“Is heaven also made in Taiwan? And does Jesus really know how to speak Samoan?” —Sia Figiel, *The Girl in the Moon Circle*

So here, an evocation of a Pacific Island life, and a connection to Taiwan, made by the Samoan novelist and writer, Sia Figel. Here, perhaps, in one of the most reflexively formulaic ways—a “Made in Taiwan” linking the circulation of a mass-produced culture with the details of an everyday lived—and pondered—experience. *The Girl in the Moon Circle*, shows Samoan life in the perspective of a wondering ten-year-old girl, Samoana, filled with questions about her school and church, the relations between her friends and family, consumer comforts like refrigerators and televisions, canned goods, cricket, worker’s wages, boys, legendary tales, and—and of course—a Made-in-Taiwan Jesus.

This is an evocation of colonial and post-colonial moments, of the importation or introduction of new experiences and engagements, about Christianity, consumer capitalism, education, labor, and the impact of a wider world—including Taiwan as a maker and marketer and disseminator of sacred and profane goods for Island markets.

This focus on movements of goods, ideas, labor transits, and transformed societies leads me to draw connections between those mobilities and those that connect Taiwan and the Oceanian Islands. I want to speak about Taiwan and the Pacific Islands in a framework of a sort of communiqué; from a few years back, a visit to Taiwan for the meeting of the Pacific Historical Association was notable is that the theme of the gathering was “Lalan, Chalan, Tala, Ara.”

These are all words referencing “path.” In Proto-Austronesian, “Zalan refers to path, way, or means to do something and cognate forms are widely found throughout the Pacific such as lalan/ dalan (Taiwan and Southeast Asia), chalan (Chamorro), tala (Solomon Islands), and Ara/ ala (Polynesia). The path originates from the past, points to the future, links tradition to the present.
to the tuna’s path through the ocean, of the extension of a leader, or of energy. So these are not only topographical markers, but guides to correct movement and good advice. In Taiwan, the indigenous Austronesian population is 2% and some members see themselves as paths of communication, “I myself am the bridge to the community.”

That community is in the locales of what has politically, geographically, and historically become denominated as Taiwan itself, but also the wider Oceanic Pacific. So, here is the argument: “Taiwan,” in this register has evolved to become more than just “Taiwan.”

Taiwan is an Oceanian place of origin, a reconnection to a disrupted continuity of history, and an evocation of a very Pacific understanding of mobility, transit, exploration, meaning-making, and ancestral tracing that ultimately links specific communities, and Asia and the Pacific Islands to the rest of the world.

In the last generation, oceanic and maritime studies have been expanded by a score of interdisciplinary works on trade, migration, cultural encounter, and exchange with wide resonance. New conceptualizations, from Paul Gilroy’s “Black Atlantic,” to a seaborne African and Indian “Hundred Horizons” of Sugata Bose, to a Pacific “Sea of Islands” of Epeli Hau‘ofa continue to reshape scholarly disciplines and popular discourses on the role of the seas in history.

The challenge of “the Pacific” is that it cannot a priori be written about as a subject. Rather, the Pacific is a subject that needs to be defined. What are its boundaries? What are the ranges of spatial—and temporal—extension?

There is not just one declared and defined “Pacific.” Rather, it is a region assembled from interlocking navigations, migrations, and settlements from the Philippines and South China Sea, Sulawesi and the Sunda Islands, the Banda and Tasman seas, the ancestral waters of the Hawaiians, Maori, or peoples of Kiribati. The Pacific is given meaning by routes of transit, wind corridors, circuits of traders and political activists, and refugees and the places they meet.

These meeting places are trans-local, not simply connected geographic locales, but connections and links that generate places invested with emotions and
historical meanings: uncertainty and affirmation, struggle, loss, mourning, denial, anxiety and hope.

For all of these, readings of places as paths, become landscapes and seascapes of movement, framed by languages of cultures on the move. Tala in Tonga is a “telling” like Jalan/ Dalan; it is conscious. A destination. It is an evocation, “Radiant star of the sea, guide my boat. The stars are always there.”

These histories of movement define Pacific peoples, as incorporated into the narratives are generations of migration: Brij Lal writes of Indian labor from the subcontinent indentured in Fiji,—a new system of slavery, but also the experience of diaspora through folk songs and historical memories. Mobility not as an alien process, but one to understand lives in the context of moving. He focuses on the “Girmít” and “girmityas,” from “agreement” in Fiji—the contract that shaped lives.

He follows the experiences of Indian settlers who tried to immerse themselves into local livelihoods, but found status, caste, and colonial discrimination differences, as well as lost friends, troubled alliances and marriages, and divorce. His work acts not as an advocate for a particular history—but a chronicler of people defined by displacement and searching, who want to know about where they came from.

Historical identities drawn from migrations, circulations, movements, and seeking places and connections are inscribed in Lalan, Jalan, Chalan—paths and searches. David Wu has looked at at the Perenakanization, of becoming a “native” and the reunion with the Chinese in Papua New Guinea, where local communities raise the PNG flag—are they Chinese? What does it mean when a PNG Chinese man marries a Russian woman in Shanghai?

Chi-Fang Chao has traced the trials of Okinawan Diaspora in Hawaii, and the means by which traditional arts are transmitted. This work borrows conceptually from James Clifford: the ways that peoples in movement can so often be defined by a desired but obstructed future. This work also speaks of the Uchinanchu/Okinawan: those who migrated to Hawaii, maintaining continuities with Okinawa, embodying historical practice through such gatherings and collective movement
of entire communities through Okinawan Obon and Nuchi du Takara dance troupes.

So, how do these Oceanian Island- and people- traverses and experiences, migrations, and heritages connect Taiwan to a broader Pacific? One way is to consider the ways that Taiwan has become a marker of identity for a certain kind of Polynesian historical narration and self-understanding.

In 2006, Samoan-New Zealander writer and actor Oscar Kightley and Maori media personality Nathan Rarere used DNA samples to frame a documentary film sojourn from New Zealand to the Cook Islands to Vanuatu to Taiwan in search of ancestors. Rarere commented, “Taiwan was incredible...We felt at home. In every cell in our body we carried the same DNA.”¹ The film won honors at an international festival in Tahiti.

Rarere had very embodied, particular things to say about Taiwan: “All the connections came together - language, culture, people. It was strange to realise that after this whole journey we didn't even need the DNA. We looked the same. We felt at home. In every cell in our body we carried the same DNA.”

Kightley, equally, embraced and understood Taiwan as a partial form of personal Samoan heritage: “When I was little and I used to read books about genies giving three wishes, I think the first wish was always like heaps of money. The second wish was nothing bad to happen to my family and the third wish always just to see where Polynesians came from.” Rarere made the historical lineage question even more emphatic: “The weird thing about journeying back through my past is it's not only my history I'm tracing. It's that of all my Māori relies who share my DNA.”

It is, of course, impossible here to escape the evocation of DNA as a master narrative of historical connectedness across cultures, generations, and history. Such explorations are not only academic questions, but matters of what researchers like Donald Evans have called “genetic curiosity.”

Evans has engaged with interviews and oral tradition studies, inquiring into the

complexities of *whakapapa* in Maori communities, the genealogical “layering” of knowledge, ancestry, and cosmology. As one respondent commented to him, “I know some of us are interested in like following genetics back to origins, like the recent one is they’re able to track Maori genetics back through Taiwan, back through into Asia, that’s the latest one. It’s very interesting.”

Why this Taiwan narrative in the genealogical histories of Samoa, or Aotearoa-New Zealand? Scholars exploring the “fluid frontiers” of Asian and Oceanian cultures and histories, like Paul D’Arcy and his colleagues, have noted that textbook-like scholarship dealing with the Pacific Islands is academically organized so that Oceania is both studied—and therefore presumed to have developed in cultural and political isolation for East and Southeast Asia upwards of fifty millennia to three thousand years ago.

Part of this was abetted by European exploration narratives like those of Dutch traders who distinguished Oceanian from Asian realms; part was established by colonial boundaries that politically demarcated territorial regions, and also by the racialization of human typologies. Some of the strongest distinctions derived from later nationalist narratives that forged ideological identities, often at the cost of cultural, ethnic, and indigenous “minorities.” Papuan-speaking and later Austronesian-speaking explorers, refugees, and colonists in the Pacific region were studied as ancestors—sometimes even legendary or mythical—with little bearing on historical or cultural continuities with Southeast China and Taiwan. Counter-narratives, such as those of “Lalan, Chalan, Tala, Ara” reconnect those continuities whose histories were disrupted in the late 1500s when Han Chinese people began to expand into what had previously been almost exclusively Austronesian Taiwan.

The author’s own work has recently been described as:

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3 Henceforth referred to as Austronesians.

(reflections) on the implications of the rising trend of conceiving the Austronesian-East Asian and Pacific worlds as one, and focus on recent scientific genetic evidence that may change the way we conceive this region and the interaction of its peoples. By the later twentieth century, post-colonial sovereignty movements among indigenous peoples at times pitted local knowledge and claims against wide-ranging genomic and genetic genealogical initiatives seeking to subsume Islander histories into larger chronicles of a DNA-defined humanity. This development threatens claims of historical primacy, challenging definitions of indigeneity, and the oral-mnemonic traditions of Islander cultures.

This has been notably borne out not only by genealogists and heritage/lineage historians, but by political agreement. As news wires reported in May of 2016, “government representatives of Taiwan and New Zealand established formal ties as a result of genetic research connecting the indigenous peoples of Taiwan and the Maori of New Zealand.”

Notably, the agreement issues from a basis in evidence drawn from population genetics, yet the discussions are broader, in that the New Zealand Commerce and Industry Office in Taipei and the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in New Zealand are signatory to a generalized "Arrangement on Cooperation on Indigenous Issues," which will establish cultural and "people-to-people" connections between Taiwan’s indigenous peoples and New Zealand Maori. The logic here is what would certainly be considered the familiar and even prosaic promotion of mutual understanding and friendly relations, given form through annual meetings as well as academic, cultural and business exchange programs.

However, the implications are more historically, culturally, and genealogically resonant than many friendship and business alliances. At Victoria University, Wellington, research biologist Geoffrey Chambers has posed the methodologies that tie together the deep histories of Taiwan and Polynesian Pacific peoples. "Like strands of fiber that can be woven together to make a strong rope accounting for evidence from all disciplines from linguistics, through archaeology and anthropology, via ethnobotany and genetics all the way to oral history."

Historical studies in this way have crossed over and engaged with molecular biology, linguistics, and anthropology to elucidate cultural linkages spread across
some 60,000 years. Geoffrey Chambers maintains that in these early migrations peoples of the Papuan language group migrated to and settled enclaves in today's Australia, and Papua New Guinea. Thousands of years later (8,000 to 10,000 years ago) Austronesian cultures established in Taiwan also voyaged to the Pacific through Taiwan by passing through the Philippines and Indonesia. Along the way the Papuans and Austronesians intermarried, giving birth to contemporary Polynesians and ultimately settling in what is now New Zealand.

Argues Chambers, making the Taiwan and Oceanian embodied historical linkage as explicit as his science will allow. "The Maori are the ultimate end product of these voyage and colonization processes," said Chambers, adding that "a ‘genetic trail’ links New Zealand Maori back all the way to the indigenous people of Taiwan, as do Austronesian languages."

Chih-Tung Huang, a member of the Amis tribe offered a personal testimony to the general framework of that statement of connection by recounting what he took to be evidence drawn from speaking with a Maori man from New Zealand. According to Huang, "we find when we want to count numbers from 1 to 10, it is almost the same in [both] languages." His point, however, was not just to draw similitudes that might interest linguistic scholars or popular practitioners, rather, he argued that this mattered because his own community’s language “faces extinction due to the introduction of Chinese and Japanese words.” He proposed a cultural exchange, based upon language relation, as a form of linguistic heritage and preservation.

"To connect with Maori is effective not only in language protection but also in disease protection," Huang added. This, interestingly, brought back the discussion once again to biological inheritance and ancestry since, “the indigenous peoples of Taiwan share a common ancestry with the Maori they also share common diseases such as high-blood pressure and diabetes. Solving the health problems of one indigenous group can benefit others.” Whether he recognized this as a cross-generational inheritance question, or one tied to parallelisms in socio-economic opportunity, access to health care, or transformed dietary habits was not recorded.

Tony Coolidge of the indigenous rights group ATAYAL, has made a broader claim, "Together indigenous people can fill in the gaps and become complete.” Indeed, this is a project pursued from multiple fronts. Not only the alliance of indigenous
groups, or the searching by engaged, curious, and committed individuals seeking heritage. The question of “filling in the gaps” of links between Asia and Oceania, and Taiwan and the Pacific Islands has also evolved into a complex of developing narratives from new evidence.

In the twenty-first century, a team of researchers published an article summarizing their latest scientific work on molecular genetic evidence for the human settlement of the Pacific, pointing out a growing scholarly consensus that Pacific islanders descended from “Neolithic agriculturalists,” who migrated from Southeast Asia thousands of years ago. To trace these ancestral Austronesian-speaking peoples, the team “analysed mitochondrial DNA, HLA and Y-chromosome polymorphisms in individuals from eight geographical locations in Asia and the Pacific,” including China, Taiwan, Java, New Guinea highlands, the New Guinea coast and Trobriand Islands, as well as New Britain and Western Samoa.  

The linkages between Taiwan and the Pacific islands are just one set of connections framed by a larger picture of continuities between the ancient human heritages of Asia and Oceania. Such overlapping narratives are framed by commercial trade, religion, invasion and empire, alliance, migration, and encounter and exchange. Early modern and Enlightenment European voyages mark these tales. In the 1520s, Álvaro de Saavedra Cerón transited the Pacific, concluding that inhabitants of Los Jardines (Enewetak) may have originated from China. Spanish galleons regularly transited Guam and the Philippines, linking the two.

Many of the apparent fractures between Asia and Oceania were created. Powerful trading monopolies like the Dutch East India Company promulgated the idea that Asia was a world of spices, silks, and treasures, whereas Oceania offered up only ethnographic reports of flowering plants, village architecture, canoes, and languages. Yet, in nineteenth-century labor histories, movements of peoples

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forged connections to Australia and then on to Canton; labor migrations across the century, with Japan and China exporting plantation workers to Hawaii, South Asian villagers becoming Indo-Fijians, Filipinos marking island groups all across the Pacific.

Contemporary population geneticists have added new chapters, arguing for, in one version, a story that describes “a rapid expansion of proto-Polynesian peoples from southern China/Taiwan, through eastern Indonesia, and into the Oceanic world during the mid-Holocene.” This narrative has a particularly strong resonance because of the environmental context: the implication that the populations were, historically speaking, fast-moving and widely mobile due to water transport across large regions, moving into territories previously unsettled by humans.

These historical narratives are attempts to understand ancestry as generalized knowledge derived from formal “scientific” methodologies. These would be genealogies as described by inheritance and blood groupings from the 1920s, evolving to studies of DNA and genetic materials after the 1950s.

As Massey University genomic researcher Murray Cox points out, “In fact, the earliest studies of genetic diversity in the Indo-Pacific region were carried out in the Southeast Asian islands and Oceania...Contrary to popular opinion, geneticists have been helping to reconstruct Pacific prehistory for the last 90 years.”

Importantly for him, “history is also carried in the DNA of living people, as well as being preserved in the bones of ancient individuals.” Where genealogy and genetics intersect, however, that history is at stake. Maori legal scholar Aroha Mead has indicated the need for mutual recognition around scientific and cultural determinations of genealogical heritage: “the human story might be written in genes from a scientific point of view but the human story from a cultural point of

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view is actually written in our culture, it’s in our language, it’s in our art, it’s in our dance, it’s in our tradition.”

For the Hawaiian scholar and activist Haunani Kay-Trask, this is very much a question of historical and cultural primacy. She traces her own genealogy to Papahanaumoku (Earth Mother) and Wakea (Sky Father), an understanding of essential claim to and protection of Hawaiian lands. This offers a pointed genealogical perspective: “I like to say to white people, well you say you come from monkeys and that's your problem, but we don't. We come from the land. We know where we come from.”

So, genealogy is not synonymous with genetics—one is a personal, communal, and embodied knowledge; the other, a set of scientific principles and knowledge codifications. This latter can come into conflict within familial ritual practice and place-based genealogies. Oceanian genealogy, properly considered, is not only a record of forebears and pedigrees. It situates speakers and listeners properly, but also reveals “the speaker’s spiritual and physical lineages, both those present and also those separated by space or time, life or death. We have a knowledge that our ancestors are never far from us.”

Both these approaches, woven together, can provide some compelling histories. Oral traditions and documentary knowledge can, for example, indicate longstanding connections between Oceanic and Asian cultures, as ethnographic studies from the 1960s have indicated: “Over the centuries, according to Carolinean tradition, islanders have had repeated contacts with Philippine, Indonesian and Melanesian New Guinea type people.” The subsequent development of molecular genetic approaches offered new tools to offer new interrogations, by reviving the question not only of magnitudes, but vectors—that is, beyond shared genetic materials, which groups were ancestral to others, stretching back in time and space?

Research geneticists in Indonesia such as Meryanne K. Tumonggor, explore parallel questions, reviewing a multiplicity of origin scenarios for Oceanic peoples, from expanding agricultural groups migrating from Taiwan through the Philippine

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archipelago, down through Indonesia, and out to the Pacific, to other more situated hypotheses of Austronesian groups launching from the Indonesian islands themselves.”

In pursuit of “an ancient genetic highway linking Asia and the Pacific.”

The outcomes are still qualified, and, in fact, there is still significant dispute about the Taiwan derivation. A research team out of Leeds including Pedro Soares, Teresa Rito, and Martin Richards received notable attention in 2011 for reporting that “the link to Taiwan does not stand up to scrutiny.” Their data, rather, indicated that DNA samples from current Polynesians could be traced to migrants from the Asian mainland who had already settled in the Bismarck Archipelago of Papua New Guinea some 6-8,000 years ago, “thousands of years before the supposed migration from Taiwan took place.”

Yet, a considerably body of research on Austronesian language derivations argues in favor of the Taiwan connection. In response, the team asserted that “Although our results throw out the likelihood of any maternal ancestry in Taiwan for the Polynesians, they don't preclude the possibility of a Taiwanese linguistic or cultural influence on the Bismarck Archipelago at that time.” The team posited a likely “voyaging corridor” of two-way transits that may have encouraged migration, again framing the DNA evidence within a socio-historical logic.

Such uncertainties, and disputes, developed around multiple schools, as summarized by another group of researchers led by Manfred Kayser in Rotterdam: “Two competing hypotheses for the origins of Polynesians are the 'express-train' model, which supposes a recent and rapid expansion of Polynesian ancestors from Asia/Taiwan via coastal and island Melanesia, and the 'entangled-bank' model, which supposes a long history of cultural and genetic interactions among Southeast Asians, Melanesians and Polynesians.”

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13 Jo Kelly, “Genetic study uncovers new path to Polynesia.”
The Kayser team’s conclusions argue for a highly qualified and complex scenario, part genetic evidence, part historical extrapolation, suggesting that Polynesian ancestors mixed significantly with Melanesian populations thereby aligning the two and incorporating a wide range of gene variations in offspring.\textsuperscript{15} Rather than an “express train,” or “entangled bank,” the Kayser team proposed a “slow boat” approach, framed around interaction but constant migration toward the central Pacific. The Soares team, rejecting Taiwan-based origin models made clear that their own research had acted to “contradict an influential ‘slow boat’ model for Polynesian origins.”\textsuperscript{16}

From the question of “origins” and ancient derivation to a complex examination of hematological and molecular overlays, genetics and genealogy continue to underscore the interrelated nature of scientific and historical research, and the Asian and Oceanic links that from blood types to molecular genetics have kept them together as central to debates about reconstructing, authorizing and maintaining the past. There is new science to supplement classic philology and folkloric studies, and genetic knowledge both reinforces and challenges genealogical traditions.

So we began with evocations of path—and this complicates “place” or Taiwan or the Pacific as just places, but rather understands them as domains of movement and interaction defined by their connections and their spaces between and interactions, not static or historically enclosed locales. As we see with genomics and genealogies, the very same questions arise—what is the path taken, and for all of the attention to molecular biology, the fundamental issue is organized around, which way did they come? How did they get here? What is our relation to them? And so what are the connections.

Clearly, place travels with people through culture, so this is not just a question of ancestral biological traces. The approach here problematizes both traditional and scientific claims—one cannot just look at origin by regression, but must understand them through transformation over time. Likewise, traditional claims can be best understood in the ways that they assert primacy over specific culture,


identity, and practice, rather than by positive knowledge and universality. This complicates claims over the past and tries to make sense of the present.

Nathan Rarere, the Maori documentarian noted earlier, had very much embraced what he thought of as his “Taiwan heritage,” and indeed, his own ancestry. “All the connections came together - language, culture, people. It was strange to realise that after this whole journey we didn't even need the DNA. We looked the same. We felt at home.

For Sia Figel’s Samoana, contemplating her life in the South Pacific: “Is heaven also made in Taiwan? And does Jesus really know how to speak Samoan?” Perhaps so.