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Responsible Primitivism: Wu Ming-yi's *The Man with the Compound Eyes* as Indigenous-Themed Environmental World Literature

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Wu Ming-yi's (吳明益) novel *The Man with the Compound Eyes* (hereafter *The Man*) features apparently idealized Indigenous characters.[1] Atile'i is preternaturally sensitive to and knowledgeable about nature, both on and around his Pacific Island home and later in Taiwan. Hafay runs a café at which she serves traditional Pangcah cuisine made with wild greens she has gathered herself on the coastal hills along Taiwan's east coast. Dahu is the son of a Bunun hunter who has spent his life getting to know the mountains in his way. Chief Anu is a Bunun hunter who is running an ethnic ecotourism operation on a mountain in southeastern Taiwan, a place that heals urbanites' wounded souls. As Atile'i puts it, "the mountain will cure you."[2]

Why would Wu create Indigenous characters like these? Given that Taiwan is a settler society, one might wonder if Wu is a Taiwanese nationalist, because nationalists in settler societies like Taiwan often idealize and identify with their Indigenous heritage.[3] Yet Wu has never made a claim to indigeneity, nor has any non-Indigenous Han Taiwanese character in his fiction. Rather than a nationalist, Wu is better described as a "primitivist," someone who sees in "primitive" Indigenous cultures solutions to "modern" problems, particularly degradation of and alienation from the natural environment. But he is not a simplistic or naive primitivist. His primitivism is tempered by knowledge of Indigenous cultures and histories and acquaintance with Indigenous individuals and lifeways in Taiwan.

Nonetheless, Wu's primitivism is part of the secret of his success as a writer of "environmental world literature," in that the perspectives of his Indigenous characters contribute to his novel's appealing "ecocosmopolitanism." As defined by Ursula Heise, ecocosmopolitanism is "an attempt to envision individuals and groups as

[1] Wu Ming-yi, 複眼人 [*Compound Eye Person*] (Taipei: Summer Festival, 2011), translated by Darryl Sterk, as *The Man with the Compound Eyes* (London: Harvill Secker, 2013).

[2] Wu, *The Man*,270.

[3] Laura Jane Murray, "Going Native, Becoming American: Colonialism, Identity, and American Writing, 1760–1820" (PhD diss., Cornell University, 1993).

part of planetary 'imagined communities' of both human and nonhuman kinds."[4] The formation of the real-life Great Pacific Garbage Patch into the Trash Vortex, a fictional floating mountain of trash, is a speculative scenario that sounds archetypally ecocosmopolitan, because it is a mess all the world's people created and are responsible for cleaning up, whatever imagined community they happen to be part of. The imagined community in the novel is a transnational group of trash-clearing scientists from Germany and Norway and Indigenous activists like Hafay and Dahu.[5] Given that so many of the characters in the novel are Indigenous, one wonders if it can be considered not just environmental world literature but also Indigenous world literature.

Indigenous World Literature

The scholars' names to reckon with today in world literature studies are Damrosch, Moretti, Casanova, and Apter, but before they started publishing, Native American literary critic Arnold Krupat had considered the possibility of Indigenous world literature.[6] However, his book was mainly about Native American literature as a part of the American national canon. The first book-length scholarly work to focus on "Indigenous world literature" is the 2018 collection *Indigenous Transnationalism*, devoted to Australian Indigenous writer Alexis Wright's 2006 novel *Carpentaria*.[7] Editor Lynda Ng and the chapter contributors point out that while we typically associate "Indigenous" peoples with temporal and spatial roots to a local landscape, which would seem to be the antithesis of worldliness, in fact, as a modern identity and status category, "Indigenous" has been international from the start. In Ronald Niezen's influential 2003 account, "global indigenism" dates to the 1960s, when Indigenous activists joined forces in their struggles for sovereignty and cultural and linguistic rights in settler states around the world.[8]

Carpentaria is not about activists at government functions or United Nations gatherings but about ordinary Indigenous people who do not have passports but are as aware as anyone of the globally interrelated character of modern life, particularly in its environmental dimensions. One way of reading Wright's novel is as an Indigenous response to a fictitious multinational corporation's mining project, which of course can

[4] Ursula K. Heise, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 61.

[5] You-ting Chen argues that Wu's *The Stolen Bicycle* is ecocosmopolitan. See his "Compound Eyes and Limited Visions: Wu Ming-yi's 'Weak Anthropocentric' Gaze for World Literature," *Ex-position*, no. 41 (2019): 33–52. *The Man with the Compound Eyes* is more explicitly so, but it is not my purpose to compare the two novels.

[6] Arnold Krupat, *The Voice in the Margin: Native American Literature and the Canon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

[7] Lynda Ng, ed., *Indigenous Transnationalism: Alexis Wright's "Carpentaria"* (Sydney: Giramondo Publishing, 2018).

[8] Ronald Niezen, *The Origins of Indigenism: Human Rights and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

only proceed with the permission of the Australian government because the project aligns with the state or national development policy. Indigenous Australians have different values from a multinational corporation and the government, values that they might today express in terms of environmentalism, even ecocosmopolitanism. Alexis Wright's characters do not use such sophisticated terminology, but they appear to be feeling their way toward an Indigenous ecocosmopolitanism. Adapting Heise slightly, Indigenous ecocosmopolitanism could be defined as culturally specific attempts by Indigenous people to imagine themselves as members of *glocal* ecocommunities, like the one that attempts to clean up the shores of eastern Taiwan after the trash tsunami hits in *The Man*.

The study of the significance of Wright's novel's travels beyond Australia's borders would have to contextualize recent efforts in Australia at reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, if not historical justice let alone contemporary equality. A prominent Australian Indigenous writer's reflection on Indigenous Australians' place in Australia is a part of this larger process. A year after the publication of *Carpentaria* in 2007, the year of the passage of the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), then prime minister Kevin Rudd made his historic apology to Indigenous peoples, in February 2008. His national apology must be seen in both local and global context, as should be unsurprising to anyone who has accepted the basic tenet of world literature that the nation-state is ultimately an inadequate container for literature or anything else for that matter. When Rudd made his apology, other countries with similar demographics as a result of similar histories of settlement were watching. Then prime minister of Canada Stephen Harper made his apology to the First Nations four months later in June. While neither country had endorsed UNDRIP, an apology is a start.

Taiwanese Cultural Production in a "Settler Society" Context

Nearly ten years later on August 1, 2016, Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen made an apology to the Indigenous people as one of the first acts of her presidency.[9] Why it made sense for her to make one is complicated. She was surely differentiating herself from the previous president, Ma Ying-jeou, whose party, the Kuomintang (KMT), had always enjoyed (and continues to enjoy) Indigenous political support.[10] Beyond the motive of peeling away Indigenous voters from the KMT, Tsai sincerely hoped to further the reconciliation process, and five years on some progress has been made, particularly with the passage of a national languages act in 2017 that made sixteen of Taiwan's Indigenous languages national languages and quintupled funding for Indigenous language revitalization.[11] But to most Indigenous activists and their

[9] Linda van der Horst, "Taiwan's President Offers Apology to Indigenous People," *The Diplomat*, August 3, 2016.

[10] Eric Hale, "'Always Campaign Time': Why Taiwan's Indigenous People Back KMT," *Aljazeera*, January 9, 2020.

[11] Gareth Price, *Language, Society, and State: From Colonization to Globalization in Taiwan* (Amsterdam: Mouton de Gruyter, 2018).

supporters, not enough progress has been made toward addressing past injustices and realizing some form of Indigenous sovereignty.[12]

It should be noted that the KMT got the ball rolling by recognizing Taiwan's Indigenous people as such in the 1990s. The KMT recognized Indigenous people for two main reasons. First, to distinguish Taiwan from China, which has a "national minority policy" that was imported from the USSR and modified to reduce local autonomy in the 1950s. Having indigenes, specifically Austronesian indigenes, Taiwan could reach out through global Indigenous, in particular Austronesian, networks.[13] Second, to pivot to democratic politics. The old monolingual, monocultural, Mandarin-only, Chinese-only language and culture policy would not play well to minorities in a democracy. The KMT recognized them as Indigenous to keep their support.

A bottom-up account, at least at the level of Indigenous elites, who might try to share their visions with ordinary Indigenous people, would be that the KMT was also responding to Indigenous activists, who took up the term "Indigenous," translated as *yuanzhumin* (原住民, literally "the people who lived here first"), around 1984, at the beginning of the local Indigenous movement. The activists could plausibly claim to be Indigenous because their Austronesian ancestors had settled Taiwan over five thousand years before Han Chinese began to migrate to Taiwan in the seventeenth century.[14] As Alice explains to Atile'i in *The Man*, "people like [the Han Taiwanese] are latecomers," and the ancestors of people like Hafay and Dahu came earlier.[15] As a result of this history, Taiwan can be compared to Australia and other settler states like New Zealand, Canada, and the United States.[16] The comparison to the United States is particularly compelling because of the time frame of settlement (starting in the seventeenth century) and the resulting demographic profile (both countries have an Indigenous population of under 5 percent).[17] In my previous research, I attempted a discussion of Taiwan's Indigenous-themed literature (and film) in terms of the concept of the settler state.[18] The year after a book chapter of mine on the topic was published, along came Wu Ming-yi's *Fuyanren* (複眼人), literally "compound eye person," in 2011, which I would go on to translate as *The Man with the Compound Eyes*.

[12] Awi Mona, "Conceptualizing Indigenous Historical Justice toward a Mutual Recognition with State in Taiwan," *Washington International Law Review* 28, no. 3 (2019): 654–76.

[13] Scott Simon, "From the Village to the United Nations and Back Again: Aboriginal Taiwan and International Indigenism," *Taiwan Journal of Indigenous Studies* 9, no. 3 (2016): 49–89.

[14] Robert Blust, "Austronesian Culture History: The Window of Language," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 86, no. 5 (1996): 28–35.

[15] Wu, *The Man*, 175.

[16] Benedict Anderson, "Western Nationalism and Eastern Nationalism: Is There a Difference That Matters?" *New Left Review* 9 (2001). https://newleftreview.org/issues/ii9/articles/benedict-anderson-western-nationalism-and-eastern-nationalism.

[17] John R. Shepherd, *Statecraft and Political Economy on the Taiwan Frontier, 1600–1800* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

[18] Darryl Sterk, "Romancing the Formosan Aborigine: Colonial Interethnic Romance and Its Democratic Revision in Postwar Film and Fiction," in *Becoming Taiwan: From Colonialism to Democracy*, ed. Ann Heylen and Scott Sommers (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2010), 49–62.

Indigenous-Themed Environmental World Literature

Kuei-fen Chiu has offered an insightful analysis of the secrets of *The Man*'s global success, in other words, the ways Wu overcame barriers to entry to world literature: by signing with the literary agent and publishing expert Gray Tan, by employing magic realism, a genre with which readers around the world are familiar, and by foregrounding his scientific knowledge, especially about the environment and his environmental concern, in that environmental issues are global in scope and matter to a great many readers.[19] In this way Wu has made it into some echelon of environmental world literature, where he remains. May he have a long "shelf life."

I argue that Indigenous content is a part of *The Man*'s appeal as a work of environmental world literature. I describe it as "Indigenous-themed" rather than Indigenous because, unlike Alexis Wright, Wu Ming-yi is not himself Indigenous, even though Indigenous characters figure prominently in the main plot and the subplots. Although the main plot is about a Han Taiwanese professor of literature named Alice, her Indigenous friends have their own subplots. One of these friends is an Indigenous youth, though not a Taiwanese one, named Atile'i. The first substantial chapter in the novel is about Atile'i. In chapter two, Atile'i leaves the imaginary island of Wayo Wayo (which was Woenesia, island of woe, in an early version of the sample translation). Wayo Wayo was partly inspired by Orchid Island as represented by the noted Tao writer Syaman Rapongan (夏曼·藍波安). Atile'i later lands on a floating trash island he calls Gesi Gesi. Gesi Gesi carries Atile'i onto the shores of eastern Taiwan, where he befriends Alice and accompanies her on a trip into the island's alpine interior to try to find her lost son and husband. Atile'i is introduced before Alice, who does not appear until chapter three. In the sample translation, chapters two and three, which was submitted by Wu Ming-yi's literary agent Gray Tan to Harvill Secker, the novel's eventual English publisher, Atile'i was given as much space as Alice. When a selection was made from this sample for *Asymptote*, a website that (cl)aims to be "the premier site for world literature in translation," chapter two about Atile'i was chosen over chapter three about Alice. In other words, *The Man*'s initial appeal to world literature readers was through its indigeneity. When Ursula Le Guin commented, "We haven't read anything like this novel. Ever. South America gave us magical realism—what is Taiwan giving us? A new way of telling our new reality, beautiful, entertaining, frightening, preposterous, true," she may have been responding to the Indigenous story of Wayo Wayo and Atile'i.[20]

[19] Kuei-fen Chiu, "The Making of Small Literature as World Literature: Taiwanese writer Wu Ming-yi," forthcoming in *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*.

[20] Gray Tan, "Ursula K. Le Guin Recommends Wu Ming-yi's *The Man with Compound Eyes*," *The Grayhawk Agency* (blog), July 16, 2013.

Research Question and Literature Review

To argue that indigeneity is an inseparable part of *The Man*'s appeal to ecocosmopolitan readers, which is to say, consumers of environmental world literature, I would have to present evidence about both production and reception, in other words, how the book was written, pitched, and marketed and then how it was read and received by professional and non-professional readers alike. In recent literary reception research, reviews left by non-professional readers on Amazon and Goodreads have become grist for the mill. Kuei-fen Chiu has used such evidence as one "indicator" of *The Man*'s global visibility.[21] But I shall not marshal such evidence because the main goal of this chapter is not to prove the thesis that Indigenous content increased *The Man*'s appeal (though I assume that thesis is correct).

The main goal is rather to answer the following research question: In idealizing Indigenous characters, did Wu Ming-yi represent Taiwan's Indigenous heritage, particularly in its environmental dimensions, responsibly? I ask this question because Wu is not himself Indigenous and may be more prone to distortion or misunderstanding of Indigenous issues. This is not to say that Indigenous writers' representations should be taken at face value or that *The Man* should be automatically dismissed as cultural appropriation. I cannot imagine that Indigenous writers would want their representations to be taken at face value; and if we outlaw writing about the other, ultimately the only one a writer will be allowed to write about is himself or herself.

What would a responsible representation of Indigenous peoples by a non-Indigenous writer like Wu be like? It should be based on a hard-nosed, realistic understanding of historical subjugation and contemporary inequality; and yet realism is not the only principle of responsible representation because representation can be both of reality and of possibility. Hence, an honest representation may partake of "primitivism," the modern idealization of Indigenous peoples who might have answers to modern problems like our degradation of and alienation from the environment. As Indigenous peoples are at a distance from their cultural "traditions," as they have been formulated in modern times, they may idealize themselves, hence "Indigenous primitivism." For Indigenous or any other kind of primitivism to have any depth and complexity, it should be "ironic" not naive.[22]

So, what kind of Taiwanese indigeneity does Wu give readers of environmental world literature in *The Man*? Before trying to answer this question myself, I should first make sure I am not reinventing the wheel.

There is now a substantial critical literature on the environmental dimensions of *The Man*, for instance about Wu's localization of Western nature writing and his vision of nature.[23] Regarding Indigenous representation, Corey Byrnes writes:

[21] Kuei-fen Chiu, "'Worlding' World Literature from the Literary Periphery: Four Taiwanese Models," *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 30, no. 1 (2018): 13–41.

[22] Darryl Sterk, "Ironic Indigenous Primitivism: Taiwan's First 'Native Feature' in an Era of Ethnic Tourism," *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 8, no. 3 (2014): 209–25.

[23] See Serena Shiuhhuah Chou, "Sense of Wilderness, Sense of Time: Mingyi Wu's Nature Writing and the Aesthetics of Change," in *East Asian Ecocriticisms: A Critical Reader*, ed. Simon C. Estok and Won-chung Kim (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 145–63 and Dingru Huang, "Compound Eyes and Limited Visions: Wu Ming-yi's 'Weak Anthropocentric' Gaze for World Literature," *Exposition*, 41 (2019): 53–70.

> Wu's portrait of the people and traditions of the fictional Wayo Wayo is lovingly detailed, but it also bears the mark of a primitive romanticism so retrograde as to seem almost ironic. Do the islanders represent an ecological alternative to the death-drive of global capitalism as embodied by the ethnically Han Taiwanese, or are they a knowing allusion to a Western literary tradition fraught with racist and imperialist origins?[24]

Presenting the counter thesis, Kathryn Chang claims that Wu is "far from idealizing or romanticizing the Taiwanese Aboriginals because he perceives their vulnerability and victimization by colonialism and global climate change."[25] Byrnes's and Chang's criticisms are actually not mutually incompatible because Byrnes is commenting on Atile'i, while Chang is commenting on Hafay and Dahu. While she is well aware of Hafay and Dahu, Rose Juan argues that Atile'i and Alice's friendship represents an encounter between oral and literate, premodern and modern.[26]

Wayo Wayo is ironic primitive romanticism, and that is a good thing. Not all primitive romanticisms are indelibly stained by their racist and imperialist origins. Wayo Wayo is ironic in the sense that it is, as Rose Juan puts it, a "fable" and a "floating signifier."[27] Atile'i and his people may offer an ecological alternative to modernity, but it is hardly feasible in a world of nearly eight billion people, nor is it one that any modern person, including any modern Indigenous person, could accept. Environmentally salient aspects of the Austronesian culture of Wayo Wayo that modern people might be able to accept are explored in Taiwan after Atile'i arrives and makes contact with Alice. Similar aspects of Formosan Austronesian cultures—cultures of the colonized Indigenous peoples of Taiwan—are explored through what Byrnes describes as "Wu's more well-rounded native Taiwanese characters." These Formosan Indigenous characters complicate Rose Juan's binaries, in that they are trying to make oral traditions relevant in modern or postmodern times. One alternative these characters explore is small-scale capitalism, which, as an approach to exchange and production, is not necessarily a force of destruction and death.

[24] Corey Byrnes, review of *The Man with the Compound Eyes*, by Wu Ming-yi, *MCLC Resource Center Publication*, October 2014.

[25] Kathryn Yalan Chang, "If Nature Had a Voice: A Material-Oriented Environmental Reading of *The Man with the Compound Eyes*," in *Ecocriticism in Taiwan: Identity, Environment, and the Arts*, ed. Chia-ju Chang and Scott Slovic (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2018), 104.

[26] Rose Hsiu-li Juan, "Imagining the Pacific Trash Vortex and the Spectacle of Environmental Disaster: Environmental Entanglement and Literary Engagement in Wu Ming-yi's *Fuyanren* (The Man with the Compound Eyes)," in *Ecocriticism in Taiwan: Identity, Environment, and the Arts*, ed. Chia-ju Chang and Scott Slovic (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2018), 79–94.

[27] Juan, "Imagining the Pacific Trash Vortex and the Spectacle of Environmental Disaster," 85 & 89. Juan's application of "floating signifier" to *The Man* is a stroke of brilliance. A translation of *signifiant flottant*, Lévi-Strauss's characterization of *mana* in Polynesian languages and cultures, "floating signifier" is particularly apt for Wayo Wayo because the island floats. What the island means is, similarly, open to interpretation, though its meaning may not be quite so hard to pin down as *mana*'s.

Ben Holgate and Christine Marran have placed *The Man* not in a Taiwanese or (in Byrnes's case) modern Chinese literary context but in a regional or global context. Holgate's book on magic realism in Austronesian and Australian nature writing ends with a chapter on Wu's novel. According to Holgate, this novel adopts a "conscious planetary perspective" that makes it a work of "environmental world literature."[28] Arguing that environmental world literature is constituted partly by intertextuality, Holgate compares *The Man* with works by Austronesian and Australian Indigenous writers. The Sea Sage in *The Man* reminds Holgate of the Māori elder Koro in Witi Ihimaera's *The Whale Rider*.[29] The floating island of trash on which Atile'i lands reminds him of the trash island Will Phantom lands on in *Carpentaria*.[30] I disagree, however, that "Atile'i represents spiritual communion with nature and a pristine environment."[31] I prefer Pei-yin Lin's qualifier in her description of Wayo Wayo as a *quasi*-utopian place.[32] I would also qualify Holgate's claim that "environmental knowledge is embodied in the Indigenous Taiwanese Bunun people."[33] Dahu has failed to inherit tradition but is nonetheless still trying to combine it with a modern scientific perspective, while Hafay's Amis tradition represents a different body of local knowledge of a different landscape, the coastal foothills.

Christine Marran's *Ecology without Culture* is global in purview. She takes *The Man* as exemplary of "texts that develop expansive ecological imaginaries that resist or explicitly dismiss exceptionalist claims made at the level of ethnicity, culture, and species in their critiques of industrial modernity."[34] But the fact that the trash cleanup effort in the novel is arguably "postnational" does not mean that the ethnic and cultural and national differences are irrelevant or unexceptional.[35] I argue that without essentializing anyone's culture, Wu develops several relevant and exceptional cultural contrasts, between Atile'i on the one hand and Hafay and Dahu the other and then further differentiating between Hafay and Dahu, who are learning from, and influencing, each other, in a process that might be described as Indigenous transculturation.[36] In developing these contrasts, Wu teaches lessons readers can apply wherever they live, both about Indigenous peoples and about ways of relating to nature.

[28] Ben Holgate, *Climate and Crises: Magical Realism as Environmental Discourse* (London: Routledge, 2019), 208.

[29] Holgate, *Climate and Crises*, 211.

[30] Holgate, *Climate and Crises*, 216.

[31] Holgate, *Climate and Crises*, 215.

[32] Pei-yin Lin, "Positioning 'Taiwanese Literature' to the World: Taiwan as Represented and Perceived in English Translation," in *Positioning Taiwan in a Global Context: Being and Becoming*, ed. Bi-yu Chang and Pei-yin Lin (London: Routledge, 2018), 22.

[33] Holgate, *Climate and Crises*, 213.

[34] Christine L. Marran, *Ecology without Culture: Aesthetics for a Toxic World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 3.

[35] Marran, *Ecology without Culture*, 2.

[36] Thanks to the editor Wen-chi Li for this insight.

Indigeneity in *The Man with the Compound Eyes*

Since Wu begins with Wayo Wayo, I will begin here, too. The initial impression one gets of Wayo Wayoan culture is of *difference*. One gets this impression through invented idioms that suggest alien approaches to orientation in space and time: Wayo Wayoans think in terms of facing the sea and facing the island's center.[37] Men calculate their ages in moons, women in the number of children. Shorter lengths of time are conveyed through idioms like "before a single fish was hooked."[38] Alice describes these metaphors skeptically as "overly poetic."[39] In creating them, Wu took inspiration from Syaman Rapongan's literal translations of Tao idioms.[40] He was probably also drawing on the findings of cognitive linguistics.[41]

Wayo Wayoans may inhabit a different cognitive world, but is Wayo Wayo a paradise? Not according to the narrator, who describes the looks on Wayo Wayoan fishermen's faces when they catch gulls with their *gawana*—a small hunting implement—as "cruel."[42] As a reader, I found the tradition of the second son's exile from the island when he turns a hundred and sixty moons to be cruel, even if a Malthusian justification could be attempted for it. The supposedly necessary cruelty of the Wayo Wayoans to themselves and other creatures is reflected in their underwater origin myth about the consequences of overconsumption.[43] They eat a certain shrimp that has been outlawed and are expelled from their watery Eden onto the shores of a tiny round island that has been painstakingly constructed by a certain bird out of grains of sand.[44] The caution against overconsumption in the myth has obvious relevance in their daily life. They are not allowed to overeat, for there is a shoal of fish called *asamu* that spy on the islanders to make sure they observe rules against eating certain things.[45] They are not allowed to cut down trees so that they can avoid the fate of Easter Island.[46] These overconsumption rules are spatialized in literal lines that the Wayo Wayoans are not allowed to cross.[47] Then Atile'i does cross the final frontier and discovers that he is no worse for it.

[37] Wu, *The Man*, 12.

[38] Wu, *The Man*, 37.

[39] Wu, *The Man*, 213.

[40] Kuei-fen Chiu, "The Production of Indigeneity: Contemporary Indigenous Literature in Taiwan and Trans-Cultural Inheritance," *The China Quarterly* 200 (2009): 1071–87.

[41] For examples of cognitive differences inscribed in language, see Nicholas Evans, *Dying Words: Endangered Languages and What They Have to Tell Us* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

[42] Wu, *The Man*, 11.

[43] Wu, *The Man*, 165–66.

[44] Wu, *The Man*, 247. The Christian myth of Eden is also about overconsumption, where the apple represents the precious resource. The Wayo Wayoan mythology seems quite Christian to me, particularly when the word is made flesh: the creator god Kabang's words will become the spirits of the deep (Wu, *The Man*, 166).

[45] Wu, *The Man*, 10.

[46] Wu, *The Man*, 170. On the "collapse" of Easter Island, see Terry L. Hunt, "Rethinking the Fall of Easter Island," *American Scientist* 94, no. 5 (2006): 412. Wu Ming-yi possibly has sampled practices from around the Indigenous world for his fictional ethnography of Wayo Wayo. Another example is Atile'i's roaring rite, which sounds like a Māori haka. See also, Wu, *The Man*, 144.

[47] Wu, *The Man*, 29 & 33.

One might then wonder if the whole point of the second son rule is for the second sons to break it, to cross the line, explore new frontiers, and learn from the people who live on them. Indeed, Wayo Wayoan material culture has elements that make sense in a seafaring context, not just a context of insular autarky. Atile'i makes a *talawaka*, a kind of outrigger canoe.[48] He observes the elevations of the sun and the morning star.[49] He carries with him a speaking flute, his lover Rasula's last gift to him, a (cultural) translation device.[50] He plays it for Alice so that she and he can find common ground.[51]

When Atile'i lands on the trash island of Gesi Gesi, he fashions another *gawana*, though not in the traditional way.[52] (He uses makeshift tools and waste plastic.) After the trash island crashes onto Taiwan, Atile'i makes a new kind of boat according to a design in a book of a plank canoe with crude tools he finds at Alice's cabin.[53] In doing so, he is adapting his culturally specific skill to a new set of circumstances. He adapts himself mentally to changing circumstances as well. His terms for airplane and ocean liner are bird of hell and ghost ship.[54] He applies his concept of "reflection" to Alice's photographs, which indeed are reflections preserved for posterity.[55] And just as he tries to take in all the new modern things he is witnessing, so Alice tries to culturally translate what she learns from Atile'i of Wayo Wayoan ways. But the notion of cultural alterity and its translatability is not in my opinion the main lesson the novel teaches about Indigenous peoples.

Rather, its main lesson is that cultures are different repertoires, which every individual can inherit and contribute to, of mental and material strategies to survive in changing or new environments without degrading them over the long term. A given culture, it stands to reason, would be knowledge adapted to a certain environment, like Wayo Wayo, but to the extent that indigeneity as presented in the novel is generalizable, it would be in adaptiveness to natural environments. Alice observes Atile'i's incredible adaptiveness to his new natural surroundings in Taiwan. Soon he knows the terrain of Taiwan better than she does, as well as the flora and fauna.[56] He forages for plants around the cabin, discovering that certain ferns are not poisonous, with no need for tradition to teach him.[57] He imitates a thrush call, then the call of the green pigeon he is trying to hunt.[58] He teaches Alice to gather food plants and snails.[59] Borrowing from Aldo Leopold, Alice claims that the mountain knows Atile'i, who knows what it is

[48] Wu, *The Man*, 13.
[49] Wu, *The Man*, 38. On Austronesian astronomy and seafaring, see D. Lewis, "Voyaging Stars: Aspects of Polynesian and Micronesian Astronomy," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London, Series A: Mathematical and Physical Sciences* 276, no. 1257 (1974): 133–48.
[50] Wu, *The Man*, 15.
[51] Wu, *The Man*, 211.
[52] Wu, *The Man*, 34–35.
[53] Wu, *The Man*, 291.
[54] Wu, *The Man*, 40.
[55] Wu, *The Man*, 164.
[56] Wu, *The Man*, 174.
[57] Wu, *The Man*, 213.
[58] Wu, *The Man*, 173.
[59] Wu, *The Man*, 213.

thinking.[60] Eventually, inspired by Atile'i's example, Alice renews her relationship with nature, which she expresses through personification or even deification.[61] These are surely aspects of indigeneity that many readers of environmental world literature who live a relatively mediated, alienated existence would find compelling.

Though Rasula, Atile'i's lover, is a minor character, she is equally compelling. Much more than Atile'i, she represents an explicit questioning of tradition. When Rasula decides to make a *talawaka* and go off in search of Atile'i, her mother warns her that she might turn into a jellyfish if she disobeys the traditional sexual division of labor, according to which only men build *talawaka*. Rasula doubts the veracity of the belief about disobedient girls turning into jellyfish and does what she wants in secret.[62] Although she does it for a clichéd reason—all for the love of her man—she represents not just the intergenerational innovation that keeps tradition relevant but also a Wayo Wayoan feminism. Atile'i fears he may not be able to become a man according to the traditional Wayo Wayo standards.[63] Rasula has no such worries about being a woman according to her own standards.

To make the fable of Wayo Wayo all the more compelling, Wu adds pathos by endangering the island. Its shores are lapped by plastic bags and bottles and have been visited by white men who studied the material culture, serving as the putative source of the ethnographic information in the novel, and who left behind children like Rasula.[64] At the end of the novel, Wayo Wayo is destroyed by a torpedo, and Atile'i along with it.[65] Scholars have associated its destruction with the nuclear tests on the Bikini Atoll, but it seems to me that the torpedo launch is an attempt to destroy the Trash Vortex. By this point Rasula, who has left the island in search of Atile'i, is safely out of range, but she dies after being found drifting in the Gulf of Mexico with a baby in her belly, the only hope for the future of the Wayo Wayoan people. As representatives of coastal foothill Pangcah and alpine Bunun culture, Hafay and Dahu offer a more hopeful alternative Austronesian future.[66]

The first Formosan Indigenous character the reader meets is Hafay. Hafay is distant from her own tradition because she did not grow up in a Pangcah village. Having left her natal village when she was young, she has no memory of it besides the silver

[60] Wu, *The Man*, 214. See also Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac: And Sketches Here and There* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1949). See Darryl Sterk, "The Apotheosis of Montage: The Videomosaic in *The Man with the Compound Eyes* as a Postmodern Ecological Sublime," *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 28, no. 2 (2016): 183–222 for discussion of Wu's use of Leopold.

[61] Wu, *The Man*, 246–47.

[62] Wu, *The Man*, 85.

[63] Wu, *The Man*, 147.

[64] Wu, *The Man*, 10 & 83–84.

[65] Wu, *The Man*, 297–99.

[66] Wayo Wayo is clearly part of the same Austronesian family of cultures and languages as Pangcah and Bunun, as evidenced by pairs of cognates. *Yina*, the Wayo Wayo word for mother, is cognate with *Ina*, the word for mother in Pangcah. The *asamu* fish that enforces taboos on Wayo Wayo is cognate with the word for taboo in Bunun, *masamu*. Although it appears that the culture and language of Wayo Wayo should come earlier, based on the out of Taiwan hypothesis, the ancestors of Hafay and Dahu would have been in Taiwan before the ancestors of Atile'i set out from Taiwan.

flowers that grew there.[67] She initially went to live with her mother in a riverside squatter community in the city.[68] After her mother died, she had to fend for herself. After a period of time working as a "masseuse," a euphemism for sex worker, she built a café called the Seventh Sisid. There, she reconnected with her culture by globalizing it. Now, the *salama* coffee she serves is "a fusion of Brazilian beans with a dash of sorghum, and certain fragrant herbs picked wild in the hills."[69]

Although her name means millet, suggesting autarkic Austronesian agriculture, Hafay's main culturally specific activity is not planting millet but rather gathering wild greens in the coastal foothills.[70] However, she would not be comfortable describing it as a "culturally specific activity" because she is critical of academic cultural study.[71] An academic study of "Pangcah culture" might assume such a thing exists, when in fact there are multiple Pangcah cultures that have changed over time. The Pangcah origin song that Hafay sings implies not only a familial origin of the Pangcah people but also the ramifications of the culture.[72] Any of these ramifications are at some kind of distance from any putative cultural source.

Hafay's critique of cultural objectification is a self-critique because she is, as the owner of the Seventh Sisid, engaged in the commodification of her culture. She gathers those herbs, the bounty of nature, to flavor the coffee and garnish the meals she sells to tourists. If they want souvenirs, Hafay sells them works by local Indigenous artists and bottles of millet wine in fancy boxes that she takes on consignment. She no doubt sells these things to help struggling local artists and entrepreneurs, and she views the art and the wine ironically: the artists had nothing better to do, and what is millet wine for outside of a ritual context?[73] As a self-critical capitalist, Hafay humanizes and localizes capitalism. Her self-criticism leads her to set clear limits. When tourists ask her to sing a song on request, she makes them an offer they are sure to refuse: a hundred dollars for *them* to sing a song for *her*.[74] Locals are welcome to come in at any time and pour themselves a free cup of coffee.[75]

Unlike Hafay, whose mother never insisted that her daughter lead a traditional life, Dahu had to argue with his traditional father about how he lives his life. In a charming conversation with his father, he pointed out that his father was once a kid who had to listen to his own father.[76] Dahu listened to his father until he failed the test of manhood by shooting the ear of the wrong animal in the Bunun coming-of-age

[67] Wu, *The Man*, 89–90.
[68] Wu, *The Man*, 92. There are several such communities in and around Taipei. See Jin-yung Wu, "Amis Aborigine Migrants' Territorialization in Metropolitan Taipei," *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1–31.
[69] Wu, *The Man*, 66.
[70] Wu, *The Man*, 61.
[71] Wu, *The Man*, 64.
[72] Wu, *The Man*, 66–67.
[73] Wu, *The Man*, 61–62.
[74] Wu, *The Man*, 63.
[75] Wu, *The Man*, 64.
[76] Wu, *The Man*, 154.

ritual.[77] Following this failure, Dahu had to find his non-traditional way of being a man, like Atile'i. Dahu's father finally gave Dahu his approval on his deathbed, telling Dahu to become a man who knows the mountains in his way.[78] So Dahu became an ecologist instead of a hunter. As a scientist, he doubts whether the taboos his father taught him have any rational basis.[79] But he carries on respecting them, apparently out of reverence for his dead father's memory.

Like Hafay with her global fusion coffee, Dahu is cosmopolitan through his daughter Umav. Umav is taking piano lessons in which she learns German pieces. Dahu sees her as a "new breed of Bunun" because she has grown up on cultural influences from everywhere mediated through YouTube.[80] Umav, the next generation, will avoid replicating the socioeconomic subordination of her mother, who, like Hafay, worked as a "masseuse."

Dahu and Hafay are not romantically involved, but they have been hanging out so long that he feels half Amis.[81] Surely, Hafay will feel partly Bunun if she settles down in the Bunun village introduced near the end of the novel.

After Hafay's café is devastated by the trash tsunami, Dahu proposes a trip for Hafay, Umav, and himself to stay with his Uncle Anu,[82] who is running an ethnic ecotourist operation in a Bunun village on a mountain in Deer County.[83] Anu is given a colorful backstory. He went into debt to buy land to fend off a columbarium consortium and turned the land into a "forest church" formed by two weeping fig trees.[84] Hafay and Umav spend the night in the forest church.[85] Anu introduces them to the forest and instructs them in how to relate to it, starting with a prayer.[86] The creatures of the forest, for instance snakes, are addressed as family members. Actual family members have been absorbed into the forest, like Anu's late son Lien, who can be sensed by anyone who takes one of Anu's ecocultural tours. Anu's teaching has a lot in common with Atile'i's (and Aldo Leopold's)! But Anu has had longer than Atile'i to think about his relationship with modernity. His sense of humor plays around the fact that contemporary Bunun are as modern as anyone. He tells that being over 170 centimeters tall is considered "a disability" for a Bunun hunter and that if you surprise a bear, he will take you to the police station. The mountain huts made of bamboo on a stone foundation are like "a five-star hotel."[87] Like Hafay and Dahu, Anu tries to

[77] Wu, *The Man*, 184.
[78] Wu, *The Man*, 187.
[79] Wu, *The Man*, 101. Dahu could have argued that the taboos help ensure the sustainable use of resources. For an argument along these lines about the Rukai, see Kurtis Pei's 1999 conference paper "Hunting System of the Rukai Tribe in Taiwan, Republic of China," in *Proceedings of the International Union of Game Biologists XXIV Congress*, Thessaloniki, Greece.
[80] Wu, *The Man*, 120.
[81] Wu, *The Man*, 155.
[82] Wu, *The Man*, 149.
[83] Wu, *The Man*, 150.
[84] Wu, *The Man*, 52.
[85] Wu, *The Man*, 259.
[86] Wu, *The Man*, 259–60.
[87] Wu, *The Man*, 261, 268.

establish a new relationship between modernity, his tribe, and his tradition in order to survive and even thrive in the age of capitalism.

The village Sazasa that is running the ecotours under Chief Anu's leadership is the most romanticized element of *The Man*. It is described in glowing terms as "a place where sugar cane grows tall, animals leap, folks grow."[88] When Hafay goes on an ecocultural hike with Anu, she feels like a hermit crab that has found a shell or like she has returned to nature's womb.[89] In this way, she seems to have forgotten her earlier critique of cultural commodification.

Anu's operation was based on an actual operation run by a Bunun chief called Aliman (阿力曼) in Luye Township (鹿野鄉, literally "Deer Country Township"), located southern Hualian County, that operated (and continues to operate) on a surprising scale: when I dropped in on my literary tour of the east coast, Aliman told me that he sometimes got two hundred visitors per day on weekends.[90] He was hardly in debt when I met him; though this is only hearsay, he was reputed to have gotten extremely rich. I doubt that most of the hundreds of visitors who go on his tours got as much bang for their buck as Hafay. Then again, it is hard to say how transformative an experience, even one you pay for, might be.

This is not to criticize Wu for not accurately representing Aliman's operation; as a writer, he does not have to represent anything realistically. He represented Aliman's operation idealistically because this kind of enterprise is potentially a source of income for Indigenous people and a way for them to contribute to society by offering a kind of environmental education to non-Indigenous urbanites who are alienated from nature.

Discussion

Does Wu's representation responsibly reflect the realities and possibilities of Indigenous peoples in Taiwan? My answer is a mostly unqualified yes. *The Man* may verge into primitivism at times, but it is also responsibly ironic and realist.

Wayo Wayo may initially seem to be a piece of romantic primitivism, but a close reading reveals that the Wayo Wayoans are not entirely in harmony with their environment: their relations with the creatures they consume are not presented as benign, and their mythology suggests they have the same problem of overconsumption as any other human community. The culture that orients them in this environment is not a body of unquestioned belief but a guide to survival that can be questioned and adapted through the generational, sexual, and cultural conflicts that take Rasula to the Bermuda Triangle and Atile'i to Taiwan. In Taiwan, Atile'i begins to question aspects of his own tradition.[91] Wu cuts his self-questioning process short with the destruction

[88] Wu, *The Man*, 268.
[89] Wu, *The Man*, 262.
[90] Darryl Sterk, "What I Learned Translating Wu Ming-yi's *The Man with the Compound Eyes*," *Compilation and Translation Review* 6, no. 2 (2013): 253–61.
[91] Wu, *The Man*, 271.

of Wayo Wayo and the deaths of Atile'i and Rasula but shows where it might lead in Taiwan.

Wu cites Pangcah and Bunun cultures as examples of coastal foothill and alpine Formosan Indigenous cultures that, similarly, are not cultural essences but guides to survival to be adapted through the same kinds of conflicts. In a modern context, Hafay and Dahu have become detached from, and critical of, their cultural traditions, and in reconnecting with those traditions they have recreated them in order to address contemporary problems: their own socioeconomic subordination, extreme overconsumption, and the sense of alienation from the natural environment that many modern people suffer from, be they Indigenous, Han, or members of other ethnic groups or nationalities. In *The Man*, Indigenous people help themselves through humanized small-scale capitalism, and in helping themselves, they help non-Indigenous people. Wu believes that this is a role for Indigenous leaders like Aliman to play as they try to provide opportunities for their communities by helping alienated non-Indigenous urbanites. I imagine Aliman thinks so, too.

Two comparisons to films, one local and one global, can highlight *The Man*'s responsible, ironic approach to the representation of Indigenous peoples. The first comparison is to *Fishing Luck* (等待飛魚, 2005). As Anita Chang argues, the Indigenous setting for the film, Orchid Island, is presented for the consumption of a tourist, a young woman in search of authentic experience, which she finds scuba diving and in the arms of a young Tao man.[92] To me, *Fishing Luck* is like a tourist brochure. Parts of *The Man* read like descriptions in a tourist brochure for Indigenous areas in eastern Taiwan, but then, except for Anu's village Sazasa, which is garbage-free in the novel and blighted by roadside litter in real life, Wu Ming-yi undermines his descriptions by covering the places in garbage. There is even plastic litter on Wayo Wayo, which is reminiscent of Orchid Island. Unlike Orchid Island, Wayo Wayo is a place that only anthropologists have visited, not a place that tourists could visit. As for romance, Wu Ming-yi uses romance to motivate Atile'i and Rasula, but he undermines it in Taiwan: Alice does not find anyone to take her late husband Thom's place, and Dahu and Hafay remain friends to the end. Finally, Sazasa does seem to be a site of authentic experience, but after going on a nature walk with Chief Anu, Sara decides to stay and study the place as a scientist, not as a tourist.[93] I imagine she will behave more responsibly than the anthropologists who sired children on Wayo Wayo.

The second comparison is to James Cameron's *Avatar*. As Slavoj Žižek argues, *Avatar* adapts a "racist" white-savior romance-and-violence formula for an audience of consumers of MMORPGs.[94] Racist romantic primitivism is a highly marketable commodity, and not just among gamers: *Avatar* reclaimed the highest-grossing film title in March 2020.[95] *The Man* arguably rode the *Avatar* wave in its passage to world

[92] Anita Chang, "In the Realm of the Indigenous: Local, National, and Global Articulations in *Fishing Luck*," *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 17, no. 3 (2009): 643–53.

[93] Wu, *The Man*, 289.

[94] An avatar is an identity in a massively multiplayer online game (MMORPG). See Slavoj Žižek, "Avatar: Return of the Natives," *New Statesman*, March 4, 2010.

[95] "Avatar Reclaims Title as Highest Grossing Film," *BBC*, March 15, 2021.

literature, but Wu Ming-yi offers a much more sophisticated treatment of Indigenous peoples than James Cameron. I have shown how Wu undermines reader expectations of romance, and the only violence in *The Man* is the "slow violence" of gradual environmental degradation, which Wu speeds up in the most dramatic scene in the novel when a tidal wave of trash crashes into Taiwan's east coast.[96] *The Man* also undermines expectations of outside salvation. The foreign experts, Detlef the German engineer and Sara the Norwegian marine biologist, who visit Taiwan after the trash wave hits, might be expected to play the role of a savior or leader, but they do not end up saving anyone or leading anything. Instead, they work alongside Taiwanese experts and volunteers, both Han and Indigenous.

A final comparison might help spotlight Wu Ming-yi's position as a writer with the opportunity to represent Taiwan to the world, including Indigenous Taiwan. This comparison is between Taiwan and Australia. In his introduction to the second edition of his magisterial monograph on the representation of Australian Indigenous peoples in Australian literature at a time when Indigenous Australians like Alexis Wright were beginning to publish, J. J. Healy wrote that perhaps it was time for white authors to fall into silence about the "blackfellow" and let him speak for himself (or her for herself).[97] Non-Indigenous Han Taiwanese writers reached a similar moment in the 1980s, at the beginning of the Indigenous literary movement, but they have hardly fallen into silence. High-profile non-Indigenous writers like Wu Ming-yi continue to write about Formosan Indigenous peoples, crowding out Indigenous writers, both at home and abroad. When *The Man* was published, no book by an Indigenous Taiwanese writer had been translated into English, though John Balcom had translated short pieces by many authors for *Indigenous Writers of Taiwan*.[98] To date, Husluman Vava's (霍斯陸曼·伐伐) *The Soul of Jade Mountain* (玉山的生命精靈, originally published in 1997) and Sakinu Ahronglong's (亞榮隆·撒可努) *Hunter School* have appeared in English translation.[99] Readers of environmental world literature should all welcome such works and read them alongside novels by the likes of Wu Ming-yi. I hope that someday soon an Indigenous Taiwanese writer will have a contribution to make to the canon of environmental world literature. Or rather, writers like Sakinu Ahronglong, Husluman Vava, and the soon-to-be-translated Syaman Rapongan have *already* started to make contributions, and it is now up to literary critics to acknowledge and discuss them.

[96] Wu, *The Man*, 129–31. On the "slow violence" that Wu speeds up, see Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2011).

[97] J. J. Healy, *Literature and the Aborigine in Australia* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1989).

[98] John Balcom and Yingtish Balcom, eds., *Indigenous Writers of Taiwan: An Anthology of Stories, Essays, and Poems* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

[99] See Husluman Vava, *The Soul of Jade Mountain*, trans. Terence Russell (Amherst: Cambria, 2020) and Sakinu Ahronglong, *Hunter School*, trans. Darryl Sterk (London: Honford Star, 2020). Sakinu Ahronglong's hunter school is similar to Aliman's ethnic ecotourism operation.