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CASE STUDY

# Flow as Method: Artistic Restorying with the Sea

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## Abstract

Welcome to our ship—a vessel for flow as methodology. While flowing, we think; while thinking, we flow. With the sea as our center, this method expands other-than-human voices in public humanities. Our ship has technology aboard, yet the navigation of tides, currents, and saltwater is guided by ancestral wayfaring methods. *Flow* (2019–) is a method for fostering collaboration among elders, cultural bearers, children, and more to nurture Indigenous oceanic stories. We decolonize stories by actively restoring "Restorying" oral traditions from the islands we reside on. Embracing the 黑潮 (Japanese: Kuroshio; Chinese: Heichao) Current as our guiding teacher, this article challenges land-centric perspectives by embracing the fluidity of cultural exchanges in Austronesian communities. We navigate toward "Going back into a future of Simplicity" by relying upon strong waves of the past alive in the complexity of the present. We turn (return) to the flow of currents as a mode of connecting with knowledge rooted in native senses of the ocean as "an extension of the land". Flow shares lessons on how Indigenous practices can facilitate interspecies community empathy and care for public humanities scholars in diverse fields.

**Keywords:** art; community; flow; sea; stories

我根本沒有「祖國」的概念，或是認同。我的理想是遊歷群島，與各島嶼的民族相遇，討論海洋的情緒，假如海洋是個「國家」的話，那絕對是我投奔的理想國。.

(I have no concept of a "motherland" or sense of identification with it. My ideal is to travel through the islands and meet the various peoples of each island, discussing the emotions of the ocean. If the ocean were a "country," it would undoubtedly be the ideal place I would wish to embrace.[1])

> I said that when the ocean currents flowed to a really high place, they flowed downwards again. But the shell got stuck at an angle in the sand, so the ocean could not wash it away and I picked it up today.[2]

[1] Syman Rapongam (夏曼藍波安) 2014, 3, translated by Tung.
[2] Child in Yuguang Elementary School workshop facilitated by Jack and Tung 2020.

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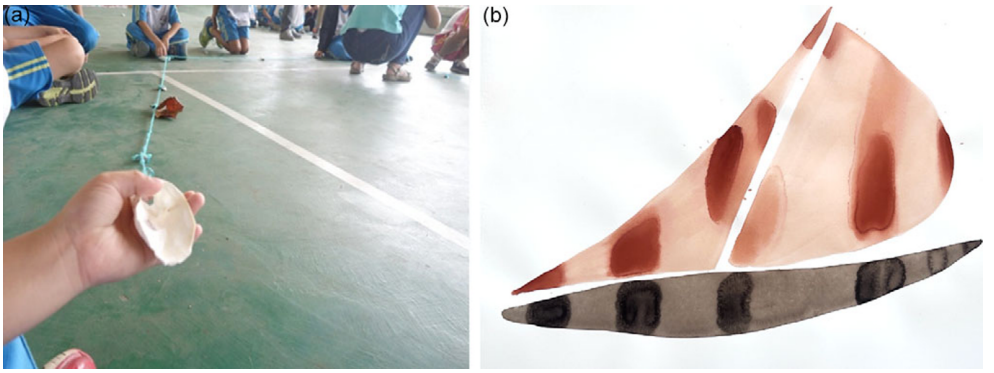



**Figure 1.** (a) Tung and Jack, *Sea-centered art workshop*, Yuguang Elementary School, Taiwan, 2018. (b) Jack, *Weaving Wind*, handmade yeddo hawthorne and walnut ink on paper, 76 cm × 56 cm, 2024.

> Humanity is found in the sea. "Humanity": human beings collectively; the fact or condition of being human; humaneness. But if we are born from the ocean, and Kānaka Maoli ancestors are still living in its depth as coral polyp and sandpaper sharks, is the seascape also human?[3]

> Imagine you are the water. Feel the water in your body, become it. Sense the water growing, changing, and teaching us important lessons together.[4]

## 1. Sea acknowledgment

While flowing, we think; while thinking, we flow. These are reflections on a sailboat—a shared vessel that uses flow as methodology. With the sea as our center, this flow expands other-than-human voices in the public humanities. Our sailboat (Figure 1) includes technology, yet the navigation of tides, currents, and saltwater is guided by ancestral wayfaring methods. *Flow: Artistic Restorying with the Sea* is a creative research project we started to foster collaboration among elders, cultural bearers, and children to nurture oceanic stories. Spirits, sea, and air guide us through this conversation by immersing the reader inside of the flow. Flow is a long-term collaborative artistic method for restoring Indigenous knowledge with the sea.[5] Our work is soaked in the seawater of Shōdo Island, the ancestral homeland of the Taira people, and Yuguang Island in Tainan, the ancestral homeland of the Siraya people. Flow is immersed in ancestral kinship and future hope across generations.

We speak from where we live now, on islands in Austronesia where we learn to flow while observing stones on the Golden Coast and sailing in the Seto Inland Sea (Figure 2). We are grateful to the spirits on Turtle Island who allowed us to meet each other on Lenape land

[3] Amimoto-Ingersoll 2016, 183.

[4] Excerpt from the breathing opening section of sea-centric art workshop organized by Jack and Tung in a hybrid format in Tainan on June 1, 2022.

[5] Commencing in 2018, Tung and Jack have engaged in collaborative public art workshops with children, students, and community members held at Tainan Municipal Yizai Elementary School Yuguang Branch (2019/2020), National University of Tainan (2019/2022), Kiyoko Sakata Studio in Naha, Okinawa (2019), Yale-NUS College (Singapore) that continued throughout the pandemic in hybrid formats (2020–2022), now our interactive flow praxis flourishes in Shōdo Island and Tainan (2022 to present).

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**Figure 2.** (a) Captain Asuka Sarai (Kakeroma Island native, Amami archipelago, former Ryūkyū Kingdom) while sailing from Nishinomiya to Shōdo Island. September 27, 2024 @ 3:49 pm. (b) Tung, evening view of a fishing village next to Taiwan Strait in Tainan Qigu, May 18, 2024.

in 2017. Direct encounters with wisdom from our academic aunties include walking with Mali Wu in Cijin Island, sharing artivism practice with human and nonhuman communities, and swimming together with lawyer Malia Akutagawa who taught us storytelling methods based on the wisdom of the sea learned from opihi shells, whales, and "Elepaio birds."[6] Our identity as descendants of "our blood and our chosen ancestors" informs our deep connections to the sea.[7] We do this with the saltwater circulating in our own bodies interdependent with the saltwater of the sea.[8]

Human and more-than-human kin communicate traditional sea-based knowledge beyond political boundaries. Our critical views of boundaries led us to embark on this ocean-centered journey to revive stories with diverse participants honoring sea-based ancestral worldviews, aiming to share them with future generations.[9] Ancestral spirits have led us into this artistic restorying and guided the process of respectfully weaving flow. These spirits have guided the organizational structure of this article: sea, spirits, winds, flows, and navigation.

Flow is, at its core, a practice-based project of Indigenous public humanities that is critical of the North American-ness in the field by engaging Austronesian islanders' worldviews on where we are, how we live, and where we are headed. Indigenous public humanities are a blurred terrain in a region where Indigenous nations remain all too silenced. Taiwan was the first Asian nation to acknowledge Indigenous peoples in 1994, followed by Japan, which officially recognized the Ainu people in 2008.[10] The work of defining who is "Indigenous" is a relational one in which we reflect upon settler exclusion of "others" in which our ancestors

[6] Liboiron 2021; Huang et al. 2023; Tung 2020, 307–24. https://dlnr.hawaii.gov/wildlife/birds/hawaii-elepaio/.

[7] Brown 2024.

[8] See Neimanis 2019, "I want to think more about the sea inside, bodily tides, and human plumbing" (67) and "Our being as bodies of water has been facilitated by water—that is, by other bodies of water that have preceded us" (110).

[9] Such as traditional Taiwan aborigines (Austronesian) views of fishing and hunting. They gave fish time to restoration in ponds and in the oceans, and they stuck strictly to the principle of using natural resources, too. See Yang 2016, 3–15.

[10] Erni 2008, 15.

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**Figure 3.** Jack, *Kuroshio currents* (Austronesia from the Philippines, Taiwan to Japan), 2019 Handmade walnut ink on paper.

engaged with lands away from their homes.[11] We choose the dialogue format to embody storytelling methods aiming to actively "Restory" oral traditions from the islands we reside on.[12] This is a public-facing project that engages practitioner knowledge, oral histories, and pedagogy beyond formal academic forms of education. We turn (return) to the flow of currents as a mode of connecting with the knowledge of Indigenous islanders through senses rooted in place.[13] Embracing the 黑潮 (Japanese: *Kuroshio*; Chinese: *Heichao*; Figure 3) Kuroshio Current as our guiding teacher and spiritual guide, this article challenges land-centric perspectives by embracing the fluidity of cultural exchanges in Austronesian communities. We navigate toward "Going back into a future of Simplicity" by relying upon waves of the past that flow actively now.[14] We turn (return) to the flow of currents as a mode of relating with ancestral knowledge rooted in the understanding of the ocean as "just an extension of the land," as Hawaiians put it.[15]

[11] "'Indigeneity' refers to those people who do not belong in European political modernity, the 'local' and 'cultural' others without a history, in contrast to the 'modern' and 'universal' states. Whether Indians were excluded from state-making in the Andes or 'disappeared' in North America (O'Brien 2010), they were all cast as outsiders unworthy of political modernity. It is still difficult to identify who is Indigenous today largely because this identity is so profoundly relational. In other words, it's not about the Indian, it's about the state" (Canessa and Picq 2024, 66).

[12] Voyageur et al. 2015.

[13] "The process of decolonization or of postcolonial development and politics becomes a (re)establishment of Indigenous geographical identity, which is not an 'authentic' reality in need of uncovering (such an assumption would support the tourist narratives of an exotic and primitive native and her land), but a (re)vitalizing of indigenous geographic identity through knowledge of and relationships with place" (Amimoto-Ingersoll 2016, 44).

[14] Yang 2016, 3–16.

[15] "Kanaka waterman and author John R. Kukeakalani Clark explains, ...To the Hawaiians, the ocean is just an extension of the land, it just happens to have some water on it. It's an extension of the land, it just happens to have some water on it. ... it's all one. It's all 'āina. That's [pointing to the sea] just 'āina with water on it (Clark 2007)." Quote from Amimoto-Ingersoll 2016, 87.

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Our selection of images comes from within the flow as we experience it together. All of the images that appear here in diptychs are selected by each author in the places where we create, write, and work to show the interrelationality between our islands. The side-by-side format stands in alignment with the horizontal relations in our collaborative dialogue itself. Single images included in this article all have a direct role in the flow as method process, for example, sharing parts of local workshops with island community members, drawings made by us to reflect on the sea currents between us while talking at a distance, and moments from embodied time on a sailboat with Indigenous guides navigating our pathways ahead.

Flow moves in multidirections, seeking to decentralize knowledge across the humanities by rediscovering connections in local interflows. Micro actions actively resist colonial ways of thinking through intimate encounters in a slow, caring manner focused on interconnected consciousness. This project contributes practical ways of engaging through participatory artistic practice immersed in Indigenous oral forms of conversational storytelling to the public humanities. This article is part of our larger work to resist the washing away of Indigenous islanders' worldviews and to decolonize histories, conceptions, and realities of the islands we live on. While including native languages, ways of life, and customs on the islands where we live, we work with sensitivity to the specificity of Indigenous cultures resisting essentializing discourses of shared experience.[16] For example, the Tawo and Ami aboriginal people strictly follow the fishing seasons and principles passed down by their ancestors, aiming to allow nature time and cycles for regeneration, rather than prioritizing mass production like capitalist fisheries.[17] We aim to integrate sea-based ancestral stories through seaside conversations and slow movements in order to integrate a symbiotic relationship between people and the ocean.[18]

The islands where we speak from are complicated by settler colonial boundaries that have been labeled as nation states of "Japan," "Formosa," and the "Republic of China."[19] Our ancestors' immigration in the nineteenth century informs our own stories resisting state-imposed place narratives. Tung is a descendant of Minnan Han Chinese immigrants who traveled by boat across the Taiwan Strait (黑水溝, Black Ditch—a historical nickname for the Taiwan Strait, reflecting its historically treacherous waters) and moved to the southern tip of Taiwan, living alongside the island's southern Indigenous peoples and the Hakka community. Jack is a descendant of Highland Scottish islander immigrants who sailed to Turtle Island in 1853. He was raised on occupied Lenape land, migrated to the archipelago of Japan in 1999, and has worked on Shōdo Island in the Seto Inland Sea since 2010. We trace our island identities through the cultivation of sea-based archipelagic connections with the flow of sea, wind, and weather currents that ignore national boundaries.[20]

[16] Liboiron 2021, "The focus on Land—what it could be, what it might become, what it is for—does not always mean accessing Land as property for settlement, though it often does" (14) and "To change colonial land relations and enact other types of Land relations requires specificity" (16); The unique differences in Indigenous discourses should not be lost within the exclusionary tendencies of essentializing Indigenous cultures, focusing on shared experiences. Canessa and Picq 2024, 71.

[17] Yang 2016, 6–8.

[18] Simon 2009, 50–68.

[19] "Indigeneity makes no sense without the modern state. Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson 2016 says that what a Mohawk is to oneself and to others carries the gendered and racialized residue of colonial state imposition. For her, it is a deeply modern identity that is interrupted by as much as it interrupts settler state narratives. Indigeneity serves as its mirror, especially female indigeneity, to perform the patriarchal state" (Canessa and Picq 2024, 67).

[20] We respectfully reserve the term "islanders" for those ancestral inhabitants of the islands where we live on that were here before the nineteenth century when our ancestors migrated. Gratitude to Dvorak 2011 for illuminating this distinction between Indigenous islanders and those who live on islands.

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**Figure 4.** (a) View from the deck of Taiseimaru by Naoya Nakamura a ship captain residing on Shōdo Island, 2024. (b) Tung, Traveling from West Coast to Taitong, Taiwan, 2024, located in eastern Taiwan, is an area rich in natural landscapes and diverse cultures, particularly in its relationship with Indigenous peoples and the Pacific Ocean.

The islands we inhabit are enmeshed with settler colonial relations, which we carry with many critical questions.[21] Beginning with Japan's *senryaku* (戦略), or military suppression (1895–1915) of Taiwan—which included managing, harvesting, and extracting forests on the lands of Indigenous people.[22] This occupation strengthened with *dōka* (同化), known as the assimilation period (1915–37), when Japanese emigration increased settling across Taiwan, in particular the East coast where resources were managed by Indigenous tribes, including Amis, Truku, Sakizaya, Kavalan, Bunun, and Seediq peoples (Figure 4). During the war, Japan ruled Taiwan through aggressive tactics *kōminka* (皇民化), or Japanization period (1937–45), when educated local elites were given Japanese names, while others were dismissed as too "primitive." The layers of colonization made Islanders' stories invisible, and Indigenous islanders' stories became even more invisible.

This article is a flow of various conversations and artwork on and about relations with the sea. We started recording conversations on Shōdo Island in October 2023, continuing on Taiwan in September 2024, splashed with online dialogues before, during, and after. The format of this article is dialogic, a "trickster abrakadabra" that relies upon the importance of the spoken word in Indigenous traditions.[23] Flow occurs while riding sailboats, exchanging emails, sharing images, holding workshops, trading messages, and conversing online. It is a collaborative project co-created among students, teachers, sailors, anglers, and others, including islanders and migrants, to re-imagine relations to the sea through artmaking. In workshops, talks, open drawing, and site visits, we let driftwood, plastic, seaweed, and other flotsam enter our consciousness (Figures 1, 5, and 6). Our work is art plus activism, or artivism, that engages social change by questioning oligarchy through anti-capitalist actions, slow ways of living, and equitable relationship building. We hope that this sailboat can decentralize knowledge in other fields of the humanities by rediscovering wet connections in trans local flows.[24]

[21] "None of these questions—coloniality, race, gender, species, class, culture, and taste—is separable from the others, and importantly, none of them is separate from us, who may be reading this at distances thousands of kilometers from the source" (Neimanis 2019, 165).

[22] For more on the managing of forests in early Japanese colonial experiments in the Ryūkyū archipelago, see 義豊弘「薩摩藩の山地政策と奄美島民の暮らし」『奄美学』, 445–72. Kusuda 2005.

[23] Conversations that influenced us include *Dohmen and Korporaal 2024* and The Harrisons 1992.

[24] Embodied feminist studies of water open this methodology of "flow," see Neimanis 2019, "'Bodies of water' is thus one alternative, but it supports and flows into others. Although my understanding of bodies of water, as an

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**Figure 5.** Jack and Tung, Carried by Currents: Sea-Centric Art Caring Beyond Borders. 2022 Video from Yuguang Elementary School, Taiwan, 2018 and Kiyoko Sakata Studio, Okinawa, 2019. Video hyperlink: https://vimeo.com/1055788968/829c19d641?share=copy.



**Figure 6.** Bottle cap from Yuguang Island engaged with by a local child in Okinawa during "What Flows in the Sea?" Open workshop, 2019.

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Here, we share three moments from a larger conversational flow: one "spirits," two "winds," and three "flows." Each of these vignettes weaves Indigenous knowledge with stories from our own experiences of the sea. On this sailboat, we are engaged in the challenges of working between spoken, automated, and written language while retaining the sea as our center. Now, let the horn ring our departure.

## 2. Spirits

> During the late Ching Dynasty, my grandfather had difficulties making a living in Fujian so he crossed the Black Ditch (Taiwan Strait) in search of a better life. After settling in Taiwan, he resided in Fangshan, an area near the southern tip of the island where Indigenous peoples, Han Chinese, and Hakka people lived together. He married, had children, opened rice mills, and ran grocery stores. In these stores, Indigenous people often came to shop, but due to language barriers, communication was limited to gestures. Many times, they exchanged goods instead of using money.[25]

**Jack:** My late grandfather shared the diary of our ancestor James Jack, a scribe who sailed from Scotland to Turtle Island in 1853. Despite the detailed record of the ship's contents, passengers, weather, and more, the local inhabitants are absent. Who did he encounter upon landing on someone else's land? What interactions did they have? Whose stories appear in the diary and whose are left out? Since migrating to the archipelago of Japan from 1999, I often reflect upon local and migrant inhabitants on the island where I live. Who was here before me and what stories do they want to pass on to the next generation?"

**Tung:** It's fascinating to think about the interconnectedness of the world's continents through the vast network of saltwater. The oceans hold an abundance of mysteries, from ancient shipwrecks to undiscovered species, there's no shortage of excitement awaiting those who venture into the depths. Boats serve as vessels, carrying us on adventures and allowing us to immerse ourselves in the beauty and intrigue of the sea. Developing a deeper sense of compassion and responsibility toward the ocean is crucial for ensuring its preservation for future generations. This involves not only appreciating its aesthetic beauty but also understanding the delicate balance of its ecosystems and the importance of sustainable practices in harvesting its resources. Education, awareness, and collective action are key in fostering a greater sense of stewardship and respect for the sea. How do you think we can encourage more compassionate attitudes toward the ocean?

**Jack**: It might help to learn more from the wind. The air moves around us each day. For many sailors, this was the energy that carried all things—water, food, culture, pottery, people, seeds, plants, stories, diseases, and more. When there is wind, we move; when there is no wind, we stay. Watching the air pressure as it flows. This morning, I was walking by the sea on the way to throw away garbage (Figure 7). I noticed four or five different species of seaweed and kelp when the sun came back after long rain over the last two nights. Local residents talk a lot about less shellfish, seaweed, and other life forms because there are fewer

antidote to Anthropocene water, emerges primarily through philosophical and phenomenological explorations that I detail in earlier chapters, and charts a path through feminist theories of relational embodiment, my advocacy of this figuration is sustained by the conversations and commitments it shares with those other imaginaries that disturb the Anthropocene narrative" (171).

[25] Story told by Tung's ninety-four-year-old aunty, Yan-yun, Tung, January 2025.

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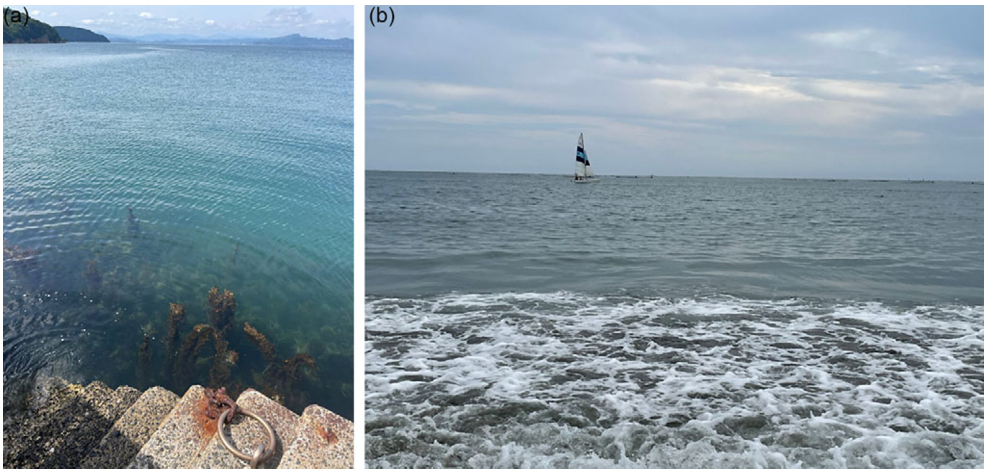



**Figure 7** (a) Sea kelp on the shoreline in the Hiraki neighborhood of Shōdo Island where Jack resides. (b) Sailboat and waves around the coast of Yuguang Island in Tainan where Tung resides.

nutrients in the sea due to household sewage being diverted out of the sea. Greywater from older houses still goes into the ocean, but new houses are required to use a septic system. What can humans do when we become aware of our harmful impact on ecosystems, for example, too much sewage or chemical pesticides linked to the "red tides?"[26] Indigenous worldviews teach us that the sea is only as healthy as the land (and its watershed).[27] What can we do now to reconnect our well-being with the health of the sea?

**Tung:** Each country has its own policies that affect ecosystems. It is hard to know which approach may be best because we cannot stop the development of industry. We need more balance, but we do not know what the ideal balance is. Hopefully, through education, we can learn how to limit our desires for consumption. In our conversation last week about the aboriginal people's way of looking to our ancestors to revive balance living with nature, we need to learn from them. The rediscovery of the aboriginal lifestyle as a model of simplicity could be useful for the management of our environment.[28]

**Jack:** True, human balance that can be found by connecting with ancestors who lived closely with other species on the islands where we are now. Before the pandemic, there was talk about "reduce, reuse, recycle," but when the virus put serious limits on our behaviors, it became obvious how we impact other species. As humans slowed down air quality improved, dolphins returned to quiet beaches, monkeys played in parks, and sea otters enjoyed urban ponds. What are some of the lessons learned from this "great slow down" period?[29] I think about this a lot. When human communities change their actions, it has positive impacts on other species. This knowledge is not new.

[26] Honjo 1994.

[27] Okinawan photographer Makishi Osamu shared with us the following oral tradition: "山はハギン、海はハギン" Yama ha hagin, Umi ha hagin ("If the forest is bare, the sea will also be bare") 2019. Translated by Jack.

[28] Berkes 2018; Yang 2016, 3–15.

[29] Scurry 2020.

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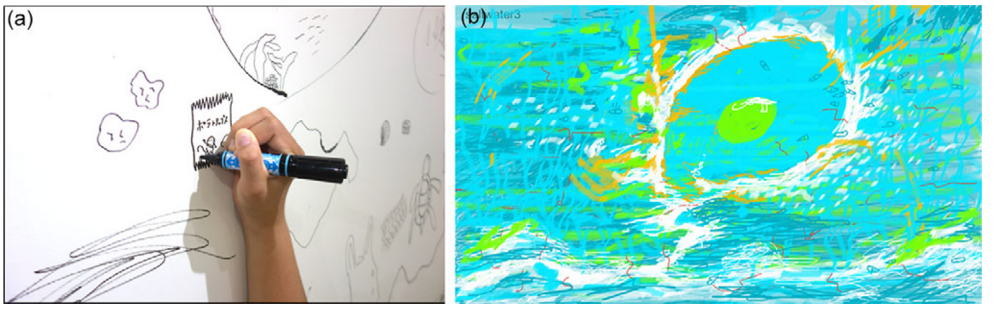



**Figure 8.** (a) Jack, Open drawing workshop, Kiyoko Sakata Studio, 2019. (b) Tung, Tainan students saltwater digital collaborative drawing, 2023.

**Tung**: We can be aware of this balance even while we are surrounded with modern technology.

**Jack**: Now we have ocean temperature, undersea current, wind speed, air pressure, and toxic pollution data. Even though we constantly invent new devices to measure things, we still do not understand our larger impact on many things, such as pheromones, bacteria, and plankton. All these things are invisible; they are in our body and our environment. Pointing our attention to these things, we realize how much we do not know. Now we might think this is the best route, but one year from now, there will be different routes. We do not know the impact of our actions, but our ancestors do. By listening to ancestral spirits of the past, we find resonances with other species.

**Tung**: To listen to ancestral spirits of the past, such as learning "Oceanic literacy," yet we are dealing with systems of education that might not deliver this in public schools.[30] If most people get their education from public schools, how can we make them aware of this past from some campaign or media? And, of course, it's important through social venues. We can create other spaces of education, like workshops by artists or non-artists (Figures 1, 5, 8, and 9); we continuously do this in our work together.

**Jack**: Reflecting upon the workshops in elementary schools, public studios, university classrooms, and community centers we have organized (Figures 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15), our methods of care for the next generation are immersed in the life of the sea.[31]

**Tung:** To heighten awareness, we use creativity to tell stories.

**Jack**: Creativity is like a human-initiated wind that can change the nutrients of the sea like a typhoon (Figure 12). Our creative work works within the flow patterns of wind.

[30] Practical examples of sea-centric pedagogic practice that we rely upon include Amimoto-Ingersoll 2016, "Oceanic literacy is the ability to read the cloud colors that indicate a passing squall, or the ripples of the water's surface telling of an approaching gust or a school of fish being chased by a large predator. An oceanic literacy requires an oceanic sensibility" (81).

[31] The educational lessons shared by Alexis Pauline Gumbs from dolphins include their livelihood in "schools" that can teach us intergenerational practices of care, nurturance, and survival (Gumbs 2020, 55–56).

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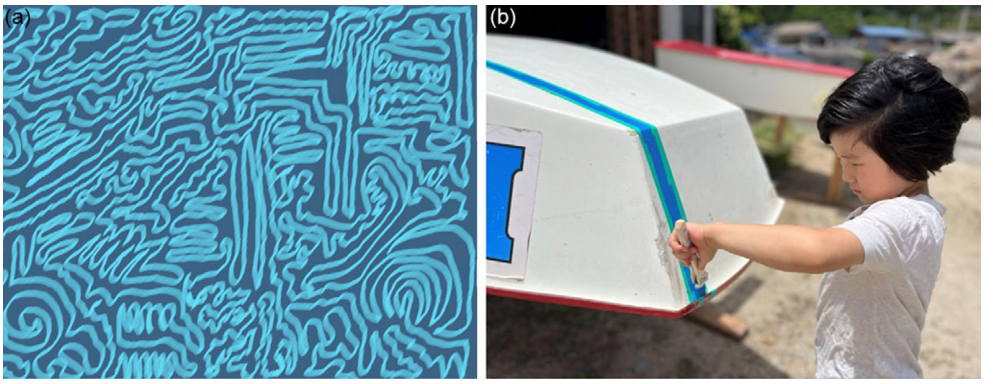



**Figure 9.** (a) Tung, Freshwater themed digital collaborative drawing by university students in Tainan, June 1, 2023. (b) Jack, Maho Nakamura painting dinghy design at the Olive Island community sailing club (1984 to present), Shōdo Island, June 2024.

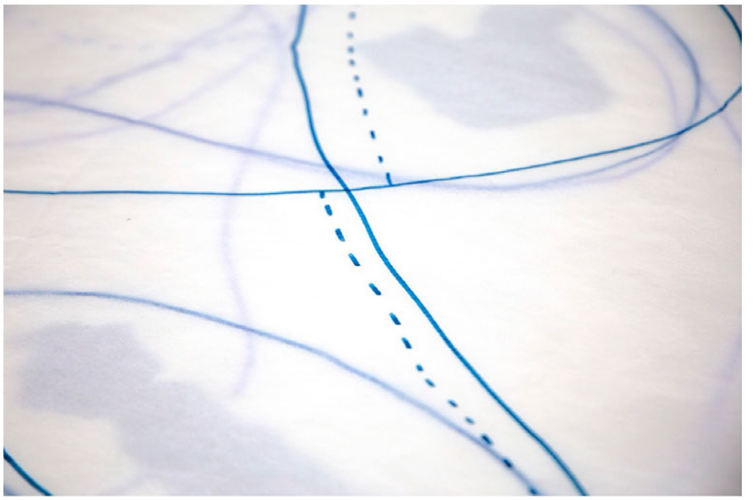


**Figure 10.** Jack, Tung, Jia Huan Ho, and Jia-Qi Chen. *Current #5 movement lines tracing children's movement between islands.* (Detail) 2020. Ink on vellum.

Yesterday, a neighborhood elder told us how the sea came into his house about thirty years ago and again three years ago.

**Tung**: Saltwater entered his home?

**Jack**: Yes, a combination of high tide and wind brought the sea in. He was upset while recalling the experience and wants to move inland. The daily fear of disaster is real, although too often "natural" disasters are actually human disasters. We know a lot about nature, for example, the tsunami that comes to the Tohoku region once a century, or here in Setouchi roughly every thirty years when the ocean floods into the village. The cycles of nature are embodied knowledge. Humans can choose what to do, or what not to do and to ignore it.

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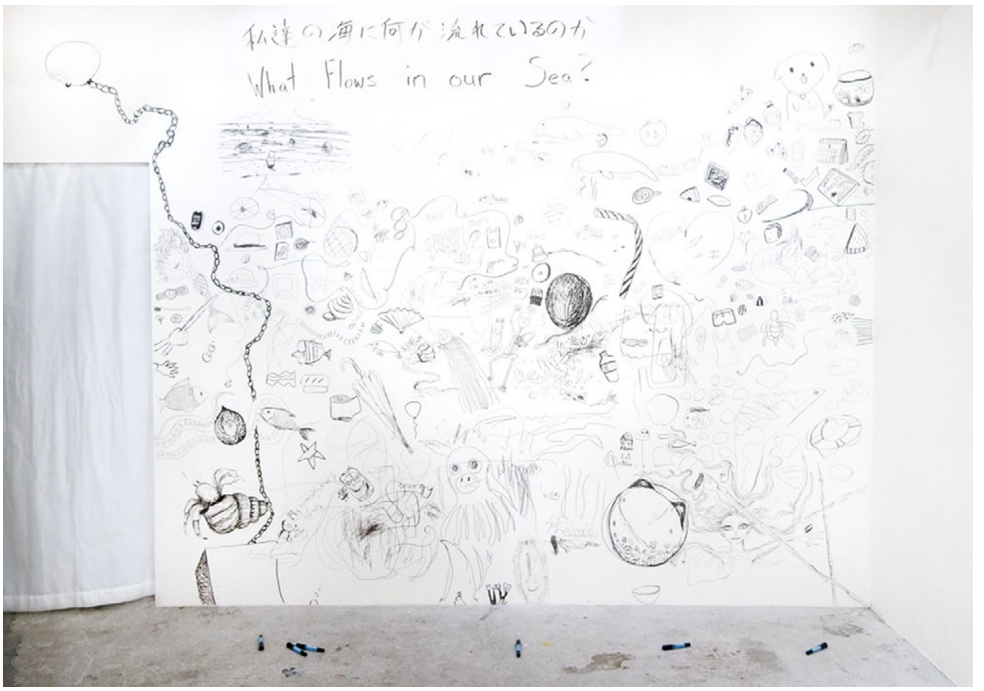



**Figure 11.** 私達の海に何が流れているのか ***What Flows in Our Sea?*** Question written on the wall for an open drawing workshop held with family members, Okinawan children, friends, and the public in Naha, Okinawa, during July 2019.

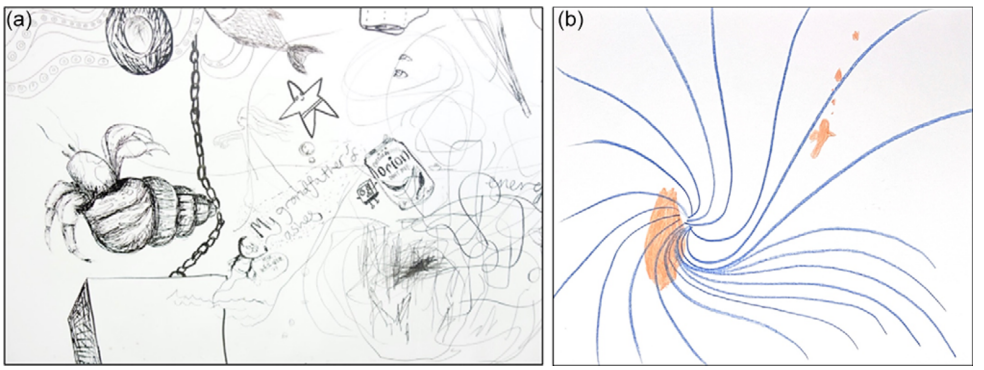



**Figure 12** (a) *What Flows in Our Sea?* 2019 (detail). (b) Jack, *Drawing of Typhoon Kongrey [No. 18] approaching Taiwan*. November 1, 2024.

**Tung**: I remember you held a dialogue with islanders and visitors on Shōdo Island titled "Small Islands with Big Visions," we too are aiming for something big.[32] We teach with a

[32] Yoshiaki Kawata, Michelle Lim, and Yoshitaka Mouri roundtable talk organized by Jack at *Sunset House: Language as House of Being* as part of Art Setouchi 2016. While art festivals, including Setouchi Triennale, Taiwan Indigenous Art Festival, and Sense Island/Land, engage with islander worldviews on different levels, however, critical reflection is also needed to consider the ethics of collaboration and the continuation of colonial relations

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**Figure 13.** (a) Tung, View of mangrove forest Green Tunnel in Sicao, Anping from the ferry, alongside the historical port "Dayun," 2024. (b) Jack, Dinghy sail mending with native Shodoshima islander and retired Boatswain Nakamura at Olive Island Club (1984–) in Kashima, Shodoshima, August 2024.



**Figure 14.** *What Flows in Our Sea?* (detail) 2019.

between center and periphery in their program management. For critical perspectives on Setouchi and its colonial nuances, see the later chapters of 石井 亨『もう「ゴミの島」と言わせない [豊島産廃不法投棄、終わりなき闘い]』2018 藤原書店 Ishii, Toru 2018, *We Will No Longer Let You Call Us "Garbage Island," [Struggle to the End of Illegal Dumping on Teshima]* Fujihara Shōten. And their web archive: http://teshimabito.com/.

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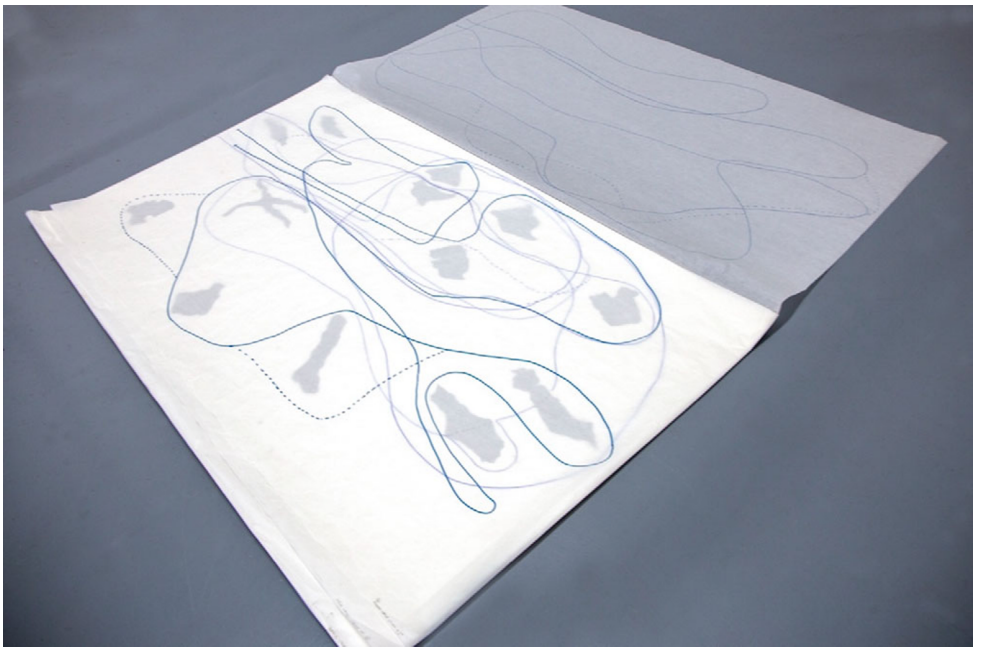


**Figure 15.** Jack, Tung, Jia Huan Ho, and Jia-Qi Chen. *Currents #1–5 movement lines tracing children's movement between islands*. 2020. Ink on vellum.

dialogical pedagogy that opens space for bottom-up idea co-creation with people of different age groups. During the second iteration of our art workshops at Yuguang Island in 2020, we led storytelling circles where children had immersive feelings of flow together with spiral shells, rubber bands, and bamboo poles collected by children the previous year. Through dialogue, participants connected with ancestral wisdom of the sea as a family member speaking to each of them.

The younger generation is important, but we are doing this for everyone because schools are a community gathering place where things change gradually with our long-term commitment to each other. I appreciate artists' practice or local art festivals that are not transactional but have continuity over long periods of time.[33] Artists and researchers also learn and gain sustenance when engaged deeply in the process.

**Jack**: Yes, what sustains the sea, the air, also sustains us. Not just surface changes, but also deeper underlying factors such as sustenance, nourishment, or strong immune system to support against disease. Resilience requires sustenance. When malnourished, unhealthy parts impact other parts of the ecosystem.

[33] In the spirit of exchange and communication that can be learned from local art festivals that are focused not only on short-term impacts and tourism, such as in Mipaliw Land art Festival in Esat Coast of Taiwan, artist Kang Ya-Zhu's work *Spinning Reel of the Intangible* delve into the weaving culture and craft of female members of the Amis tribe. The artwork was one of the outcomes of a long-term artistic residency on-site that enabled the artist to learn about the handling of weaving materials, collaborations, and dialogues with "ina" (Taiwanese aboriginal community call female elders "ina").

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**Tung**: Considering sustenance in a holistic sense, I see it as necessary for supporting both individuals and communities. It is essential for the health of ecosystems to continue developing sustainably. This perspective highlights the interconnectedness of all living things and the importance of nurturing these connections to ensure ongoing health and development. It reminds us how crucial it is to support both individual and collective well-being for sustainable growth.

**Jack**: Like neural cells, their signals can continue even if 99% are cut off; if a single strain remains, it can still regenerate and continue to thrive. Ancestral knowledge is also capable of regeneration even in places where it has been strained.

**Tung**: I wish I were looking at the sea now like you. I think of the sea all day in the city.

**Jack**: Lately, I am realizing that the desire to be near the sea is just as important as being near the sea. So even here, right? It is very close, the bike ride or walk, or going to the store, I go by the sea almost every day, but I still yearn to be closer. A neighbor's house in front of the sea was once filled with the ocean around five decades ago. Everything's right in front of his house—the beach, the playground, and the sailboat. The desire to be near the sea does not change, whether you are in the mountains or in a city, or even on the island but away from the seashore. Like a magnetic pull that grows stronger when you are farther away from it. That desire to know how the sea is doing, as if they were a family member, a person you know, a mother or grandfather. Or you know, a child who you want to see.

**Tung**: Sure.

**Jack:** So that attraction is so powerful, right? The sea is pulling us closer. We know when we are near even before we can see it. Memories of the smell of sea winds, saltwater on the body or the shimmering surfaces of waves stay with us minutes, days even years away from the sea. The sea lives with us in our bodily memories especially when we are apart.

**Tung**: While you are saying this, I thought the sea is calling us now. Whether it is a desire or calling, this suggests that you wanted to do something with the sea or for the sea. This is the moment for us to immerse ourselves in wet elements, regenerating with emotion in our collaborative work.

**Jack**: Yes, karma?

**Tung**: A calling can have many layers of different meanings. Such as "命定" in Chinese language: it can be both something deep that you feel about yourself, a calling, a destiny, or a responsibility and mission that you desire to fulfill in life. I wish we could take action to take care of the ecosystem together with the sea.

## 3. Winds

**...**
our islands are separated
by artificial lines on paper
but deep down
the ocean our mother
connects us

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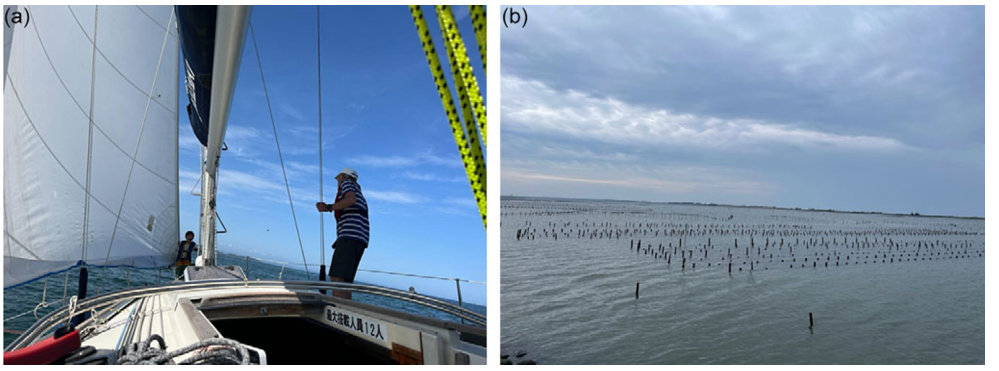



**Figure 16** (a) Jack, aboard Yuji & Asuka's sloop, May 2024. (b) Tung. Wandering around the lagoons in the Qigu and Beimen areas, May 18, 2024.

and nourishes us
our images.[34]

**Tung:** The harbor in Anping is located in the southwestern part of Tainan City, Taiwan (Figure 7). It has been changing a lot since my last visit. There will be one more hotel, shopping mall, and luxury houses for sale in this area in the near future. It is going to be a trendy area. Are we living a life that is bringing us closer to nature or more distant from it?

**Jack:** Yesterday, at the helm of Yūjiand Asuka's 33-foot sloop...my heart raced while catching gusts of wind, forgetting about land-centric time (Figure 16).[35] At the port, I observed the Daigo Olive Maru Ferry leaving Tonosho toward Takamatsu and the Shodoshima Maru Ferry returning, then the Daishichi Shodoshima Maru Ferry leaving Tonosho for Okayama. I grew nervous. Glancing under the genoa sail I noticed the 365-ton Ferry Teshima approaching us from Karato Port among the other four ferries coming closer and felt overwhelmed by the strength of the wind as we sailed fast into the mouth of Tonosho.

We chose to tack and turn into the port. As we pulled in the flapping sails tight, we noticed the Olympia ferry returning from Okayama in the same path closing in fast at our helm. Too close. We turned back into the wind, wondering what to do amidst five large ships headed in and out of the harbor. Waking up from a nap in the cabin, Yūji calmly observed all the ships in the strong winds then spoke softly: "The only two on our path are the two going to/from Okayama so keep an eye on those." He gently suggested we duck behind the ship at our helm and return to Igisue Port. We turned onto a starboard tack and angled perfectly back to the port as the wind continued to spout intensely filling our sails on a hard tack. Leaning into the wind on the upward side, I cut the rudder deeper to hold the course, now knowing where we were headed gave direction in the storm. The swift shift from a sunny relaxing sail to the dark clouds with intense bursts of wind firmed my grip on the ship's wheel as we now headed toward our goal.

[34] Excerpt from the poem "Vast Canvas" by Teweiariki Teaero from Koya 2024, 254.
[35] Native to Shōdo Island Yūji Sukata has worked at Okazaki Sailboat builders for the past thirty-five years.

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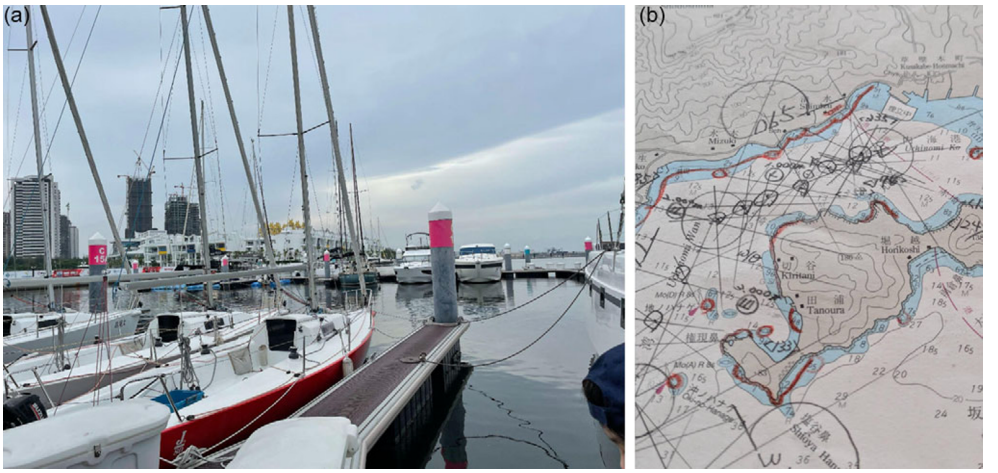



**Figure 17.** (a) Tung, The luxury redevelopment area of Aiping harbor, which is next to the historical and heritage site, May 12, 2024. (b) Jack, Ship position map with hand-drawn compass triangulation bearings by ship captain Naowya Nakamura before entering Uchinomi Bay, Shōdo Island in October 2024.

Indigenous lessons learned at sea today included to always keep an eye on what lies behind you, to stay calm amidst the strongest storm, and to keep a navigational aim in mind (especially when the goal is not visible (Figure 17).

**Tung**: I sense a deep sensitivity within you regarding ocean paths in your mind. When you observe the ocean, various objects and materials carried by it appear to convey stories or their own journeys to you. While many people visit the ocean purely as spectators, appreciating its beauty, they may also come across unsightly aspects, such as litter along the coast or in the sea, prompting a desire to distance themselves from it. When confronted with such pollution, there is a belief that it should not be present there. Although people may be willing to join others in cleaning up the garbage, they find individual efforts less appealing. How can we encourage each other to embrace a more compassionate attitude toward the ocean, and what collaborative actions can we take to achieve this?

**Jack**: Spend more time together with the sea, learn its rhythms, colors, translucency, and health. Uncle Sugiyama, native to Shōdo Island, teaches us what shellfish can and cannot be eaten each month, which fish can be caught in each season and when kelp can or cannot be harvested. But he also smokes cigarettes in front of the sea every day and chucks the butts onto the beach. Living close to the sea, the likelihood of taking it for granted also arises. Daily contact with the sea to observe its moods like a family member, gently wake up together in the morning, check the tide as a sibling helps. Walking my kid to school this morning, we checked the tide—observed if it was moving in or out. At first, it appeared to be moving out, but then we looked closely and it was actually coming in. The high tide was less than an hour ago on the charts. Even when distant from the ocean, it's possible to observe wind, pressure, or weather charts in real time. If it's not possible to look directly and feel the salty air on your skin, then it is possible to observe colorful wind maps in motion. And kindly correcting ourselves when we encounter human trash in the sea and on the coast. Notice how the sea, air, and water respond when taking actions of care with the sea in our family.

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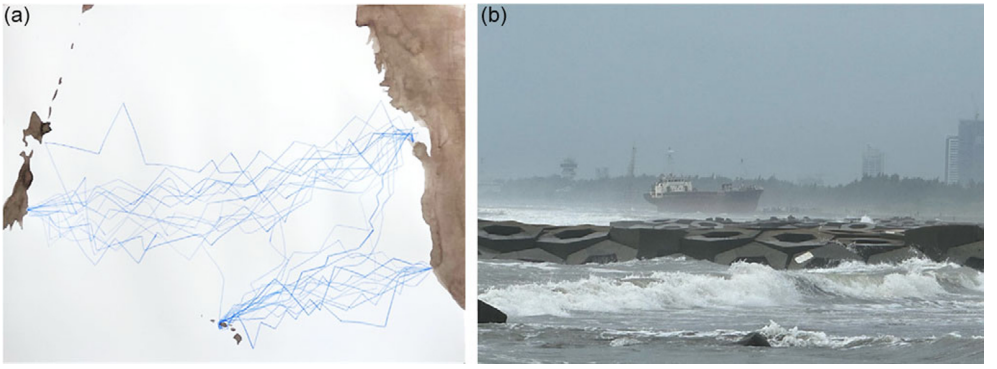



**Figure 18.** (a) Jack, Nippon maru sailing pathway across the Pacific, Colored pencil and handmade walnut ink on paper, 2024. (b) Tung, Cameroon-registered cargo shipwrecked "DOLPHIN" located 0.2 nautical miles from beach in Tainan Golden Beach after typhoon, 2024.

**Tung**: Recently, I was wandering around the lagoons in the Qigu and Beimen areas (Figure 16). Everywhere, I saw oyster farms. We should be grateful to the marine ecosystem for providing us with such abundant resources, but these resources are not inexhaustible. People must cherish the precious resources of nature. A friend mentioned growing up in a village by the sea in this area during his childhood. He said that Qigu has changed a lot now, with many new facilities. He feels that the memories of his childhood no longer exist (Figure 2). The past memories should not be obliterated in the course of the development of these coastal living areas. How can the environmental aesthetics related to the ocean coexist with and be preserved alongside the natural marine environment (里海; Japanese: Satoumi).

## 4. Flows

> 外國。日本。有一天，有一個人在喝飲料。那天下很大雨，那裡就淹水了。然後，瓶蓋又掉下去，所以，就被沖到河裡。流到這裡來，流到台南之前，從河裡流到大海裡。從日本到台灣，它的旅程長，它在大海裡的生活過得很好。
>
> (Overseas. Japan. One day, there was a person drinking a beverage. It was raining heavily and flooded. Then, the cap fell [out of the boy's hand] and was washed into the river. It then floated all the way here. [It first flowed into the] ocean before floating to Tainan. [The bottle cap's journey was] long. It led a good life in the ocean.[36])

**Jack**: Look at the cargo ship ashore here in front of us on the Gold Coast in Tainan; apparently, it was registered in Africa with a crew from Myanmar.[37] During the typhoon it ran aground, everyone had to get off onto the beach and many local rescuers went to help, while the winds were still very strong. Relations with the sea are also life-threatening at times.

[36] Story told by child on Yuguang Island during sea-centric art workshop by Tung and Jack 2020. Translated by Jia Huan Ho.

[37] Regan, Ward, and Cheung 2024.

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**Tung**: Typhoon Gaemi came at the end of July 2024 (Figure 18). It was a severe typhoon with sustained winds up to 205 kph (125 mph); it was the biggest typhoon in eight years to hit Taiwan.

**Jack**: This makes me think about ships that are always moving, carrying 99% of the products we use daily. The flow of labor on ships breaks in the news when beached, becoming an opportunity for us to think about other ships in the ocean. Local teachers Hsieh and Chen Yu just told us that the ship has been abandoned for over a month.

**Tung**: Let us think more about relations between ocean and land here in connection to other places.

**Jack**: What is a ship when it is grounded?

**Tung:** Ocean currents and winds are so strong that they changed their course, but those shutterbugs who are taking photos, posting, and checking this ship on SNS aren't capturing invisible labor. They might just be aiming for fun.

**Jack**: When the typhoon was here, people on the ship had to decide whether to jump, with or without a life jacket, they did not have enough time to get the rescue boat out, so some had to jump and swim to shore in the middle of the typhoon.

**Tung**: The ship could not carry people safely anymore during the typhoon.

**Jack**: What happens to human and more-than-human flow when a ship gets wrecked?

**Tung**: In the past few years, there have been fewer big typhoons, which may seem good but is not necessarily so because in ecological terms everything is related.

**Jack**: In Taiwan?

**Tung**: We have less typhoons, some droughts, and then very heavy rain.

**Jack**: More extreme weather?

**Tung:** Yes, sometimes we need a typhoon to bring rain.

**Jack**: In the Amami archipelago, typhoons are seen as healthy mixers that bring up cooler layers of the ocean depths to mix with the top layers, which helps restore undersea life (Figure 12).[38] Typhoons can also function like a washing machine, helping to clean the ocean so that seaweed and fish are churned up, which, in turn, helps to cleanse corals and to replenish nutrients from the land. Islanders say that this spin cycle helps diverse species flow within the marine ecosystem.

**Tung**: Many objects carried by the typhoon surround us now on the coastline.

**Jack**: Driftwood.

[38] Oral tradition of typhoons healthy impact on coral, seaweed, and fish generously shared with us by Kakeroma islander Asuka Sarai in early 2024.

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**Tung**: Plastic bottles and shells.

**Jack**: While we gaze into the waves now, many young people are also sitting near us. Why are we attracted to the sea and what do humans yearn for in the ocean?

**Tung**: A kind of openness found by the sea perhaps.

**Jack**: Connecting with sea spirits is a healing medicine. Sit alone or with others near the sea and observe its mood. Doing nothing is something with the ocean as our family member. Deep connection to the sea can also become a catalyst for social change by remembering that human and more-than-human health is always sustained by the sea.

**Tung**: The ocean consumes our carbon dioxide as we breathe oxygen in relaxation together. The coastline between Tainan and Kaohsiung is a short distance, but each part has different traces of history that are changing. To be honest, this project has given me new opportunities I would not normally have to observe this shore. I see there is so much along the seaside to bear witness to.

**Jack:** What do you observe when you look closely and feel the sea?

**Tung**: At Taijiang National Park (台江國家公園), in Anping, there are wetlands, lagoons, mangrove forests, and wildlife, which makes it special (Figure 13). I recently connected a local ecologist with an artist from London to start an eco-art project there. In the lagoon, aquaculture farmers have built oyster farms (Figure 16) and there is a very small historical port "Dayun" (大員) from the Chin Dynasty by the farm. You can re-imagine a lot of trading and small wooden ships traveling in and out three hundred years ago, when historical Tainan City was built in the eighteenth century. But if you visit the other redeveloped district of Anping, you will discover that the property developers are trying to build super luxury apartments with small boats by each flat alongside a five-star hotel. This area is next to some seaside villages, still underdeveloped (Figure 17).

**Jack:** Is this the same area we went to yesterday by the temple?

**Tung**: Yes, they are not far from each other. The Taoist temple we saw is in one of these villages. During the 1970s, local businesses were focused on recycling industrial metals such as copper. The community made a lot of money from this recycling business, usually from human and industrial waste, but they may have damaged the environment and workers' health.[39] Nowadays, some rural areas in China also use recycling to improve the local economy. Here, some village people who became rich from the recycling had money to donate to the temple, but now this business is over. They learned that although they can make a fortune from recycling, it is threatening the health of local people.

**Jack:** This reminds me of when we went to Xing Da Harbor five years ago. We walked around speaking with the fishing community. I remember the smell of alcohol and international workers in a post-industrial neighborhood, a very different atmosphere from this tourist-friendly seaside. I am deeply concerned about the fragility of people living together with the sea, economic vulnerability, and the impact of decisions made by others who are not living

[39] See the report from Taiwanese government published by the Institute of Labor, Occupational Safety and Health, Ministry of Labor "Hazards Exposure Survey of Metal Recycling Process in Recycling Industries" in 2018.

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by the sea. Their future is being decided by export-based prices of fish, which are out of their control. They aim to make a living from the sea, instead of living *with* the sea. A vulnerability created by colonialism, capitalism, and extractive structures, separating fishing that is part of village life. The value of those who catch fish and foods from the sea is seen as an essential role in the community as providers of sustenance.[40] How can we reassert the value of people living with the sea today?

**Tung**: The working conditions on the ships are dangerous. Communication between migrant workers and operators is difficult due to language barriers. Working with the sea for a living is very complicated. Local residents run a market that focuses on selling fish, shellfish, and all kinds of seafood, but principles of ecological cycles maintained by Taiwan's traditional aboriginal cultures are often not considered. The assumption that fresh available fish separated from the health of the sea is a worldview proliferated by Han Chinese culture.

**Jack:** I clearly remember the face of one of the fishermen we talked with, while lively, his face also expressed tremendous hardship. Facing challenges, not only immediate dangers at sea, but threats on land. Challenges at sea include tidal currents, windstorms, cargo ships, and weather. But the risks on land are what we need to work on as humans. A fisherman who is the same age as me on Shōdo Island, Yoshihito Nagae, told me about a near collision with a cargo ship where he had to cut away an expensive fishing net to escape alive. He survived, but the risks on land are increasingly harder to avoid. He said he will not force his children to take on the job as it is too hard to survive making a living.

**Tung**: We have a term to describe this 邊緣人 (*bienyuanren*), which means "people who are at the borders of society." They are not included in power structures. They are between borders. I often see kids playing on the beach. I can tell they are from the nearby community because there are no parents or adults accompanied them. They pick up things from the beach and play with them, like broken plastic toys or found materials, very creatively picking up things and play by themselves. This reminds me when we met the head teacher yesterday, who said we are welcome to lead a workshop here because it's better than nothing. The children in this area do not have enough confidence or understanding about their community. He said if we can bring art and imagination, it could be very positive and helpful. The content is open to co-create together.

**Jack:** Interesting, the idea of communities living by the sea with "nothing" has many different meanings. People feel the healing power of "nothing" as unquantifiable sea medicine, but it's also a lack of value assigned to what is always there too as human values shift. Weren't the principal and teacher also talking about locals in Tainan turning their back to the sea now, changing life directions?

**Tung**: Yes. I told them what we would like to do because the head teacher asked me what I wanted to find from my research. He wanted a very straightforward answer. I started to explain, and they agreed, saying they needed to know more: "we don't know enough about the sea even though we are just next to it." We have started this project in 2018, and we are still learning a lot.

[40] "Since we get the resource from Mother Nature, it is only fair and reasonable we protect the environment so that it can continue sustainably. Co-existence with natural environment while taking only what is appropriate and necessary has been the ancient teaching passed down from one generation to another in the indigenous community" (Hsu 2023, 32).

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**Figure 19.** (a) Jack, Harvest moon rising over Shōdo Island, September 15, 2024. (b) Tung, Tainan ship captain's view, May 10, 2024.

**Jack**: Openness to learn is a state of receptivity. Listen to the sea, feel the saltwater in your own body.[41] This is working to find alternatives to the current devaluing of vulnerable livelihoods on the borders of sea and land. There are ways of shifting our awareness toward care if we recognize our own accountability and vulnerability.[42] Young people moving closer to the sea is part of a larger shift in observation that brings about changes if we refuse to forget those who live and work with the sea in daily life. Whenever we eat fish, seaweed, or sleep to the sounds of water or use recycled packing at the grocery store, when we remember the sea as a family member, we shifts relations.

**Tung**: Yes. I hope the young generation will look at the sea and love, learn and live together with it too.

> Indigenous futurity does not require the erasure of non-Indigenous peoples in the ways that settler futurity requires of Indigenous peoples.[43]

## 5. Horizons: Navigating futures

Thank you for joining us on this sail with sea, spirits, winds, and flows—all found in the sea between Yuguang and Shōdo Islands. How did you feel on this sailboat? (Figure 19). Moving with the wind requires nonlinear zigzag pathways (Figure 18) that enable responsible artist and researcher actions with community protocols established by native islanders.[44] We aim to cultivate love for sea and land drawing upon contemporary application of Indigenous knowledge transferred respectfully through flow in this article. Artistic praxis can cultivate love for water and land in our own neighborhoods with oceanic resonance. Artists are aware of the potential of art for opening up imagination and going into real worlds to influence

[41] "Our bodies are hydrophilic, through and through. This should hardly come as a surprise. It is almost too cliché to say these days that 60–90 per cent of our bodies is constituted of water, but perhaps it is the only reasonable place to start this chapter. About the same percentage of the earth's surface is wet and blue. Water infiltrates and inhabits the vapour we breathe, the land we work, the animal, vegetable, meteorological and other earth others with whom we share this planet. As embodied beings, we are, primarily, bodies of water in a watery world" (Neimanis 2019, 65).

[42] Brown 2024.

[43] McCoy, Tuck, and McKenzie 2016, 20.

[44] Becker 1995.

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people for sensitive and controversial issues such as hidden history and ecological justice. Indigenous storytelling is at the center of expanding understanding of cultural flow.

We envision other scholars utilizing this flow method for decolonizing stories in the communities where they live now. Our micro actions actively resist colonial ways of thinking through intimate encounters in a slow, caring manner focused on interconnected consciousness. This research shares lessons in how to immerse humanities in the saltwater, tides, wind, and spirits through collaborative drawing, storytelling, and the art of deep listening. Experiences of participants in community art practices show how other public humanities scholars can also foster relationships, inter-community empathy, and care for previously overlooked worldviews. For example, learning how to retain an expansive navigator's view while moving to notice your own relation with less visible communities while in movement is one lesson we offer others.

Native islander worldviews expand public humanities and Indigenous humanities by providing wisdom of how humans can live with nature in occupied, colonized, and militarized islands. The flow provides us with practical, storied, and philosophical lessons for how to de-escalate violence, degrow capitalist relations, and revive slow currents of connection crossing borders today. We work to facilitate relationships, inter-community empathy, and care for marine environments. Artivism can amplify the voices of those who have been silenced on the islands where we live, to bring transformations that sustain life long into the future.[45] Through the experience of intimate relationships found through currents, waves, and winds of inter-Asian cultural flows empower creative perspectives woven together with Indigenous knowledge systems, oral modes of communication, mythology, and methodological transmission passed across generations. Micro actions actively resist colonial ways of thinking through intimate encounters in a slow, caring manner focused on interconnected consciousness in sea-centered encounters. The flow of ancestral spirits, salty air, and sea tides here are a connective tissue for weaving native stories of maintaining a goal in mind with your own communities.

Islanders' knowledge matters now as it shows ideological and practical methods for maintaining ecological cycles of human and more-than-human relations from the past to inform abundant futures.[46] As island settlers, our own cultural ancestors are entangled with Han and white settler colonial stories; therefore, we both work with critical praxis in our own artistic and anthropological backgrounds, aiming to reflect upon past actions while reviving Indigenous relations with the places we live. *Flow* is a reminder that the ocean has no boundaries, is interconnected with the world, and can create common futures sharing sailboats. We share Gumbs' hope: "I believe in the flow of your future."[47]

We encourage you to open dialogue in your communities with the following questions as a starting point to rediscover on a journey:

What is our role in the community?
Where are we headed and why are we aiming there?

[45] Hsu 2023, 18–46.

[46] "Traditional Taiwan aborigines used natural resource frugally…the aboriginal lifestyle as a model of simplicity useful for our reference in the management of our environment and suggests a return visit to this lifestyle…more encompassing environmental protection, which requires also the complementary contributions of many other ecological thoughts and movements. See Berkes 2018; Yang 2016, 3.

[47] Gumbs, Undrowned, 2020.

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Who is this project for (native, human, and more-than-human species)?
What can we discover collectively from other living things and objects?
What can saltwater teach us (both inside our bodies and in the world)?
What links can we discover between this island and other islands in the sea?
What are our navigational bearings in our practice while underway?

We are not alone; other scholars are working to decolonize curriculum, acknowledge Indigenous land and prioritize collaboration over competition.[48] We find that interdisciplinary research in the humanities today is aided by artistic forms of self-reflection with Indigenous knowledge. Recentering the flow of the sea in other diverse fields today can nourish love for islands and land while repairing polluted rivers, depopulated villages, and wartime communities through care, imagination, education, and childcare. To shift toward "futures of deep yes," we share practical ways to integrate flow into your work in the humanities by sharing a sample of our methodology working with open questions collaboratively.[49]

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**Conflicts of interests.** The authors declare none.

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[48] Hawkins and Kern 2024, 80.

[49] See Brown 2024, "I believe we are living in a world dominated by the imaginations of ancestors who did not love us, who did not believe in an abundant earth and our collective power to steward it. ...We must reclaim the experience of joy and satisfaction for everyone. How do we build the future on a deep yes? A deep longing for what we want."

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