural disconnection and isolation within a Chinese diaspora, it may make three smaller contributions.

First, it demonstrates how a designed voice that combines a new digital form of cyanotype illustration, poetic text and bookbinding might, through its reflection on traditional Chinese travelogues, produce a distinctive form of 懷舊藝術 (nostalgic Chinese art).

Second it demonstrates how the almost lost traditional craft of 龍鱗裝 (dragon scale binding) can be employed as a contemporary vehicle for contemporary poetic book design.

Finally, the project demonstrates how design can elevate 日常生活 (engagement with the everyday) to a form of poetic expression that reaches into Chinese sensibilities while positioning itself as a contemporary text in a diasporic environment.

#### FURTHER RESEARCH

This project uses the design of a travelogue to express nostalgia. I believe that the concept of the travelogue might productively be applied to a wider variety of subjects in future research. My use of travelogues to document locations I have visited could be extended beyond the cities in which I was born and raised. Future projects might combine poetry and illustration with other forms of travel and as such extend the work of author-illustrators like Ao Liu and Chiang Yee.

Given my experience of studying internationally I have become increasingly interested in ways that we might combine Western and Chinese design as a form of bridge-building that connects through beauty and quiet observation.



Figure 6.1. Cyanotype treatment of a photograph of my cousin and me playing (2003) in Praia de Hac Sá, Macau (2003).

### ... IN CLOSING...

In 2003 my mother took this photograph of me playing with my cousin (Figure 6.1). When I look at it, I remember the smell of salt, the sound of a cool wind, the soft sand beneath my feet ... and the call of children playing. I could not have imagined at such a time that my educational journey would take me to another hemisphere, to study in a university in another part the world.

The process of this thesis journey has been deeply gratifying. From the initial disarray and pressure to create a question, research its context and understand the project's methodology, I travelled through unforeseen disruption and change to a state of eventual settling. In this project, I have sought a kind of elegant, melancholic design, that is restrained and poetic. This has happened because of the support of numerous people.

This project is my largest creative undertaking to date. I have felt both strain and motivation. During the fieldwork, I was able to reflect on the paths I walked as a child and discover details I had not consciously considered before. At the same time, I became more aware of the delicate poetic nature of my interior voice. This I think may be the true voice of a designer. Not the scramble to meet client's needs but, instead, a way of speaking to the world, both as an insider and as one who visits ideas, places and challenges.

In response to these things, as a designer one might bring into the world both clarity and beauty.

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