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A River Runs Through Us All: Asian and Pacific Linkages in Contemporary Performance from Aotearoa

Abstract

This essay seeks to broaden and diversify discussions of the transpacific itineraries that weave throughout Oceania by exploring artistic transactions among Māori, Pasifika, and Chinese peoples that are routed through Aotearoa New Zealand. I consider how New Zealand-based performance artists move beyond US-dominated categories and priorities to expose new relationships between islands and continents, and between Indigenous, diasporic, and immigrant identities and ways of being. I chart this terrain by examining three collaborative, intercultural performance works. The multilayered, photographic series Red Coats + Indians: The Games We Play (2019–20), created by New Zealand-born Sāmoan artist Greg Semu in collaboration with Indigenous Formosans in Taiwan, uses the iconic figure of Captain James Cook as an allegory for Chinese colonialism. Renee Liang's opera The Bone Feeder (2017) and choreographer Moss Te Ururangi Patterson's choral and dance ensemble piece Awa: When Two Rivers Collide (2017) trace geographical and spiritual connections between Aotearoa and China, but do so in ways that weave Aotearoa into wider Pacific circuits and crossings. The essay demonstrates the important role of the visual and performing arts in imagining mobilities, dis-positioning, place-making, and identities in Oceania, and in highlighting alternative Pacific and Asian linkages and modes of knowledge production.

Keywords: *transpacific, Oceania, intercultural performance, dance, opera, photography, China, Aotearoa New Zealand*

How can we broaden and diversify discussions of the transpacific itineraries that course throughout Oceania and their impact on Pacific Island worlds? This essay approaches the task by exploring artistic transactions among Māori, Chinese, and peoples from the wider Pacific that are routed through Aotearoa New Zealand. In a period when the United States' foreign policy is focused anew across the Pacific Ocean, I consider how New Zealand's own ongoing and developing engagements with Asia move us beyond US-dominated categories and priorities to uncover

alternative relationships between islands and continents, and among Indigenous, diasporic, and immigrant identities and ways of being.¹ In this article I chart features of this terrain by examining three collaborative, intercultural works, beginning with the performance-based photographic series *Red Coats + Indians: The Games We Play* (2019–20). Created by New Zealand-born Sāmoan artist Greg Semu, in collaboration with Indigenous Formosans in Taiwan, this multilayered project repositions Captain James Cook, the iconic figure of British exploration in the Pacific, as an allegory for Chinese colonialism. I then turn to two works that imagine geographical and spiritual tracings between Aotearoa and China, and, in so doing, weave Aotearoa into wider Pacific circuits and crossings. Chinese New Zealander Renee Liang's opera *The Bone Feeder* (2017), performed in te reo Māori, English, and Cantonese, unfolds against the wider historical backdrop of repatriation of migrant Chinese remains across the Pacific, focusing on the disruption of this process and the "re-homing" of Chinese bones on Māori land. The choral and dance ensemble performance *Awa: When Two Rivers Collide* (2017), devised by Māori choreographer Moss Te Ururangi Patterson with Atamira Dance Company and the Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra in association with Auckland Arts Festival, explores repatriation from a different angle. Based on the memory of Patterson's father, who died while working on a hydroelectric dam project in China, the dance depicts a contest between the ancestral guardians of the Tongariro and Yellow Rivers over the father's spirit and his eventual return home.²

These examples emphasize the important role of contemporary visual and performing arts in helping to shape place-making and identities in Oceania. While the works attend to how Asian and European colonialisms produce (im)mobilities and displacements, and also establish new homes and communities, each one reaches beyond the colonial binary to explore intercultural affiliations and surprising juxtapositions that reveal and reconfigure existing alliances and trace new trajectories across the broader Pacific region. Whereas all of these pieces deal with death, loss, and remains, they are also invested in revival and resilience, and in cultural formations that contest hegemonic politics and institutions and generate future imaginings. In thinking through these Asian and Pacific exchanges, I take up a transpacific framework, encouraged by its promise as a way of tracing transnational interactions that speak to the concerns of our current moment, while also mindful, in Tina Chen's words, of its "inherent asymmetries that must be explored in order to generate a more nuanced interpretive logic of transpacific possibility."³ In this respect, this essay is inspired by the theme of a 2018 symposium presented by the Department of History of Art and Visual Culture at

the University of California, Santa Cruz—"Pacific Island Worlds: Transpacific Dis/Positions"—which gave rise to this special issue of *Pacific Arts*. The organizers' productive call to understand the transpacific through the lens of Tongan scholar Eveli Hau'ofa's "vision of island worlds that have been intimately connected within a vast relational network" is relevant to the performances under consideration here, in terms of how they trace relations within, through, and among (rather than crossing over) communities of the Pacific Ocean world, offering a more decolonial view of the transpacific that privileges indigeneity and island ontologies.⁴ *Red Coats + Indians*, *The Bone Feeder*, and *Awa* do not merely describe intercultural encounters but actively bring different bodies, (im)materialities, cosmologies, and epistemologies together in the space-time of performance. Consequently, these collaborations do more than simply contribute to a more nuanced discourse on transnational Asian and Pacific creative praxis; they instantiate real-world solidarities and community networks that imagine new ways of living and relating in Oceania.

Transpacific Trajectories and Oceanic Imaginaries

Examining Chinese artistic intersections with Māori and other Pacific peoples in and through New Zealand encourages a more expansive and sophisticated view of transpacific relations. The interdisciplinary field of transpacific studies, as it has taken shape over the past decade, "both extends and exceeds the earlier categories of 'Asia Pacific' and 'Pacific Rim'" by providing tools to analyze more finely "the ways that different Asian, Pacific Island, and American cultures and communities mutually shape one another as they circulate throughout the region."⁵ China's meteoric ascent as a paramount economic and burgeoning military force in the Pacific region has stoked US concerns about security and the need to protect transnational capital interests in the northwestern Pacific in the era of "America's Pacific Century."⁶ It has also lent urgency to transpacific scholarship that (among other topics) critically assays various aspects of the US-China dyad and their neo-Cold War sensibilities.⁷ Vitaly important as this work is, it is also characteristic of a tendency in transpacific studies to reinforce a division between the flourishing "rim" of economic prosperity and the islands and oceans of the "basin," which remain largely elided or obscured. In turn, studies that have focused on the insular Pacific have often strategically distinguished Island cultures from their Asian neighbors, and indeed the whole "Pacific Islands"/"South Pacific" regional formation bears the legacy of colonial powers' post-war attempts to keep

island nations oriented toward a Western perspective and away from the threat of “Asiatic Communism.”⁸ Recently, transpacific studies has seen welcome advances in terms of thinking in more engaged ways about the dynamics between islands and continents, which include centering Indigenous subjectivities and favoring Oceanic and archipelagic approaches, exploring the potential of what Erin Suzuki terms “several alternative transpacifics.”⁹

As a Pākehā New Zealand scholar, I engage the transpacific from a different set of coordinates, situating Aotearoa as a crucial southern site and impetus for Asian and Pacific interactions. Here, I find it helpful to think about Christine Kim and Helen Hok-Sze Leung’s concept of the “minor transpacific,” which draws and expands upon Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih’s notion of “minor transnationalism” with its focus on “the creative interventions that networks of minoritized cultures produce within and across national boundaries.”¹⁰ The minor transpacific—as “at once a historical condition, a migratory network, a relation to power, and an analytic”—usefully “emphasizes the lateral relations among minor histories and minor locations in the Asia-Pacific region,” modulating our understanding of major political and economic entities.¹¹ These points of reference are necessary because, despite the considerable promise of transpacific studies to offer alternate and resistant views of the Pacific beyond trade agreements, treaties, and political alliances, there is much more work to be done, especially where transpacific discourse intersects with theater and performance studies, to push against what Rob Wilson describes as “the taken-for-granted view of an Asia/Pacific imaginary with Asian cultures and sites cast as transnational capital forces of globalization and set relentlessly against the interior Pacific—which is figured as a raw resource, fantasy site, vacancy, and/or source of subaltern and diasporic labor.”¹² Artistic and performance practice has great potential to show how the Chinese presence and role in the Pacific Islands, and its historical and ongoing relationships with Pacific communities, can be brought into illuminating, reciprocal conversation with discussions on the networks built by Indigenous Pacific peoples with each other and more broadly across Oceania. These existing Indigenous relational frameworks (as Hau’ofa’s work reminds us) are crucial components of transpacific connectivity. They also draw important attention to the greater recognition of indigeneity internationally which has catalyzed contemporary intercultural exchange across the Pacific, acknowledging both local belonging and affiliations with similarly positioned peoples worldwide. A more complex view of such regional interconnections and genealogies thus speaks soundly to Wilson’s question of how Oceania can become “the site of

alternative modes of Asian and Pacific, or Pacific and Asian, linkage and knowledge formation.”¹³



Figure 1. Detail from the Chinese *Kunyu Quantu* (*A Complete Map of the World*), by Ferdinand Verbiest (Nan Huairen) for the Qing dynasty Kangxi Emperor, 1674. Woodblock print, hand colored. In this view of the Pacific, the *Kunyu Quantu* advances beyond European maps that showed only the scant line of New Zealand’s west coast mapped by Dutch explorer Abel Tasman in 1642 to indicate the east coast of Australia and New Zealand as an insular entity. Reproduced with permission of Xiaowu Zhang and Cultural Relics Publishing

New Zealand exists as a salient node in this larger schema, both demographically and by way of a robust art and performance ecology that has enabled it to be the site or source of the performance works discussed in this essay.¹⁴ Both island and rimland, New Zealand has, as David Pearson notes, undergone a gradual transition from a relatively privileged position of being part of the British Empire “towards new vulnerabilities within a different world hierarchy of nation-states within which China and other Asian countries have become increasingly influential political and economic players.”¹⁵ New Zealand’s push for greater economic integration with Asian markets in the 1990s led to former Prime Minister Jim Bolger’s contentious 1993 declaration that New Zealand was an Asian country.¹⁶ Yet at the same time, New Zealand’s role as a major destination point for post-war Pacific Islander migration has reoriented the country’s domestic and foreign policy, its regional commitments, and its identity

as a Pacific nation. The cultures and communities engaged directly here—Chinese, Indigenous Formosan, Sāmoan, and Māori—share historical and ongoing links as Austronesian peoples, an early branch of Southern Mongoloid, descendants of whom entered the Pacific about 3,000 years ago. As they spread and diversified, one group became the Polynesian seafarers who eventually migrated to Aotearoa in c.1200 CE, and these connections form part of a living *whakapapa* (genealogy, layering of ancestry). In the modern era, there is little evidence that China and Aotearoa had knowledge of one another prior to the eighteenth century, although it is worth acknowledging a curious feature of the 1674 Chinese *Kunyu Quantu* (*A Complete Map of the World*) (Fig. 1), a landmark of Sino-Western cultural exchange and cartographic visual art created by Flemish Jesuit Ferdinand Verbiest (Nan Huaijen) for the Qing dynasty Kangxi Emperor.¹⁷ It is the world's first map to depict New Zealand (Xin Selandiya) as an island, predating by a century the map made following Cook's circumnavigation of New Zealand (1769–70), published in 1773.

British imperial ambitions in the Asia-Pacific region brought China and New Zealand into correlation during the 1790s, through the trade in fur and tea, and subsequently absorbed both Hong Kong and New Zealand into the British Empire in the early 1840s. The discovery of gold in California in 1848 saw thousands of Chinese men (primarily Cantonese from Guangdong province) flock to “Gold Mountain,” as well as to Australia's “New Gold Mountain” troves in the 1850s and to New Zealand in the 1860s. These newcomers from the Qing Empire gathered New Zealand into a new transpacific matrix, incorporating the young British colony into a “Chinese Commonwealth”; as Stevan Eldred-Grigg and Zeng Dazheng argue, “New Zealand now belonged not only to a booming new Europe but, thanks to gold, to a vast new China.”¹⁸ After the yield of the goldfields dwindled, those Chinese who stayed in New Zealand and prospered in different professions had to navigate an increasingly dominant Pākehā settler-colonial society, were characterized as a threat to the country's whiteness ideology, and were subjected to draconian restrictions on immigration and naturalization. By the turn of the twentieth century, Māori, too, were excluded from the developing national formation, and in their unique role as *tangata whenua* (Indigenous people) were engaged in complex dynamics of assimilation and resistance as they faced land confiscations stemming from breaches of the Treaty of Waitangi (1840) and various other diminutions of Native autonomy and expression. While these evolving circumstances throughout the twentieth century created certain conditions for Māori and Chinese to find commonality in adversity, these relationships were enriched and complicated from the 1950s by the influx of non-

Māori Pacific peoples, who carried out their own complex negotiations with these established communities alongside their differentiated struggles and marginalization vis-à-vis the Pākehā settler-state.¹⁹

New Zealand's major immigration review in 1986 opened the door to a significant new wave of Chinese and other Asian arrivals, the same year that Māori-Pākehā biculturalism became *de facto* cultural policy. Ensuing questions of how to balance the British, the Pacific, and the Asian in New Zealand's evolving self-conception tap into the unresolved issue of how immigrant communities might fit into a bicultural, treaty-based notion of the nation-state, which, Paul Spoonley contends, remains an obstacle for the development of a New Zealand-specific multiculturalism.²⁰ The contemporary relations among New Zealand's main ethnic groups are too intricate to adumbrate in this overview, but I focus here on the performing arts as an increasingly potent vehicle not only for examining these dynamics and embodying the possibilities of multicultural social practice, but also for speculating beyond the everyday—engaging alternate realities and cartographies to posit new imaginaries for Oceania.²¹ Since the 1970s, Māori theatrical performance has intervened in mainstream Pākehā cultural production and has become established as a key strand of New Zealand's creative scene and, arguably, its political discourse. Māori theater voices, in turn, provided inspiration for Pacific and Asian creative artists during the 1990s, who intervened in the bicultural framework, articulating their own perspectives on national politics, stereotypes, and discourses of identity and belonging, and founding a creative praxis that has flourished and diversified in the twenty-first century.

Red Coats + Indians, *The Bone Feeder*, and *Awa* highlight intercultural partnerships among these communities. In each case, their situated contexts voyage beyond the national, exploring networks and itineraries that speak to wider regional matrices. Their modes of artistic engagement are indicative of a recent turn in intercultural performance studies away from previous emphases on linear and hierarchical collaborations between Western auteurs and non-Western laborers, binary source-target models of analysis, and aesthetic encounters between discrete cultural systems. Instead, this new critical discourse and creative practice privileges mobile connections and transborder collaborations that are heterogeneous and non-hierarchical, and focuses attention on transversal minor-to-minor relations in ways that query dominant cultures and transgressively reimagine national and regional formations. Such work recognizes and respects diversity while building alliances with transformative capacity and which emphasize the processual elements of social becoming, attending both to the

micropolitics of the local and to macroscopic global phenomena.²² I consider how this sort of performance can be a force for what Anne Salmond has called *experiments across worlds*. Salmond points to the possibilities of exchanges across different realities that might allow “new forms of order to emerge,” and that might lead to new ways of living.²³ She imagines the potential of “drawing upon divergent strands from different philosophical legacies to confront current challenges and dilemmas, generating new kinds of insights and outcomes on the way.”²⁴ Artistic performance may rarely change the world, and so I hesitate to make those sorts of claims for particular projects. The fact is that such experiments are complicated and also expose the challenges and constraints of reaching across different realities. As I observe in what follows, performance also brings to light disconnections, ambivalences, and problems of representation that are not always easily reconciled. But I do remain open to the ways that intercultural performance praxis in Oceania might bolster the generative, world-making capacity of Salmond’s vision through its ability to excavate and validate repressed histories, galvanize alternative knowledge circuits, and advance new aesthetic and socio-political configurations—staging new dis/positions and contributing to an “art of living” across the region.

Dragging Up History: Greg Semu, *Red Coats + Indians* Series

Red Coats + Indians: The Games We Play (2019–20) (Fig. 2), created by New Zealand-born Sāmoan artist Greg Semu, is notable for the inventive, unusual, and challenging ways in which various transpacific narratives are overlaid and entwined, braiding together different regional perspectives on diaspora, indigeneity, and colonialism. Semu’s expansive and multilayered approach to bringing Pacific histories and viewpoints into conversation with Chinese and Taiwanese ones in this series evolved from his eight-week artist’s residency at the Taitung Indigenous Cultural and Creative Industries Park (TTICC) in Taiwan.²⁵ As Kim and Leung note in regard to the minor transpacific, a focus on Taiwan in this matrix “underscores the importance of Indigenous struggles throughout the transpacific region while highlighting how discourses of Indigeneity are mobilized throughout the Pacific and within various local sites.”²⁶ Semu explains, however, that the trans-Indigenous reciprocity he anticipated during his residency was compromised by the facilitators’ poor organization, lack of authentic contacts with Indigenous Taiwanese artists, and by the censoring of fellow artists’ work on the topic of Cross-Strait relations that he witnessed.²⁷ Fortunately, an Indigenous arts

lecturer at the National Dong Hwa University was able to connect Semu with arts students and performers drawn mainly from the local 'Amis community and to make sure Semu's project needs were met.²⁸ These experiences, however, prompted Semu to take a more covert, allegorical approach to his work; he embedded more oblique narratives within and alongside the apparent stories, and drew on drama, theater, and fantasy to encourage the participants to explore their feelings, anger, and imagination.²⁹ The collaboration resulted in a series of five life-sized photographic tableaux depicting battle scenes; three of these were presented in the project's premiere exhibition at TTICC in 2019 and are the focus of this discussion.



Figure 2. Greg Semu, photographic still from the series *Red Coats + Indians: The Games We Play*, 2019–20. Courtesy of the artist³⁰

Semu, currently based in Sydney, Australia, has received international acclaim for his community-arts projects undertaken in partnership with Indigenous, remote, and ethnic minority groups in Australasia and the Pacific. His elaborately staged, performative scenes are captured as large-scale photographic images that explore and critically interrogate experiences of colonialism, displacement, and intergenerational trauma; in his words, he is “flipping the script” in provocative ways that encourage dialogue and new ways of seeing.³¹ In works such as *The Last Cannibal Supper... Cause Tomorrow We Become Christians*

(2010), undertaken with Kanak collaborators in New Caledonia; *The Raft of the Tagata Pasifika (People of the Pacific)* (2014–16), created with Cook Islands actors in Rarotonga; and *Blood Red* (2016–17), completed in Coen, an Indigenous community in far north Queensland, Semu has experimented with various strategies of role-play, substitution, and role-reversal to unsettle colonial histories and to offer alternative images.³² These images can pursue more affirming possibilities but can also be visually confronting. Throughout his oeuvre, Semu's strategic visual repositionings embed reflexive commentary on art-historical conventions that entrench colonial hierarchies, yet he also places key emphasis on the role of theater and theatricality in stimulating fresh conversation. For him, the theatrical frame allows for critical distance, productively setting aside the scene for observation and contemplation to help provoke a shift in the conceptual—and, potentially, the lived—paradigms of his participants and viewers.³³

Although *Red Coats + Indians* presents fictionalized scenes, it cites and reworks key tropes that circulate throughout the Pacific region. Semu's surface narrative references the exploratory Pacific voyages and eventual death of Captain Cook, which, in a nod to the artist's New Zealand upbringing and Australian base, derive their topicality from the 250th anniversary of the navigator's "discoveries" being variously celebrated and lamented in 2019–20. Notably, the drama of this subject not only emerges through the elaborately choreographed engagements caught dynamically in the stills, but also in Semu's approach to the *theatricality* of colonial encounter: the formulaic, repeatable scenarios and their proliferating aftermaths, which altogether comprise, in Semu's words, "a fictitious narrative of operatic proportions, globally and historically."³⁴ As he describes it, "In this pantomime we reenact the tragic death of Captain Cook and reverse the cliched narrative" of settler-colonial dominance whereby the "savage Indians" rise up and save the day "by winning the game and protecting their lands, their culture and their sovereignty for the future of their people."³⁵ Whereas this stance places Semu's series within the recurrent waves of artistic and scholarly reassessment that inevitably accompany any public commemoration of Cook's entangled legacy, and posits a counter-scenario that might appear to have been tirelessly rehearsed, what is significant about Semu's angle is how he resituates the Cook narrative to speak to a framework of Chinese colonialism in Taiwan, particularly its impacts on the island's Indigenous peoples.

Although Cook's voyages and his demise in Hawai'i in 1779 have been principal elements of Euro-American settler-colonial fetishization, as well as of Pacific revisionist historiography, Cook's story does not resonate in Asia to nearly

the same extent. Semu's alternative transpacific trajectories, whereby European and Pacific histories become rooted in and routed through East Asian ones, provide a way for the 'Amis to stage an empowering narrative under the eyes of government censors while also opening the community to wider connections across the Pacific. The artwork pursues these objectives via a succession of visual and dramatic superimpositions that enable a multiplicity of trans-Indigenous, Asian-Pacific, and (de)colonial crossings and dis/positions to be adumbrated through a mixture of history and fantasy. At the same time, *Red Coats + Indians'* "inter-imperiality" embeds its own erasures and uneasy exchanges that raise questions about the ethics and limits of intercultural racial performativity; these dynamics are impacted by the complicated ways in which Cook's historio-mythology frequently elides local and regional histories, practices, and identities.³⁶

Semu's initial tableau, a charged face-off between the "Red Coats" and the "Indians" offers a rich example of the coded visual signifiers that index these interlocking narratives. Semu's use of "Indians" should be understood here in terms of the generic name given by Cook and his contemporaries to the Indigenous peoples of the Pacific and beyond, but is also intended as a critique of the racist game of "Cowboys and Indians" that entrenches colonial hierarchies and practices. On the left side of the image, 'Amis performers pose as a group of warriors—of different genders and armed with spears and longbows—arrayed in opposition to the serried ranks of colonizers (likewise played by 'Amis) bearing muskets and swords on the right. Within this accreted role-play, the red-uniformed actors suggest Cook's officers and British militia, but more covertly reference Taiwan's layered history of colonialism. Semu gestures to the Japanese occupation of Taiwan from 1895–1945, with its suppression of both Taiwanese-Chinese and First Nations military resistance, denial of Indigenous land rights, forced relocations, and undermining of traditional governance.³⁷ But most prominently—by way of the signal color of the People's Republic of China (PRC)—he indicates China's invasions and occupations of Taiwan: among them, the Qing dynasty's annexation and two-century rule over the island, its subsequent (re)appropriation by the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) in 1945, and the institution of an authoritarian form of military government. The imagery likewise references ongoing disputes over the political status of Taiwan and whether the Republic of China should remain a separate, self-governing entity or merge with the mainland to constitute "One China," wherein Aboriginal cultures are frequently appropriated to enhance Taiwan's distinctiveness.³⁸ Semu's decision to set this opening scene on the flat rooftop of an urban apartment block overlays

these histories onto contemporary, quotidian space and time, creating a trans-temporal arrangement that acknowledges how, for Indigenous Taiwanese, the war still continues.³⁹

Such visual encodings are replete throughout *Red Coats + Indians*. But what intrigues me most as a performance scholar is the deliberate lack of similitude, the not-quite-fits, the moments when these surrogations and substitutions expose their constructedness through slippage or excess. Here, I suggest that Semu undertakes a form of what Katrin Sieg calls “ethnic drag,” which involves “the performance of ‘race’ as masquerade.”⁴⁰ Although Sieg develops her analyses within the very different context of post-war West Germany, her ideas offer some useful ways of thinking about Semu’s choices. Going beyond gender drag to draw on postcolonial discourses of ambivalence and mimicry, as well as Brechtian concepts and techniques of defamiliarization or estrangement, Sieg explores the potential of ethnic drag to open critical space for seeing race differently; by *signifying* rather than *representing* race relations, ethnic drag addresses a range of social conflicts.⁴¹ By exposing the performative apparatus and, specifically, through the self-conscious disjunction of body, actor, and role, this approach undoes mimetic depictions, questioning seemingly stable and immutable identities and social structures and allowing room for other possibilities: “As a technique of estrangement, drag denounces that which dominant ideology presents as natural, normal, and inescapable, without always offering another truth.”⁴² In particular, I ask how Semu’s version of ethnic drag operates as a mode of historiographic intervention: how does “dragging up the past” become a way of doing, re-doing, or undoing history?⁴³ How does it enable the artwork to connect multiple histories, and to imagine alternative futures? Conversely, what situated histories and identities might it also threaten to submerge?

Semu’s core move is to have an Indigenous Taiwanese actor play a Chinese Captain Cook. Semu presents this composite character with a tousled, ill-fitting blond wig that purposely reveals the actor’s own black hair beneath, and a stylized historical costume of stark white breeches, long boots, and a waistcoat that leaves visible the actor’s bare arms. This messy misfit of actor and roles refuses mimesis and exposes the various layers that demand to be seen through the masquerade, disclosing “Chinese-ness” while hyper-troping an excessive whiteness. The portrayal parodies Cook’s white mask, decentering and denaturalizing white authority, while simultaneously, through this equivalence, emphasizing Chinese coloniality and subjecting it to a similar treatment. Accordingly, the portrayal disrupts the binary that associates imperialism with patriarchal masculinity

dominating feminized Indigenous bodies and lands. The emergence of the Indigenous as a destabilizing force from within the figure of the colonizer casts into relief the performative and contingent nature of hegemonic structures and histories; in Brechtian mode, history is posited as mutable, not inevitable, and open to new outcomes, thus advancing the potential for the masquerade to subvert, resist, and transform the social order.⁴⁴



Figure 3. Greg Semu, photographic still from the series *Red Coats + Indians: The Games We Play*, 2019–20. Courtesy of the artist

The two subsequent tableaux explode taut suspension and anticipation into violent, dynamic movement; the actors leap and arc in a clamorous, visceral battle caught sharply and startlingly in medias res (Fig. 3). These images shift us to the archetypal backdrop of the beach, the classic locus of Pacific cross-cultural encounter: the roiling clouds of a stormy sky, wind-blasted graveled shore, and concrete piles stacked against the steely sea moodily frame a furious scene of rebellion as the Red Coats, clustered in the middle of the melee, are eventually overcome by the Indians, the momentum of the warriors contrasting with the bloodied fallen. In their visual and choreographic composition, these scenes respond directly to eighteenth-century paintings of the fatal conflict between the British and Hawaiians that participated in an incipient mythmaking which figured Cook as a hero in a European tragedy. In particular, the melodramatic, chaotic crush of the opposing groups at the water's edge recalls such famous renderings as British-based German artist Johan Zoffany's *The Death of Captain James Cook*

(c. 1795), as well as *The Death of Cook* (1784) by British painter John Webber, official artist on Cook's third voyage. In both cases, Cook is presented as a tragic victim: in Zoffany's version, he lies helpless, supine; Webber goes further to reinforce an image of Cook as a peacemaker, his arm extended in a gesture of forbearance as he is stabbed unawares.

Although Semu's representation of Cook as an active, gun-wielding participant might appear to be an obvious intervention, figuring Cook so overtly as a mobile signifier of imperial violence and oppression within this iconic scene allows the series to engage even more broadly with what Sieg calls "proximate historical narratives," the complex ways in which stories of disenfranchised peoples touch and become contiguous in certain representations.⁴⁵ Cook is a particularly apt figure for this treatment because his wide-ranging voyages impacted so many Indigenous communities throughout and beyond the Pacific, and because of the ways that stories of his encounters and death have been reinterpreted and redeployed for so many different purposes. Semu is hardly alone among artists from Oceania in employing Cook as metonym and metaphor in order to recognize related histories and struggles across the region, nor in participating in the device of his demise so as to advance local resistance to colonial legacies. In this context, Semu's Asian Cook figure can be interpreted as part of a wider phenomenon of "dragging up" or "queering" Cook in various ways: the repertoire includes Aboriginal Australian Captain Cooks, Kanak (New Caledonian) Cooks, and Cooks presented with Polynesian features, adorned with Māori tattoos, and subjected to transformative Pacific afterlives.⁴⁶ Consequently, beyond European renderings, Semu's battle scenes also recall—perhaps inevitably if not intentionally—these attempts to reposition Cook from Oceanian perspectives, prompting further consideration of what is revealed and concealed by the seemingly endless end(s) of Cook.

The act of defeating a Chinese Captain Cook shows how recourse to Pacific histories and mythologies fuels the community empowerment impulse in Semu's artwork that envisages a different outcome for Indigenous Taiwanese: how about we win for once?⁴⁷ Simultaneously, however, the 'Amis actors might be understood to enact their own kind of drag in these tableaux, symbolically re-cast to invoke or imagine various other moments of Indigenous uprising, resistance, and struggles for self-determination. With Cook's killing, Taitung Beach "becomes" Hawai'i's Kealakekua Bay, but it also splits prismatically to encompass other sites of violent encounter across the region and their legacies. Brutal as the scene appears, however, Semu does not advocate for physical retaliation but for a mindset that resists and reaches beyond the strictures of colonial thinking; the

fact that the guns are obviously wooden sticks or branches and that the longbows have no arrows underscores that the weapons Semu champions are those of the imagination.⁴⁸

Semu's project seeks to recognize affinities among Indigenous Taiwanese and peoples in the wider Pacific, and to encourage minor-to-minor solidarities that remember violent pasts but envisage more empowered futures. Yet, the work's broad-ranging equivalences, condensations, and distortions are not without their difficulties. The costuming of one of the 'Amis warriors in a Plains Native American feathered headdress, for example (Fig. 2, far left; Fig. 3, right), imagines forms of resistance against British colonialism in North America as well as the subsequent pioneer expansionism that fueled the United States' transpacific ambitions. It does so, however, at the risk of reinforcing, rather than ironizing or critiquing, reductive stereotypes.⁴⁹ This foregrounds Sieg's argument that the Brechtian paradigm of drag can, in certain situations, court "essentialist readings" by lending corporeal proof to clichéd images, thus undermining attempts to "construct a transformative notion of political community and ethnic interests."⁵⁰ Centrally, moreover, Semu's approach to restaging art-historical antecedents does not rethink the Hawaiian-British encounter nor the event of Cook's death in ways that surface Kanaka Maoli (Native Hawaiian) perspectives. Indeed, the refraction of the event into multiple scenarios, identities, and spaces creates a lacuna within which the original Indigenous actors and their stories disappear.⁵¹ Thus, a reading of the patent and latent stories in Semu's performance-based photographic capture should acknowledge how his Asian and Pacific crossings involve a set of strategic displacements in the face of censorship that open up new ways of imagining transpacific connections. At the same time, however, *Red Coats + Indians* raises questions about the limits of such aesthetic experiments across worlds and of the terms on which such affiliations are structured; it prompts us to ponder the implications of the representational politics of this kind of interculturalism, especially the issue of how to balance wide-ranging associations and local, specific claims to place.

Red Coats + Indians links Asian and Pacific scenarios in multiple ways, opening out from the perspective of a New Zealand-born Pacific artist and drawing on the trope of Cook as a figure central to New Zealand's colonial and national identity. In contrast, the performance works *The Bone Feeder* and *Awa* focus more directly on relationships between Aotearoa and mainland China. Produced in New Zealand, their intercultural collaborations explore, in complementary ways, how deep engagements with Chinese histories present new prospects for New Zealand and for its Māori and Chinese communities, both on and off the stage.

“My Family Flowers Here”: Renee Liang, *The Bone Feeder*

Above the wide, windswept shore of the Hokianga Harbor in New Zealand’s far north stands a red Chinese gate, a vibrant beacon amid the muted hues of dunes, beach scrub, and ocean reaching out to the broad horizon. This poignant memorial remembers the 499 Chinese gold miners whose bones were shipwrecked in 1902 en route to Hong Kong for reinterment in Guangdong in southern China. Those coffins that washed ashore were gathered by local Māori from Te Rarawa and Te Roroa *iwi* (tribal groups), who protected and took care of the remains until their families could come to honor them. This evocative history, with its turbulent circuits of loss, care, and renewal, becomes palpable as I sit in Auckland’s ASB Waterfront Theater for Renee Liang’s *The Bone Feeder*, an opera for twelve voices and a chamber ensemble (Figs. 4–6). One of the most prominent artistic pieces inspired by this story, the opera creates an immersive Gesamtkunstwerk through the libretto sung in English, Cantonese, and te reo Māori; Gareth Farr’s haunting soundscape of Western and Chinese classical instruments together with *taonga pūoro* (traditional Māori instrumentation) composed by James Webster; its cast of Māori, Asian, and Pākehā performers; and its compelling mise-en-scène. The wide stage heaped with golden sand conjures the beach at Mitimiti; the dappled light bathes the audience and performers in shades of sea and sky; and a long projection screen upstage features a succession of antique silver static and moving images: sometimes scenes from the natural landscape, sometimes symbolic patterns that speak to the story’s profound entwinements.⁵²

Renee Liang, MNZM, a second-generation Chinese Kiwi poet, playwright, fiction writer, pediatrician, and medical researcher, has had an important role in articulating and advancing the voices of the Chinese and broader Asian communities in Aotearoa. Over time, explains Liang, through conversations with descendants of the shipwrecked Chinese gold miners and her own artistic contributions, she has developed a sense of having become “one of the guardians of the story.”⁵³ Originally produced as a play over three versions in 2009, 2010, and 2011, the 2017 opera relates the quest of a young Chinese New Zealand man, Ben Kwan (Henry Choo), who travels from urban Auckland to the Hokianga to locate the bones of his great-great-grandfather, Choy Kwan (Jaewoo Kim), in the hope that by repatriating his remains to China and honoring them ceremonially, he might find a salve for his own cultural deracination. The opera—as it unfolds across time and space, past and present, living and dead, and in China, settler New Zealand, and Te Ao Māori—reveals how traumatic cosmic disruption leads eventually, through new intersections, to a positive change in New Zealand’s

social order. It also, vitally, foregrounds New Zealand's place in a wider transpacific matrix by recalling and imagining historical and contemporary relations with China that interleave Indigenous, colonial, migrant, and diasporic experiences and identities.



Figure 4. Scene from *The Bone Feeder*, written by Renee Liang, directed by Sara Brodie, and scored by Gareth Farr. Photograph by Candice Whitmore for GATE Photography

For almost a century from 1855, the Pacific was crisscrossed by a dense, intricate network of ships returning the bones of deceased, male Chinese emigrants to their homeland. Borne of an eminent desire in the nineteenth century to be buried in one's native village, where one's descendants could tend one's grave and make offerings in order to ensure future peace and prosperity, the practice of *jianyun* (the collecting and sending of bones) became a large-scale, embedded, and distinctive aspect of the Cantonese diaspora. It was enabled by transnational systems of institutions and associations, and formed the endpoint of a migration process that was always intended to be cyclical rather than linear.⁵⁴ Fellow Chinese carefully exhumed, cleaned, and packed their compatriots' bones for shipping, whereupon they were all routed via Hong Kong as a major transpacific entrepot: there, the bones received *jiao* (purification rites) before heading on to their final destinations in China.⁵⁵ As Elizabeth Sinn explains,

homecomings of this sort had particular socio-cultural, spiritual, and cosmic connotations: “Nothing was more abhorred and feared than dying in a strange land, deprived of attendance from one’s family and becoming a hungry, lonely ghost, unfed and unclothed, drifting in limbo.”⁵⁶ Whereas, traditionally, the practice of returning remains to one’s hometown for reburial was the privilege of the affluent and powerful, the newfound wealth on the goldfields of California (whence the first shipment took place) enabled en masse repatriation of ordinary laborers as well; according to Sinn, “what might initially have appeared an unlikely innovation and a luxury soon came to be perceived as a necessity.”⁵⁷ This enormous enterprise saw tens of thousands of coffins, bone boxes, and spirit boxes become a regular feature of transpacific traffic from the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand until the operation was halted by the establishment of the PRC in 1949.⁵⁸

Therefore, when the *SS Ventnor* (the mortuary vessel chartered by the Chinese New Zealand association Cheong Shing Tong) foundered off the Hokianga Heads on October 28, 1902, the event represented a disaster of cosmic proportions for the Chinese community in New Zealand, its members dismayed by the notion of their countrymen’s spirits condemned to wander forever as hungry ghosts in a foreign land. Significantly, however, the local Māori treated the exhumed bones as *taonga* (treasured objects) and reburied them in their own *wāhi tapu* (sacred/secret location), ensuring the protection of the miners’ *wairua* (souls). Māori *tangihanga* (death rituals) have certain affinities with Chinese Buddhist practices and beliefs. Stephen Deed acknowledges that although pre-colonial and pre-Christian burial customs varied among *iwi* and *hapū*, feeding a person’s spirit to sustain them on their final journey was not a wholly foreign concept for Māori, nor was the secondary disposition of exhumed remains (*hahunga*).⁵⁹ More directly, however, Māori funeral ceremonies, akin to Chinese ones, sought to maintain harmonious relations between humans and natural and supernatural worlds.⁶⁰ Although *urupā* (burial grounds) and *wāhi tapu* were physically inconspicuous, Deed observes, they were “integral components of the cultural and spiritual landscape of a society in which the intertwined themes of death, *tapu* [the sacred], *mana whenua* [power from the land] and *whakapapa* [genealogy, layering of ancestry] were paramount.”⁶¹ By incorporating the Chinese bones and spirits into a practice that bound the living with the ancestral dead and with the land, Māori enfolded them into an alternative cosmology with transformative potential, inextricably linked to Aotearoa New Zealand.⁶² The opera works as an artistic extension and reinforcement of these past ties and of the consequent rapprochements between Te Roroa, Te Rarawa, and Chinese Kiwi

communities in the present day that have grown out of this history.⁶³ As the show's director Sara Brodie suggests in the performance's program, "it seems the Chinese miners of New Zealand form their own iwi, now held by the tangata whenua [Indigenous people] and landscape in loving hands."⁶⁴

In its respectful and reciprocal interweaving of Māori, Chinese, and European influences, *The Bone Feeder's* interculturalisms rethink the rules of opera-making in New Zealand.⁶⁵ They moreover exemplify how minor-to-minor relations between Indigenous Māori and immigrant Chinese, both past and present, reconfigure the dominant bicultural dyad and its insistent engagement with Pākehā settler-colonialism while pointing to the productive potential of wider Oceanic and transpacific connections instantiated by these dis/positions. Importantly, the opera does not conclude with Ben Kwan repatriating his great-great-grandfather Choy Kwan's remains to China; instead, the story confirms the re-homing of Chinese bones in Māori land, with Papatūānuku (the land, mother earth) as a major character in the work's more-than-human scheme, thus redirecting the circuitry of *jianyun* to indicate new futures that emerge from these interlinked histories.⁶⁶ In addition to tracing transpacific geographies, then, *The Bone Feeder* emphasizes another meaning of the prefix "trans-" in transpacific: that of change or transformation. As a result of more than a century spent in the South Pacific, the deceased miners start to become something else; as Choy Kwan reflects, "Over time earth seeps into old bones / Roots come down and grow through the cracks."⁶⁷ A core part of this re-orientation for the older Kwan, however, is his discovery, via Ben, of a New Zealand family that descends not from his Chinese wife, Wei Wei (Xing Xing), but from his relationship with a Pākehā woman, Louisa (Chelsea Dolman): "My family flowers here— / A spring blossom / A spreading tree, a new dynasty."⁶⁸ In contrast to the Māori Ferryman (Te Oti Rakena), a liminal guardian figure who looks after the ghosts and guides Ben in his Stygian passage across Hokianga Harbor, and who readily occupies "[t]he space between the states, life/death, air and water," both Ben and Kwan lament their unanchored state in a duet where they describe themselves as adrift, floating from scene to scene.⁶⁹ The opera's reparative outcome thus emphasizes how both characters come to understand that they belong in New Zealand and that New Zealand belongs in some way with them, advancing a concept of Oceanic place-making that positions Aotearoa and China relationally and mutually.

The Bone Feeder's operatic form is more pared back and less expository than the play version—"a narrative poem" as Liang puts it, that compresses imagery and layers time-space through its scenography, choreography, and musical structure.⁷⁰ The opera's spatio-temporal fluidity allows for a reading of

transpacific relations that spans places and periods, drawing upon theater's heterotopic capacity to bring different sites and moments into simultaneity on the stage. Contrapuntal scenes—that imbricate Choy Kwan and the pregnant Wei Wei in the Pearl River Delta of the 1850s, Choy Kwan and Louisa in Dunedin of the 1890s, and the characters in the ongoing contemporary moment of the Hokianga—consistently weave together China and Aotearoa, gesturing to their ocean-crossing histories, exchanges, and (im)mobilities. This feature of the work, notably, flows into the representations of haunting and tropes of the ghostly that deeply infuse the work's logic. In addition to characters who actually are ghosts (Choy Kwan and his fellow miners), who are imbued with ghostly qualities (the Ferryman), or who, like Ben, are haunted by an unresolved history that speaks to "heredity itself as a form of ghosting," the opera abounds with memories of the dead evoked and brought back from the past.⁷¹ In a general respect, this resonates with theater scholars' ready acknowledgment of theater as a quintessentially "haunted" medium in its deployment of recycling and repetition, and in a different way, of acting as a process of conjuring and communing with the dead, and of actors "unconcealing and making visible what otherwise is invisible [. . .] unforgetting the presence of something absent."⁷² Yet, *The Bone Feeder's* performative interculturalisms also intervene more specifically into the theorization of the ghost in Western spectrality studies by foregrounding Māori understandings of *kehua* (ghosts) and spirits, along with Chinese ones, especially their theatrical representation. The notion that haunting disrupts Western linear temporality is here placed in relation to Māori and wider Pacific notions of time-space in which past, present, and future are inter-implicated rather than autonomous, and also in relation to dramatic manipulations of time and space in genres of Chinese theater where, through death, according to Xiaohuan Zhao, "the nature of what is possible is thus transcended so that past and present are overlapped and fused into a whole that advances both at the same time yet in different dimensions on the stage."⁷³

There is much to say about *The Bone Feeder's* "dramatic hauntologies," especially—per Mary Luckhurst and Emilie Morin—about how the opera's decolonial praxis uses ghosts and other spectral tropologies to reveal repressed and unresolved violences, destabilize dominant epistemologies and political hegemonies, and privilege competing histories and narratives that promote more fluid constructions of national identity.⁷⁴ But what interests me particularly here is the inventive way in which Liang diverges from conventional tales in which the plot turns on the ghost's quest for justice and its subsequent spiritual ascension through its agentic work on the living.⁷⁵ In Liang's work, the Chinese ghosts aren't

given this capacity; instead, crucially, the workings of the plot are activated by the agency of Māori women. Choy Kwan's ghostly self has no knowledge or ability to act beyond his immediate observation of time passing; like his ghostly compatriots, he is "fated to wander these foreign hills" without hope of deliverance, amid "the pine needles, the old dead tree, the freezing rain."⁷⁶ He has no power to summon Ben to Mitimiti, nor does he know anything of his descendant (Choy Kwan's comic miner friends make the connection before he does). In the more explanatory play version, we learn that the Ferryman's grandmother, Kere, found a jade cicada in Choy Kwan's skull when she was a young girl and, heeding the cicada's call, eventually had it sent to his descendants in New Zealand so that they would have a clue about where to find him.⁷⁷ As a result of Kere's actions, Ben and Kwan not only meet, but Kwan's posthumous encounter with his great-great-grandson gives him new knowledge that completely changes what he wants his spiritual destiny to be; he says to Ben, "this jade cicada led you here / not to bring me home / but to bring home to me, here."⁷⁸ Liang's transpacific reworking of ghost narratives highlights lateral affiliations that honor a Māori-Chinese relationship of remembrance and care, avowing Pākehā genealogies but accentuating connections between Indigenous and diasporic communities that open alternative pathways for finding a foothold in Aotearoa.

The Bone Feeder's modes of weaving belonging via being on and being with the land are also advanced materially and through the production's visual aesthetic. Here, I want to elaborate on the jade cicada, which, as both talisman and torment for Ben, inscribes transpacific trajectories, together with the device of *tāmoko* (Māori tattoo design) as an integral component of the scenography. The cicada has a longstanding role in Chinese culture as a symbol of rebirth and immortality, due to its unique life cycle whereby the nymph stays buried in the earth for years, nourishing itself on roots, before emerging into the sunlight, climbing high into the trees, and shedding its outer skin to reveal its full, adult form. The Chinese historical custom of placing jade amulets shaped like cicadas on the tongues of corpses analogized the hope that the spirit would likewise rise on "a path to eternal existence in a transcendent realm."⁷⁹ The performance acknowledges jade's congruence with Māori *pounamu* (greenstone), similarly a stone of great cultural and spiritual significance, invested with *mana* (spiritual power) and *tapu* (sacredness), and featured in burial practices. A powerful actant, the jade cicada harbors an effective power that compels behavior and scripts social action. In the production, it is refracted and diversified in the figure of the cicada dancer, performed by an instrumentalist who steps out from the orchestra

to animate the object's *mauri* (life force), and also through its visual imaging on the projection screen, with both devices adding resonance to the miners' long waiting in the earth for their family observances to release them on the spirit path.



Figure 5. Projected image designed by James Webster of a jade cicada covered in *tāmoko* designs. *The Bone Feeder*, written by Renee Liang, directed by Sara Brodie, and scored by Gareth Farr. Image created by Charley Draper, Sara Brodie, and James Webster. With permission of the artists and Auckland Arts Festival

The transformative potential signified by the cicada is lent further intercultural valence by the *tāmoko* patterns that emerge on the projection screen early in the performance when Ben first meets the Ferryman and that establish themselves as a more dominant aspect of the visual scheme as the opera unfolds (Fig. 5). Leading Māori arts practitioner James Webster (Tainui, Te Arawa, Pākehā) created these designs for the show. He explains that the Ferryman motif draws on designs connected to the Far North region and employs sinuous *puhoro* and *kirikiore* patterns to indicate speed, agility, and a fluid traversal of sky and ocean.⁸⁰ Elsewhere in the performance, other gradually entwining *tāmoko* patterns become symbolic of how the Chinese miners' histories become resignified: overwritten and co-written with and alongside Māoritanga. Scholar Ngahua Te Awekotuku (Te Arawa, Tūhoe, Waikato) has written eloquently about the various meanings and emotions expressed through the (act of) *moko*; among them, the suggestion that taking the *moko* in a ritual gesture of mourning and release may be an active form of memento mori that grieves and remembers but also lets go and heals.⁸¹ These core sentiments in the opera are augmented with more general operations and connotations of *tāmoko* with its binding of history, community, place, and *whakapapa* (layering of ancestry), and culminate in a series of captivating images of the cicada itself covered in *tāmoko* designs.

In our conversation about the cicada motifs, Webster revealed the rich and intricate ways in which the dense visual inscriptions elaborate the opera's narrative strands. The *koru* patterns repeatedly furled along the cicada's wings

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represent growth and prosperity and acknowledge the ancestral genealogies of the Chinese miners' families. They also suggest bonds between people and new branches of the miners' *whakapapa*. Twisting *pikorua* forms in the center of the image reinforce the binding of people together, while also evoking the DNA helix and its continuum of life, death, and evolution. The *mangopare* (hammerhead shark) motifs that trace the cicada's spine foreground the strength and determination of Chinese immigrants and their struggles in Aotearoa, and the *raperape* (spiral wave) forms on the cicada's head reference the creative consciousness, especially the enterprise demonstrated by the Chinese businessmen who organized the repatriation of bones.⁸² This profound, symbolic encapsulation and acknowledgment of these histories from a Māori perspective lend visual support for Choy Kwan's shift in expectation that he will be repatriated to China, emphasizing instead that his immortality in fact inheres in a new strain of family in Aotearoa with special links to Māori.



Figure 6. Scene from *The Bone Feeder*, written by Renee Liang, directed by Sara Brodie, and scored by Gareth Farr. Photograph courtesy of Candice Whitmore for GATE Photography

The opera's finale performs one last transformation through which the past is at once laid to rest and opened to new futures: the resolution of Ben's own quest cycle with his "death" and "rebirth." Ben's resolve to exhume and repatriate

Kwan's remains is now a disruption of the new order: the elemental and spiritual forces of Papatūānuku (the earth) rebel, and Ben is overwhelmed in a storm scene in which his descent and recovery set the stage for reconciliation across temporalities, geographies, and cosmologies. Significantly, during this rite of passage the jade cicada breaks—but does it break apart so much as break open? That is, it represents a productive rupture that opens to a new order of being and belonging for Ben and bespeaks his own maturation. The opera's closing moments feature Ben and the Ferryman performing the Bai San ceremony to feed and honor Kwan's ancestral spirit, and sharing a Māori *hongi* (pressing noses in greeting; Fig. 6). In the New Zealand context, *The Bone Feeder's* intercultural form and content exemplify how performance practices highlight and galvanize alternative knowledge circuits created through what Sean Metzger describes as “minor-to-minor transnational relationalities” that expose the “lateral configurations that link phenomena that have either been historically repressed [. . .] or that have only recently (re)emerged.”⁸³ With its complex interweaving of roots and routes, Liang's opera pursues experiments across worlds that give rise to other kinds of encounters, realities, forms of order, and ways of living, revealing how intended and accidental Oceanic dis/positionings of the past generate new modes of place-making that continue to evolve.

**Atamira Dance Company and Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra,
*Awa: When Two Rivers Collide***

The communal acknowledgment at the end of *The Bone Feeder* that “a river runs through us all” carries us into a consideration of the experimental dance work *Awa: When Two Rivers Collide* (2017), programmed at the same Auckland Arts Festival.⁸⁴ *Awa* (the title meaning “river”), like *The Bone Feeder*, deals with the loss of loved ones, the predicament of a spirit caught in a foreign land and unable to return home across the watery passages linking China and Aotearoa, and the animacy and agency of the elemental—but this time centers a Māori perspective. The production emerged from tours to Beijing and Guangdong that director and choreographer Moss Te Ururangi Patterson (Ngāti Tūwharetoa, Ngāti Pūkenga, Ngāti Rāhiri) undertook while working as artistic director of Atamira Dance Company, one of New Zealand's leading Indigenous dance ensembles, and through relationships nurtured with the pioneering Guangdong Modern Dance Company. A multi-award-winning dance artist, Patterson has garnered an international reputation for his distinctive choreographic work with Atamira and

his new company, TOHU, and for his intercultural collaborations and Indigenous knowledge exchanges developed through tours and residencies. An important aspect of this work involves large-scale collaborations with community groups, which emphasize creating a meaningful space for people to gather together. The objective of such pieces, often performed publicly only once, is to elevate the participants, empowering them for a moment in time, and building relationships of care.⁸⁵ Patterson and assistant choreographers Su Ka and Yu Fen Wang created a culturally and spiritually safe space for sharing and improvising gestural vocabularies of Māori *kapa haka* (performing arts/group dance) and Chinese tai chi martial arts to fashion an innovative form of modern dance theater with the core ensemble. Encompassing more than one hundred professional and community performers, *Awa* was also expressed through the Western orchestral arrangements of the Auckland Philharmonia, a Chinese pipa (lute) player (Min Gao), a Māori *taonga pūoro* (musical instrumentation) master (Riki Bennett), and two massed choirs: the Auckland Chinese Philharmonic Choir and the junior choir of Te Kura Kaupapa Māori o Te Kotuku, who performed renditions of Chinese choral songs and *waiata* (songs) from Ngāti Tūwharetoa *iwi*, respectively.

The devised work is based on Patterson's personal story. His father, an engineer from Tūrangi, a North Island town created from the Tongariro River hydroelectric power scheme, went to work in Jiyuan, China, at the Xiaolangdi Dam on the Yellow River (Huang He). When he passed away suddenly in China, he was returned home in a closed coffin, which made it difficult for the Māori family to carry out the protocols of *tangihanga* (death rituals) and to grieve properly. *Awa* thus explores the emotional impact on Patterson of his father's "physical form brought home but the spirit being left overseas," probing these unresolved feelings and seeking forms of closure and resolution.⁸⁶ In a wider sense, the piece's conciliatory work engages environmental concerns about the damming of rivers that are part of this transpacific relationship, tracing "a journey about the suffering arising when our own desires veil us from the importance of protecting our precious resources."⁸⁷

Over the past decade, control over freshwater has become the topic of passionate and contested clashes and legal debates in New Zealand, with diverging Māori and European views of ownership and caretakership of the environment that root in the nineteenth century accruing new, contemporary urgency in light of the privatization of power companies and the neoliberal quantification and commodification of natural resources.⁸⁸ *Awa* highlights the awareness of a river as a living being; indeed, as a legal person with its own rights, ancestral power, and life force—a status formally recognized by the New Zealand

government in 2014 in regard to another major North Island river, the Whanganui.⁸⁹ The two rivers featured in this performance—the Tongariro, which flows from the central plateau of the North Island and has an ancestral relation to the Ngāti Tūwharetoa *iwi*; and the Yellow River, acknowledged as the cradle of Chinese civilization and the spiritual home and sustenance of the Chinese nation—are here recognized as ancestors, living wholes, binding their people together and emphasizing how waterways, land, people, and *whakapapa* are inextricably interwoven (the people belong to the river, not the other way around). *Awa* is presented as a series of scenes depicting the journey of the *wairua* (spirit, soul) of Te Uru Rangi (portal to heaven)—the name Patterson’s father gave him as a child. The story begins with the lament at Te Uru Rangi’s *tangi* (funeral), where the spirit begins its journey through Te Rerenga Wairua, but it is pulled back and trapped in limbo between realms, unable to return home.⁹⁰ Eventually, the desire from his family in Aotearoa unleashes the Tongariro River’s *kaitiaki* (guardian in charge of the *mauri*, the life force, of the river)—a *taniwha* (ancestral water guardian) in the form of a serpent which travels the celestial pathways and grapples with Te Uru Rangi to bring him home. But Te Uru Rangi is also pulled and restrained by the Naga spirit (a snake-like water deity) of the Yellow River as retribution for the great blockage in that river caused by Te Uru Rangi while in physical form. The heart of the performance is about the Tongariro and Yellow Rivers trying to find resolution and restore balance.⁹¹

This approach prompts us to think about how relations between Aotearoa and China, as portrayed in *Awa*, engage human and non-human performativities in ways that go beyond representational strategies (i.e., *this* stands for *that* on the stage). In each of the case studies discussed in this essay, I have shown how performance’s capacity to bring together different bodies, objects, and immaterialities in time and space can contribute uniquely to the conjuring of linked transpacific and Oceanic imaginaries and, sometimes, their instantiation. *Awa* certainly employs narrative and representational techniques, reflecting Patterson’s interest in symbology. But an important aspect of the work is how it uses non-representational modes to activate and make co-present ancestral energies that relate to human (Te Uru Rangi/the father) and non-human entities (the rivers), helping us to imagine, through performance, the interdependence of human and non-human rights.⁹² Performance scholar Margaret Werry observes how, directly after the 2014 New Zealand parliamentary vote on the Whanganui River Bill, the *karanga* (ceremonial call of welcome), *karakia* (prayer), *waiata* (song), and *haka* (posture dance) performed from the parliamentary gallery by members of the river’s *iwi* operated to “presence non-human kin by naming them,

acknowledging and honoring them. At the same time, the bodies of the performers themselves presence the absent entities by virtue of their ancestry: they are, in an absolute sense, co-substantial.”⁹³

Nathan Matthews elucidates how Māori performance conducts and amplifies powerful effects, forces, and intensities that can traverse bodies through performance dynamics such as *ihi*, the awe-inspiring psychic power that elicits an emotional response from the audience; *wehi*, the reaction to the power of the performance that incites fear, awe, or respect; and *wana*, the condition created by the combination of *ihi* and *wehi*, the performance’s aura that envelops both performers and audience.⁹⁴ Werry subsequently argues that “sensitivity to these affects, then, is a way of registering the *appearance* of the non-human through the performance of the human.”⁹⁵ I suggest that these effects can also manifest in other kinds of contemporary, aesthetic performance such as *Awa*, in which traditional performance forms like *haka*, *karanga*, and *waiata* are incorporated alongside its other repertoires, in which performers serve as genealogical bodies that co-presence human and non-human ancestors, and in which stage architectures create vortices for spiritual energies. To make present the Tongariro and Yellow rivers in these ways enriches the piece’s complex working-out of relationships between human and non-human ancestors, people, and the environment against a backdrop of transnational modernity.

* * *

I sit in the high-ceilinged, Edwardian-era auditorium of the Auckland Town Hall amid a packed house of Māori, Pākehā, and Chinese adults and children waiting for the single performance of *Awa*.⁹⁶ The tiered stage arrangement flanked by two staircases creates an arena in which musicians can communicate intimately with dancers and singers. Making the most of its soaring height, the forestage features a huge, sculptural structure anchored top and bottom by two concentric steel circles (Fig. 7). Between these circles stretch suspension ropes, producing two containing formations—one inside the other, reaching upward to the sky and down to the earthen stage floor—that the dancers can move around and pass between. The *mise-en-scène* is thick with mist and bathed in a blue wash; soft lights playing through the mist evoke the illusion of sub-aqua shadows, depths, and ripples—the myriad movements and elemental actions taking place



Figure 7. *Awa: When Two Rivers Collide*, devised by Moss Te Ururangi Patterson/Atamira with the Auckland Philharmonia, Auckland Town Hall, 2017. Set design by Robin Rawstorne, with lighting and AV design by Jeremy Fern and Rowan Pierce. Photograph courtesy of Rawstorne Studio/Tohu Productions

below the surface of a body of water. As the show progresses, an upstage light directed at the audience in a glaring pin-spot brightens, generating a striking X pattern against the mist with two geometric banks of light against the darkness. Within this pattern, the crossed lines of the ropes appearing and disappearing through the azure space remind me of the woven *tukutuku* (woven latticework) panels within a *whareniui* (Māori meeting house and the focal point of a *marae*, or meeting ground). Indeed, Patterson tells me that the concept of the *whareniui*—as a vector or conduit for energy received from the ancestors that is channeled into the earth and then recycled up through the physical structure of the house—is core to this central set piece in *Awa*. Robin Rawstorne’s architectonic suspended rope set designs for Atamira are part of several other works by Patterson, and reflect Patterson’s interest in Indigenous architectures and their potential to serve as portals to connect us with what is above, below, and around us.⁹⁷ In this way, the entire performance can be understood as a vector and pathway for ancestral energies, bringing the spiritual realm into being within the space.



Figure 8. *Awa: When Two Rivers Collide*, devised by Moss Te Ururangi Patterson/Atamira with the Auckland Philharmonia, Auckland Town Hall, 2017. Set design by Robin Rawstorne, with lighting and AV design by Jeremy Fern and Rowan Pierce. Photograph courtesy of Rawstorne Studio/Tohu Productions

Awa begins gradually, seeding the initial journey of Te Uru Rangi while a *haka* performed at half strength sounds the lament (Fig. 8). The first part of the performance introduces and enhances the idea of the rivers' spiritual personifications, with the multiple currents and flows that comprise their living complexities enacted through fluid dancing. As the Chinese and Māori choirs start to sing, seven male dancers enter: three Chinese, three Māori, and one Pākehā crawl along the stage in serpentine fashion, then, stretching and reaching, rise together. The Māori chanting and the mournful sounds of the *taonga pūoro* are ethereal, otherworldly, while the orchestra's Bach fugues counterposed here give the impression of a river building from a trickle into a flow. Moving in lithe synchrony, the pulsating bodies gather energy, working as an organic whole. Sinuous and connected movement phrases are punctuated with tight, energetic explosions—eddies and confluences physicalizing the yin and yang of tai chi, the curves and flourishes of calligraphy, and the wave and whirlpool motifs of

kōwhaiwhai (scrolling ornamentation) are interwoven with balletic grace. Against an aural backdrop of strings, the ensemble dances with their foreheads connected, first in pairs and then in threes, synching and twisting. These elemental sequences, executed with meticulous coordination as the dancers pass through the undulating tenebrism and the X of light, offer up some mesmerizing moments: the repeated gesture of the dancers passing their hands over their shaven heads and down their backs, as if water was running down and over them; the dancers stepping lightly, their feet hardly connecting with the stage, as though traversing liquid rather than land; a Māori dancer produces a beautiful gesture with his hand moving like a fish darting swiftly through the stream.

The shift to a more narrative mode in the work is signaled by a duet featuring one Māori dancer (Luke Paull Hanna) and one Chinese dancer (Xiaochao Wen), who enact the fight between the guardians of the Tongariro and Yellow Rivers, with the spirit of Te Uru Rangi evoked in the struggle between them. Their dance is sensuous, intimate, but taut with a tortured intensity; their choreography grows ever more frenetic and urgent as their combat gathers energy. At this point, the Māori children's choir enters the space, marking a new phase of the piece. The leader of the group presents a bamboo staff to the Māori dancer, which gives him great power as he wields it. He can manipulate and control the serpentine entities that surround him: turn them on the end of the staff, align them like a catch of fish on a line and then slide them off, raise them up into a frenzy, and lay them supine, to a background of strong anapests from the orchestral string section. Patterson states that the bamboo staff here references the Māori *marae* protocol of *whaikōrero* (formal speeches) and the *rākau*, the speaking stick, that confers status to the person holding it.⁹⁸ It is this authority that enables the Tongariro *taniwha* to finally rescue Te Uru Rangi. Yet, significantly, in their final encounter, when the bamboo staff is a connecting rod filled with tension between the *taniwha*, the Yellow River guardian fights back and eventually ends up with the staff. For Patterson, this important moment signifies the restoration of balance necessary for the Yellow River, which has been subject to Te Uru Rangi's violations; the moment emphasizes the need to honor the Yellow River as a living entity with a right to well-being and to acknowledge its *mana* (spiritual power). *Awa's* final resolution unfolds in a powerful and moving sequence in which the staff is placed vertically center stage, illuminated by a focused shaft of light from above, and the performers—adults and children alike—reach out to grasp it along its length. In this moment, the staff functions as a *poutokomanawa*, the central column at the heart of the *wharenuī* that connects earth and sky and forms the metaphorical backbone of the primal ancestor. This communal, intergenerational expression of

whakapapa evokes a charged state in which ancestors and descendants become co-present. With the past assuaged, *Awa* looks hopefully to the future: we hear a Māori chant with a young boy leading the call as the piece ends.

Awa proceeds from a Māori “cosmo-onto-epistemology” and builds upon congruences and synergies between Māori and Chinese repertoires and communities.⁹⁹ Accordingly, the river that flows through space and time also serves as a metaphor for the confluence of distinct identities, personalities, and properties: as Salmond writes, a “hydrological account of identity” evokes the river in terms of how “distinct streams of people with their different histories swirl together to form a river that in turn flows out to sea.”¹⁰⁰ Beyond its stage aesthetic, *Awa* does important work through its outreach to and engagement with local Chinese in Auckland in addition to the professional artists brought over from China. Patterson speaks of how his intercultural performance projects directly address racism in New Zealand’s wider society, working directly with minority Indigenous and immigrant groups to stand united against prejudice and to work toward equity.¹⁰¹ By working locally and regionally, in Oceanic and in transpacific terms, and telling old stories in new ways, Patterson’s literal and conceptual journeys encourage participants and audiences to see differently and to set sail on new voyages of discovery with one another. As he affirms, “it’s about us being able to hop into another *waka* [canoe, seagoing craft] in our lives through the confidence we build in this process.”¹⁰²

* * *

Read together, *Red Coats + Indians*, *The Bone Feeder*, and *Awa* provide new perspectives on how transpacific connections and Oceanic imaginaries can be productively articulated. Centering Aotearoa New Zealand as a location of—and source for—Asian and Pacific interactions diverges from US-dominated concerns and coordinates to explore alternative transpacific paradigms and illuminate different questions about place-making and identities that can be asked of this diverse and expansive region. I have utilized the notion of the minor transpacific to highlight lateral connections among less prominent nodes such as New Zealand and Taiwan, and to address more distributed Chinese identities in the diaspora. This approach modulates understandings of China as a major political, economic, and military presence in the Pacific region, while also foregrounding Indigenous viewpoints and existing networks within Oceania. Although the stories told have a masculine focus—it would be good to see more work of this sort privileging women and nonbinary perspectives—their form and content range widely, from

historical encounters to contemporary transnational circulations that are producing Asia and Oceania in a new era of globalization. Set in littoral, marine, and riparian contexts, these photographic, operatic, and danced pieces engage multiple cross-currents, encouraging more fluid concepts of national and regional identity while still acknowledging intrinsic ties between seas, rivers, land, and people. As an embodied and spatio-temporal medium, performance has a profound capacity to traverse geographies and temporalities within its physical scene, and to evoke multiple registers of the human, more-than-human, spiritual, and cosmogenic. These dynamics also enable audiences and viewers to experience how the personal and local are enmeshed with the larger operations of capitalism, colonialism, public works schemes, and labor diasporas. This discussion has also shown that mediating between wide-ranging affinities and emplaced histories and identities can throw up thorny issues of identity and representation. But intercultural performance projects can also enhance Oceanic relationality in real-world situations by forging and reinforcing community connections that have the potential to help participants negotiate relationships between Indigenous, diasporic/migrant, and settler-colonial groups. Therefore, while the works deal with experiences of loss, death, and displacement, they are also invested in various modes of renewal, resistance, and productive reconciliation; as Lionnet and Shih maintain, “beyond the nostalgic and the melancholic, these solidarities point to ways of becoming more engaged with present and future promises of transformation through active participation in the production of local knowledges and global cultures.”¹⁰³ The performing arts in Oceania have much to offer in their experiments across worlds.

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Notes

¹ Yuan Shu and Donald E. Pease, “Introduction: Transnational American Studies and the Transpacific Imaginary,” in *American Studies as Transnational Practice*:

Turning Toward the Transpacific, eds. Yuan Shu and Donald E. Pease (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2015), 3.

² I am extremely grateful to Greg Semu, Renee Liang, and Moss Patterson for so generously taking the time to talk to me about their work and for their comments on draft versions of this essay. Thanks, also, to the two anonymous reviewers for *Pacific Arts* whose valuable feedback greatly improved the article.

³ Tina Chen, "(The) Transpacific Turns," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature*, January 30, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.013.782>.

⁴ "Pacific Island Worlds: Transpacific Dis/Positions," symposium program (University of California Santa Cruz, May 5, 2018), 1.

⁵ Erin Suzuki, "Transpacific," in *The Routledge Companion to Asian American and Pacific Islander Literature*, ed. Rachel C. Lee (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 352. See also Viet Thanh Nguyen and Janet Hoskins, "Introduction: Transpacific Studies: Critical Perspectives on an Emerging Field," in *Transpacific Studies: Framing an Emerging Field*, eds. Janet Hoskins and Viet Thanh Nguyen (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2014), 1–38.

⁶ Hillary Clinton, "America's Pacific Century," *Foreign Policy* 189 (Nov. 2011): 56–63.

⁷ See Lisa Yoneyama, "Toward a Decolonial Genealogy of the Transpacific," *American Quarterly* 69, no. 3 (Sept. 2017): 471–82.

⁸ Greg Fry, "The South Pacific 'Experiment': Reflections on the Origins of Regional Identity," *The Journal of Pacific History* 32, no. 2 (1997): 200.

⁹ Suzuki, "Transpacific," 352.

¹⁰ Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih, "Introduction: Thinking Through the Minor, Transnationally," in *Minor Transnationalism*, ed. Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 7.

¹¹ Christine Kim and Helen Hok-Sze Leung, "The Minor Transpacific: A Roundtable Discussion," *BC Studies*, no. 198 (Summer 2018): 13–14.

¹² Rob Wilson, "Toward an Eco-poetics of Oceania: Worlding the Asia-Pacific Region as Space-Time Ecumene," in *American Studies as Transnational Practice: Turning Toward the Transpacific*, eds. Yuan Shu and Donald E. Pease (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2015), 229.

¹³ Wilson, "Toward an Eco-poetics," 228.

¹⁴ Although I am discussing Indigenous and diasporic communities that are understood as ethnic minorities in Aotearoa New Zealand, it should be noted that in terms of Pacific Island cultural production, New Zealand is a *major* node. Consequently (to subject the musical metaphor to further torsion), one might think about the *relative minor* in the (trans)Pacific. There are several organizations and initiatives that encourage creative transpacific relations between Aotearoa, Pacific Island nations, and Asia. Key examples include Creative New Zealand artist residencies and the Asia New Zealand Foundation's residencies, and well as Indigenous initiatives in Taiwan such as the Pulima Arts Festival. Playmarket hosts creative development opportunities for playwrights and performance-makers, while

several local and national companies and arts festivals offer platforms both for the production of home-grown work and for collaborative enterprises with artists elsewhere in Asia and the Pacific Islands.

¹⁵ David Pearson, “The ‘Majority Factor’: Shaping Chinese and Māori Minorities,” in *The Dragon & the Taniwha: Māori & Chinese in New Zealand*, ed. Manying Ip (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2009), 46.

¹⁶ See Rochelle Bright, “Is New Zealand an Asian Country? The 1993–1997 Debate,” in *New Zealand and Asia: Perceptions, Identity and Engagement*, ed. Yongjin Zhang (Auckland: New Zealand Asia Institute, University of Auckland, 1999), 31–52.

¹⁷ There is considerable discussion of this map. For an overview, see, inter alia, Natasha Reichle, ed., *China at the Center: Ricci and Verbiest World Maps* (San Francisco: Asian Art Museum, 2016); Gang Song and Paola Demattè, “Mapping an Acentric World: Ferdinand Verbiest’s *Kunyu Quantu*,” in *China on Paper: European and Chinese Works from the Late Sixteenth to the Early Nineteenth Century*, eds. Marcia Reed and Paola Demattè (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2007), 71–87; and William Tai Yuen, *The Origins of China’s Awareness of New Zealand 1674–1911* (Auckland: New Zealand Asia Institute, University of Auckland, 2005).

¹⁸ Stevan Eldred-Grigg with Zeng Dazheng, *White Ghosts, Yellow Peril: China and New Zealand 1790–1950* (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2014), 70.

¹⁹ For fuller discussions of this history, see Pearson, “The ‘Majority Factor,’” and Nigel Murphy, “‘Māoriland’ and ‘Yellow Peril’: Discourses of Māori and Chinese in the Formation of New Zealand’s National Identity 1890–1914,” in *The Dragon and the Taniwha: Māori and Chinese in New Zealand*, ed. Manying Yip (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2009), 56–88.

²⁰ Paul Spoonley, “‘I Made a Space For You’: Renegotiating National Identity and Citizenship in Contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand,” in *Asians and the New Multiculturalism in Aotearoa New Zealand*, ed. Gautam Ghosh and Jacqueline Leckie (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2015), 40, 52.

²¹ Pākehā comprise 70% of New Zealand’s population, Māori 16.5%, Asian 15%, and non-Māori Pacific Islander 9%.

²² The discourse on the “new interculturalism” in theatre and performance studies is expansive, but for authoritative overviews of these approaches, see Ric Knowles, *Performing the Intercultural City* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press 2017); Rossella Ferrari, *Transnational Chinese Theatres: Intercultural Performance Networks in East Asia* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020); and Charlotte McIvor and Daphne P. Lei, eds., *The Methuen Drama Handbook of Performance and Interculturalism* (London: Methuen, 2020).

²³ Anne Salmond, *Tears of Rangī: Experiments Across Worlds* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2017), 3.

²⁴ Salmond, *Tears of Rangī*, 314.

²⁵ Both political entities use the name “China”: The People’s Republic of China (PRC), commonly known as China, and the Republic of China (ROC), commonly known as Taiwan. Over 95% of Taiwan’s population is of Han Chinese ethnicity.

Indigenous Taiwanese are also referred to as Formosan people, Taiwanese Austronesians, Yuanzhumin, or Gāoshān people, and comprise approximately 2.4% of Taiwan's population.

²⁶ Kim and Leung, "Minor Transpacific," 15.

²⁷ Greg Semu, personal communication, April 28, 2021.

²⁸ The 'Amis are the traditional land owners and main tribe of the Taitung district on the south-east coast of Taiwan. The 'Amis make up the largest group of sixteen officially recognized Taiwanese Indigenous Peoples. In contemporary Taiwan, the 'Amis also comprise the majority of urban Indigenous people and have developed many urban communities all around the island.

²⁹ Greg Semu, interview by the author, May 4, 2020.

³⁰ Greg Semu provides this acknowledgement: "We acknowledge and pay homage to the traditional landowners and custodians past, present, and emerging for where these images were created: The 'Amis Tribe, Taitung District, southeast coast Taiwan; Bulareyaung Dance Company; Taitung County Government; and National Taitung University" (Semu, personal communication, May 23, 2021).

³¹ Semu, interview.

³² Traditional owners of the Coen region are the Ayapathu, Kaanju, Lama Lama, Umpila, and Wik-Mungkan peoples.

³³ Semu, interview.

³⁴ I take the concept of the scenario from Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003). Greg Semu, "Artist Statement: *Red Coats + Indians*," <http://www.gregsemu.photography/red-coats-and-indians>.

³⁵ Semu, "Artist Statement."

³⁶ Rossella Ferrari, *Transnational Chinese Theatres: Intercultural Performance Networks in East Asia* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 12.

³⁷ Mark Munsterhjelm, "The First Nations of Taiwan: A Special Report on Taiwan's Indigenous Peoples," *Cultural Survival Quarterly Magazine*, June 2002, <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/first-nations-taiwan-special-report-taiwans-indigenous>.

³⁸ This rivalry between Beijing and Taipei has also manifested in competition for diplomatic recognition by Pacific Island nations. See Jian Yang, *The Pacific Islands in China's Grand Strategy: Small States, Big Games* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

³⁹ Semu, interview.

⁴⁰ Katrin Sieg, *Ethnic Drag: Performing Race, Nation, Sexuality in West Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 2.

⁴¹ Sieg, *Ethnic Drag*, 4, 255.

⁴² Sieg, *Ethnic Drag*, 2.

⁴³ See *Drag Histories, Herstories and Hairstories: Drag in a Changing Scene*, Vol. 2, ed. Mark Edward and Stephen Farrier (London: Methuen Drama, 2021), 1.

⁴⁴ Sieg, *Ethnic Drag*, 12.

⁴⁵ Sieg, *Ethnic Drag*, 14.

⁴⁶ See, inter alia, Aboriginal and South Sea Islander dancer Malcolm Cole's performance as Captain Cook for the inaugural Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander float in the Sydney Gay Mardi Gras Parade in 1988; Pierre Gope and Nicolas Kurtovich's play *Les Dieux sont Borgnes (The Gods are One-Eyed)* (New Caledonia, 2002); Sāmoan, Tahitian, and Rarotongan artist Michel Tuffery's painting *Cookie in the Cook Islands* (2008); Pākehā artist Lester Hall's digital pigment print *Kia Ora Cook*; and Robert Sullivan and John Psathas's oratorio *Orpheus in Rarohenga* (Aotearoa, 2002).

⁴⁷ Semu, interview.

⁴⁸ Semu, personal communication, May 13, 2021.

⁴⁹ Semu explains that this element of the performance was not one he intended in advance. The war bonnet was made and gifted to the group by the mother of one of the administrators; intrigued by the gesture, he included it in the tableau. Personal communication, May 13, 2021.

⁵⁰ Sieg makes these observations in regard to Native American representation, but in a different context. Her point about the potential problems with forms of ethnic drag, however, is relevant to note here. See *Ethnic Drag*, 222–23.

⁵¹ A fuller discussion of *Red Coats + Indians* might consider the final two images in the series, which were not exhibited at TTICC. They were shot separately from the group scenes and include Semu himself. The photo *The Death of Captain Cook and Other Colonial Catastrophes* depicts Semu as a blood-spattered character crying out to the heavens while supporting the body of the slain Cook; see <http://www.gregsemu.photography/the-death-of-captain-cook>. Here, Semu ventures beyond the binary of colonizer and colonized to indicate how such ideologies entrench divisions among Indigenous peoples themselves. The artist deliberately leaves it open to interpretation as to whether his character is the winner or the loser here, murderer or mourner, or both: the catastrophe is the divisiveness that forces people to choose sides, turning kin against kin (Greg Semu, personal communication, April 28, 2021). Once again, however, the politics of overlaying a specifically Sāmoan/Chinese encounter on to a historical Hawaiian/British one are complicated, and require a more extensive analysis than I have room to include here.

⁵² A video recording of the 2017 Auckland Arts Festival performance of *The Bone Feeder* can be viewed on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YA6XvHTnkIE>.

⁵³ Renee Liang, interview by the author, February 18, 2020.

⁵⁴ Elizabeth Sinn, *Pacific Crossing: California Gold, Chinese Migration, and the Making of Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2013), 265–66.

⁵⁵ Sinn, *Pacific Crossing*, 281–82.

⁵⁶ Sinn, *Pacific Crossing*, 266.

⁵⁷ Sinn, *Pacific Crossing*, 268, 270.

⁵⁸ When a person was known to have died but their remains could not be found, their “spirit was summoned in a ritual and then deposited in a spirit box (*zhaohun*

xiang). The spirit box too would be sent back to China, and given the same care as physical remains." Sinn, *Pacific Crossing*, 275.

⁵⁹ Stephen Deed, *Unearthly Landscapes: New Zealand's Early Cemeteries, Churchyards, and Urupā* (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2015), 30, 31, 214.

⁶⁰ Deed, *Unearthly Landscapes*, 34.

⁶¹ Deed, *Unearthly Landscapes*, 35.

⁶² Emma Cox, "Hungry Ghosts and Inalienable Remains: Performing Rights of Repatriation," in *Theatre and Human Rights after 1945: Things Unspeakable*, eds. Mary Luckhurst and Emilie Morin (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2015), 113.

⁶³ For an account, see Renee Liang, "Naming Our Ancestors Lost in the Hokianga," *Newsroom*, April 9, 2021, <https://www.newsroom.co.nz/naming-our-ancestors-lost-in-the-hokianga>.

⁶⁴ Sarah Brodie, performance program for *The Bone Feeder* (Auckland Arts Festival, March 23–26, 2017), n.p.

⁶⁵ Liang, interview. For an astute discussion of how Māori and Chinese customs and repertoires are brought together in this work, see Cynthia Hiu Ying Lam and Rand T. Hazou, "Decoloniality and Contemporary Asian Theatre in New Zealand," *Theatre Journal* 72, no. 3 (Sept. 2020): 325–43.

⁶⁶ This character is created after Choie Sew Hoy, a prominent Dunedin-based, Chinese businessman who chartered the *Ventnor* and arranged the shipment of coffins, but ended up on the vessel himself after his sudden death.

⁶⁷ Renee Liang, *The Bone Feeder Opera*, libretto 2.18 (2016), 15, *Auckland Arts Festival 8–26 March 2017* (website), <http://2017.aaf.co.nz/assets/2017-Documents/Show-Programmes/The-Bone-Feeder-Opera-libretto-2.18-FINAL.pdf>.

⁶⁸ Liang, *The Bone Feeder*, libretto, 15.

⁶⁹ Liang, *The Bone Feeder*, libretto, 2.

⁷⁰ Liang, interview.

⁷¹ Mary Luckhurst and Emilie Morin, "Introduction: Theatre and Spectrality," in *Theatre and Ghosts: Materiality, Performance and Modernity*, eds. Mary Luckhurst and Emilie Morin (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 14.

⁷² Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001); Alice Rayner, *Ghosts: Death's Double and the Phenomena of Theatre* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), xvi.

⁷³ Xiaohuan Zhao, "Ghosts and Spirits in Zaju and Noh," *Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics* 38, no. 1–2 (2015): 16.

⁷⁴ Luckhurst and Morin, "Theatre and Spectrality," 1, 11, 15.

⁷⁵ Wang-NGai Siu with Peter Lovrick, *Chinese Opera: Images and Stories* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997), 189 ff.

⁷⁶ Liang, *The Bone Feeder*, libretto, 2, 10.

⁷⁷ Renee Liang, *The Bone Feeder*, play script (Wellington: Playmarket, 2014), 6–7.

⁷⁸ Liang, *Bone Feeder*, libretto, 17.

⁷⁹ See, for example, National Museum of Asian Art, Smithsonian Institution, "The Cicada in China," April 29, 2016, <https://asia.si.edu/cicadas/>.

- ⁸⁰ James Webster, interview by the author, September 16, 2021.
- ⁸¹ Ngahuia Te Awekotuku, "Memento Mori, Memento Māori – Moko and Memory," Tangi Research Programme Working Paper (Hamilton: Māori and Psychology Research Unit, University of Waikato, 2009), 2, 6.
- ⁸² Webster, interview.
- ⁸³ Sean Metzger, "Editorial Comment: Minor Asias," *Theatre Journal* 72, no. 3 (Sept. 2020): xv.
- ⁸⁴ Liang, *The Bone Feeder*, libretto, 20.
- ⁸⁵ Moss Te Ururangi Patterson, interview by the author, April 19, 2021.
- ⁸⁶ Atamira Dance Company and Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra, in association with Auckland Arts Festival, *Awa: When Two Rivers Collide*, performance program (March 25, 2017), 5.
- ⁸⁷ Atamira Dance Company, 4.
- ⁸⁸ Salmond, *Tears of Rangi*, 295.
- ⁸⁹ Salmond, *Tears of Rangi*, 293–94.
- ⁹⁰ Te Rerenga Wairua is the leaping-off place of spirits at Cape Rēinga at the northernmost tip of Aotearoa. Many *iwi* believe that the spirits of the dead fly to Te Rerenga Wairua and from there take their underwater journey to Hawaiki for their final rest.
- ⁹¹ Atamira Dance Company, 5.
- ⁹² See Margaret Werry, "What's Left of Rights? Arendt and Political Ontology in the Anthropocene," *Performance Philosophy* 5, no. 1 (2019): 5.
- ⁹³ Werry, "What's Left of Rights?," 13.
- ⁹⁴ Nathan Matthews, "The Physicality of Māori Message Transmission," *Junctures* (Dec. 2004): 10. See also Rachael Ka'ai-Mahuta, Tania Ka'ai, and John Moorfield, eds., *Kia Rōnaki: The Māori Performing Arts* (Auckland: Pearson, 2013), xv–xvi.
- ⁹⁵ Werry, "What's Left of Rights?," 13, italics in original.
- ⁹⁶ My analysis is based on my viewing of the performance of *Awa: When Two Rivers Collide* by the Atamira Dance Company and Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra, for the Auckland Festival, at Auckland Town Hall, on March 25, 2017.
- ⁹⁷ For several examples of this design aesthetic, see <https://rawstornestudio.com/Atamira-Dance-Co>. Patterson, interview.
- ⁹⁸ Patterson, interview.
- ⁹⁹ Werry, "What's Left of Rights?," 13.
- ¹⁰⁰ Salmond, *Tears of Rangi*, 313.
- ¹⁰¹ Patterson, interview.
- ¹⁰² Atamira Dance Company, 8. Italics in original.
- ¹⁰³ Lionnet and Shih, "Introduction," 21.