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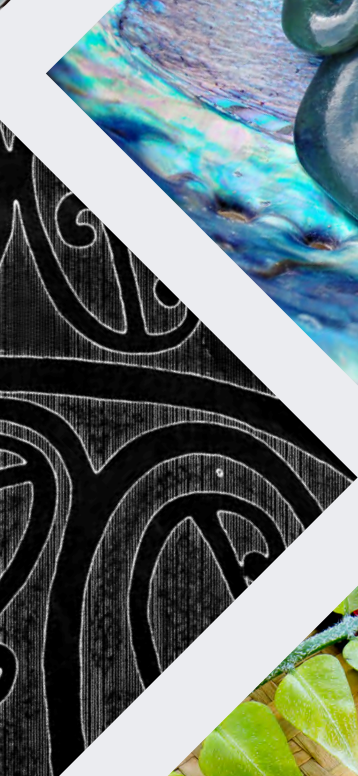
TE HONO A TE AO MĀORI KI A HAINA:

MĀORI APPROACHES TO
ENGAGEMENT WITH CHINA
PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE

Author:



ACE CONSULTING





HE WHAKATAUKĪ HEI MIHI — MĀORI AND CHINESE SAYINGS

Whakarongo aku au, ki te tangi ā te manu nei ā te mā tūi, tūi tuituia! Tuia i runga, tuia i raro, tuia i roto tuia i waho, tuia i te here tangata ka rongo te Ao, ka rongo te Pō! Tuia i te kawae tangata ka heke mai Ki Hawaiki nui, Hawaiki roa, Hawaiki pāmamao, Ki te hono i wairua, ki te Whai Ao, ki te Ao Mārama! Tīhei mauriora!

Listen to the talking birds herein They are calling us to unite, intertwine together! To connect the heavens above with the worlds below, To bind the external worlds with the internal worlds, To thread the many strands of people together! Let the unity of their words resound through the world of light, and even into the realm of the night.

Gather together the descent lines of those of the past who have journeyed from Hawaiki to this place of inspiration to this new world, the world dawning around us!

(Ihimaera, 2023, p. 24)

“海内存知己，天涯若比邻”

A bosom friend afar brings a distant land near

- 王勃《送杜少府之任蜀州》

This line in Mandarin comes from the Tang Dynasty poet Wang Bo (650–676 AD) in his famous work ‘Farewell to Vice-Prefect Du in Shuzhou.’

The poem expresses deep feelings of friendship and connection despite physical distance. It conveys that as long as there is mutual understanding and deep connection, physical distance is insignificant.

This concept resonates with spiritual closeness—the enduring nature of a true friendship that cannot be weakened by separation (He & Xiong, 2019), a representation of the relationship between Māori and Chinese.



CHAIR'S FOREWORD

Māori engagement with China and Chinese people has played a unique role in the development of Aotearoa New Zealand's bilateral relationship with China and will continue to do so.

It's a story that starts with the ancestors of Māori voyaging from the Asia region into Polynesia and as far as New Zealand over millennia.

Much more recently, early Māori contact with Chinese immigrants from the 1860s was wary and limited at first but revealed surprisingly similar perspectives and customs across both cultures over time.

These similarities are evident in many examples of mutual respect, partnership and intermarriage between the two communities here in New Zealand.

They have also contributed to successful contemporary Māori engagement with the People's Republic of China and its people.

This is often seen as a trading relationship, and it is true that Māori exporters—both primary produce, and services like tourism—have used tikanga and cross-cultural skills to benefit greatly from China's economic rise. But that is far from the full story.

The New Zealand China Council Te Kaunihera o Aotearoa me Haina has commissioned this report on past, present and future Māori engagement with China and its people for three main reasons:

Firstly, Māori-China engagement is a rich story that deserves to be told and celebrated. Many readers will be aware of the commercial aspects. Few may know that a Māori korowai (cloak) was gifted by the Māori King to Chairman Mao in the 1950s; or that there are strong existing partnerships involving Māori and Chinese sportspeople, artists, researchers, educators and others.

Secondly, as the early pioneers who wove Māori business and other connections with China

leave us their important legacy and move on, our Council wants to encourage and support an emerging generation of Māori who are exploring China's potential for themselves. The world is increasingly complex, and New Zealand's relationship with China holds both opportunities for success and differences that must be managed carefully. But this does not mean we need to place China into either the "too hard" or "yesterday's news" basket. Many more chapters of the story will be written.

Thirdly, we wanted to explore in more detail the proposition that the unique approach of Māori to engagement with China can offer both lessons and support for the New Zealand-China relationship. Our report demonstrates that Māori culture is a core aspect of New Zealand's identity in the eyes of the Chinese people, contributing to the unique value proposition that we present to China.

Among the key messages of the report, I wish in particular to underline:

- The visionary importance Māori place on a long-term relationship with China and its people, beyond short-term news cycles;
- The confidence Māori should have to continue instinctive and effective tikanga approaches to engaging with China; and
- The continuing potential that the Chinese market holds for Māori-produced goods and services in China, based on their unique provenance which stands out in an increasingly crowded market.

I thank the report authors at Ace Consulting, Dr Jason Mika and Xiaoliang Niu, for taking on this research, supported by Council staff. I also acknowledge and thank the many interviewees contacted by the researchers, not listed here, who gave their considerable time and knowledge to the project.

Lastly our thanks to New Zealand Māori Tourism for its partnership and support for this research project—it is very much appreciated.

John McKinnon

Chair, New Zealand China Council



KUPU WHAKATAKI A TE HEAMANA

Kua whai wāhi whakahirahira te tūhononga a te Māori ki a Haina me ōna iwi ki te whakawhanake i te hononga o Aotearoa me Haina, ā, ka haere tonu ēnei āhuetanga.

He hītori mai rā anō e tīmata mai i ngā tūpuna i a rātou e tere mai i Āhia ki Poronīhia, ā, ka tau ki Aotearoa i roto i ngā mano tau.

I roto i ngā tau tata ake nei, i tūtaki tuatahi te Māori ki ngā manene Hainamana i te tekau tau 1860. Ahakoa he iti te pāhekoheko i te tuatahi, nō muri mai ka kitea ētahi āhuetanga ōrite i ngā tikanga me ngā uara o ēnei ahurea e rua.

I te roanga o te wā, nā te whakaute, te mahi tahi, me te rironga o te mārena i whanake ai te hononga i waenganui i ngā hapori e rua i Aotearoa.

Ko ēnei tūhononga anō i whai wāhi nui ki te anga whakamua o te pāhekoheko a te Māori ki a Haina i ēnei rā.

Ahakoa ko te tauhokohoko tētahi wāhanga nui o te hononga—otirā ngā ahumahi matua me te tāpoi—ehara tēnei i te wāhanga kotahi anake. Kua tāngia i te tikanga Māori me ngā pūkenga o ia ahurea ki a whai hua mai i te aranga ake o te ōhanga o Haina, heoi, he maha tonu ngā kōrero mō tēnei kaupapa.

I whakahaua e Te Kaunihera o Aotearoa me Haina tēnei pūrongo hei tūhura i ngā tūhononga o mua, o nāianei, me ngā rautaki a te Māori mō Haina ā muri ake nei, mō ngā take e toru:

Tuatahi, he kōrero whakahirahira tēnei, e tika ana kia kōrerotia, kia whakanuitia. E mōhiotia whānuitia ana te hononga arumoni, engari kāore pea te tokomaha i te mōhio i tākohatia e te Kīngi Māori tētahi korowai ki a Heamana Mao i ngā tau 1950, me te mea hoki e mahi tahi ana te Māori me te Hainamana i te ao hākinakina, toi, rangahau, mātāuranga me ētahi atu mea.

Tuarua, i te hekenga o ngā kaiārahi Māori tuatahi, i waihanga e rātou i ngā here ki a Haina, ā, kua

waihotia ngā tapuwae mā tātou e whai—Ko te hiahia o te Kaunihera kia tautoko i te reanga hou e tūhura ana i ngā āheinga i Haina. He ao hurihuri te ao e noho nei e tātou, ā, me tūpato, kāti, me āta haere tātou i tā tātou hononga ki a Haina. Heoi, kāore e tika kia whakaaroarohia a Haina hei kaupapa “uaua rawa” rānei, hei “kōrero o neherā” rānei—he nui tonu ngā whārangi e tāia ana.

Tuatoru, e whai nei mātou ki te tūhura me pēhea e taea ai e te huarahi Māori ki a Haina te tuku akoranga me te tautoko mō te hononga whānui ake o Aotearoa me Haina. Ko te ahurea Māori tētahi wāhanga matua o te tuakiri o Aotearoa ki tā te tirohanga o Haina, ā, he hua ahurei ka tāpaetia e tātou ki a Haina.

Ko ētahi o ngā tino kōrero o tēnei pūrongo:

- E tino whai whakaaro ana a Ngāi Māori ki te waihanga i ngā hononga mauroa ki a Haina, ehara i te mea mō ngā huringa o te wā noa iho.
- Me haere tonu te Māori i runga i ngā tikanga Māori hei huarahi māori, hei huarahi whai hua mō te tūhononga ki a Haina.
- Ko te āheinga tonutanga o te mākete Hainamana mō ngā taonga me ngā ratonga i hangaia e te Māori i Haina, nā runga i tō rātou ahurei takenga, e tū motuhake nei i roto i te mākete e kī ake nei.

E tuku mihi ana ki ngā kaituhi o tēnei pūrongo, ki a Tākuta Jason Mika rāua ko Xiaoliang Niu nō Ace Consulting, me ngā kaimahi o te Kaunihera i tautoko i tēnei rangahau. E mihi ana hoki ki te hunga i uiuitia, nā rātou i tohatoha wā rātou whakaaro, nā, i wāwāhitia i a rātou kāore i whakahuatia i konei. E mihi ana hoki ki te hunga i uiuitia, ahakoa kāore e whakahuatia i konei, nā rātou i tohatoha i wā rātou whakaaro, ā, i wāwāhitia i a rātou anō.

Hei whakakōpani nei, ka mihi ki a New Zealand Māori Tourism mō tā rātou mahi tahi me tō rātou tautoko i tēnei rangahau, ā, nā rātou te pūtea i tuku hei hāpai i tēnei kaupapa.

John McKinnon

Heamana, Te Kaunihera o Aotearoa me Haina



1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Common descent, shared world views and values

- Māori and Chinese connections are ancient, tracing their common descent from the Austronesian migrations, when Māori ancestors are believed to have journeyed from Southern China and Taiwan some 4,000 years ago.
- Remarkably, these distant relations are still apparent in the shared values, customs, languages, and knowledge systems found across Southeast Asia and the Pacific. For example, Māori and Chinese world views share commonalities despite developing separately over thousands of years. Māori world views, informed by mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge) and tikanga Māori (Māori customs), resonate with Chinese philosophical traditions of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism.

1.2 Early Māori-Chinese contact in Aotearoa New Zealand

- Significant Chinese migration to New Zealand began in the 1860s. Early interactions between Māori and Chinese were marked by both cooperation and tension, highlighting the complexity of these relationships under colonial influence. Opportunities for engagement expanded as Chinese immigrants became involved in gold mining, market gardening, and other enterprises, as well as military service.
- Chinese immigrants faced discriminatory policies such as the Immigration Restriction Amendment Act 1920, confining Māori and Chinese contact to economic transactions. The struggles of Chinese immigrants

mirrored those of Māori during European colonisation, fostering a sense of solidarity between the two communities

- Intermarriage also occurred, for example, between Māori families who worked in Chinese market gardens, where shared values of family and economic stability provided common ground. These unions were, however, often met with societal disapproval.

1.3 Developing Māori engagement with the People's Republic of China

- Cold War dynamics and New Zealand's alignment with Western powers limited formal Māori contact with the People's Republic of China (PRC) prior to the 1970s. But initial cultural exchanges foretold the use of cultural diplomacy as a foundation for collaboration beyond economic engagement.
- Māori engagement with China gained momentum after 1972 when formal diplomatic relations between New Zealand and China were established. Economic relations accelerated after the signing of a bilateral free trade agreement in 2008 opened up export opportunities for Māori business. This included tourism and international education services as well as primary produce and other goods.
- Māori trade missions to China, particularly ministerial-led ones in 2010, 2012, and 2015 strengthened the groundwork for future engagement. The integral role of culture in these missions demonstrated the power of relational over transactional approaches to Māori engagement with China.



- Cultural diplomacy, including kapa haka , waiata, and gifting of taonga, continues to aid the development of 关系 gūanxi-whanaungatanga (relationships) based on trust and reciprocity.

1.4 Strengthening Māori economic relations with China

- China consistently represents the most significant destination for Māori global exports, but it is declining as a proportion of the total. Between 2017 and 2023, Māori authority exports to China peaked in 2018 at NZ\$347 million, dropping to NZ\$239 million in 2023. A range of factors have contributed to this, but none are necessarily long-term constraints on Māori trade growth with China.
- Specific opportunities for Māori business exist in export sectors where Māori sustainability and environmental approaches intersect with high demand in China, for example forestry and wood products. Māori industries could contribute to economic resilience while supporting cultural values through sustainable practices.
- Māori tourism has been a significant way to educate Chinese visitors about Māori culture. There is a need to manage the risk that cultural activities are perceived as 'entertainment' without proper understanding of cultural and spiritual significance. But Māori cultural experiences rank highly as a drawcard for Chinese visitors.
- There is limited data on the long-term scope and impact of Chinese investment in Māori enterprise. Concern about maintaining Māori values in governance and land use highlights the need for culturally aligned partnerships and better data.

1.5 Leading with culture

- The business relationship between Māori and Chinese partners extends beyond economic transactions, reflecting deeper cultural connections based on shared values like hospitality (manaakitanga) and relationality (whanaungatanga). Culture and commerce are not seen as separate, instead, they are considered integral business practices. When Māori lead with culture a different in-market reaction is generated, which makes a difference in the ability of Māori to engage with Chinese people.
- Māori businesspeople are used to moving between cultures in New Zealand and, therefore, possess the instinctive cross-cultural adaptability needed to do business with China. Māori businesses should have confidence to lead with culture, knowing it will resonate and facilitate genuine connections with Chinese partners.
- Māori trade missions with culture as an integral element can achieve cut-through in the Chinese market. Participants feel confident as part of a group with shared world views and business approaches. Collaboration across sectors during these missions can strengthen bonds and provide a framework for ongoing relationships, but post-mission follow-up is essential to maintain momentum.
- Culture is considered not only an enabler of Māori international business and trade with China, but also a competitive advantage for New Zealand. The power of culture to establish a favourable relationship and procure commercial arrangements has been underestimated by New Zealand trade officials in the past.
- A te ao Māori perspective, which emphasises where things come from and



and beverage enterprises often integrate Māori values into their strategies, emphasising the importance of tradition in commerce, but this approach must be effectively communicated to be impactful.

1.6 Non-business contacts

- Māori engagement with modern China is diverse. Examples include Māori sportspeople accessing opportunities in China's professional sports leagues and developing China's rugby talent; game development and technology collaborations; research linking traditional Chinese medicine and rongoā Māori; and fashion and art collaboration.
- Te reo Māori is now taught at undergraduate level at one university in Beijing.

1.7 Future Māori-China engagement

- Relationships between Māori and Chinese in Aotearoa New Zealand are mixed, with positive views observed in workplaces and teams where social interaction is routine and negative views apparent where social interaction is more limited. Local effort within the Māori and Chinese communities to promote mutual understanding offers cultural strength to the continuity of Māori-China relations.
- While many in New Zealand remain cautious of China because of its political ideology, Māori are often more open to China because of a focus on personal relationships and ancestral connections.
- A stronger Māori economy offers a solid basis for expanding trade and business with China. There are some concerns about overdependence of Māori exporters on the Chinese market should New Zealand-China relations deteriorate. The concern about

this risk among Māori is, however, muted by a nuanced disposition toward China. The Māori economy's ability to expand its relationship with China, however, could be constrained by the official stance of either government on the bilateral relationship. Balanced advice on diversification makes sense.

- China sees Māori as critical to engaging with New Zealand. Yet, China seems unfamiliar with the significance of the Māori economy and treaty settlements. Evidence suggests, however, that China's appreciation of the Indigenous economy is likely more favourable than it is sometimes perceived to be.



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2.4 Abbreviations

AI	artificial intelligence
ANZAC	Australian and New Zealand Army Corps
ANZF	Asia New Zealand Foundation
BERL	Business & Economic Research Limited
BFSU	Beijing Foreign Studies University
BOPRU	Bay of Plenty Rugby Union
EV	electric vehicle
FTA	free trade agreement
GDP	gross domestic product
MFAT	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade
MKGI	Māori Kiwifruit Growers Incorporated
NZ	New Zealand
NZD	New Zealand Dollar
NZMT	New Zealand Māori Tourism
PRC	People's Republic of China



2.5 Glossary

Aotearoa	New Zealand
haka	dance
hapū	subtribe
hauora	health, wellbeing
hui	meeting
iwi	tribe
kai	food
kaimoana	seafood
kanohi	eye, face
kanohi-ki-te-kanohi	face-to-face
kaitiaki	guardian, steward, custodian
kaitiakitanga	guardianship, stewardship
kapa haka	concert party
karakia	prayer, incantation
kaupapa	purpose, philosophy, subject
kiwi	flightless native bird, New Zealander
Kīngitanga	King Movement
kōrero	speak
kōrerorero	conversation
kōwhaiwhai	painted patterns
kotahitanga	unity
mana	power, authority, dignity
manaaki	care for, look after, concern for
manaakitanga	hospitality, generosity
Māori	Indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand
marae	sacred courtyard in front of a meeting house
mātauranga	knowledge
mauri	life force
mirimiri	massage
ōhanga	economy, economic
Pākehā	New Zealander of European descent
pakiaka	root of a tree
pepeha	tribal saying
rangatiratanga	chiefly authority, leadership
rongoā	treat, medicine
tā moko	traditional tattooing
tamariki	children
tāne	man, men
tangata whenua	Indigenous people, people of the land
taonga	treasure
tatauranga	statistics
tauīwi	non-Māori, foreigner
te ao Māori	Māori world, Māori world view, Māori society
te reo Māori	Māori language
tikanga	culture, custom
tikanga rangahau	research ethics
tino rangatiratanga	self-determination
Tiriti o Waitangi	Treaty of Waitangi



tohunga	expert
tuakiri	identity
tukutuku	woven reed panels
tūrangawaewae	domicile
umanga	business
urupā	cemetery
utu	pay, reciprocity, revenge
waharoa	gateway
wāhine	woman, women
waiata	song, sing
wairua	spirit, soul
wairuatanga	spirituality
whakairo	carve, carving
whakapapa	genealogy
whānau	family, extended family
whanaungatanga	relationships
whare	house, home
whare taonga	museum

2.6 Acknowledgements

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3. INTRODUCTION

3.1 Purpose and scope

This report explores Māori engagement with China and its people, past, present, and future, both here in Aotearoa New Zealand ('New Zealand') and in the People's Republic of China ('China'). Its purpose is to support a balanced and resilient relationship between New Zealand and China, with a focus on Māori-Chinese relations at a prominent level, tracing their historical, cultural, and economic connections. The report assembles insights from written records and first-hand accounts of Māori, Chinese, and Pākehā people into Māori-China engagement. It covers four aspects: early Māori engagement with China, current business relations, other contemporary links, and future opportunities with recommendations.

3.2 New Zealand China Council

The New Zealand China Council Te Kaunihera o Aotearoa me Haina is a national, multi-sector, non-partisan organisation focused on a balanced and resilient bilateral relationship with China, with a commitment to incorporate Māori perspectives in its work. The Council has a good appreciation of Māori engagement with China through the presence of eminent Māori on its board and interaction with Māori knowledge-holders. This report provides the Council with an opportunity to advance its strategic commitment to Māori.

3.3 Researchers

Ace is a Māori and Pacific-owned management consultancy specialising in Māori, Pacific, and Indigenous economic development research and policy based in Hamilton, New Zealand. Ace director Dr Jason Paul Mika (Tūhoe, Ngāti Awa, Whakatōhea, Ngāti Kahungunu) and Ace associate Xiaoliang Niu are the authors of this report. Importantly, the literature review and this report have been written from an apolitical standpoint. Nonetheless, the report presents an account of the information based on the positionalities of the authors as Māori and Chinese researchers with relevant knowledge and interest in Māori engagement with China.

3.4 Methodology

The research for this report was conducted according to kaupapa Māori research principles, which recognise the validity of tikanga Māori (Māori culture) and te reo Māori (Māori language), and seek transformational Māori outcomes on the basis of tino rangatiratanga (Māori self-determination) (Smith et al., 2012; Smith, 1999). A five-step process was used comprising co-designing the research with Council staff; critically reviewing relevant literature; interviewing people who have knowledge of Māori engagement with China; a report on the findings; and peer review of the results with stakeholders. Interviews were conducted in accordance with tikanga rangahau (Māori research ethics), including the provision of an information sheet and consent form and the use of an interview schedule (see Annexes 14.1, 14.2, and 14.3).



4. MĀORI AND CHINESE WORLD VIEWS

4.1 Māori world view

Te ao Māori refers to the Māori world view, which is a distinctly Māori way of understanding the world and human interaction with it (Royal, 2003). According to Mika, Rout, et al. (2022), the Māori world view is relational, meaning all things, living and non-living, are related. In this view, a good life, or wellbeing, is defined by reciprocal balance in relations between human and nonhuman communities and spiritual and physical realms (Mika, Dell, Newth, & Houkamau, 2022b). Māori values, which originate from the Māori world view, play a crucial role in Māori society. Mātauranga Māori refers to the body of Māori knowledge, wisdom, and understanding passed down through generations (Harmsworth & Awatere, 2013; Hikuroa, 2017; Mead, 2016; Ruwhiu & Cone, 2013). Mātauranga Māori covers all branches of knowledge, past, present and future, and is continuously evolving through contextually appropriate and intentional application (Harmsworth & Awatere, 2013; Hikuroa, 2017; Mead, 2016; Ruwhiu & Cone, 2013; Winiata & Luke, 2021). Tikanga Māori are customs that stem from mātauranga Māori (Mead, 2016; Mika, Dell, Elers, et al., 2022). In other words, tikanga Māori is the framework within which Māori values are understood, practised, and transmitted (Mead, 2016; Mika et al., 2020a; Smith, 2021).

4.2 Māori values

The origin, meaning and practice of Māori values is a deeply-held characteristic of Māori identity (Durie, 2011; Tinirau, 2017), but it is possible for tauīwi (non-Māori) to appreciate their meaning and effect when engaging with Māori (Cribb et al., 2022). Important Māori values include whanaungatanga (relationships), whakapapa (genealogical connections), mauri (life force), mana (power), manaakitanga (generosity), kaitiakitanga (stewardship), rangatiratanga (leadership), utu (reciprocity), and wairuatanga (spirituality) (Knox, 2005). Together, such values represent an ethical code for responsible and aspirational management of Māori organisations and enterprises (Mika et al., 2020b; Wilkins, 2024).

Whanaungatanga refers to the relationships and connections between individuals, families, and communities (Mead, 2016). This value emphasises building and maintaining kinship and bonds of trust and support, extending to community networks. Whakapapa, the genealogical connection between people, ancestors, and the environment, is fundamental to identity, and to understanding personal and collective responsibilities. Whakapapa organises relationships across time and space, linking individuals to natural and spiritual realms. Whakapapa guides decision-making processes in business, ensuring that commercial activities align with ancestral obligations and environmental stewardship (Mika et al., 2020a). Wairuatanga highlights the importance of spirituality in daily life (Mead, 2016; Mika, Dell, Newth, & Houkamau, 2022a). The concept acknowledges the spiritual essence of people, place, and things, influencing how Māori interact with the natural and social worlds (Mead, 2016; Mika, Dell, Newth, & Houkamau, 2022a; Pere, 1982).

All values and their associated practices have a connection to their spiritual source. For example, mauri represents the life force in all living and non-living things and the binding force between the physical and spiritual realms, present in people, animals, plants, land, and even



inanimate objects (Harmsworth & Awatere, 2013; Hikuroa et al., 2011; Spiller, Erakovic, et al., 2011; Spiller, Pio, Erakovic, & Hēnare, 2011). Mauri gives a being or entity vitality and capacity for life (Harmsworth & Awatere, 2013; Hikuroa et al., 2011; Spiller, Erakovic, et al., 2011). Mauri reflects the interconnectedness of all life forms, and maintaining this vitality is a core responsibility in Māori environmental ethics (Harmsworth & Awatere, 2013; Hikuroa et al., 2011; Rout et al., 2021; Spiller, Erakovic, et al., 2011).

Human agency and potential are linked to the concept of mana, which represents spiritual authority and prestige, evident in leadership and responsibility (Mead, 2016; Mika, Dell, Newth, & Houkamau, 2022a; Patterson, 2000). In modern Māori economies, mana is demonstrated by protecting community interests and maintaining social balance (Wolfgramm et al., 2020). Related to mana is manaakitanga, a concept, value, and practice which encourages generosity, kindness and hospitality, ensuring the wellbeing of others (Mead, 2016; Mika, Dell, Newth, & Houkamau, 2022a).

The exercise of mana is contingent upon the presence and recognition of rangatiratanga, which signifies self-determination and the right to manage one's own affairs (Mead, 2016; Mika, Dell, Newth, & Houkamau, 2022a; Spiller, Pio, Erakovic, & Henare, 2011). This value is observed in mana motuhake or tribal autonomy (Hokowhitu et al., 2022; Mika, 2021). In organisational terms, rangatiratanga is expressed through Māori leadership and its emphasis on cultural identity, sovereignty over resources, and the pursuit of collective goals (Mika et al., 2020a; Mika & O'Sullivan, 2014; Wolfgramm et al., 2020).

In respect of care for people and the environment, kaitiakitanga is a value that imbues human endeavour with a strong stewardship and guardianship ethic (Mead, 2016; Mika, Dell, Newth, & Houkamau, 2022a; Spiller, Pio, Erakovic, & Hēnare, 2011). This concept obliges Māori to care for people and protect the environment ensuring its sustainability (Kawharu, 2000). In management practice, kaitiakitanga has become a framework for incorporating environmental responsibility into business strategies, where economic growth is balanced with ecological care (Awatere et al., 2013; Mead, 2016; Mika, Dell, Newth, & Houkamau, 2022a; Nicholson et al., 2019; Roberts et al., 1995; Rout et al., 2021). Kaitiakitanga counteracts the tendency toward trade-offs in use and non-use of nature by reference to utu, a Māori value and practice that promotes reciprocity and balance in relationships (Mika et al., 2024), where actions are returned in kind to maintain social balance (Mead, 2016). Utu is central to ethical business practice, where reciprocal exchanges foster long-term trust and fairness (Mika, Dell, Newth, & Houkamau, 2022b; Reid et al., 2021).

4.3 Chinese world view

Chinese culture is deeply influenced by philosophies and religions like Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, emphasising family, social harmony, and respect for authority (Cheng, 1991; Feng & Bodde, 1997). 普通话 (Putonghua, also known as Mandarin) is the official language and the language of the education system and is, thus, spoken or at least understood by well over one billion people (Norman, 1988; Ramsey, 1987). China is also home to a large number of other dialects and languages (Norman, 1988; Ramsey, 1987), spoken both by the majority Han ethnicity as well as 55 other ethnicities known in China as 'ethnic minorities' (Ramsey, 1987). 粤语 (Cantonese) is primarily spoken by Han Chinese in southern cities like Guangzhou, Hong Kong and Macau (Norman, 1988; Ramsey, 1987). 闽南语 (Hokkien) is widely used in the Fujian Province of southeastern China, in the cities of Xiamen, Quanzhou, and Zhangzhou (Norman,



1988; Ramsey, 1987). These last two languages are also widely spoken in overseas Chinese communities in Southeast Asia, Canada, and the United States.

4.4 Chinese values

Traditional values are central to Chinese moral philosophy and social conduct (Pan et al., 2019; Yin, 2003). Table 2 offers a summary of traditional Chinese values and their English meanings.

Table 1 Traditional Chinese values and beliefs

Chinese values	English translation	Explanation
孝 (Xiào)	Filial piety	Respect and care for one's parents and ancestors.
气(qì)	Life force	The vital energy that flows through living things.
关系(guānxi)	Relationships	Enduring personal connections.
忠 (Zhōng)	Loyalty	Devotion to family, friends, and country.
义 (Yì)	Righteousness	Upholds justice and moral integrity.
诚 (Chéng)	Honesty	Sincerity and truthfulness in actions.
耻 (Chǐ)	Shame	Awareness of moral boundaries and self-discipline.
谦 (Qiān)	Humility	Advocates modesty and avoiding arrogance.
恕 (Shù)	Forgiveness	Encourages tolerance and understanding.
毅 (Yì)	Perseverance	Commitment to achieving goals despite adversity.
仁 (Rén)	Kindness	Central value of compassion.
和 (Hé)	Harmony	Promotes peace and balance in relationships.
敬 (Jìng)	Respect	Importance of valuing traditions and other people.
俭 (Jiǎn)	Thriftiness	Advocates simplicity and avoiding waste.
风水 (fēngshuǐ)	Balance	Harmonising people with the environment.

Source: Adapted from China Daily (2020); Pan et al. (2019); Yin (2003)

These values, deeply ingrained in Chinese culture, not only guided the behaviour of early Chinese settlers in New Zealand but still influence Chinese people globally. The emphasis on



family, perseverance, and respect for tradition has played a significant role in shaping Chinese identity and their interactions with other cultures.

4.5 Shared values

Common meanings of Māori and Chinese values and their potential to strengthen Māori engagement with China are explored here. We focus on shared values, principles, and aspirations such as the importance of family, respect for elders, and collective wellbeing (Ip, 2003; Jefferies, 2024; Rout et al., 2022).

4.5.1 *Mauri (life force) and 气(qì)*

Mauri is essential for ensuring the wellbeing of individuals, communities, and the environment (Morgan, 2006). 气 (Qì), in Chinese culture, refers to the vital energy that flows through all living things and connects them to the universe (Ma'auga & Liu, 2020; Zhang & Rose, 2001). Mauri and 气(qì) are similar in their recognition of the vitality in all living things which must be respected and maintained, as this cosmic power connects humans to the natural world and the spiritual realm (Mead, 2016; Zhang & Rose, 2001).

In Māori and Chinese contexts, practices that protect and enhance mauri or 气(qì), such as environmental stewardship and traditional rituals, are central to wellbeing and harmony (Wolfgramm et al., 2020; Zhang & Rose, 2001). This shared commitment to tradition is exemplified in the revived recognition of Matariki, the Māori New Year (Matamua, 2023) and the Chinese New Year. The Chinese New Year, for example, is associated with positive energy, intended to empower people. Vitality enhancing traditions of the Chinese New Year are evident in families gathering, eating traditional foods, children receiving a 'red packet' (红包) from elders, people hanging calligraphy couplets (对联) and other symbols (e.g., 福 happiness) for good fortune, and visiting the family graveyard to honour one's ancestors.

4.5.2 *Whanaungatanga (kinship), 关系(guānxi), and 孝(xiào)*

Whanaungatanga mirrors the Chinese practice of 关系(guānxi) (relationships and networks), which prioritises long-term trust and community-oriented approaches (Fan, 2002; Sharples, 2012). Both cultures emphasise the importance of long-term, trust-based relationships (Bian, 1997; Fan, 2002; Hwang, 1987; Mead, 2016). Whether through whanaungatanga or 关系(guānxi), personal relationships form the foundation for successful engagements in Māori and Chinese business contexts. Trust, reciprocity, and direct engagement are essential for lasting partnerships. For instance, kanohi-ki-te-kanohi, or face-to-face encounters, demonstrates integrity and establishes trust in Māori and Chinese business cultures (Tonumaip'e'a, 2018).

孝 (xiào) means filial piety in Chinese culture, respecting and caring for one's parents and ancestors, ensuring that family remains at the heart of the social structure (Chan & Tan, 2004; Nuyen, 2004). Both cultures, Māori and Chinese, prioritise family, respect, loyalty, and care for elders and ancestors, and the collective responsibilities of family and other relationships (Chan & Tan, 2004; Ma'auga & Liu, 2020; Mead, 2016; Nuyen, 2004; Pan et al., 2019). Family and relationships with others play a crucial role in social stability and wellbeing, and respect and care for elders foster intergenerational bonds, contributing to the resilience of both Māori and Chinese communities (Ip, 2003; Mead, 2016; Pan et al., 2019; Rout et al., 2022). Engaging whānau in collective decision-making processes and Chinese family structures where multi-



generational households live together are common (Chan & Tan, 2004; Ip, 2003; Ma'auga & Liu, 2020; Mead, 2016; Nuyen, 2004; Pan et al., 2019).

4.5.3 *Manaakitanga (hospitality, care) and 和 (Hé)*

Manaakitanga is similar to 和 (Hé), harmony and peace in social relationships (Christensen, 2019; Li, 2013; Li et al., 2016; Pan et al., 2019; Peng et al., 2016). Both cultures value harmonious social relationships, highlighting mutual respect, generosity, and peace, in which conflict avoidance and maintaining balance are key cultural principles (China Daily, 2020; Ihi Research, 2019; Mead, 2016; Pan et al., 2019; Rout et al., 2022). Māori and Chinese values also intersect through the practice of hospitality and respect for traditions. For instance, during a Māori delegation to China, shared practices like offering food (kai) and song (waiata) helped create meaningful cultural exchange beyond economic interests (Foon, 2022; Māori Economic Taskforce, 2011b).

4.5.4 *Rangatiratanga (leadership, self-determination) and 敬 (jìng)*

Rangatiratanga can be seen as comparable to 敬 (jìng), respect for authority within the family and in the community (Hwang, 1987; Li, 2013; Yao, 2000), which exists in both cultures. In Chinese culture, this concept is similar to rangatiratanga, which encompasses leadership and autonomy (Mead, 2016; Pan et al., 2019). Leaders are expected to guide their people while balancing power and ensuring the wellbeing of the community (Hwang, 1987; Ma'auga & Liu, 2020; Mead, 2016; Pan et al., 2019). Māori leaders exercise rangatiratanga and assert autonomy over resources to ensure the wellbeing of their people, while in Chinese society, respect for leaders is central to maintaining social harmony (Hwang, 1987; Ma'auga & Liu, 2020; Mead, 2016; Pan et al., 2019; Yao, 2000). A point of difference, however, is that Māori have more consistently challenged the authority of the state where this has unfairly and illegally been used to usurp the mana and rangatiratanga of Māori over their people, lands, and taonga (Harris, 2004; Walker, 2004).

4.5.5 *Kaitiakitanga (stewardship) and 風水 (fēngshuǐ)*

Māori and Chinese communities are deeply committed to intergenerational obligations, and environmental stewardship is a fundamental example of this. Although based on different principles, kaitiakitanga has some similarities to 風水 (fēngshuǐ) insofar as they are both based on the practice of harmonising individuals with their environment to promote balance and wellbeing (Bruun, 2003; Kawharu, 2000; Mak & So, 2011). This intergenerational focus in both cultures prioritises reciprocal and harmonious relationships with nature, where humans are seen as stewards of the environment, stressing living in balance with natural forces to maintain harmony and ensure the wellbeing of future generations (Ihi Research, 2019; Ma'auga & Liu, 2020; Mullins, 2022).



5. MĀORI-CHINA CONNECTIONS IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

5.1 Austronesian connections

Tracing their migration back to East Polynesia, Māori are part of the Polynesian triangle, extending from Hawai'i to Easter Island, then to New Zealand (Bellwood, 1987; Howe, 2008). New Zealand, the last major land mass on earth to be settled, saw the arrival of Māori around 1250-1300 AD during what is known as the 'Great Migration' (Bellwood, 1987; Howe, 2008; Lu, 2009). Genetic studies suggest that these founding Māori ancestors numbered between 70 to 190 people, indicating that the East Polynesian migration was intended rather than a chance event (Lu, 2009).

Scholars have debated the precise origins of Polynesian peoples, including Māori. Researchers tend to point to Southeast Asia, particularly Taiwan, as the departure point of the Austronesian migration (Bellwood, 1987; Howe, 2008; Marshall et al., 2005; Su et al., 2000; Te Taumata, 2022; Underhill et al., 2001). Linguistic, archaeological, and genetic evidence suggests that the ancestors of the Polynesians, migrated through Southeast Asia, interacting with Melanesian populations before settling in Polynesia, and eventually reaching New Zealand (Lu, 2009). This evidence supports the notion that Māori have ancestral ties to Asia, particularly to southern China and Taiwan, where Austronesian languages are believed to have originated approximately 4,000 to 6,000 years ago (Bellwood, 2017; Bellwood, 1987; Lu, 2009). According to Lu (2009), the motivation behind these voyages, including those of Māori, were likely driven by social factors such as prestige, curiosity, and a desire for exploration rather than necessity.

Genetic studies reveal that Māori have ancestral links to North Asia, supporting long-held theories that the first inhabitants of Aotearoa had Asian origins (Elder, 2022). Māori Affairs Minister Dr Pita Sharples reaffirmed these ancestral ties during a trade delegation of Māori business leaders to China when he stated that the ancestors of the Māori set off from Asia (Sharples, 2013b). Sharples expressed that Māori were akin to a 'younger brother' reconnecting with their elder relations (Mullins, 2022).

5.2 Chinese migration to New Zealand

Early Māori engagement with 'China' started with the interaction between Māori and Chinese people in New Zealand. This section provides background on contexts in which Māori and Chinese people were most likely to have engaged.

5.2.1 First immigrants

Early Chinese migration to New Zealand began in the mid-19th century. Chinese were the largest non-European and non-Polynesian ethnic group to settle in New Zealand until recently, when they were eclipsed by the Indian population as New Zealand's third-largest ethnic group (Ip, 2003; Ng, 2003; D. Wang, 2023). Appo Hocton was one of the earliest recorded Chinese immigrants, known originally as Wong Ah Poo Hoc Ting. He arrived in Nelson in 1842 as a cabin boy on an immigrant ship from a village in 广东 Guangdong Province, a coastal region in South



China (France, 2013; New Zealand Foreign Affairs & Trade, 2023; D. Wang, 2023). Upon arriving, Hocton worked as a housekeeper and established a carting business from his savings. In 1853, Hocton became New Zealand’s first naturalised Chinese person, allowing him to own property (France, 2013). By 2000, Hocton’s descendants numbered 1,600 (France, 2013; D. Wang, 2023).

5.2.2 Gold miners

The first large-scale wave of Chinese immigration to New Zealand began during the Otago gold rush in the 1860s (Fong, 1959; Ip, 2003, 2009; McKinnon, 1996; Ng, 1993; Sing, 1996) (see Figure 1). Chinese immigrants arrived from Australia, invited by the Otago Chamber of Commerce to fill labour shortages in the goldfields left by departing European miners (Fung, 2014; Ng, 2003; Ritchie, 2003; Sing, 1996). Poverty, overpopulation, and political turmoil in China, combined with New Zealand’s demand for labour and favourable exchange rates, made work in the Otago goldfields highly attractive, driving 19th century Chinese migration (Murphy, 1994; Ng, 1993). The gold miners were mainly men from 广东 Guangdong province, arriving as sojourners intending to return with their acquired wealth (Ng, 2003).

The influx was gradual, with a total of 1,219 Chinese gold miners (1,213 males and 6 females, or 0.56% of the New Zealand population) at the 1867 census (Fung, 2014; Ip, 2005). By 1874, Chinese miners in Otago exceeded 5,000, and by 1885, they made up 40% of Otago’s mining workforce, producing around 30% of the region’s gold output (Fung, 2014; Ng, 2003; Ritchie, 2003; Sing, 1996).

Figure 1 Chinese gold miners in Central Otago



Source: McNeur (1900)



5.2.3 Entrepreneurs

As legal and social barriers persisted and goldfield wealth diminished, Chinese immigrants transitioned to entrepreneurial pursuits as gardeners, restaurateurs, and launderers (Foon, 2022; Lee, 2003; Ng, 2003; Sing, 1996). Market gardening became a key sector for Chinese workers in the 1920s, as most Chinese men from rural peasant backgrounds were familiar with growing crops (Ip, 1996; Lee, 2003; Ng, 2003). By the late 19th century less than 50% of Chinese migrants remained in gold mining, with Chinese market gardens emerging in regions like Te Tairāwhiti (East Coast) (see Figure 2), providing essential produce to local markets (Foon, 2022; Ng, 2003; Sing, 1996). These ventures allowed Chinese immigrants to build economic stability despite prevailing social and legal impediments (Foon, 2022; Ip, 1996; Ng, 2003; Sing, 1996).

Figure 2 Chinese market gardeners



Source: Chase (1903)

Focus 1 Evolving policies on Chinese immigration

Early Chinese immigrants faced numerous challenges, including racial discrimination, harsh living conditions, and exclusionary legislation such as the Chinese Immigration Act of 1881 (Eldred-Grigg & Zeng, 2014; Murphy, 1994; D. Wang, 2023). This Act limited the number of Chinese immigrants allowed on each ship to just one per 10 tons of the vessel's volume, a restriction that was further tightened to one per 100 tons in 1896 (Beaglehole, 2015). Subsequent amendments introduced a Poll Tax (人头税) of £10 (equivalent to \$1,770 today), which was later raised to £100 in 1896 (Murphy, 1994; NZ History, 2024; D. Wang, 2023).



These 'targeted' measures restricted Chinese immigrants' ability to bring family with them (Fong, 1959; McKinnon, 1996; Ng, 1993, 2003). The Immigration Restriction Amendment Act of 1920 similarly introduced measures to limit non-European (non-white) immigration, affecting Chinese, reflecting the institutional racism of the time (Ip, 1996; Murphy, 1994; Ng, 1993).

The Immigration Act of 1987 represents a pivotal change in New Zealand's immigration policy. The Act removed the traditional country-based criteria for New Zealand immigration, eliminating the government's preference for immigrants from the United Kingdom (UK), Western Europe and North America (Bedford et al., 2000; Greif, 1995; Winkelmann & Winkelmann, 1998). In its place, the 1987 Act introduced a merit-based system which valued skills, qualifications, experience, business success, and access to financial capital, which New Zealand needed (Fung, 2014; Ip, 1996; D. Wang, 2023; Winkelmann & Winkelmann, 1998). As a result, Chinese immigration numbers grew from 19,566 in 1987 to 83,320 in 1996, making this one of New Zealand's fastest-growing ethnic groups (Ip, 2003; McKinnon, 1996; D. Wang, 2023; J. Wang, 2023). The country's demographic composition was drastically altered (Liu, 2009). Census 2023 records New Zealand's Chinese population at 279,039 people (RNZ, 2024). This compares to the 2018 census, when Chinese were New Zealand's fourth largest ethnic group with 231,387 people, behind Europeans (70.2%), Māori (16.5%), and Pacific (8.1%) (Stats NZ, 2019; D. Wang, 2023).

5.2.4 Military service

Chinese immigrants also demonstrated their commitment to their adopted country during World War I. Yet, Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) soldiers of Chinese origin faced anti-Chinese sentiment even during service and were often overlooked in historical accounts (Brown, 2019; Chanwai-Earle, 2016; Kennedy, 2015; University of Canterbury, 2019). Recent efforts, such as the event held at Pukeahu National War Memorial Park in 2016 and a book titled *Chinese Anzacs: Australians of Chinese Descent in the Defence Forces 1885-1919* by Alastair Kennedy, have sought to honour the role of Chinese New Zealanders in New Zealand's military history (Chanwai-Earle, 2016; Kennedy, 2015; University of Canterbury, 2019). Kennedy, a retired British Army officer, wrote the book to highlight the often-overlooked contributions of Chinese Australian and New Zealanders who served in World War I (Chanwai-Earle, 2016).

In 1914, when the Great War broke out, Chinese residents from the Eng family expressed a desire to fight for New Zealand and eventually served in Europe (Foon, 2022). Between 1914 and 1919, over 55 Chinese New Zealanders enlisted and fought in major campaigns such as Gallipoli and Somme (Chanwai-Earle, 2016). One notable example is Norman Low, the first Chinese graduate from Canterbury University, who served in Gallipoli, Egypt, and France before succumbing to war-related injuries (being gassed in the Somme) in his mid-30s and buried in 1921 in Shanghai (University of Canterbury, 2019). Norman's brother, Victor Low, who followed him into military service, became renowned for surveying and carving the iconic Bulford Kiwi in England (see Figure 3) (Brown, 2019; University of Canterbury, 2019).



Figure 3 Sergeant Major Victor Low



Source: Brown (2019) A 1917 portrait of the 5th Tunnelling Company, with Sergeant Major Victor Low highlighted. Image courtesy of the Sue Baker Wilson collection.

5.3 Māori-Chinese intermarriage

In the 1920s, Chinese-owned market gardens started employing Māori. They became sites of contact between Chinese men and Māori women, from which relationships developed (Lee, 2003; Ng, 2003), resulting in increased Māori-Chinese intermarriage (see Figure 4) (Ip, 1996, 2003; Lee, 2003). Mutual respect, the pragmatism of household economics, and shared values of family wellbeing made the unions possible (Ip, 2003; Lee, 2003). Māori women were drawn to the financial stability Chinese men offered and appreciated working alongside their whānau in the gardens (Lee, 2003). Māori-Chinese offspring with hybrid identities also emerged (Ip, 2008; Lee, 2003).



Figure 4 Chinese market gardeners, Pukekohe



Source: Riethmaier (1975)

Intermarriage, however, was often met with societal disapproval driven by racial, moral, and cultural anxieties, particularly from Pākehā and some Māori (Ip, 1996, 2003). For instance, the 1929 Ngata Inquiry into Māori-Chinese relationships, concluded that such unions were morally and culturally harmful, but decided against recommending restricting the employment of Māori girls and women in Chinese market gardens due to the resulting hardship this would cause (Hughes et al., 1929; Wanhalla, 2011). Negative stereotypes about Māori women being exploited and framing racial intermarriage as a threat to societal stability and public morality, reflecting broader racial anxieties, were reinforced (Lee, 2003). The dominant colonial narrative stigmatised Māori-Chinese relationships and the children born from them (Ip, 2008; Lee, 2003; Lu, 2024). These pressures, however, did not stop many Māori-Chinese unions from thriving and contributing to New Zealand’s multicultural fabric (Lu, 2024). While the 1920s and 1930s saw few Māori-Chinese unions, their legacy persists as their descendants continue to navigate complex identities shaped by both cultures (Lee, 2003).

The legacy of Māori-Chinese relations, particularly through intermarriage and economic cooperation, continues to shape the identities of their descendants. For instance, one Māori-Chinese descendant, Mikaela Mee-Sahn Hanara Joe, shared that her great-grandfather Joe Kum Chee, a Chinese immigrant from Guangzhou in the 1920s, married into a Māori family and established a business despite significant adversity and racism (Lu, 2024). Their resilience shows how Māori and Chinese families created familial and economic bonds. Similarly, Dr Jenny Joy Bol Jun Lee-Morgan shared her experience of discrimination not only from Pākehā



but also from Māori and Chinese communities (Lee, 2003; Lu, 2024). The sense of not being 'good enough' or 'in-between' for either group, caused by New Zealand's history of racial and social hierarchy, often leads to alienation and exclusion (Lu, 2024). These experiences reflect the challenges Māori-Chinese individuals face as they navigate and celebrate their cultural backgrounds.

5.4 Māori-Chinese solidarity

Early relations between Māori and Chinese immigrants were generally favourable, though initially limited (J. Wang, 2023). Both groups faced marginalisation by European settlers during New Zealand's colonial period (1840-1907), which shaped the broader social context in which these early encounters occurred (Ip, 2003; Liu & Lu, 2008). Māori, who had already established long-standing trade relationships with European settlers, often viewed Chinese immigrants through the lens of European colonial attitudes, which were frequently prejudicial (Ip, 1996, 2003). Through this lens, Māori perceived Chinese immigrants as economic rivals or culturally and socially distinct outsiders, further amplifying anti-Chinese sentiment (Ip, 1996; McKinnon, 1996).

Despite these initial perceptions, Māori were more open to trade and cultural exchange with Chinese immigrants, fostering cooperative interaction (Ip, 1996). Over time, Māori began to see the parallels between their own struggles and those of the Chinese, particularly regarding land loss, economic hardship, and efforts to preserve cultural identity (Ip, 1996). Both Māori and Chinese experienced political and economic exclusion and institutional racism, which further facilitated a form of solidarity between the two communities, particularly in rural areas (Ip, 2003, 2009). These shared struggles fostered a sense of cohesion between the two communities, particularly in areas where their paths intersected like small-scale agriculture (market gardens) and trade (Ip, 1996; Lee, 2003; Ng, 1993; Sing, 1996). Solidarity also arose through cultural affinity and tragedy as noted in the story of the SS Ventnor (see Focus 2, Figures 5 and 6).

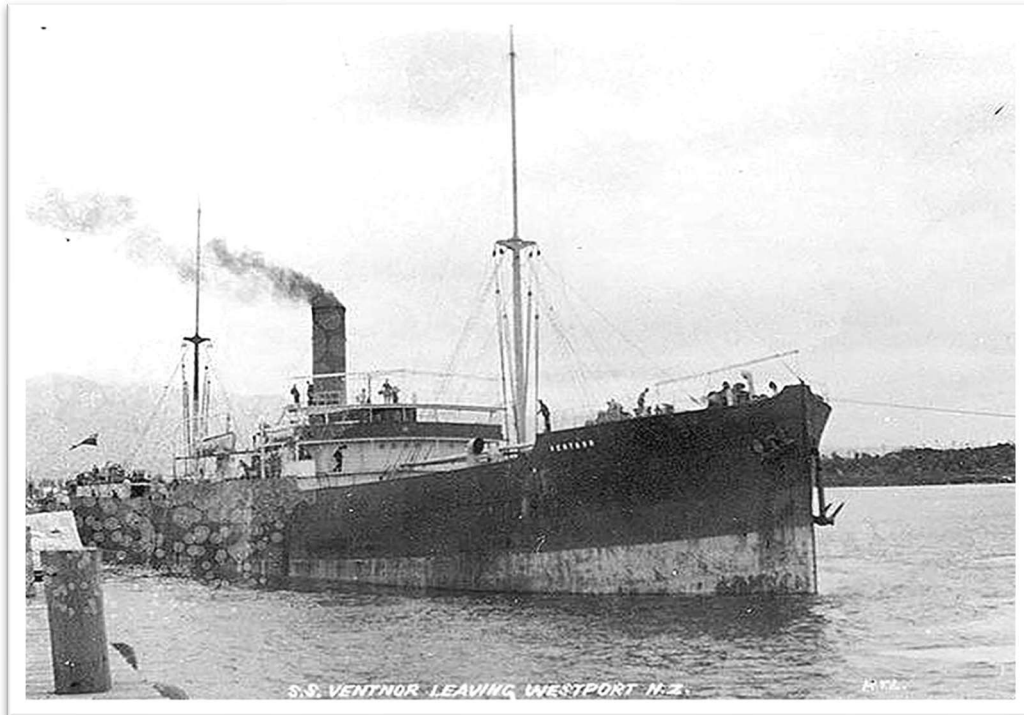
Focus 2 The SS Ventnor connection

One of the most symbolic examples of early Māori and Chinese cooperation occurred following the sinking of the SS Ventnor off the Hokianga coast in 1902. The ship was carrying the remains of 499 Chinese gold miners, which were being repatriated to their ancestral home in Guangdong, China, following Chinese custom (Hui, 2020; O'Leary, 2021; To, 2018). Cheong Sing Tong, a Chinese benevolent society, chartered the SS Ventnor to facilitate the return of the deceased miners' remains (To, 2018). Tragically, the sinking of the Ventnor resulted in the loss of 13 lives, along with the miners' remains (Piper & Xia, 2021; To, 2021). After the shipwreck, the miners' bones washed ashore, scattered along the Hokianga coastline. Local iwi, including Te Roroa and Te Rarawa, discovered the remains and guided by a tradition of manaakitanga (care and generosity), buried the bones in their urupā (burial ground) (O'Leary, 2021; To, 2018, 2021). Despite not knowing the origins of the bones, Māori treated them with the same reverence as they would their own ancestors. This act of kindness, discovered years later when iwi sought to have the remains reunited with their kin, formed the basis for a deep spiritual and cultural connection between Māori and Chinese (Piper & Xia, 2021; To, 2018). The SS Ventnor symbolises cross-cultural respect and collaboration, with commemorative events like memorials and joint Māori-Chinese ceremonies honouring the gold miners and reflecting enduring spiritual connections (To,



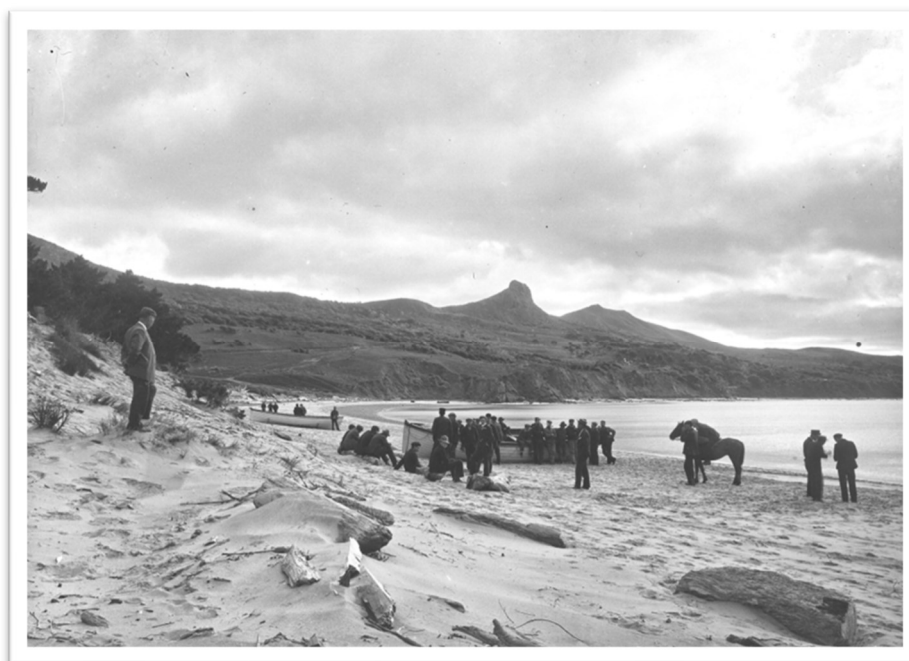
2018). Events, including those during the 清明节(Qing Ming or 'tomb-sweeping' Festival when ancestors' graves are visited), highlight the event's modern significance as a representation of mutual respect and shared history, now recognised as a key part of New Zealand's history and included in the school curriculum (Asia New Zealand Foundation, 2021).

Figure 5 SS Ventnor



Source: To (2018)

Figure 6 After the wreck of the SS Ventnor, 1902



Source: Dawes (1902)



6. MĀORI CONNECTIONS WITH THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

A second major phase of contact relates to Māori engagement with Chinese people in the PRC. This section draws on evidence pre- and post-1949 when China reopened its borders, China's 1970s reforms, and subsequent cultural interaction.

6.1 Engagement with China pre- and post-World War II

Following the end of World War II and the adoption of the Statute of Westminster in 1947, New Zealand began to assert more independent control over its foreign affairs (McKinnon, 2013). New Zealand's engagement with the PRC was, however, constrained by Cold War tensions and New Zealand's alignment with Western powers, particularly the United States (US) and the United Kingdom (UK) (Belich, 2002a; McKinnon, 2013). New Zealand's support for the Korean War (1950-1953) and its participation in alliances like the Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) reinforced political distance from the PRC (Belich, 2002a, 2002b; McKinnon, 2013). Moreover, when it was formed in 1949, the PRC, as a communist state, was met with suspicion and hostility by Western-aligned countries, including New Zealand (McKinnon, 2013). This global political climate, influenced by anti-communist sentiment, further complicated New Zealand-China relations (Belich, 2002b). Māori, like other New Zealanders, had few opportunities to engage with the PRC directly before the 1970s. Nonetheless, while limited in scope, initial Māori and Chinese exchanges laid the groundwork for their future engagement (see Focus 3, Figure 7).

Focus 3 A korowai for Chairman Mao

In 1957, before formal diplomatic ties were established, filmmaker Rudall Hayward was with his wife Ramai Hayward when she presented a cloak by Māori King Korokī to Chairman Mao during a visit to China, symbolising the long-standing connection between the two cultures (McKinnon, 2022; Sharples, 2013b). This gesture highlighted the value both Māori and Chinese place on cultural symbols and gifts. The cloak, later loaned to Te Papa Tongarewa Museum of New Zealand for display alongside the exhibitions *Kura Pounamu: Treasured Stone of Aotearoa New Zealand* and *Brian Brake: Lens on China and New Zealand* from June to October 2013, represents an enduring friendship between the nations (Sharples, 2013a).



Figure 7 Korowai (cloak)



Source: The Embassy of the People's Republic of China in New Zealand (2013)

6.2 Engagement post-1970's reforms

Driven by a global trend of recognising the growing influence of the PRC, including the visit of then US president Richard Nixon and the need for economic diversification, New Zealand established formal diplomatic relations with China in December 1972 (Elder, 2022; McKinnon, 2013). This policy change marked a major milestone in the history of Māori-Chinese political relations, paving the way for more structured political and economic collaboration between the two peoples (New Zealand Foreign Affairs & Trade, 2023).

Māori benefited from this recognition, providing opportunities for structured trade, cultural exchange, and political collaboration with China. Māori leaders were early participants in this renewed diplomatic relationship, with figures like Hone Tuwhare joining a Māori workers' delegation to China in 1973, marking the start of cultural and trade exchanges that would continue to flourish (Elder, 2022). This legacy has become increasingly important as New Zealand and China have grown closer in trade and diplomatic relations. Māori leaders recognise that their connection with China extends beyond economic interests, drawing on shared cultural values and a desire for understanding despite occasional disagreements (Mullins, 2022).

Furthermore, China's reform and opening-up policies, introduced under Deng Xiaoping in the 1970s, transformed the relationship between New Zealand and China (Fraser, 2022). The reforms created scope for international trade and cooperation, allowing Māori to expand their



political and economic engagement with China. Māori leaders, driven by values such as manaakitanga (generosity) and whanaungatanga (relationships), sought to align their long-term goals with China's rapidly growing economy (Mullins, 2022). Māori enterprises began exploring trade and investment possibilities in the Chinese market, seeing China as a strategic export partner for goods such as kaimoana (seafood), forestry products, and agricultural goods (NZIER, 2003).

High-level diplomatic visits have played a critical role in shaping the political relationship between Māori and China. Since formal relations were established in 1972, Chinese leaders have often viewed New Zealand as a proving ground for their international diplomacy credentials, given the country's small size and non-threatening status (Elder, 2022). Over time, diplomatic relationships have helped bridge initial misunderstandings and strengthen ties. New Zealand's first ambassador to China noted that while mutual understanding was limited at the start of the relationship, it improved significantly through ongoing dialogue and cooperation (Elder, 2022).



7. THE MĀORI-CHINA BUSINESS STORY

Māori and Chinese are both entrepreneurial peoples having ancient traditions of enterprise and trade (Firth, 1929; Zhaoyang, 2021), which took divergent routes at the onset of the Austronesian migration from Taiwan (Marshall et al., 2005; Martins, 2020). These peoples are now reconnecting as a result of the formation of modern, industrialised nation-states who are willing to do business once more (Sharples, 2010).

7.1 Expanding bilateral trade

Māori trade with China has been expedited via the New Zealand-China free trade agreement (FTA) which entered into force on 1 October 2008 (MFAT, 2021). This FTA marked a turning point, significantly increasing bilateral trade and creating new avenues for Māori engagement with China (Fisher & Matthews, 2017). As the first developed country to sign a full FTA with China, New Zealand's trade with China increased from NZ\$8 billion in 2008 to over NZ\$35 billion by 2023 (Fisher & Matthews, 2017; New Zealand Foreign Affairs & Trade, 2021; Sharples, 2010; Stats NZ, 2024a). China is now New Zealand's largest trading partner (Fisher & Matthews, 2017; Stats NZ, 2024a).

7.2 Māori goods exports

7.2.1 *The global context*

Establishing with confidence the economic value of Māori goods and services exports is difficult because of data limitations and the initial narrowness of the definition of Māori enterprise (Mika et al., 2019). Until 2016, the definition of Māori business for statistics purposes was limited to Māori authorities, which are businesses that receive, manage, or administer collectively owned Māori assets, mainly land (Stats NZ, 2024b). Māori economic estimates have, therefore, tended to rely on various data sources and assumptions. For example, Mika (2014) estimated the value of global Māori exports in 1999/2000 at about NZ\$875 million, representing around 3% of New Zealand's total exports. Consistent with a growing Māori economy (Nana et al., 2015), by 2012, Business & Economic Research Limited (BERL) economists estimated that Māori goods exports were valued at approximately NZ\$3.4 billion, contributing 5.6% of New Zealand's total exports (Schulze et al., 2021; Schulze & Sanderson, 2018). Māori exports were dominated by natural resource sectors generating NZ\$1.8 billion, with meat and dairy exports accounting for NZ\$1.3 billion (Schulze & Sanderson, 2018).

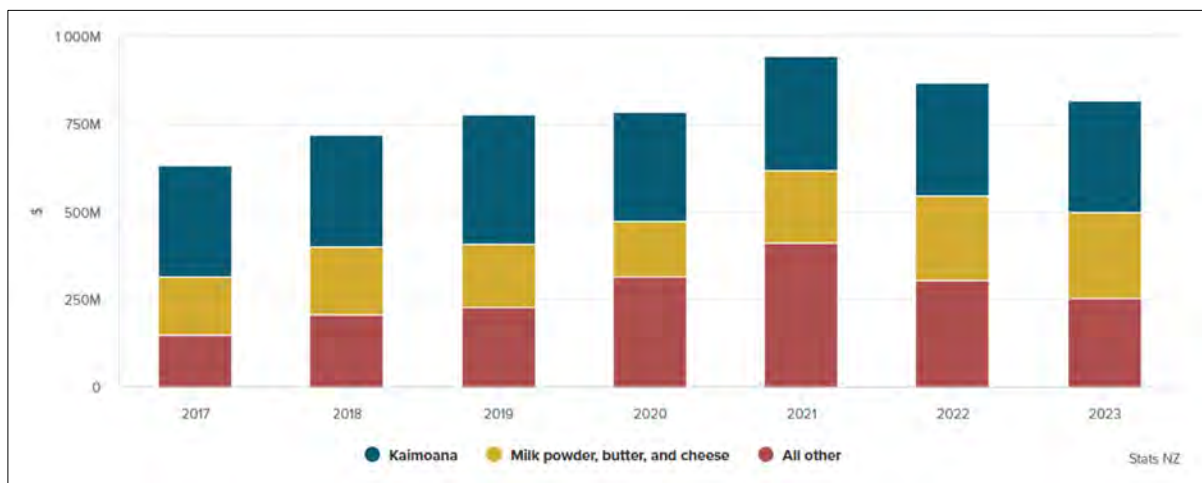
Stats NZ's Tauranga Umanga Māori (Māori business statistics) series provides one of the most dependable, albeit incomplete, sources of data on Māori enterprise and their export activity (Duoba et al., 2023). In 2023, Tauranga Umanga Māori included data on 5,187 Māori businesses, comprising 1,290 Māori authorities and 2,630 other Māori enterprises. Stats NZ defines Māori authorities as "economically significant businesses involved in the collective management of assets held by Māori," while other Māori enterprises are "Māori businesses that are economically significant and are not Māori authorities" (Stats NZ, 2024c, p. 2).

In 2015, Māori authorities exported NZ\$485 million worth of goods to 65 countries (41% to China), with kaimoana (seafood) making up NZ\$304 million, or 63% of total Māori merchandise exports (Schulze et al., 2021; Schulze & Sanderson, 2018). Māori authority goods exports for the



2023 year were NZ\$816 million and NZ\$534 million for other Māori enterprises, producing a combined total value of Māori exports of NZ\$1.35 billion (Stats NZ, 2024c). Figure 8 shows that of the NZ\$816 million in Māori authority goods exports in 2023, kaimoana (seafood) (39%), dairy products (milk powder, butter, and cheese) (30%), and other goods (31%) are similar in value, indicating diversified demand for Māori primary products.

Figure 8 Value of Māori authority goods exports (NZ\$), by selected commodity, 2017-2023



Source: Stats NZ (2024c)

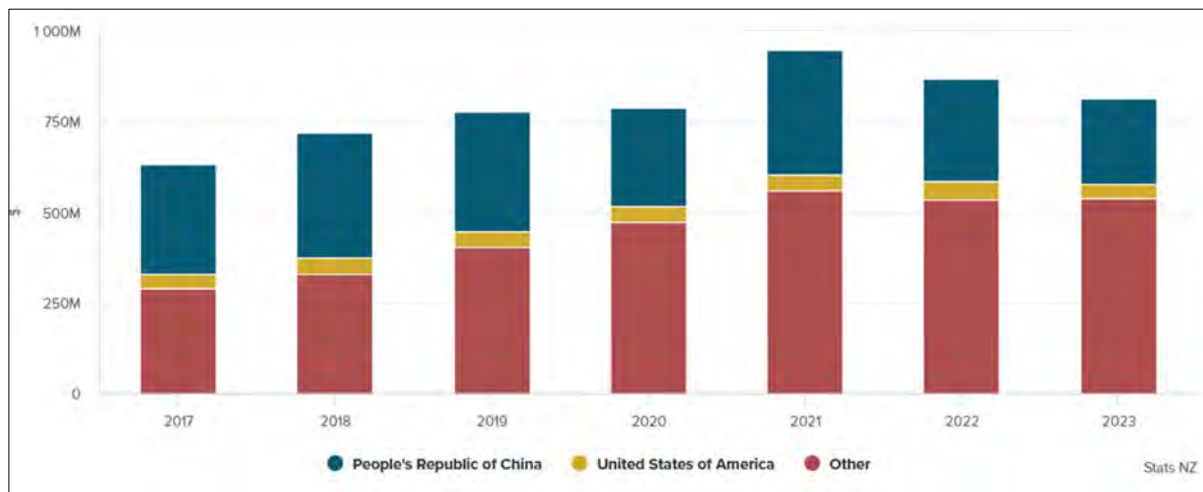
7.2.2 Māori goods exports to China

The Māori economy's primary sector assets align with China's increasing demand for high-quality agricultural and food products, making China a key trading partner (Fisher & Matthews, 2017). Māori businesses capitalised on the opportunities presented by the FTA, utilising their ownership and interests in New Zealand's primary assets. Since the FTA's implementation in 2008, Māori exports to China have seen significant growth.

China consistently represents the most significant destination for Māori exports, with nearly half of all Māori exports destined for the Chinese market (Rout et al., 2022). Yet, Māori exports to China have recently declined, from a peak of NZ\$347 million in 2018 to NZ\$239 million in 2023 (see Figure 9). This drop is likely due to a combination of China's delayed exit from Covid-19 in early 2023, its mixed economic performance and decreased consumer confidence since then, concerns about geopolitical tensions, and consequent efforts to diversify market risk. None of these factors are necessarily long-term constraints on Māori export growth to China.



Figure 9 Value of goods exported by Māori authorities (\$), by selected market



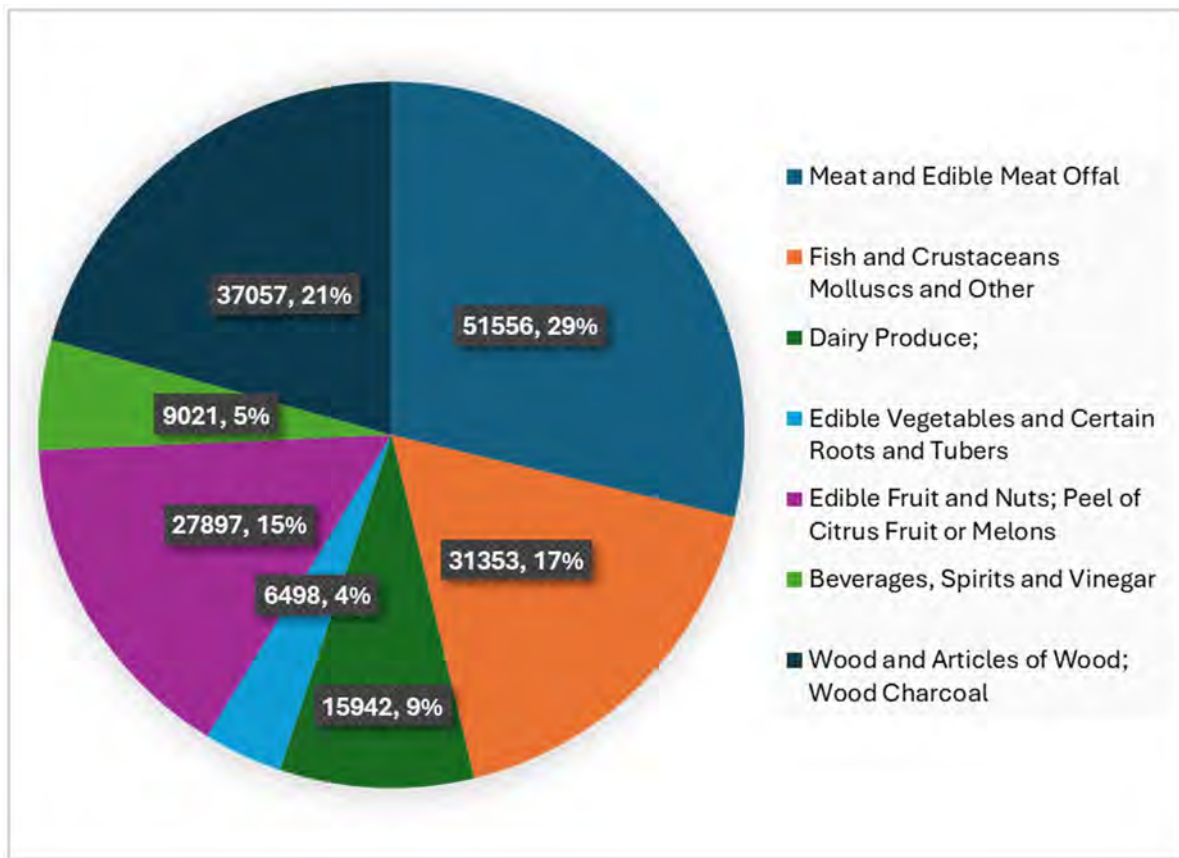
Source: Stats NZ (2024c)

7.3 China's imported goods

Reflecting on China's imports provides an indication of whether what the Māori economy produces is what China wants. China remains a lucrative market for the Māori economy as Chinese consumers seek high-quality, clean, and safe products. In 2022, Chinese imports of goods such as meat, seafood, dairy, vegetables, and wood products remained steady and reached high values (see Figure 10), reflecting strong demand despite China's economic turbulence. China's import volumes highlight the potential for Māori exporters to increase their market presence in key product categories that align with Māori industries. Seafood, for instance, is still a high-consumption product category in China, with fish and crustacean imports exceeding NZ\$31 billion in 2022 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2023a). Māori-produced kaimoana, valued at NZ\$325 million (Stats NZ, 2024b), has substantial room for growth, especially given the premium placed on sustainably sourced products in the Chinese market.



Figure 10 Selected Chinese goods imports (NZD millions)



Source: National Bureau of Statistics of China (2023b); Note figures used NZD converted from USD as at 31 October 2024 using an exchange rate of 1USD to 1.67NZD.

The dairy sector also offers opportunities for Māori. China imported NZ\$15.9 billion in dairy products in 2022 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2023a), demonstrating strong demand for high-quality milk powder, butter, and cheese. Furthermore, other Chinese imports indicate opportunities for Māori business. For instance, China’s demand for wood and forestry goods reached nearly NZ\$37 billion in 2022 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2023a), which aligns well with the Māori economy’s interests in commercial forestry. By strategically scaling production and targeting these high-demand segments, Māori industries could contribute to economic resilience while supporting cultural values through sustainable practices.

Focus 4 Māori-grown kiwifruit to China

Not all Māori exports to China are immediately visible. Fruit produced by Māori Kiwifruit Growers Incorporated (MKGI) (2017) partnering with Zespri is an example. China is Zespri’s largest market, with 20-25% of its global fruit exported there annually. In the year to September 2023, the value of New Zealand kiwifruit exported to China increased 25.8% to reach NZ\$876 million. By the end of the season, this is expected to reach around 30% growth and total more than NZ\$1.1 billion. Around 250 Māori kiwifruit orchards based in nine growing regions of New Zealand, from the top of the North Island to the top of the South Island, make up approximately 10% of this booming industry. MKGI has partnered with Zespri



to export Māori-grown Zespri kiwifruit into markets like Hawai'i and the United Arab Emirates, collaborating on marketing that emphasises the product's provenance. While this marketing approach is not under consideration for China, MKGI general manager Amy Tocker says the grower's collective is committed to taking delegations to China to see for themselves the growth potential there for their fruit. And Tocker sees potential for elements of the Māori-grown story to become stronger in Zespri's brand profile in China over time.

7.4 Investment

Chinese business partners have been willing to consider investing in the Māori economy, but investment cooperation has lagged behind trade in goods and services. Chinese investors often seek freehold ownership of land as part of investments, which is at odds with the land ownership principles of iwi and Māori business. Other tensions remain between Māori and Chinese on matters of resource management and Māori values in governance. There is limited data on the long-term scope and impact of Chinese investment in Māori enterprise. There is a need for culturally aligned partnerships and better data on Māori-Chinese ventures and investments.

In February 2017, Ngāti Kahungunu (2017) hosted the Taniwha Dragon Economic Summit in Hastings to explore Chinese investment in Māori business. The event attracted 250 attendees, including then New Zealand Prime Minister Rt Hon Bill English, ministers, members of parliament, and three mayors. Ngāti Kahungunu reported that one NZ\$42 million investment deal was signed between a local hapū and Chinese partners in the kiwifruit sector. Other deals announced at the hui making up a total of NZ\$138 million focused on supply of Māori primary produce to Chinese partners (Fisher & Matthews, 2017; O'Sullivan, 2017). Another example is Chinese dairy investment company Super Organic Dairy partnering with Māori farming trust Waituhi Kuratau to establish Maui Milk Limited as a sheep milk producer, as well as having a focus on genetic innovation. These strands of the business were combined to form Maui Food Group in 2021 (Farmers Weekly, 2021).

Fuwah International Group, an industrial investment company involved in the construction and operation of luxury hotels, is a prime example of blending elements of Chinese and Māori culture into its business and investments. During construction of Auckland's Park Hyatt Hotel, Fuwah integrated Māori cultural elements into the design while incorporating traditional Chinese features such as 紫檀 (sandalwood) furniture and artwork (China Chamber of Commerce in New Zealand, 2024; Mix Interiors, 2021).

Not all investment deals have been without difficulty, however. Shanghai CRED's acquisition from a US businessman of the Carrington Estate, sitting on Ngāti Kahu land in 2013, was initially viewed as positive with the Chinese company's directors engaging regularly and sensitively with local iwi. The partnership has since become strained (Pitman, 2024). 富华国际集团

7.5 Tourism

Before Covid-19, tourism was New Zealand's largest export industry, contributing \$40.9 billion to the economy and directly employing 8.4% (229,566 people) of the workforce, supporting regional economies (Tourism New Zealand, 2023). Māori have a long history of involvement in the business of tourism in New Zealand, with an increasing focus on cultural authenticity, sustainability, and community wellbeing (Macpherson et al., 2021; Mika & Scheyvens, 2022;



Puriri & McIntosh, 2019). Māori tourism operators emphasise traditional values such as manaakitanga (hospitality) and kaitiakitanga (stewardship) in their operations, products and services (Mika & Scheyvens, 2022). According to Nana et al. (2021), Māori tourism is a key component of the Māori economy, contributing \$1.2 billion to GDP in 2023 (New Zealand Māori Tourism, 2025). Across New Zealand, 3,595 Māori tourism businesses operated in core and general tourism industries, collectively employing over 15,000 people (New Zealand Māori Tourism, 2025). Accommodation, food, art, recreation, and cultural performances are key Māori offerings (Puriri & McIntosh, 2019).

Following the New Zealand-China FTA, Chinese visitors increased significantly from 150,000 to over 400,000 in 2019; making China New Zealand's second-largest pre-Covid-19 visitor market (behind Australia) (Bradley, 2024; Fisher & Matthews, 2017; Howison et al., 2017; Tonumaipē'a, 2018). The September 2024 International Visitor Survey shows that travellers from China spent NZ\$1.24 billion in New Zealand during the previous 12 months (MBIE, 2024). Yet, data on the value of China as a market for Māori tourism operators is difficult to obtain. Given that Māori culture rates highly amongst Chinese visitors (Li, 2020), New Zealand Māori Tourism (NZMT) assesses that Māori tourism benefits substantially from Chinese visitor spend.

Storytelling through the performance of traditional Māori song, music, and dance have found appeal among Chinese tourists and visitors (Mika & Scheyvens, 2022; Puriri & McIntosh, 2019), alongside guided tours of marae, and Māori history and educational programmes. Chinese tourists are often eager to engage with Māori culture and traditions and Māori tourism enterprises have increasingly tailored their offerings to attract Chinese tourists (Fountain et al., 2010; Howison et al., 2017; Puriri & McIntosh, 2019). These mutually enriching interactions provide Chinese visitors with a deeper understanding of New Zealand's Indigenous culture while allowing Māori to strengthen their cultural heritage (Fountain et al., 2010; Mika & Scheyvens, 2022).

Tourism New Zealand's China Visitors & Market Insights (2024, p. 7) indicates that Chinese travellers rate "a place that is significant to Māori" as one of their top activities. Recent research that New Zealand Story (2024) completed on China market perceptions found that Chinese visitors value Māori culture, reflecting an open-minded and tolerant society, with tourism key to shaping perceptions of New Zealand. The research also concluded that educating Chinese consumers on te ao Māori and its contributions to New Zealand ideas, culture and industry can strengthen perceptions and highlight unique aspects of national identity.

Some studies have concluded that encountering Māori culture in tourist settings has led to misunderstandings, with Chinese tourists perceiving these experiences as entertainment rather than appreciating their cultural and spiritual significance (Fountain et al., 2010; Howison et al., 2017). This interpretation mirrors the way in which ethnic minority cultures are sometimes presented to majority Han domestic tourists in China. This perception challenges Māori tourism operators, who seek to provide authentic cultural experiences. Māori see their language and culture as taonga (treasures) whose revitalisation is aided by cultural performances for visitors. Tourists have expressed a desire for cultural narratives and educational material to be available in Chinese (Howison et al., 2017). Overcoming these barriers could enhance Māori and Chinese connections and perceptions through tourism.



7.6 Culture as a strength in trade

7.6.1 Culture improves Māori-China business engagement

The relationship between Māori and Chinese business partners extends beyond economic transactions, reflecting deeper cultural connections based on shared values like manaakitanga (hospitality) and whanaungatanga (relationality) (Mika & Scheyvens, 2022). The cultural dimension sets Māori enterprise apart, allowing its offerings to be more readily accepted in China. When Māori lead with culture a different in-market reaction is generated, which makes a difference in the ability of Māori to engage with Chinese people. Thus, Māori businesses are using their cultural values to create a competitive edge in the Chinese market. Alignment between tikanga Māori and Chinese values resonates with Chinese consumers' appreciation for symbolic, spiritual artefacts (Māori Economic Taskforce, 2011b) (see Focus 5, Figure 8). Additionally, cultural practices such as haka (dance) are enhancing Māori brand recognition and authenticity in China. Moreover, shared values provide a foundation for partnerships (Fan, 2002).

A key element of shared culture is the role of food as a catalyst for relationships with banquets used to show manaakitanga in China and in New Zealand. Chinese food has also become popular with Māori and Pacific peoples. Allied to food is people. The exchange of people through delegations has been crucial to Māori engagement in China despite barriers, which have since arisen such as visa challenges.

Focus 5 He Pakiaka: A whare taonga in Beijing

The central place of Māori culture in the image New Zealand presents to China is exemplified in He Pakiaka, the whare taonga at the New Zealand Embassy in Beijing (see Figure 11).

The name He Pakiaka means 'a plant root.' Strong roots lead to the production of many strong flowers; strong flowers in turn give strong healthy seeds. From an original single seed, many new seeds will be dispersed and many new and strong plants will grow. The seed of He Pakiaka itself was planted in May 1984, when New Zealand Race Relations Conciliator, Mr Hiwi Tauroa, visited China. The project was completed in 1986 through the efforts of tohunga whakairo (master carver) Pakariki Harrison and artists Cliff Whiting and Arnold Manaaki Wilson, who were supported by iwi representatives, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Beryl Small the wife of the then New Zealand ambassador to China, and members of the New Zealand China Trade Association. The whare contains expertly created whakairo (carving), tukutuku (woven reed panels) and kōwhaiwhai (painted patterns). These three art forms are symbolically linked to create a cohesive whole, yet each carver and group independently determined the style and composition of their own work. The heritage and designs of many iwi are represented. Later, the original New Zealand Embassy was demolished and replaced on the same site by a larger building, formally opened in 2019. He Pakiaka was carefully preserved and reinstated. The whare has hosted numerous New Zealand and Chinese visitors to the Embassy, in accordance with tikanga Māori (Māori customs).



Figure 11 He Pakiaka



Source: New Zealand Foreign Affairs and Trade (n. d.)

7.6.2 Māori culture as a competitive advantage for New Zealand

A significant finding of our research is that culture is considered not only an enabler of Māori international business and trade with China, but also a competitive advantage for New Zealand. The power of culture to establish a favourable relationship and procure commercial arrangements has been noticeably underestimated by trade officials in the past. Yet, cultural exchange and cultural diplomacy have been employed to strengthen political and economic relationships between New Zealand and China. Cultural diplomacy uses a country's cultural assets, such as art, language, and education, to promote mutual understanding and respect between nations, whereas exchanges bridge cultures and build relationships (Goff, 2020). In this view, culture and commerce are not seen as separate but are considered integral business practices. This approach has been evident in the New Zealand-China government-to-government relationship where such connections are valued.

7.6.3 Māori provenance resonates with Chinese consumers

A te ao Māori perspective places emphasis on where things come from and taking the time to engage, which resonates with Chinese consumers as they have become increasingly experienced and sophisticated. The novelty of foreign goods has declined as they have become more affordable and commonplace. In addition, products of local companies now increasingly rival or exceed imported goods on price and quality. In this highly competitive market, Chinese shoppers spend considerable time researching the provenance of their intended purchases, to understand their origins, quality and uniqueness. Māori products stand out because of their unique cultural origins, close links to nature and sustainability. This approach, however, must be effectively communicated to be impactful.



7.6.4 Sustainability and cultural integrity

The strategic focus of Māori enterprise on sustainable practice and cultural integrity provides these firms with the basis for a competitive advantage in China. For example, Māori products resonate well with Chinese consumers' preferences for product attributes that emphasise environmental sustainability and product traceability (Rout et al., 2022), making them desirable in the Chinese market (Māori Economic Taskforce, 2011a). Chinese investments in Māori businesses extend to tourism, property, and hospitality sectors, reflecting a growing interest in sustainable, culturally integrated business. While these partnerships provide economic benefits, they also raise concerns about ensuring long-term land use aligns with Māori values (Mullins, 2022).

7.6.5 Adaptability

The size and complexity of the Chinese market obliges New Zealand entrepreneurs to thoroughly research the market, obtain the necessary capital, and secure intellectual property protections early. Māori businesspeople are used to toggling between cultures and, therefore, possess an instinctive cross-cultural adaptability (Manganda et al., 2022; Tretiakov et al., 2020). Māori businesses that succeed often rely on strong cultural connections, aligning their values with the Chinese market, and adapting to China's dynamic consumer behaviour with practical strategies such as using Chinese-preferred payment platforms like 支付宝 (Alipay) and 微信支付 (WeChat Pay).

7.6.6 Māori trade missions

High-level delegations, such as the first Māori ministerial trade mission Dr Pita Sharples led to China in 2010, have fostered business and cultural connections (Fisher & Matthews, 2017; Sharples, 2010). During this trade mission, China was gifted a waharoa (a carved gateway), representing the spirit of manaakitanga (hospitality) and koha (gifting), symbolising the lasting friendship between the Māori and Chinese communities (see Figure 9) (Sharples, 2010; Te Taumata, 2022). Such gestures highlight the combined importance of cultural and economic interests (Mullins, 2022). These missions, particularly those led by ministers in 2010, 2012, and 2015, laid the groundwork for future engagement. Cultural diplomacy, including haka, waiata, and gifting pounamu, developed 关系 gūanxi-whanaungatanga (relationships) based on trust and reciprocity. These missions emphasised culture as integral, distinguishing Māori enterprise from the transactional approach of Western enterprise. Collaboration across sectors during these missions strengthened bonds and provided a framework for ongoing relationships.

Māori enterprise collaboration has been effective in engaging with China. Māori businesses have shared knowledge, collectively marketed products, and combined trade show participation during trade missions. The challenge, however, lies in maintaining these collaborative efforts post-mission among trade delegates, both officials and entrepreneurs. Māori-led trade mission success has been attributed to planning, government support, export readiness of the firms, and strong cultural engagement. Ministerial-led trade missions open doors; export readiness prepares firms to meet China's expectations, while planning helps anticipate risk. On-the-ground verification and due diligence were highlighted as essential for building trust. Additionally, long-term relationship management, cultural competence, and aligning business goals with shared values were identified as critical enablers for Māori-China engagement.



Māori businesses have also adopted innovative trade models, such as the 'food basket' initiative, where smaller businesses collaborate with larger firms to share in-market costs, risks, and experiences. This approach aligns with the Māori value of whanaungatanga (kinship) by fostering collective success, ensuring both cultural and economic objectives are achieved (Mullins, 2022).

Figure 12 Dr Sharples-led delegation by the waharoa at Baoshan Folk Arts Museum, Shanghai (September 2010)



Source: Māori Economic Taskforce (2011c, p. 9)



8. OTHER FORMS OF MĀORI ENGAGEMENT WITH CHINA

Other forms of activity and endeavour, including fashion, art, language, culture, sport, education, research, and technology are part of the story of Māori engagement with China. Snapshots follow as windows into selected forms of Māori engagement with China.

8.1 Art and culture exchange

Greenstone, known as ‘玉 (jade)’ in China and ‘pounamu’ in Māori culture is a notable example of a mutually revered cultural artefact (New Zealand China Trade Association, 2013). Jade has been cherished in China for thousands of years, symbolising power, protection, and human connection to the divine (Ip, 1996; New Zealand China Trade Association, 2013; Powles, 2022). Similarly, pounamu holds immense mana, symbolising peace in Māori culture while also being used as the base material in tools, weapons, and adornments (Mead, 2016; Powles, 2022). Te Papa held an 18-month exhibition, ‘Kura Pounamu,’ in China’s National Museum in Beijing and in provincial museums, helping Māori and Chinese audiences engage with the heritage these stones embody, fostering stronger cultural connections (New Zealand China Trade Association, 2013; Powles, 2022). Pounamu and jade artists have also exchanged visits.

Exhibitions have been a valued form of cultural exchange. For example, Te Puia, the Māori Arts and Craft Institute showcased Māori art in China in an exhibition called Tuku Iho, the Living Legacy (Te Ao Māori News, 2019). China was the first country to host Tuku Iho, in Beijing in 2013. The exhibition returned to Shanghai in 2019 as the centrepiece of the China-New Zealand Year of Tourism—illustrating the links between cultural engagement and the forging of economic partnerships. The exhibition featured 70 traditional artworks with onsite displays of wood, stone, bone, and jade carving, as well as tā moko (traditional tattooing). With Mayor Meng Foon and his district council’s support, Gisborne hosted a month-long art exhibition in 2008 in Beijing coinciding with the Summer Olympics. The exhibition attracted over 40,000 visitors (Foon, 2022).

8.2 Sport

Sporting links between Māori and China are not widespread, as both countries strengths are in different codes. Nonetheless, examples of successful engagement in sport can be observed.

8.2.1 Basketball

Tai Wynyard (Ngāpuhi) advanced his professional basketball career by accepting a contract to play the 3x3 form of the game with the Shanghai Sharks—the first New Zealander to professionally play this format in China (Sharp, 2023). Wynyard connected with the Sharks while playing at a 3x3 tournament in Singapore. He says he accepted their offer to gain new experiences in Asia and play 3x3 basketball as well as the more usual five-player format. The Sharks offered an attractive package—consistent with the rewards on offer for foreign players in football (soccer) and other national sports leagues in China. For Wynyard, a major difference is the training style between New Zealand and China, with shorter sessions and more rest time



at home. There are similarities with Māori and Pacific cultures too, such as Chinese ‘table’ culture—building personal and business connections through sharing food and drink.

New Zealand basketball legend Pero Cameron (Ngāpuhi) is another basketball professional now working in China. In August 2024, Cameron stepped down from his role as Tall Blacks coach to coach the Ningbo Rockets in China’s professional basketball league (Basketball New Zealand, 2024). Basketball New Zealand does not promote particular leagues like China to up-and-coming kiwi players but will try to assist them on the pathway they choose. Basketball New Zealand general manager of high performance Paul Downes says that if young people aspire to play in any overseas league “it’s making sure it is a responsible choice” (Reid, 2024, p. 9).

8.2.2 Rugby

In recent years, the Bay of Plenty Rugby Union (BOPRU), which contains Māori talent at coach and player level, explored strategic partnerships in Asia. The union found Japan a mature market with limited opportunities for growth. Instead, the union settled on China as largely untapped. This decision coincided with a shift in China from promotion of individual sports to team sports and China’s determination to perform well in a range of sports at the Olympics. Chinese businesspeople in the Bay of Plenty as well as people at Zespri with experience in China, helped BOPRU. After 18 months of negotiations, BOPRU signed a partnership agreement with the China Rugby Football Association to assist with the development of rugby in China.

One outcome of this new relationship was the chance for the Bay of Plenty to host the Chinese women’s sevens team for training prior to their qualification matches for the 2024 Paris Olympics. A group of 25 players, and 10 coaches and managers including some originally from the Bay of Plenty, travelled twice from China to train in Rotorua and Tauranga. China’s women’s sevens team qualified for Paris, lost to New Zealand in their first pool match, but unexpectedly defeated Fiji (Xinhua, 2024). BOPRU has made numerous trips to China and sent coaches to Chinese schools and universities to teach rugby to students. According to BOPRU chief executive Mike Rogers, a natural affinity between Māori and Chinese cultures helped to build bridges. Teaching Māori greetings and haka are a popular part of school visits, strengthening the connection to local culture. BOPRU recommends all New Zealand organisations harness this interest and connection.

8.3 Fashion and design

Fashion designer and New Zealand China Council member Kiri Nathan has been forging links with China for her label and as part of the Kāhui Māori Fashion Collective which she established after a visit to China in 2019. After a visit to southern China, Kiri coordinated 15 Māori creatives to visit with an “into market” focus (Nathan, 2025, p. 1), facilitating high-level meetings with market buyers and distributors. Learning and adapting to business and social culture in China has been difficult but necessary to connect with the Chinese fashion and textiles sector.



As a foreigner trying to do business in China, I think the first thing we need to do is acknowledge and respect that they are tangata whenua (the people of that land) and with that comes rights. The right to do business in a manner that has been developed over 8000 years. We, as manuhiri (visitors), need to learn how to adapt and respect their whakapapa (genealogy), language and their business culture—not the other way around. In the process of my learning, I've made many costly mistakes. Ones that I'd like to try and help other Māori designers avoid—Kiri Nathan



(Asia New Zealand Foundation, 2019, p. 1)

Kiri's brand is not focused on a certain aesthetic, but on the brand's ethos, which is consistent with an ancient belief system intrinsically aligned with Chinese and Māori cultures. Kiri's success in the Chinese market is attributed to her willingness to learn about China's culture and how they conduct business and trade, reinforced by what she says is a "natural ease and understanding between Chinese and Māori" (Asia New Zealand Foundation, 2019, p. 1).

8.4 Technology

A visit to China in July 2024 by 10 Māori entrepreneurs in game development and creative media explored the potential for collaboration with China's fast-evolving and well-resourced gaming and tech sectors (Asia New Zealand Foundation, 2024). The Asia New Zealand Foundation Te Whītau Tūhono organised trip took in Guangzhou, Shenzhen and Shanghai, meeting WeChat developers Tencent, China's game developers association, and attending China Joy, in Shanghai. While Japan has traditionally been the primary inspiration for Māori digital sector professionals seeking to connect with Asia, China is catching up. The purpose of the visit was to strengthen the knowledge and confidence Māori digital entrepreneurs need to develop business and creative collaborations in China. Asia New Zealand Foundation's business programme manager Ethan Jones (Ngāi Takoto, Te Aupōuri) says, "Māori tend to need less cultural translation in China, with approaches like establishing relationships before transacting business a feature of both cultures." "Māori are also familiar with transitioning between two cultures and worlds in New Zealand, making it easier to do so in China as well," says Jones.

One of the delegates, founder of interactive media for entertainment and education company 4Phase Aotearoa, found experience rewarding:



There was a high level of respect between the two cultures, and we understood each other inherently in ways that can't always be interpreted or articulated. The cultural appreciation that we received was phenomenal and really highlighted how the rest of the world sees Māori in comparison to the reality we face on our own land, in our own home—Morgana Watson



(Asia New Zealand Foundation, 2024, p. 1)



Focus 6 Tikanga 2.0 and artificial intelligence

Dr Leonard (Ed) Robson (Te Rarawa, Ngāpuhi) is leading a team at Te Pūtahitanga Data Science to harness artificial intelligence (AI) to give Māori businesses a tikanga Māori edge and engage successfully with Chinese partners (He Pātai AI Systems Ltd, n. d.).

Dr Robson's long career in informational technology (IT) included roles at IBM based in Asia, where he observed that China was advancing its modernisation within the framework of its traditional (Confucianist and Taoist) cultural and philosophical principles, as were Māori; and that there were similarities between both frameworks. This led to Dr Robson completing his PhD research on converging Sino and Māori belief systems at Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi (Robson, 2020).

Te Pūtahitanga Data Science has now combined his research and IT backgrounds to develop an AI tool to assist Māori to engage effectively with China, by channelling knowledge of the tikanga of both cultures. With funding, there is potential to create a new digital tool to give Māori businesses another advantage in the Chinese market.

8.5 Traditional medicine

Research is underway to explore common elements and opportunities for commercial development between traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) and rongoā Māori (RM), which refers to traditional Māori healing and medicine. Both TCM and RM sit alongside conventional medicine, offering alternative philosophies and treatments which echo that body of knowledge (Zhang, 2024). TCM and RM share similarities and differences. Commonalities include a holistic approach to health spanning physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual elements; a focus on bodily energy flow; use of plants with medicinal qualities; manual manipulation; and a personalised approach. Yet the two medical traditions come from different cultural origins and use different theoretical principles, with different diagnostic and manipulation techniques used.

Mirimiri (massage) techniques in RM and Tuina practice in TCM are examples of treatments with some elements in common across both cultures (Manawaora, n. d.). Mirimiri aligns with the belief that tension build up in the body reflects accumulated trauma and stress which can cause illness, pain, or dysfunction if untreated. Tuina is based on the theory that imbalances of 气 *qi*, the body's vital life force or energy, can cause blockages that lead to symptoms such as pain and illness (Rush & Cronkleton, 2024). Tuina practitioners use their fingers to apply pressure to target specific acupoints and to stimulate these points.

TCM is more commercialised than RM. This is due to historical differences but could offer signposts for Māori practitioners who aspire to culturally authentic, commercially viable, and evidence-based practice (Mika et al., 2024). According to Dame Naida Glavish, Māori may feel distrust about sharing their intellectual property, wanting to avoid the misuse or abuse of their practices. Furthermore, RM practitioners rarely seek payment which is not the case with TCM. The worldwide use of Artemisinin, an extract from a medicinal plant first mentioned in Chinese medical texts dating back to the Eastern Jin Dynasty (317-420AD), is a remarkable example of TCM commercialisation (Wang et al., 2019).



8.6 Māori language learning in China

Beijing Foreign Studies University (BFSU) in China's capital city offers a te reo Māori language paper to undergraduate students, alongside other Pacific languages including Papua New Guinea's Tok Pisin, Samoan and Tongan (see Figure 10). It is compulsory for language students at the university to study English and another mainstream foreign language. Te reo Māori is then offered to students with additional interest. The supply of teaching staff is a challenge. The paper is taught by a Chinese teacher who studied at the University of Auckland.

Figure 13 New Zealand China Council visit to Beijing Foreign Studies University, November 2024



Source: New Zealand China Council (2024)



9. PERSPECTIVES ON MĀORI-CHINA ENGAGEMENT

9.1 Knowledge-holder perspectives

In addition to the review of written material, we held kōrerorero (conversations) with 14 people who had first-hand knowledge and experience of Māori engaging with China. The kōrerorero were online or in-person, lasting approximately 60 minutes, covering their personal stories and connection to the subject. Participants shared their memories and knowledge of historic and more recent Māori engagement with China, and what they considered as vital to future engagement.

Table 2 Participants

Participant	Brief description of the participant
P1	A tāne of mixed Chinese, Māori, and Pākehā heritage working in a kaitiaki role for his iwi. He has worked in a major city in China and his family has a legacy in market gardening around their marae.
P2	A tāne with Cantonese heritage, managing an organisation that facilitates cultural exchanges between New Zealand and Asia. His work focuses on promoting New Zealand's relations with China and the rest of Asia.
P3	A tāne who has worked as a government official with experience in China, including language studies and diplomatic work. He was engaged in developing international relations between New Zealand and China.
P4	A tāne with Māori whakapapa who has held various leadership roles, including working in trade and investment, both domestically and internationally. He has experience of working in China.
P5	A wāhine born in China and raised in Hong Kong, with close ties to early Chinese immigrants who interacted with Māori communities through market gardening.
P6	A tāne involved in iwi Māori fisheries. The focus of his work is on reconnecting with his iwi heritage and ensuring sustainability in the fishing industry.
P7	A New Zealand-born tāne who took part in one of the earliest exchange programmes between New Zealand and China. He is particularly interested in Chinese history and cultural exchanges.
P8	A wāhine who identifies as Māori and has experience in foreign affairs, having served as a New Zealand official and engaged in promoting relations between New Zealand and China in trade.



P9	A tāne of mixed heritage with a background in public policy, particularly focused on Māori economic development. He has been involved in various trade missions to China and has in-depth knowledge about the Chinese market.
P10	A wāhine with Māori and Chinese heritage, whose family has a history of migration between China and New Zealand. She maintains strong ties to both cultures and has been involved in her family's market gardening business.
P11	A wāhine working in the fashion industry who has long-established relationships and extensive knowledge of collaborating with Chinese counterparts.
P12	A tāne who identifies as Māori and has experience in tribal governance and international business. He has experience in engaging with China in previous trade delegations.
P13	A wāhine who migrated from mainland China and initially came to New Zealand as an international student. She became a small business owner, governance official, and has extensively collaborated with Māori.
P14	A tāne who migrated from mainland China, initially arriving as an international student. He works as a manager with customer-facing responsibilities and actively interacts with Māori consumers in this role.

9.2 What to engage on

When asked about what Māori should prioritise when engaging with China, participants identified trade, tourism, culture, and creative industries of art, fashion, and digital storytelling.

9.2.1 Trade and economic opportunities

Growth in trade with China is attributed to New Zealand's FTA with China and the size of the Chinese population, which have been beneficial for Māori. Māori trade with China is particularly strong in the primary industries of farming, fisheries, and forestry. Their scale and long-standing channels are significant for Māori exporters, but exports have expanded beyond commodities to sophisticated products evident in innovations like mozzarella cheese (P8). This shift aligns with Chinese consumer preferences for high-quality products incorporating cultural provenance.

"A lot of our staples... the dairy and the meat and wool, etc., but then also a lot more sophistication...what Fonterra, for example, is doing in the China market in terms of... mozzarella. Innovation around mozzarella, and now I think the last stat I heard is that Fonterra cheese was topping 50% of China's pizzas with this fast-growing mozzarella." (P8)

The FTA has facilitated Māori trade growth, creating access for more Māori enterprises to this large and dynamic market. By tapping into consumer trends and enhancing product offerings, Māori businesses have the potential to build substantial market share in China.



9.2.2 Tourism and cultural experiences

Chinese interest in Indigenous culture presents a strategic opportunity in the tourism sector. Māori tourism offerings, which have focused on cultural experiences, align well with the trend of Chinese tourists shifting from large-group tours to more personalised, small-group experiences. This preference change creates a fitting context for Māori tourism operators who excel in offering intimate, educational encounters that emphasise cultural heritage, values, and practices.

“The Chinese are now travelling in much smaller groups, or couples... travelling together. So, there is a bit of change coming from the China market.” (P9)

NZMT, a pivotal organisation in this sector, has sought to inform Māori operators about the cultural preferences of Chinese tourists. By collaborating with key Chinese tourism industry actors, Māori tourism operators have managed to stay ahead of changing market preferences.

“We kind of helped to build up...knowledge, including on itineraries, about Māori tourism, so highlighted opportunities that Chinese tourists may wish to seek, and making sure Māori tourism operators are well informed about the China market.” (P9)

By crafting tourism experiences that cater to the Chinese market’s interests in Indigenous culture, Māori tourism operators can strengthen their appeal and create lasting connections.

9.2.3 Māori art, fashion, and creative industries

Creative industries are another area in which to engage with China, particularly art, fashion, and digital storytelling. Māori-led delegations have effectively showcased these industries in China, establishing significant connections with influential Chinese companies and consumer markets. For example, in 2017, a Māori-led fashion delegation travelled to Guangzhou for the Guangdong Fashion Week, which allowed Māori designers to establish a foothold, building the groundwork for future exchanges and collaborations. Since then, Māori representation in Chinese fashion events has expanded, highlighting interest for Māori creative works in the Chinese market.

Success in cultural initiatives has been carried over to gaming and digital media. For instance, a recent Asia New Zealand Foundation delegation enabled Māori gaming developers and digital storytellers to visit major Chinese cities, where the scale and infrastructure of Chinese media and tech companies certainly left an impression.

“We got to places like Tencent, MiHoYo, or domestic company, GDC. They’re called gaming development creatives. And we got to Shanghai Museum and Baoshan Folk Art Museum in Shanghai, and so I didn’t realise until I got there, because I was reading, you know, the program before I left, as you do, and trying to familiarise myself with people and things, and I didn’t realise...the scale that they’re working on, and the intentionality, you know.” (P10)



These exchanges provide a pathway for Māori creatives to connect with Chinese audiences while simultaneously raising the profile of Māori culture and artistic expression in the Chinese market.

9.2.4 Education and knowledge exchange

Educational and knowledge-sharing exchanges, though not strictly commercial, form an important part of Māori engagement with China. These exchanges create an avenue for cultural and professional development, allowing participants to gain insights into each other's cultures and world views. Programmes like the 'Root Seeking' tours funded by the New Zealand Chinese Association, enabled young Chinese New Zealanders to explore their ancestral villages in China, which hold a cultural resonance similar to the Māori concept of tūrangawaewae (literally, 'a place on which to stand,' denoted by one's ancestral connections, and expressed through pepeha or tribal sayings). Political and economic barriers such as visa complexities, however, often hinder such exchanges, highlighting the need for more accessible and consistent support.

"Since about 2015, 2016... we haven't been able to get visas for our journalists to go to China... political stumbling blocks... there's all these technical rules and bureaucracy that we've had to work through." (P2)

As education and knowledge exchanges continue, they promise to deepen the Māori-China relationship by fostering mutual understanding. These exchanges can bridge cultural divides, reinforce ancestral connections, and lay the groundwork for continued cooperation.

9.3 What works when engaging with China

9.3.1 Cultural diplomacy

Cultural diplomacy offers a powerful method for advancing Māori-China relations. Māori-led trade missions have increasingly incorporated cultural elements such as kapa haka (concert party) and waiata (song), which have become valued features of delegations to China. These practices are not simply ceremonial, but are integral features of Māori engagement, enabling Māori and Chinese counterparts to connect more deeply. The cultural parallels between the Māori concept of whanaungatanga (relationships) and the Chinese concept of 关系 gūanxi (relationships and trust) facilitate mutual understanding and respect, creating a personalised basis for engagement. This relational approach is particularly effective in China, where business interactions are often grounded in personal relationships.

"Māori culture, having...a kapa haka group as part of a trade delegation... it definitely breaks the ice in some of those formal settings, and it opens the door where other countries don't have that advantage." (P9)

By embracing cultural diplomacy as a core component of trade missions, Māori representatives gain an advantage among Chinese audiences, where an appreciation for cultural authenticity can distinguish Māori businesses. This approach enables Māori to differentiate themselves from other delegations, providing Māori businesses with a competitive edge. Understanding 关系 gūanxi has allowed Māori delegations to foster deep connections with Chinese counterparts, moving beyond transactional interactions toward partnerships rooted in respect and reciprocity. For instance, the Chinese practice of getting to



know business partners on a personal level, often over shared meals and social gatherings, mirrors the Māori approach of whakawhanaungatanga (establishing relationships), making culture a natural foundation for building trust.

“Māori understood that [关系 gūanxi], compared to a very Western construct of which was quite transactional, of doing business. And that was something which was a real eye opener...for many people and why that Māori-China kind of engagement was really so strong.” (P9)

By prioritising relationship-building, Māori representatives have found receptivity and enthusiasm among Chinese counterparts, creating an atmosphere conducive to collaboration.

9.3.2 Leading with culture

Extending on the idea of cultural diplomacy, when Māori enterprises lead with culture, they generate a unique response in the Chinese market. For example, a Māori fashion designer podcast illustrates how effectively Māori culture can create strong bonds with Chinese consumers. Māori business leaders who played a significant role in the early Sharples-led trade missions to China, have affirmed these insights through first-hand experience. Māori enterprises that communicate their origins and embrace a te ao Māori perspective resonate strongly with Chinese consumers, though this cultural attribute is not always fully conveyed.

“Like Kiri Nathan, and I did a podcast with her for the New Zealand China Council, and she talks about the importance of leading with culture. And it's always amazing to see how Kiri does that. She does that so effectively, because you can really see how she's able to form a connection and a bond, because culture is so strong in China as well, and it makes a real difference.” (P8)

“When I have experienced it, you can, you know, all of the things that you hear are true and really resonated, and that you often find that Māori business and the focus on where things come from, and taking a te ao Māori perspective, really resonates with Chinese people and Chinese consumers.” (P8)

Leading with culture effectively creates a memorable impression for Chinese people, as it allows Māori delegates to showcase values and stories unique to their communities.

9.3.3 Collaborative approach

Māori trade missions and business delegations to China are often structured around kaupapa Māori (a Māori approach), where the emphasis is on collective purpose. Collaboration within Māori business coalitions has proven advantageous, as firms operate without competition, fostering a culture of mutual support where larger firms assist smaller ones. An example is the 2015 trade mission led by Māori development minister Te Ururoa Flavell, where Māori businesses came together to explore opportunities in China. Māori practices such as waiata were integrated into the mission, which highlighted respect and reduced cultural barriers in formal settings.



"In 2015, we had a delegation visiting led by Te Ururoa Flavell, who was then the Minister of Māori Development. He had probably about 15 or 16 people coming with him... all in differing ways connected to Māori business. Some already had links in China, some were developing them." (P4)

An example of in-market collaboration is when products such as clams, wine, and oysters from different companies were branded as Māori produce, enhancing their in-market appeal.

"The benefits of working with Māori business in a coalition is that they're really willing to share. So, a lot of value is just brought by bringing them together so the larger companies can share with the smaller ones. And everyone is really open. There was absolutely no competition." (P8)

This collaborative model ensures that Māori enterprises, especially the smaller ones, gain support from larger firms, strengthening their ability to be competitive in the Chinese market.

9.3.4 In-market support and due diligence

While culture opens doors, business acumen and on-the-ground in-market partners with local knowledge, language skills, and networks are essential to commercialising ideas in China.

"Mēnā pono ana koe, ka pono ana rātau, ko tērā ko te tūāpapa mō te whāinga i ngā deals (Good faith behaviour on both sides is a foundation for achieving commercial goals). He āhuetanga pērā i te whakawhanaungatanga, ēngari he āhua rerekē ki tō te Māori (That's a relational approach, but it's a little different to Māori)".

Navigating the Chinese market presents a considerable challenge, especially for smaller Māori enterprises, due to the scale required and the costs associated with market entry. For instance, a honey producer stressed the need to receive assistance with trademark registration and due diligence on potential Chinese partners. Given China's 'first to file' system, businesses must secure trademarks early to protect brand ownership. This early protection of brand and business names is essential, as rebranding can be costly if a different name is later required.

Conducting due diligence on partners in China is essential. This process often involves verifying in-person the legitimacy of firms' claims about their capabilities. For instance, when significant interest in New Zealand honey emerged, one prospective Chinese partner claimed they had access to 1,000 stores. This claim was verified through local business contacts, assuring the Māori enterprise involved of the credibility of the partnership.

Māori enterprises with significant scale are doing well in China, but their strength comes from having sufficient size, using distribution channels, having the right business partner, right labels, and name, and demonstrating an ability to deliver.

"The ones that have been most effective, and this is just what I think rather than what I can sort of actually verify, they would have been the ones that sort of had a decent size and scale and... there's, definitely one of the honey producers was working... when they've got the right partner, when the right partnerships are made, and they've got the scale to supply the market, and they've got all of the basics done right... so the right labelling



and marketing and packaging, and they're able to do all of the follow-through." (P8)

9.3.5 Authenticity and sustainability

The authenticity and sustainability inherent in Māori business practices resonate strongly within the Chinese market, where there is an increasing demand for genuine, safe, and sustainable products. Māori enterprises that communicate their commitment to environmental stewardship, cultural integrity, and community wellbeing appeal to Chinese consumers who value these attributes. The strength of Māori businesses lies in their connection to the land and people, qualities that Chinese consumers recognise and appreciate. For instance, Māori food and beverage clusters like Haukai have focused on authentically representing Māori culture, which appeals to consumers who value authenticity and sustainability. By emphasising these principles, Māori enterprises differentiate themselves in China.

"I think that Māori business does also...have an advantage, in terms of what Māori businesses are producing and their connection to the land and their care for people and place. And so, I think that those things resonate as well when you've got that sort of direct connection, and that's important. Those are things that really will resonate to Chinese consumers." (P8)

In an increasingly competitive market, Māori enterprises that communicate these values effectively gain a competitive edge in China.



10. FUTURE MĀORI-CHINA ENGAGEMENT

This study considered Māori perceptions of China as well as new areas for cooperation, and the actions needed to advance Māori engagement with China.

10.1 Expansive opportunities for trade and exchange

Opportunities for beneficial growth in Māori engagement with China include cultural and business exchanges, joint ventures, expanding exports in sectors in which Māori stand out, and making full use of the FTA with China. Māori values-based engagement in the China market has worked well and could be extended. Māori cultural and intellectual property have been at risk, but new safeguards in the revamped FTA should help avert this. Chinese tourists value Indigenous cultural tourism but also want technology-infused cultural signposts and translation.

Future Māori-China engagement is influenced by the political and economic position of Māori in New Zealand. While treaty settlements have seen iwi rapidly redevelop their tribal economies and contribute substantially to New Zealand's economy (Barry & Henger, 2024), the constitutional status of Māori as tangata whenua is less secure (Duff, 2023). The Māori response has been to revive kotahitanga (Māori unity) (Meijl, 2024) as a national movement, which was the basis for the formation of the Kīngitanga (King Movement) (Ruru, 2024).

10.2 A stronger Māori economy provides a foundation

Despite a deteriorating political climate for Māori and treaty policy, te ōhanga Māori (the Māori economy) is growing, with the value of Māori economic assets revised from NZ\$69 billion in 2018 to NZ\$119 billion in 2023 (Schulze, 2024). The Māori economy exists as source of wellbeing, underpinned by Māori values, with kaitiakitanga operating as an intergenerational ethic of sustainability (Bathurst, 2022; Best, 2013; Kohere, 2023). As Māori enterprises increasingly seek to conduct business internationally (Jurado & Mika, 2022), an innate obligation to honour ancestral legacies and provide for future generations continues to operate as a potent ethic for responsible business (Mika et al., 2020b). A challenge, however, for Māori enterprise is being underprepared for China. Segmenting the market into manageable niches, collaborating with other enterprises, and finding the right partner represent cogent responses to this challenge.

10.3 Responding to the diversification call

Some concern was evident about the overdependence of Māori exporters on the Chinese market should New Zealand-China relations deteriorate, with some fearing economic retaliatory action. Concerns about this risk among Māori are, however, tempered by a nuanced disposition toward China. The ability to expand Māori relationships with China could be constrained by the official stance of either government on the bilateral relationship. Seeking balanced advice on diversification is encouraged.



10.4 Māori and Chinese perceptions of each other

In terms of perceptions, many in New Zealand remain cautious of China because of its political ideology. Yet, Māori are more open to China because of a focus on personal relationships and ancestral connections. Relationships between Māori and Chinese are mixed, with positive views observed in environments such as workplaces where social interaction is routine, and negative views apparent where social interaction is more limited. Social distance can lead to stereotypical views, misunderstandings, and transgressions. Local effort within the Māori and Chinese communities to promote mutual understanding offers strength to the continuity of Māori-China relations. But underlying tensions remain, which may benefit from culturally appropriate processes for resolving conflict such as cultural exchanges and tourism, joint ventures, and economic cooperation with a focus on Māori industrial strengths. China sees engaging with Māori as critical to engaging with New Zealand. Evidence suggests that China's appreciation of the Māori economy is likely more favourable than it is sometimes perceived to be. Despite this, China seems unfamiliar with the significance of the Māori economy and treaty settlements. When buying from or investing in New Zealand, Chinese business is considering how the Māori dimension plays out.

10.5 Diverse opportunities available

New Zealand's default view of China as an economic opportunity negates seeing the country's multiple realities and its non-economic value. Future Māori-China engagement presents limitless opportunities spanning cultural, political, and economic areas. Shared values and leveraging both technological advancements and trade agreements, Māori and Chinese communities have the potential to create mutually beneficial, long-term relationships and cultural understanding. There is, however, scope for additional research on early Māori engagement, the state of Māori business and trade in China, and support for Māori engagement.



11. RECOMMENDATIONS

For those seeking to advance and promote future engagement between Māori and China for a balanced and resilient relationship, we recommend the following actions:

- a. **Increase awareness through education**, social marketing, and events of the historical connections between Māori and Chinese communities, particularly in relation to events such as the SS Ventnor and Māori contributions to early Chinese-owned market gardens;
- b. **Support further research** on early as well as contemporary Māori-Chinese interactions in New Zealand through, for example, oral histories, archival research, and collaborative studies between Māori and Chinese scholars;
- c. **Strengthen cultural diplomacy** by developing a policy, training, development and an exchange programme for Māori and Chinese officials, industry and business leaders who aspire to understand and master cultural diplomacy in relation to international business, trade, and investment, including provision for artistic collaborations, language exchanges, and cultural festivals as platforms for engagement;
- d. **Support integration of cultural elements** in Māori engagement with China on business and trade missions including, for example, kapa haka, waiata, and pounamu gifting to build trust (关系 guānxi) and meaningful connections which differentiate Māori enterprise;
- e. **Promote economic collaboration** among Māori enterprise, particularly in tourism, agriculture, the arts, and digital trade, as they prepare for opportunities in China, given Māori economic growth and trade with China which offer a foundation for mutual benefit;
- f. **Invest in export readiness and market intelligence** to help Māori enterprises address scalability challenges and achieve sustainable business growth through enterprise collaboration, access to export-readiness and customised business incubator services, and market research and product development linked to Chinese consumer trends;
- g. **Improve digital capability** of Māori enterprise by supporting e-commerce adoption (e.g., WeChat, Alipay) in the Chinese market and exploring the effectiveness of Māori enterprises' e-commerce strategies and innovative ways to protect Māori intellectual and cultural property in China;
- h. **Support business research** on the impact of Chinese investments in Māori enterprise, particularly regarding governance structures, cultural preservation, resource management, and the efficacy of culture as a competitive advantage;
- i. **Explore and support Māori-China collaboration** on sustainability by aligning Māori principles such as kaitiakitanga (stewardship) with Chinese practices like 风水 (fēngshuǐ) to unlock the impact of joint environmental initiatives; and
- j. **Develop the cultural capability of Māori and Chinese enterprises** by learning about each other's cultures, languages, and supporting people-to-people exchanges among individuals and institutions, involving kaupapa Māori education and health.



12. CONCLUSION

This report set out to explore Māori approaches to engagement with China past, present, and future to support a balanced and resilient relationship between Aotearoa New Zealand and China. The study involved working with the New Zealand China Council team to identify research priorities, reviewing available literature on historical, cultural, and economic contact between Māori and China, and kōrerorero with Māori, Chinese, and Pākehā who have first-hand experience of Māori-China engagement in business, diplomatic, and cultural capacities.

We draw these conclusions from the research:

- A strong cultural and historical foundation exists for current and future Māori-China engagement based on shared ancestry, values, and mutually beneficial exchange;
- Cultural diplomacy where culture leads and business follows through sharing art, artistic expression, kai and koha has been highly effective in Māori-China engagements;
- A history of Māori engagement with China through interaction with Chinese immigrants as goldminers, market gardeners, and marriage partners has reinforced domestic ties;
- More recent Māori engagement with China through collaboration with Chinese firms in housing, seafood, fashion, health, education, languages has reinforced overseas ties;
- The more significant risk to future Māori engagement with China is likely to be New Zealand's changing stance on China.

Finally, public and private investments in Māori enterprise collaboration, export-readiness, market intelligence, research on Māori business in China, cultural diplomacy, and cultural, business, and science exchanges are needed to advance Māori engagement with China. Critical gaps in knowledge remain, however. First, there is limited long-term data on the impact of Chinese investments in Māori enterprise, particularly the influence over governance, culture, and land. More evidence is needed on how Māori businesses adapt their values and practices in response to changing market demands. It is unclear how Māori values adapt within the Chinese market, where scalability and rapid consumer shifts are to be expected. Another gap is how modern Chinese migration impacts Māori communities, particularly economic opportunities, political influence, and cultural integration. Little research is available about collaboration between Māori and Chinese businesses on environmental matters.



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14. ANNEXES

14.1 Information sheet



ACE CONSULTING

INFORMATION SHEET

Te hono a te ao Māori ki a Haina
A project of New Zealand China Council
 30 August 2024

Tēnā koe i roto i ngā āhuatanga o te wā.

Introduction
 Te Hono a te ao Māori ki a Haina (Māori connections to China) is a project of the New Zealand China Council (council). Dr Jason Mika (Tūhoe, Ngāti Awa, Whakatōhea, Ngāti Kahungunu) of Ace Consulting Limited (Ace) has been engaged to complete the project whose purpose is to support a balanced and resilient bilateral relationship between New Zealand and China with a focus on Māori engagement with China past, present, and future. A report with recommendations will be published in December 2024.

Invitation to participate
 We invite you to participate in an interview on Māori engagement with China past, present and future. Your interview will help us to understand te ao Māori (Māori society) and China relations. This may include Māori and Chinese interaction during New Zealand’s colonial period (1840-1946), post-colonial period (1947-present), and possible future relations, across family, commerce and trade; sport, art, language and culture; education, research, and technology.

Process
 Participation is voluntary. Interviews may take up to 60 minutes and will be conducted when convenient for you. Interviews will be online or phone and recorded with your consent. You and your organisation will not be identified. Your interview remains your data, information, and knowledge. We will keep your interview data under secure electronic storage and only Dr Mika and his associate Xiaoliang Niu will have access to interview data. We would like to write academic papers and your interview may be used for this purpose with your consent.

Participant rights
 As a participant, you have the right to:

- Decline to answer any question;
- Withdraw at any stage;
- Ask questions about the project at any time;
- Not be named unless you give permission to the researcher;
- Be given a summary of the findings and a copy of your transcript; and
- Ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview.

Contacts
 If you have any queries, please contact Jason Mika in the first instance.

Ace Consulting Limited	New Zealand China Council
Dr Jason Mika, Director m: 021 970 421 e: jason.mika@waikato.ac.nz	Alistair Crozier, Executive Director t: 09 379 4641 e: alistair.crozier@nzchinacouncil.org.nz



14.2 Consent form



ACE CONSULTING

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM—INDIVIDUAL

Te Hono a te ao Māori ki a Haina
A project of New Zealand China Council
30 August 2024

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

Please **tick** all the boxes that apply:

- I agree to the interview being sound and/or video recorded.
- I wish to have my recording and transcript returned to me.
- I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.
- I agree to allow academic papers to be written based on this interview.

Signature _____ **Date:** _____

Full name:
Iwi affiliation:
Email:
Phone: _____

Please email a copy of the completed form to jason.mika@waikato.ac.nz



14.3 Interview schedule



ACE CONSULTING

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Te hono a te ao Māori ki a Haina
A project of New Zealand China Council
30 August 2024

About you and your organisation

1. Where were you born and raised? [origin stories, whakapapa]
2. How did you come to be in your current role? [career history and relevance]
3. What does your organisation do, why, how, and for whom? [organisational context]

Māori engagement

4. What has been your role and experience in te ao Māori? [Māori experience]
5. What has been your role and experience in engaging with China? [China experience]
6. Why have Māori engaged with China? [rationale]
7. In what ways have Māori engaged with China? [methods]
8. What has worked well in terms of Māori engagement with China? [success factors]
9. What has not worked well in terms of Māori engagement with China? [failure factors]
10. What has been the role of culture in Māori engagement with China? [culture]
11. How have tensions been managed in Māori engagement with China? [conflict]

New Zealand and China relations

12. What are some similarities and differences between te ao Māori and China? [perceptions]
13. What is a Māori view of New Zealand's relationship with China? [Māori lens]
14. What is a New Zealand view of the Māori relationship with China? [New Zealand lens]

Future relations

15. What opportunities are there to expand Māori engagement with China? [value creation]
16. What support is needed to expand Māori engagement with China? [enablers]
17. What barriers do you see for Māori engagement with China? [constraints]
18. How will Māori benefit from engagement with China? [benefits]
19. How will China benefit from engagement with Māori? [benefits]



TE HONO A TE AO MĀORI KI A HAINA:

MĀORI APPROACHES TO ENGAGEMENT WITH CHINA PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE

FEBRUARY 2025

AUTHORS:

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TRANSLATOR OF CHAIR'S FOREWORD:

MATIU REI