

## Light of Hope: Symbolism and Narratives in Visual Arts

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### Abstract

This study presents an investigation into the symbolic significance of light, hope, and ships in visual art through an iterative process of documentary analysis and design creation. The aims were 1) to craft and analyze contemporary visual design pieces that utilize light as a medium to symbolically represent hope; 2) to create designs inspired by the enduring image of ancient Chinese sailboats; and 3) to explore and illuminating the complex interplay of resilience, aspiration, and guidance inherent in human experience. Initial sketches serve as preliminary visual representations, evolving into final designs through the experimental use of various materials and equipment, including LEDs, steel wire, fence net, electric welding machines, and ribbons. These materials were chosen considering both their symbolic and aesthetic contributions to the designs. Prototypes were constructed and continually refined, resulting in final designs that were then analyzed and documented. The entire process from initial concept to final creation was rigorously documented, providing both visual and narrative records of the creative journey. The resulting designs offer a nuanced reflection on hope, utilizing ships and light as central motifs to symbolize life's journey towards optimism. The study highlights the intrinsic link between the chosen materials and symbols, where wood represents the natural instinct of seeking and hoping; steel epitomizes strength and resilience; and bamboo, noted for its flexibility, mirrors human adaptability amidst adversities. Each material is not only historic and practical but also metaphorical, adding layers to the narrative of hope and aspiration. Through a systematic exploration of themes, the study illuminates the intertwined relationships of hope, light, and journey, contributing to a holistic understanding of these themes in visual design.

Keywords: Hope, Light, Ships, Symbolism, Visual Design

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## Introduction

This study embarks on an exploration of the symbolic meanings of light, hope, and ships within visual art, constructing a cohesive body of knowledge that examines their interplay and significance in contemporary society. By integrating documentary analysis and design creation, this research aims to elucidate the profound connections between these symbols and their manifestations in both historical and modern contexts. In contemporary urban societies, the rapid pace of life and technological advancements often overshadow the spiritual and emotional needs of individuals. Economic powerhouses, notably Guangzhou, have become magnets for individuals seeking improved livelihoods. As a testament to this migratory pattern, Guangdong province alone accounts for over 31 million migrant workers, with nearly a quarter hailing from different provinces within China (Chen, Guo & Wu 2011). As these urban landscapes burgeon, many inhabitants feel the weight of spiritual detachment, often replacing profound anchors with materialistic pursuits (Luetz & Nunn 2023; Okulicz-Kozaryn 2022).

Symbolically, light has frequently emerged as a metaphor for hope across different cultures and narratives (Anozie 2021; Graham 2009; Šarić 2020). The guiding lighthouses for sailors, the reassuring glimmer of stars for travelers, and the soft glow of ceremonial lamps in religious rituals all serve as beacons of hope and guidance (Strang, Edensor, & Puckering 2018). This study explores the intricate relationship between light - not just as a physical illumination, but also embodying guidance and clarity in various contexts, from spotlights to soft lights - and hope, the innate human feeling of expectation, desire, and aspiration towards achieving specific outcomes in visual design.

Rooted in personal experiences, the research captures the narrative of an individual transitioning from humble beginnings in a modest urban setting, navigating the academic realm, and later diving into the tumultuous waters of professional life. This trajectory, punctuated by various roles in diverse cities, from modest employment to ambitious entrepreneurial ventures, mirrors the journey of a vessel navigating through dark waters, always guided by the unwavering light of hope. This is a narrative that underscores the universality of human quests for brighter horizons.

Navigating the modern work landscape poses its unique set of challenges, especially for the younger generation (Zhou 2022). Yet, there's a universal aspiration: to find that beacon of hope that provides direction (Kim et al. 2021; Ngai et al. 2023). By examining the nexus

between light and hope, this research resonates with a wider audience, offering a perspective that even amidst formidable challenges, there is always a glimmer guiding one's path. The study not only delves into the theoretical interplay of light and hope but also crafts visual narratives, employing a tapestry of materials and techniques. Here, ancient Chinese sailboats emerge as symbols of enduring voyages, interspersed with the warm, guiding glow of lightbulbs, akin to stars in the vast night sky, all culminating into a sensory experience of hope's journey. At the heart of this research is the understanding that each individual embarks on a journey, fueled by dreams and hopes, molded by their distinct circumstances. These aspirations, diverse as they might be, converge in their quest for a guiding light. By observing and analyzing these individual journeys, the study synthesizes evocative representations, intertwining light and hope, guiding ships and twinkling beacons, capturing the essence of human resilience and aspiration (Figure 1). Therefore, the primary objectives of this study are: 1) to craft and analyze contemporary visual design pieces that utilize light as a medium to symbolically represent hope; 2) to create designs inspired by the enduring image of ancient Chinese sailboats; and 3) to explore and illuminating the complex interplay of resilience, aspiration, and guidance inherent in human experience.

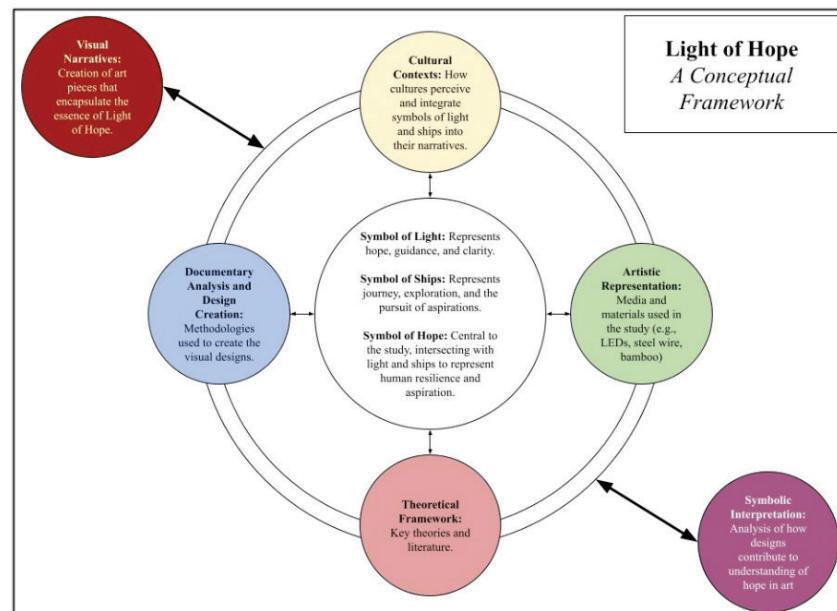


Figure 1. Conceptual framework for this study, Light of Hope.



## Literature Review

### (1) The Universality of Hope and Light

"Light is fundamental to religious experience, and its symbolism pervades the geography of sacred landscapes" (Weightman 1996, 59). This conclusion captures the essence of the omnipresence and significance of light across diverse religious practices and spiritual understandings worldwide. Within the realm of religion, light is often emblematic of purity, wisdom, illumination, and the divine (Ingram 1974). It is not uncommon to observe religious texts and doctrines employing metaphors of light to convey the presence of a higher power, enlightenment, or spiritual awakening (Matracchi 2021). In Christianity, for instance, light is frequently used as a metaphor for Christ, serving as a guiding force leading believers out of darkness (Seewald & Pope Benedict XVI 2019). Similarly, in Hinduism, light symbolizes knowledge, dispelling the darkness of ignorance (Tjandradipura, Santosa & Adhitama 2021). The festival of Diwali, celebrated by millions of Hindus, Sikhs, and Jains across the globe, is a festival of lights, symbolizing the victory of light over darkness, good over evil. In Islamic traditions, light also holds significant spiritual meaning, often associated with the divine, wisdom, and guidance (Bonnér 2019). Moreover, the use of light extends beyond the confines of religious doctrines and rituals, embedding itself in the physical spaces deemed sacred by these faith traditions. Sacred sites, churches, temples, and mosques often incorporate architectural elements that play with natural or artificial light, creating an atmosphere that is conducive to reflection, reverence, and connection to the divine (Guirguis et al. 2020). The strategic use of light within these spaces is far from arbitrary; it is carefully designed to evoke a sense of the sacred, guiding the faithful's spiritual journey and experience. Beyond religious contexts, the symbolism of light permeates societal understandings and cultural expressions, often representing hope, clarity, and the promise of a new day. Whether through art, literature, or popular media, light continues to be a powerful motif reflecting humanity's collective aspirations for understanding, enlightenment, and hope amidst the complexities of the human experience. This multifaceted representation of light in various forms serves as a testament to its enduring and universal appeal as a symbol of hope and enlightenment in different societal and cultural contexts.

Laurie Halse Anderson, an American novelist renowned for stories that interweave darkness and hope, employs symbols like the sun to create hopeful imagery (Oatman High 2010). Anderson believes in the power of writing as a communion, a deep connection between the writer, the universe, and the reader (Kaywell 2007). While redemption and salvation are

tied to specific religious beliefs, Anderson sees hope as a universally relatable concept, a beacon that transcends barriers. Throughout her works, symbols like glass, mirrors, candles, and stars illuminate the path, offering light amid obscurity (Sulaiman 2019). While many have varied interpretations of hope, it is a compelling reason to face each day. By juxtaposing life's various moments with the enlightening role of light, a rich tapestry of emotions and stories is revealed. Streetlights, for instance, serve as gentle guides, while the unwavering beacon of a lighthouse steers fishermen to safety (Strang, Edensor & Puckering 2018). The ambient glow within homes evokes familial warmth and intimacy (Wey n.d.). These diverse manifestations of light, from guiding lighthouses to the comforting glow within homes, collectively emphasize light's role as a harbinger of hope and guidance in everyday life.

#### (2) Light and Hope in Artistic Expression

As the quest for artistic inspiration unfolds, the search spans diverse artists resonating with similar thematic undertones. Irrespective of geography or culture, the beacon of hope remains a constant guiding light, underpinned by shared human desires and aspirations (Scioli & Biller 2009). Events, like the 2022 art exposition in Zhengzhou, bridged past and present, offering a renewed perspective on ancient practices, such as Zheng He's voyages (Hoon 2012). These voyages, while adventurous, also had a profound impact on trade, craft, and cultural exchanges. The event underscored 'hope' as a multifaceted gem, with each facet offering a unique view into its depth and breadth. Within the darkness that often symbolizes despair in many cultures, the shimmer of light emerges as a beacon of hope and solace. Across regions like Asia and Southeast Asia, traditions encapsulate this motif, making it an integral part of their cultural fabric (Sukamto et al. 2019). The Lantern Festival, where lotus lanterns are released, or the temples that have long been seen as places of refuge, reiterate the power of light (Wang 2003). Installation arts further this narrative by offering an immersive experience, allowing audiences to engage with and be enveloped by the expansive environments they create (Zong & Kamal 2022). The boundaries between the art and the viewer blur, leading to a richer, more profound connection. This interactive and immersive quality of light in artistic expressions offers a dynamic and engaging canvas for conveying messages of hope and resilience, further expanding the thematic depth explored by various artists.

In the realm of visual arts, artists like Ma Yue bring forth a compelling narrative. Her oil painting series of Light of Hope stands as a testament to the transformative power of art (Figure 2a). The play of light and shadow in her works captivates and instills a renewed



sense of hope in the viewer. Drawing inspiration from such brilliance, this study aspires to offer viewers a similar renewed sense of hope through its visual narrative. Similarly, the Mechanical Interactive Installation Laboratory, with its focus on light's rhythmic oscillations, presents another facet of this exploration (Figure 2b). Renowned Spanish designer Antoni Arola, too, weaves a unique story with light. His creations, transcending mere illumination, offer atmospheric depth and richness, serving as a cornerstone of inspiration for this study (Figure 2c). The convergence of empirical data with such artistic inspirations lays a solid foundation for the discourse to come.

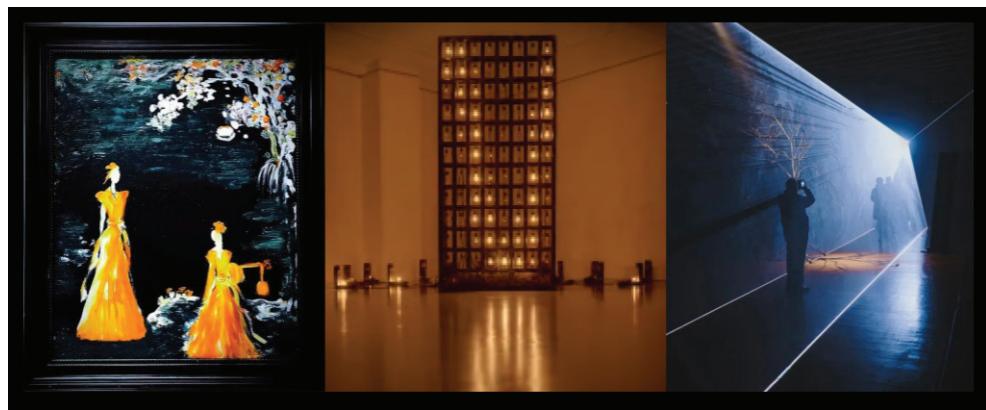


Figure 2a-c. Artistic inspirations for this investigation: (left to right) 1a - oil painting series of "Light of Hope", Yue Ma, oil on canvas, 60 x 80cm, Yihe, 2022 (online); 1b - "Light of Hope Interactive Device Works", M lab Mechanical Device Laboratory, installation art, 200 x 500 cm, Xiaohongshu, 2022 (online); 1c - "Fiat Lux", Antoni Arola, installation art, 100 x 400 cm, Xiaohongshu, 2020 (online).

The symbolism of light and darkness, and their respective associations with hope and despair, is not confined to Asian and Southeast Asian cultures; it is indeed a universal motif found in traditions and rituals around the globe (Edensor 2017). Various cultures have developed unique expressions and interpretations of these symbols to articulate their conceptualizations of hope, despair, and the human condition. For instance, in Western cultures, the use of light and darkness is often explored in visual arts and literature, reflecting the age-old dichotomy of good versus evil, knowledge versus ignorance, and hope versus despair (Forceville & Renckens 2013). In many African traditions, dawn, characterized by the gradual transition from darkness to light, is seen as a time of renewal and rebirth, carrying hopes for a new beginning (Okafor 2008). Native American cultures also harbor profound

respect for the sun as a source of light and life, often incorporating sunlight into their ceremonial practices to symbolize hope, enlightenment, and the life-giving force of nature (Owusu 1999).

In many Jewish celebrations and rituals, light holds a significant place, symbolizing hope, joy, and the divine presence, as seen in the lighting of the menorah during Hanukkah, which commemorates the miracle of oil lasting for eight days (Russack 1986). This act of kindling light is seen as a triumph of hope and faith over despair and oppression. Similarly, in many Catholic and Christian practices, candles are lit to represent the light of Christ, bringing hope and guidance to the faithful amidst darkness (Sardi & Motsianos 2021). During the festive season of Christmas, lights are prominently displayed, symbolizing the star of Bethlehem that guided the wise men, serving as a beacon of hope and the heralding of a savior (Sokolova 2020). The cultures of the Middle East and North Africa, too, incorporate light into various aspects of their daily and ceremonial life, using it as a potent symbol of guidance, wisdom, and the divine (Stone 2018). In essence, each culture brings forth a unique and rich tapestry of symbols and meanings associated with light and darkness, providing a multifaceted understanding of hope and despair that is deeply embedded in the collective consciousness of people around the world, reflecting their shared and diverse experiences, beliefs, and values.

### (3) Boats as Symbols of Hope in Southeast Asia

In China, tales of trade and migration further accentuate light's emblematic representation of hope in the context of sailing. During these voyages, beacons on ships were not mere navigational aids but stood as metaphoric symbols of hope. Despite the many challenges, such as unpredictable storms or the mysteries of uncharted territories, the focus remained steadfast on the destination. Every successful voyage was a testament to hope and perseverance. Over time, the vessel has also become associated with the meaning of hope. However, this is not a standard reading of the place of the boat in traditional Asian societies.

The emblematic representation of boats in Southeast Asian societies bears significant symbolic importance, as evidenced by the work of Ballard, Bradley, Myhre, and Wilson (2004). Boats serve not merely as physical vessels but as essential metaphors deeply embedded in the cultural and social framework of these societies, intricately woven into the tapestry of social organization, life transitions, and spiritual beliefs. Manguin (2001) acknowledges boats as paramount symbols of social organization in Southeast Asia, embodying the basic



units of family or community, akin to houses and villages. The architectural and symbolic integration of boats within settlements manifests in various ways: some communities structure their villages like ships, while others use boat-like stone enclosures, often positioned centrally, as significant markers representing the settlement's inception and the unity of its community (De Jonge and van Dijk 2012). These representations also play a pivotal role in delineating social hierarchies and statuses. Notably, in communities like the Lampung in South Sumatra, high-ranking individuals utilize wheeled boats for ceremonial participations, emphasizing their elevated status within the community (Roveneldo & Isnaeni 2022). Similarly, boat-prow carvings are exclusively used for noble coffins in the Toraja community in Sulawesi (Syahrun & Melamba 2022).

The symbolism of boats is prominently featured in rituals associated with life transitions, such as initiation, marriage, and death (Ballard et al., 2004). The multifaceted utilization of boat symbolism in these rituals underscores their pivotal role as conduits for transition, marking significant passages in an individual's life, often reflecting changes in status and life stages. For instance, the tampan ship cloths of the Lampung region are integral to ceremonies, serving as tangible symbols signifying transition to a different life state (Wong, Masters & Chu 2022). Moreover, boats embody vehicles for shamanic practices, facilitating spiritual travels and connecting the terrestrial with the celestial, the living with the deceased, and the present with the ancestral (Ballard et al. 2004). Boat imagery is particularly prevalent in mortuary practices, where they symbolically ferry souls to the afterlife or the ancestral homeland (Kimwah, Ibrahim & Arus 2020). This association is deeply ingrained in the societal psyche, to the extent that the terms for 'boat' and 'coffin' are often interchangeable in many Austronesian-speaking communities. Ancestors occupy a central position in this symbolic nexus, their presence revered and invoked during significant life transition ceremonies, highlighting the ancestral reverence and its significant influence on boat symbolism across different domains.

However, Ballard et al. (2004) caution against reducing the diversity of Asian boat imagery and associated practices into a monolithic symbolic complex, as this approach overlooks the vibrant local variations in these symbols and practices. Instead, a region-wide complex of beliefs and practices must be acknowledged, which is expressed through different mediums over time, providing a more nuanced understanding of the symbolic significance of boats in the region. Boats are not mere physical entities but potent symbols embodying social organization, life transitions, and spiritual beliefs. These symbols serve

as mirrors reflecting the societal values, hierarchies, and beliefs, providing a unique lens through which one can explore and understand the complex social and cultural dynamics at play in Southeast Asian societies.

Given the rich and diverse tapestry of light and hope symbolism elucidated in the literature, our study aims to craft and analyze contemporary visual design pieces that leverage light as a medium to symbolize hope, drawing inspiration from ancient Chinese sailboats. This endeavor will not only explore but also illuminate the intricate interplay of resilience, aspiration, and guidance that are deeply embedded in human experiences, providing valuable insights for understanding and interpreting the symbolic language of light and hope in visual design.

### 1. Materials and Methods

The research embarked on a dual-path inquiry, blending comprehensive documentary analysis with an iterative process of artistic creation, meticulously designed to explore not only the symbolic significance of hope, light, and ships but also to understand their artistic representation and interpretation. The data collection for this study unfolded through a twofold strategy. The first strategy involved an extensive documentary analysis. Primary data were gleaned through various digital networks, including online databases, digital libraries, e-journals, and scholarly articles, which offered academic literature pertinent to themes of hope, light, ships, and their symbolic representations in art and culture. The search strings crafted for this purpose were broad, capturing a range of publications relevant to the research questions. To complement this, photographs of related art installations at various galleries were taken, serving as secondary data. These visual data were integral, aiding in the comparative analysis and examination of themes as manifested through different artistic styles, mediums, and cultural contexts.

Transitioning to the artistic creation process, initial sketches visualizing ships were drafted post the thorough analysis of literature and visual data. These sketches were preliminary visual representations of the explored themes. A variety of materials and equipment, including warm light LEDs, steel wire, fence net, electric welding machine, and ribbons, were experimentally selected and employed for crafting the art pieces. Each material was chosen after considering its symbolic and aesthetic contributions to the artwork. Prototypes were then constructed to test and refine the conceptualized ideas. The first model, a tangible representation of the initial concept, was a small frame made from iron wire and wood, providing valuable insights into the feasibility and visual impact of the proposed design.



Informed by this prototype, subsequent models were developed, incorporating necessary adjustments and improvements until the final artworks were assembled, displayed, and photographed for documentation and analysis.

The data analysis process was systematic and segmented into interconnected stages. The initial phase of thematic analysis focused on the concept of hope, delving into its historical and universal aspects as an intrinsic human emotion and symbol. The study then shifted attention to form symbols, with a significant focus on light as a powerful symbol of hope. The analysis delved deeper into the contrasting elements of light and darkness, exploring their perceptual and symbolic impacts. Additionally, the study examined various artistic techniques and mediums, focusing particularly on installation art, aiming to understand the practical and symbolic potentials of different mediums in representing the identified themes.

The creation process of the artworks was iterative and reflective (Figure 3). Initial sketches and designs were constantly revisited and refined in light of insights gathered from the data analysis phase. Prototypes underwent a series of tests and evaluations based on their visual impact, symbolic representation, and aesthetic appeal. Each stage of the artistic creation process was diligently documented through photographs and notes, providing a visual and narrative record of the creative journey, facilitating reflection, analysis, and presentation of the research findings. To ensure the reliability and validity of the research findings, triangulation was employed, combining literary review, visual data analysis, and artistic creation. This multi-method approach offered a holistic understanding of the research themes, allowing for cross-verification of findings and insights from different data sources and methodologies. In conclusion, the adopted methodology provided a structured yet flexible framework for exploring and understanding the symbolic themes of hope, light, and ships, contributing to both the fields of symbolic studies and visual art through a deep and nuanced understanding of the themes.



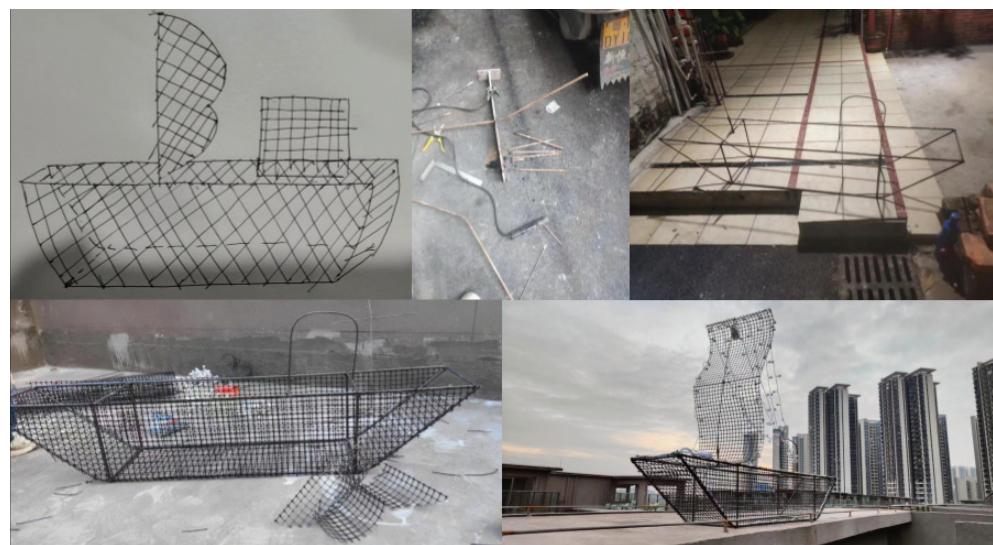


Figure 3. Images of the creation process, including sketches, models and prototype creation.

## Results

### (1) Pre-Thesis Creative Works

Drawing inspiration from various themes and materials, the pre-thesis works (Figures 4a-c) revolve around the central concept of light as a beacon of hope. In the first piece, a poetic sentiment from China serves as the core inspiration, leading to the creation of a cosmic galaxy using lanterns and bulbs in a dim space. These lanterns are meticulously crafted and hand-painted with traditional Chinese stories, illuminating the celestial narrative and evoking memories of people yearned for from afar. Evolving from this celestial theme, the essence of nature and faith is explored through a symbolic tree of hope created from instant coffee cans, iron wire, and wooden pagodas. The tree, surrounded by handmade lotus lamps, becomes a testament to hope that lights up the surrounding darkness. Finally, delving into the universal nature of hope, an array of vessels crafted from wood is showcased. These vessels, illuminated from within, signify the relentless human spirit and its undying hope. Collectively, these works each utilize the techniques of installation art to depict the pervading presence of hope in various facets of life.



Figure 4a-c (left to right). 4a - Pre-thesis work 1, "Light of Hope", 300 x 1000 cm, installation art; 4b - Pre-thesis work 2, "Light of Hope", 150 x 300 cm, installation art; 4c - Pre-thesis work 3, "Light of Hope", 40 x 130 x 200 cm, installation art.

To illustrate the evolution from these initial concepts to the finalized thesis works, a transition analysis is presented in Table 1. This table compares the thematic development, material usage, and symbolic interpretation across the pre-thesis and thesis works, highlighting the progressive deepening of the narrative and complexity in artistic expression.

Table 1: Transition Analysis from Pre-Thesis to Thesis Creative Works

Component	Pre-Thesis Works	Thesis Works
Themes	Light as a beacon of hope, celestial narrative, universal nature of hope	Journey towards optimism, life's struggles, resilience
Materials Used	Lanterns, bulbs, instant coffee cans, iron wire, wooden pagodas, wood	Steel, bamboo, mirror, lighting elements
Symbolic Meaning	Hope illuminating darkness, evoking memories and narratives	Hope guiding through darkness, resilience in adversity
Artistic Techniques	Installation art with static displays, hand-painting	Installation art with dynamic elements, structural complexity
Visual Impact	Celestial and nature-inspired designs, intimate and contemplative	Bold navigational and familial motifs, expansive and reflective

## (2) Thesis Creative Works

The thesis artworks endeavor to offer a nuanced reflection on hope, weaving the symbol of voyages and light to denote life's journey towards optimism. Each piece tells a unique story, with ships and boats serving as central motifs.

In the first piece, a modern fishing boat is meticulously crafted from steel, encapsulating the journey through darkness towards hope (Figure 5a). The selected shape of this boat is significant as it mirrors the traditional structure, while a sail and light added to the design visually convey the theme of hope in darkness. The boat, which is fashioned to resemble a cabin, is lit and positioned on a two-meter-high open-air platform, seemingly sailing under a night sky adorned with warm, round halos of light around both the boat and its sail. The presentation of this boat, sailing in the night with guiding lights, effectively communicates the pursuit of distant hope.

The journey evolves with the second piece, an ancient multi-sail sailboat fabricated from refined steel, which symbolizes ancient Chinese voyagers (Figure 5b). These adventurers navigated treacherous seas, with their boat being a beacon of hope, even in uncertain circumstances. The artwork features a mirror base under the boat, which enhances the visual effect by creating reflections reminiscent of starlight on night waters. The material chosen for the ship and the addition of mobile display parts contribute to a stronger visual impact, with lights on the ship illuminating the night sky, creating a synergy between light and reflected starlight in the mirror.

Transitioning from the ancient to the familial, the third piece presents a family unit crafted delicately from lightweight bamboo chips, underlining sentiments of unity, fragility, and shared hope (Figure 5c). The artwork consists of three boats of varying sizes, representing a family. These are hung in the air with lights connecting all the boats, providing a sense of forward and upward movement to the viewer. The choice of bamboo, which moves slightly even with minimal wind, underscores the uncertainties faced in the pursuit of hope. This piece was crafted meticulously with bamboo chips tied and glued together to create delicate hulls, and the entire setup is illuminated against a grey, empty wall, presenting a compelling visual of collective hope.

The culmination of the thesis is a grand depiction in the fourth piece, a steel ship representing a father's determination, accompanied by smaller ships symbolizing family members (Figure 5d). This work encapsulates a father leading his family towards hope, and it's crafted with attention to the struggles encountered during life's journey. The large



ship is intentionally given a rustic appearance, having been soaked in saltwater to induce rust, symbolizing life's hardships and resilience. The piece is dynamic, with flashing lights added to simulate movement towards hope, and a spotlight illuminating the hull emphasizes the relentless struggle towards a hopeful destination.

Overall, the suite of artworks, ranging from 150 x 300 cm to larger installations of 200 x 700 cm, intricately explores the intertwined themes of hope, light, and journey. Each piece, while distinct, contributes to a cohesive narrative of perseverance, collective spirit, and the inexorable movement towards hope amidst life's complexities.



Figure 5a-d (clockwise from top left). 5a - Thesis work 1, "Light of Hope", 150 x 300 cm, installation art; 5b - Thesis work 2, "Light of Hope", 300 x 220 cm, installation art; 5c - Thesis work 3, "Light of Hope", 150 x 700 cm, installation art; 5d - Thesis work 4, "Light of Hope", 200 x 700 cm, installation art.

## Discussion

The odyssey explored in Light of Hope intricately mirrors the kaleidoscope of human experience, illuminating the universal quest for hope embedded within the diverse tapestry of life. This quest for hope, a beacon that allures everyone, regardless of societal status or background, is a theme deeply ingrained and universally resonant in the human psyche. Everyone's pursuit is undoubtedly individual, but they all navigate the ebb and flow of a common current: aspiration (Scioli & Biller 2009). Comparatively, the creative works developed in this research share thematic affinities with Ma Yue's use of light to evoke emotional resonance, yet they diverge in their use of physical space and materials. While Ma Yue's oil paintings capture light within static frames, this research extends into three-dimensional space, incorporating dynamic light interactions akin to those seen in works by M Lab Mechanical Device Laboratory. Unlike Antoni Arola's ambient installations, the artworks in this study emphasize narrative progression through the physical journey of ships, marking a distinct approach in the conceptual integration of light and hope.

Drawing from the dense symbolism within various religious and spiritual practices, where light is heralded as a symbol of purity, wisdom, and the divine, the chosen symbol of ships in the artworks is not arbitrary (Ingram 1974; Weightman 1996; Matracchi 2021). Ships are not mere vessels of travel but have long been potent symbols, embodying human exploration, discovery, and progression (Manguin 2001). The unpredictable seas they sail mirror life's uncertainties, symbolizing the myriad challenges life unfurls. In their resilient voyage through darkness, surmounting each wave and enduring each storm, ships have metamorphosed into eloquent metaphors for life's journey (Wong, Masters & Chu 2022). They encapsulate resilience, forward momentum, and the ceaseless pursuit of what unfurls beyond the horizon - hope in its most distilled form. Furthermore, drawing upon Ballard et al. (2004), the choice of ships is intricately connected with cultural symbols and social organization in Asia, serving as vital metaphors deeply entrenched in cultural and spiritual frameworks.

Utilizing traditional shipbuilding materials like wood, steel, and bamboo was not a capricious decision but a deeply contemplated choice that weaves additional layers into the narrative (Ballard et al., 2004). These materials, while historic and practical, echo metaphors of human characteristics in the pursuit of hope. Wood resonates with the natural instinct of seeking and hoping; steel epitomizes strength and resilience, while bamboo, celebrated for its flexibility and robustness, mirrors human adaptability amidst adversities.



Moreover, a careful analysis of the historical migrations in China brings forth poignant insights into how the artworks resonate with these movements (Hoon 2012). Countless individuals, driven by adversities, placed their hopes on boats, embarking on perilous journeys towards prospects of a better life, with their vessels floating in mid-air adorned with light bulbs, becoming potent symbols of hope and destiny.

The decision to incorporate lamps within the artworks serves as a pivotal design element, eloquently echoing the extensive and multifaceted symbolism of light, which has been deeply embedded in various cultural, religious, and societal contexts as reviewed in the literature. The lamps serve as more than mere instruments of visibility; they are symbolic representations of guidance and illumination, offering a beacon of clarity within the treacherous, often inscrutable, paths and darkened waters of human experience (Strang, Edensor & Puckering 2018). Moreover, lamps mirror the broader societal and cultural connotations of light as a symbol of hope, clarity, and promise of a new dawn, as seen in various forms of artistic and literary expressions (Forceville & Renckens 2013; Oatman High 2010; Sulaiman 2019). The ambient glow of the lamps within the artworks might be seen as evoking feelings of warmth and familial intimacy, reminiscent of the comforting glow within homes that offers solace and a sense of security (Wey n.d.). Through the incorporation of these lamps, the artworks seamlessly weave a narrative that is at once personal and universal, encapsulating the collective human aspiration for understanding, enlightenment, and hope amidst the complex tapestry of human existence.

In religious and spiritual spheres, light is an emblem of purity, wisdom, and divinity, providing a guiding force that leads adherents out of the metaphorical darkness, symbolizing ignorance, fear, and despair (Weightman 1996; Ingram 1974; Matracchi 2021). For instance, within Christianity, light not only signifies Christ but acts as a spiritual compass, guiding believers through the often tumultuous seas of life towards hope and salvation (Seewald & Pope Benedict XVI 2019). Similarly, in the profound tapestry of Hindu traditions, light stands as a symbol of knowledge and enlightenment, fiercely combating and ultimately dispelling the pervasive darkness of ignorance (Tjandradipura, Santosa & Adhitama 2021). The lamps in the artworks can be interpreted as external manifestations of internal, spiritual light, akin to the inner wisdom or inherent moral compass that individuals often rely upon to navigate through life's challenges. This internal light could also symbolize intuitive understanding and innate wisdom, which individuals draw upon in moments of darkness and uncertainty. Much like the role of lighthouses and beacons for ships traversing through

nocturnal, uncertain seascapes, these sources of illumination are crucial. They not only guide individuals but also offer hope, clarity, and direction, serving as indispensable tools for navigation through the intricate, often bewildering, labyrinth of life (Sulaiman 2019).

The artworks, besides linking past with present, explore a theme seldom traversed in Chinese art: the profound impact of historical events on contemporary perceptions of hope. The immersive experience offered by installation art engages audiences profoundly, creating environments that envelop them (Zong & Kamal 2022), fostering a deeper connection, making the Light of Hope series a canvas not only of artistic expression but of profound exploration into the human psyche, an odyssey through time, and a homage to the unyielding spirit of hope that ceaselessly defines humanity (Scioli & Biller 2009).

In conclusion, the significance of the themes explored in the Light of Hope artworks is accentuated by their timely relevance and universal appeal. The research successfully achieved its first objective by crafting and analyzing contemporary visual design pieces that utilized light as a medium to symbolically represent hope. Through the innovative use of LEDs, mirrors, and other reflective materials, these artworks vividly depicted light as a beacon of resilience and optimism. Secondly, the artworks were deeply inspired by the enduring image of ancient Chinese sailboats, fulfilling the second objective. This was evident in the structural design of the pieces, which meticulously mirrored the form and essence of these historic vessels, thus celebrating their symbolic journey through time. Lastly, the study explored and illuminated the complex interplay of resilience, aspiration, and guidance inherent in human experience, the third objective. By juxtaposing the physical light with the metaphorical light of hope, the artworks encapsulated the dynamic struggle and triumph inherent in the human spirit. Each piece served as a narrative arc that guided viewers through the emotional landscape of striving, overcoming, and ultimately, aspiring beyond the visible horizon.

### Limitations and Recommendations

This visual arts thesis, Light of Hope, relates the intertwined themes of illumination and guidance. Our present-day analysis reveals that throughout history, irrespective of the era, people have perennially sought a beacon, a light, both literal and metaphorical, to guide them through life's labyrinth. It is evident that, whether urban or rural, individuals require some guiding light to help them find their way. In urban environments, streetlights are



quintessential in illuminating pathways, while in the countryside, stars play this crucial role. These symbols not only represent physical direction but also the internal guidance one seeks in life. The light of hope, in this context, acts as a compass pointing towards success and victory. The creative process in this investigation was heavily influenced by background investigation. The resulting artworks, featuring ships both ancient and modern, capture the essence of hope. Ships, universally recognized as vehicles of movement and progression, resonate well with the idea. Similarly, different types of lights - fixed, cold, warm, and flashing - were analyzed to capture their evocative power, emphasizing that in the depth of darkness, the smallest glimmer can ignite feelings of hope.

While this thesis offers valuable insights into the intersection of light and hope symbolism through art, its limitations must be acknowledged. The study is largely interpretative and subjective, with the artworks' perceived meanings highly dependent on individual viewer perspectives, potentially leading to varied interpretations that may diverge from the intended narrative. The selection of symbols and materials, while deeply considered, is not exhaustive, as the complexity of hope and light symbolism transcends the chosen thematic elements, with myriad other symbols and materials that might convey these themes left unexplored. Additionally, the study does not engage with a diverse audience to gather a range of viewer responses, thereby limiting the understanding of the reception and impact of the artworks across different demographic and cultural groups. Moreover, while the artworks capture the thematic essence of hope and resilience, they may not fully encapsulate the breadth of human emotional experiences related to these themes. Future developments could explore more interactive and immersive forms of installation, potentially incorporating audience interaction to enhance the emotional resonance of the pieces. Additionally, there is scope for integrating more diverse cultural symbols and narratives to broaden the appeal and relevance of the artworks across different societal contexts. Future research should also consider exploring the interplay of light and shadow in different cultural contexts, potentially through collaborative projects that span multiple disciplines. This would not only enhance the depth of the narrative but also enrich the interpretive possibilities of light as a symbol of hope in art and culture.

The Light of Hope theme, represented through ships and lights, holds boundless potential for further exploration and interpretation. There are manifold symbols that can be integrated to represent hope. Beyond ships, other potent symbols like clocks, suns, sunflowers, or wings can be explored. The realm of artistic expression is vast. Delving deeper into different

art forms and enhancing one's knowledge base can lead to novel interpretations, potentially leveraging mediums like performance art. A more exhaustive collection of personal stories and experiences will enrich the narrative. By understanding and empathizing with these stories, creators can produce art that resonates more profoundly with viewers, making the portrayal of hope even more impactful.

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