
Heritage Planning in Migrant Societies: A Case Study of Chinese Communities in Auckland, New Zealand

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Heritage planning is often considered a subordinate field of heritage conservation and urban planning. It rarely challenges the authorised heritage discourse underpinning the exclusivity of heritage. This research aims to diversify the interpretation of heritage beyond the biased parameters by institutional policies premised on authorised heritage discourse (Smith, 2006) and inform a wider struggle for racial and social justice aiming at enriching culturally diverse heritage and increasing public access to the heritage industry (Hopkins, 2008; Terracciano, 2018, 2020). The research focuses on the cultural heritage of the Chinese diaspora and the New Zealand context and aims to broaden heritage planning to include migrant minorities.

Chinese communities were recognised as the largest Asian ethnic group in New Zealand in the 2013 Census. The first arrival of Chinese people to New Zealand can be traced back to the 1850s, while the first wave of Chinese settlement relates to the late period of the gold rush in the 1860s. In the next century, flows of Chinese people arrived from different countries. The New Zealand Chinese migration history can be divided into four key milestones (see Table 1).

Table 1. Chinese migration history in New Zealand.

Key Milestones in New Zealand Chinese Migration History	Time	Chinese Communities
Invitation to work as gold miners from the Otago government	1860s-1900s	Early sojourners
Refugee allowance during WW2, though constrained by a poll tax	1900s-1952	Descendants of people who paid the Chinese-only poll tax/ the long-established Chinese community
Granting of full citizenship rights in 1952	1952-1987	
The 1987 Immigration Act and its modifications	1987-1994	Hong Kong migrants

1994- 1997	Taiwanese migrants
1997- present	Mainland Chinese migrants

Source: Author

Chinese participation within New Zealand society has been hampered by prejudice, poll taxes, immigration restrictions and other regulatory discrimination since 1860. It resulted in the attitude of cautious engagement and keeping a low profile. Such cautiousness and quietness are evident in the architecture and the use of architecture on Grey's Avenue. After they took over buildings that were designed and built to align with the dominant culture, they coded the Chinese presence on the street in a 'thin and quiet' manner. The Auckland Chinese scene encompasses the history of Grey's Avenue, the archaeological site at 44 Wakefield Street, Kong Foong Yuen, Choice Plaza, Dominion Road, and various businesses including supermarkets and restaurants (see Figures 1-2).



Figure 1. Choice Plaza.

Source: Author's photograph, 2021



Figure 2. Model of Wah Lee's store at Auckland War Memorial Museum.

Source: Author's photograph, 2022

Chinese cultural heritage is a multicultural concept in the case study of Auckland. There are multiple representative samples in the variation and constant of different heritage themes. Essentially, Chinese cultural heritage is a meaning-oriented concept that varies by individual rather than being a scientific term. The primary meanings of Chinese cultural heritage can be divided into three aspects: 'being Chinese', 'cultural inheritance', and 'relationship with Māori communities'. The very concern is their cultural identity – who they are: who they are in the past, present, and future; who they are in their minds and the local context. Through the dual lenses of time and space, participants were concerned with Chinese cultural heritage in three relations: homeland and home, us and them, authenticity and re-creation (see Table 2). These three relations uncover the conception of Chinese cultural heritage in the spatial dimension as a sense of place attachment, in the emotional dimension as nostalgia, and in the temporal dimension as a continuous cultural process.

Table 2. Divergences in understanding Chinese cultural heritage from the dual lenses of time and space.

	Heritage in mind	Heritage on land
Past	Homeland	Home
Present	Us	Them
Future	Authenticity	Re-creation

Source: Author

New Zealand Chinese heritage has been over-represented by the gold-mining heritage in the Otago region while being less acknowledged in the North Island (see Table 3). So far, Auckland’s initiatives have primarily revolved around intangible endeavours, particularly through festivals, with less visible advancement in preserving tangible heritage.

Table 3. Chinese historic places and areas on the New Zealand Heritage List¹

Heritage building/site	Category	Location	Time (in relation to Chinese communities)	Date entered	Notes
Ah Lum’s Store	Historic Place Category 1	Arrowtown, Otago Region	19 th century	1987	‘One of the only original buildings that remains standing in the Chinese settlement of Arrowtown’
Arrowtown Chinese Settlement	Historic Place Category 2	Arrowtown, Otago Region	19 th century	1985	‘The last remaining Chinese settlement in a relatively intact state in Otago’
Gay Tan’s Cottage	Historic Place Category 2	Macraes, Otago Region	19 th century	2004	‘An extremely rare example of Chinese affluence in the goldfields’
Illustrious Energy Historic Area	Historic Area	Alexandra, Otago Region	19 th century	2004	‘Represents the history of the Chinese miners living in isolated and harsh

¹ According to the keyword of ‘Chinese’ and the criterion of the significance of Chinese community to the place or area, researcher identified 17 registered Chinese historic places and areas in the List by February, 2022.

					conditions in nineteenth century Otago.’
Kaiapoi House (Former)	Historic Place Category 2	Hamilton, Waikato Region	1938-c1965	2009	‘Strong associations with Waikato’s Chinese community’
Lawrence Chinese Camp	Historic Place Category 1	Lawrence, Otago Region	19 th century	2019	‘A vital part of the history of Chinese miners in Otago.’
Lawrence Chinese Graves Historic Area, Lawrence Cemetery	Historic Area	Lawrence, Otago Region	19 th century	2004	‘Represent the often unwritten and untraceable histories of individual miners who came to New Zealand to seek their fortune in the goldfields.’
Lower Nevis Historic Area	Historic Area	Lower Nevis Valley, Otago Region	19 th century	2010	‘Was once home to a scattered community of pastoralists, miners (both European and Chinese) and their families.’
Lye Bows Historic Area	Historic Area	Alexandra, Otago Region	19 th century	2004	‘Lye Bow’s market garden, orchard and associated workings represent the interrelationship of goldmining and support industries in Otago.’
Miner’s Rock Shelter	Historic Place Category 2	Fruitlands, Otago Region	19 th century	2005	‘A representative example of the type of shelter used by miners in the 1860s in this area of Otago.’
Murphy’s Flat Reserve Historic Area	Historic Area	Macraes, Otago Region	19 th century	2001	For a cluster of “Chinamen’s huts” on the flat in 1891 and the isolation of the dead Chinese man Hui Shing Tsoch who was thought to have leprosy
Ng King Brothers Chinese Market Garden Settlement	Historic Place Category 1	Ashburton, Canterbury Region	20 th century	2020	‘A rare remaining example of a twentieth century Chinese market garden settlement in New Zealand’
Sew Hoy’s Gold Workings and Water Race System	Historic Place Category 1	Upper Nevis Valley, Southland Region	19-20 th century	2019	‘Sew Hoy’s Gold Mining and Water Race System represents the significant history of Chinese gold mining in Otago and more widely in New Zealand.’

Sew Hoy's Big Beach Claim Historic Area	Historic Area	Queenstown, Otago Region	19 th century	2004	'Provided the impetus for the gold dredging boom of the late 1880s and confirmed Sew Hoy's status as a leading player in the goldmining industry in Otago.'
Sew Hoy's Building (Former)	Historic Place Category 1	Dunedin, Otago Region	19 th century	2021	'The only surviving representation of an important and extensive network of Chinese retailers in Stafford Street.'
Southern Cemetery	Historic Place Category 1	Dunedin, Otago Region	19-20 th century	2006	'It contains a section of nineteenth and early twentieth century Chinese burials.'
Wong Gong's Terrace Historic Area	Historic Area	Queenstown, Otago Region	19 th century	2004	'It provides a representative, largely unmodified archaeological example of a Chinese store, market gardens and associated structures in an isolated area of the nineteenth century Otago goldfields.'

Chinese cultural heritage is evidently marginalised in the New Zealand heritage system. The mismatches between Auckland Chinese participants and the New Zealand heritage system can be understood through three distinct layers: the meaning of heritage, heritage manifestation, and views of history (see Table 4). Furthermore, neither the perspectives on heritage significance nor their criteria for Chinese cultural heritage are incommensurable to the dominant approaches of New Zealand heritage system. Most Chinese participants believed that the manifestation of heritage plays a significant role in cultural representation and mutual acceptance. Alternative heritage assessment criteria include showing Chinese communities' contribution to New Zealand, merit, authenticity, spiritual value, historical value, and aesthetic value. Taking into account the intrinsic deficiencies in the New Zealand heritage system, the underappreciated role of heritage in planning, and the absence of migrant minorities in the national identity, it becomes inevitable that Chinese cultural heritage remains under-represented in New Zealand.

Table 4. Major mismatches between the community narrative and the official heritage discourse in the Auckland case study.

	Meaning of heritage	Heritage manifestation	Views of history
Community narrative	Meaning-oriented	Diverse manifestations	Cyclical
Official heritage discourse	Material-focusing	Festival celebrations	Linear

Source: Author

Drawing from the Auckland case study, migrant heritage can be understood through its meaning, conception, and societal impact (see Figure 3). The meaning of migrant heritage can be explained by the internal relation between the cultural identity of a homogenous community and the external connections between migrants and indigenous people and the local environment. The societal impact of migrant heritage encompasses cultural exchange, fostering a sense of belonging among migrants, and promoting community cohesion within a migrant society. The conception of migrant heritage can be divided into three dimensions: spatial, emotional, and temporal. The spatial dimension indicates multiple forms of attachment to places, including one's home, homeland, and other enlightening places where migrants have lived or visited. The emotional dimension revolves around a range of emotions experienced by migrants, such as loneliness, sorrow, a sense of exclusion, and homesickness, which stem from their memories and unique minority histories. Lastly, the temporal dimension reveals the cultural process of migrant heritage. It can evolve on its own sense, mix with other migrant heritage, and be created within the local context.

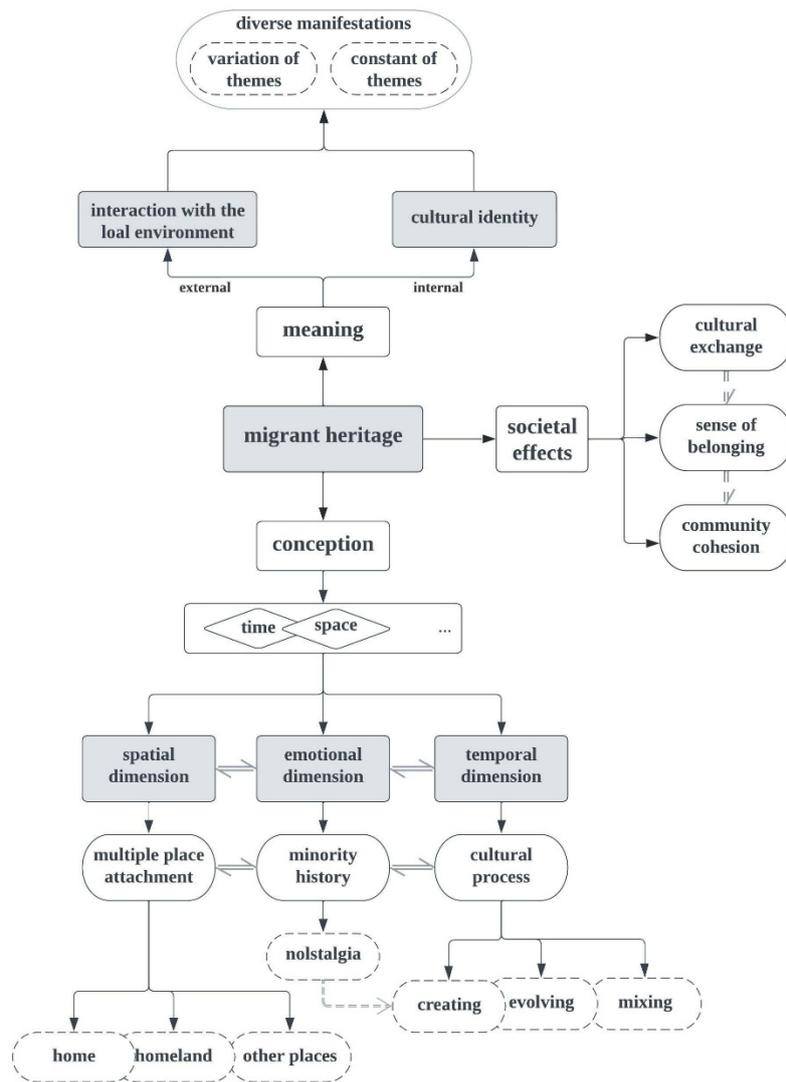


Figure 3. The meaning, conception, and societal impact of migrant heritage.

Source: Author

This research introduces a community-based heritage model as an alternative approach to migrant heritage. The model can be divided into three parts:

1. What – heritage themes, such as event, activity, exhibition, architecture;
2. Why – heritage significance, such as cultural representation, and mutual acceptance, heritage uniqueness of being different from other migrant heritage in the home country and the traditional cultural heritage in the homeland;
3. How – heritage representation of diverse manifestations.

Heritage planning in New Zealand could be broadened in three key areas. Firstly, community partnerships could be broadened to history education that acknowledge and embrace all New Zealanders and their ancestors and community consultation that aims to engage tangata whenua and migrant minorities with mutual respect and an understanding of potential cultural differences. Secondly, strong collaboration could be promoted between communities and government entities, as well as between fields of migration and heritage studies, and heritage and planning. Thirdly, cultural diversity awareness could be integrated into the heritage profession to support a broader picture of the heritage of New Zealand. Such integration could be supported by a stand-alone heritage monitoring system, and adapted national multicultural policies based on the Treaty of Waitangi/Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

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