

Wu's The Man with the Compound Eyes and the Worlding of Environmental Literature

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Shiuhhuah Serena Chou,

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Thematic Issue ***New Work in Ecocriticism***. Ed. Simon C. Estok and Murali Sivaramakrishnan

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol16/iss4/>>

Abstract: In her article "Wu's *The Man with the Compound Eyes* and the Worlding of Environmental Literature" Shiuhhuah Serena Chou discusses Mingyi Wu's novel in the context of ecocriticism's trans-cultural turn. Chou presents an overview of the cultural milieu in which Wu rises onto the world literary scene and proceeds by examining the problematics and potentials of ecocritical studies' transnationalization. Chou argues that while Wu's desire to understand the local through the vocabulary of the global, his readership reveals a sense of ecocosmopolitanism. The globalized local or localized global in Wu's novel reveals a cosmopolitan sense of the world and the readership of *The Man with the Compound Eyes* reveals the worlding of ecocriticism as a process of cultural adaptation and translation.

Shiuhhuah Serena CHOU

Wu's *The Man with the Compound Eyes* and the Worlding of Environmental Literature

Taiwanese ecocritic and environmental writer Mingyi Wu (吳明益 1971-) made history with his novel *The Man with the Compound Eyes*, which, in addition to receiving numerous Taiwanese literary awards, was widely distributed on the world literary market. The international debut in 2013 of *The Man with the Compound Eyes* in Beijing was followed by Harvill Secker's 2013 and Pantheon's 2014 English-language versions and Stock's 2014 French version and translations are being undertaken in other languages (see Tan <<http://blog.roodo.com/grayhawk/archives/18826386.html>>). Unlike previous translations of Taiwanese literature circulated beyond its national borders, Wu's novel was the first book published by a mainstream English-language publishing house without government sponsorship. The transnational recognition of *The Man with the Compound Eyes* plays an integral role in the ecocritical thinking of global ecology and the problematization of the worlding of environmental literature. While capturing local differences, Wu writes a text of global and universal value. The international visibility of *The Man with the Compound Eyes* may perhaps have as much to do with the transnational literacy of Wu's ecological imagination as with the cultural capital of his writing as an exotic Other who locates the Indigenous and the local at the center of a contemporary environmental apocalypse narrative. For a cosmopolitan writer such as Wu, however, worlding also serves as an efficient strategy for entering and intervening in the international sphere of literature: in configuring the globality of the natural world as a "compound eye" of multiplicities of difference, he constructs a heterogeneous mode of reading attuned to the inherent tensions and frustrations of global-local encounters.

Set in Haven, a fictional Taiwanese coastal town, *The Man with the Compound Eyes* is an apocalyptic novel about the transnational solidarity between Alice, a local literature professor, and Atile'i, an outcast washed ashore from a shipwreck. The alternating narrative structure moves back and forth between the two protagonists of disparate cosmologies capturing their direct, immediate experience of surviving earthquakes, tsunamis, climate change, and transboundary environmental disasters in the form of what Timothy Morton calls "hyperobjects" massively distributed in time and space (1). The cross-cultural exchange ends with a climax where Atile'i sails towards a new wave of borderless marine debris that also wiped out the entire Pacific Wayo Wayo island and its civilization thousands of kilometers away. The central narrative plot reveals *The Man with a Compound Eyes* as a revision of James Cameron's 2009 *Avatar* where in the classic plot of colonial encounter and resistance the solidarity between the Native (Alice) and the foreign (Atile'i) and the survival of the two cultural-ecological traditions is shaped by the environmental dynamics of the global capitalist economy.

As in *Avatar*, one of the critical appeals of Wu's magical-realist novel is indeed the planetary scale and the cultural and ethical possibilities is sketched out for global ecology as a new model for environmental citizenship. Published two years after the premiere of Cameron's science fiction fantasy, Wu has a keen eye for local manifestations of transnational entanglements of human-induced, environmental catastrophes and captures local endemic feelings of trans-hemispheric environmental disasters such as the tsunami that brings ashore the ever-swirling trans-Pacific garbage patch. As in *Avatar*, *The Man with the Compound Eyes* is an epic tale that evokes ecological destruction of global proportions. Reading the local as the nodal point of a complex global ecological system, Wu extends the thematic and conceptual framework of the ecocritical field of inquiry into the global space (on systems thinking and ecocriticism see, e.g., Estok, "Tracking"; on systems and the study of culture and literature, see, e.g., Tötösy de Zepetnek). Echoing Cameron's imaginary portrayal of the Indigenous Na'vi coalition at the level of the Pandora planet, Wu's novel celebrates stories of transnational cross-cultural alliance evoking (the fictional Wayo Wayo people's) nature-based spirituality as a strategic tool central to effective local cultural-environmental mobilization. In the face of globalized environmental crisis, Cameron and Wu take a global turn to seek inspirations from Indigenous traditional knowledge in transnational grassroots solidarity. In the attempt to reimagine globalized environmental catastrophes, Wu's novel has become an essential part of the rising global interest in what Joni Adamson calls an "indigenous cosmivision" (148) or what environmental Bron Taylor names a "dark green religion" (4) and that configure environmental globality as a "multinatural" superorganism (Ad-

amson 146) or a "Gaia-like superorganism" (Taylor 4) of wholeness and spiritual connectedness. As Taylor argues, "*Avatar* was a *reflection* of the global emergence of dark green religion [and] it might even effectively *advance* such spirituality and ethics" (5; emphases in original). Both *Avatar* and *The Man with the Compound Eyes* correspond to what Ursula K. Heise notes with regard to ecocriticism's recent global expansion of "its objects of study" ("Globality" 638).

In view of Wu's body of work and his rising international reputation, I discuss what accounts for the international attention to *The Man with the Compound Eyes*, a novel that could be briefly summarized as the cross-culture alliance of a displaced intellectual woman and an Indigenous boy with deep feelings of belonging and affinity to the biosphere. Also, what is ultimately "global" about the perspective of an environmental novel that approaches the entrapments of ecological disasters, although trans-hemispheric in scale, through the invocation of local/Indigenous traditional knowledge and, unfortunately, cultural otherness? Ecocriticism over the past five years witnessed a growing awareness of the need to challenge the limits of the overshadowing influence of place-rooted US-American centered ecocriticism in addressing humanity's future in the face of globalized environmental crises. Ecocritics from different regions of the world dedicate themselves to developing a transnational discourse of "deterritorialization." Critics such as Heise focus not only on decentering the U.S. as the dominant ideological and epistemological center of ecocriticism, but also on destabilizing the local-as-sustainability versus global-as-disenfranchisement dichotomy prevalent since the 1980s (*Sense of Place* 10). This transnationalization could be construed as an "ecocosmopolitan" critical project committed to "investigat[ing] by what means individuals and groups in specific cultural contexts have succeeded in envisioning themselves in similarly concrete fashion as part of the global biosphere, or by what means they might be enabled do so" (Heise, *Sense of Place* 62).

If the popularity of Wu's novel can be understood as a fraction of ecocriticism's progressive transnationalization in terms of its objects of study, then what does Wu's novel reveal about this global turn? How do we approach a non-Western literary imaginary that is already globally-informed and, more importantly, how do we promote a transnational environmental consciousness through literary texts that invest in different cultural traditions? In the words of Philip J. Deloria, "can one truly act as a planetary citizen in the context of local knowledge and local politics that are structured by transnational flows of capital, goods, and people—even while the power of the nation-state exerts itself on local (and thus global) life? What would such acts look like" (xvii) and "what might a new ecocriticism look like" (xv)? In this sense, what alternative modes of representation and critique might we derive from *The Man with the Compound Eyes*? The purpose of my inquiry is not to assert that the engagement in Indigenous or non-Western classics as new theoretical possibilities leads necessarily to the romanticization of the Other, but to initiate discussions along the lines of Heise and Deloria at this crossroads of ecocriticism's transnationalization. One might also ask what might "ecocosmopolitanism" or "environmental world citizenship" look like? And, more importantly, what roles have traditional categories of the Indigenous and the non-Western taken on or been given to in the formulation of an environmental ethics that aims to transcend cultural and national borders? Wu's success corresponds to this wave of ecocritical transnationalization that in the search for an alternative global ethical and aesthetic template adopts Indigenous/non-Western literatures and cultures for their diversity or "alterity," but often overlooks the ambiguity of global-local encounters embedded not only within the author's own narrative choice, but within the critical reception of the text (Heise, "Globality" 638).

In reviews such as Manohla Dargis's "A New Eden, Both Cosmic and Cinematic" and Thomas Elsaesser's "The 'Return' of 3-D: On Some of the Logics and Genealogies of the Image in the Twenty-First Century" we find the claim that *Avatar* owes its record as the fourteenth highest-grossing film of all time to its unprecedented 3D cinematic technology. With scenes of boundless grandeur, *Avatar* captures the interconnectivity of Eywa, the luminescent guiding deity of the Na'vis of Pandora, on an expansive scale and through networks of relations. Like *Avatar*, *The Man with the Compound Eyes* is notable for its unique literary style, its mixture of "hard-edged realism and extravagantly detailed fantasy" (Aw

<<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/sep/28/man-compound-eyes-wu-mingyi-review>>). According to Yuxiang Hao, "it is a reminder of Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges' novels, whose concerto-like narration and invocation of classical music techniques such as chorus and counterpoint not only

allow him to build a beautiful garden along the bumpy creative road but also generate boundless poet-ic meanings with limited words" (100; unless indicated otherwise, all translations are mine).

Wu's novel emerges onto the world stage in a similar aesthetic context as *Avatar*, but its immediate international recognition prompts readers and critics to problematize the conception of what Heise calls ecocriticism's "transnational turn" ("Transnational Turn" 381). When Random House publisher Marthie Markstein contextualizes Wu within the framework of world literary production in her review "Magic Realism? Futuristic Fairytale? Ecological Disaster Novel? You Decide," she urges Wu's readers to acknowledge the operation of *The Man with the Compound Eyes* at the shifting geographies of "world literature" and her enshrinement of Wu atop a pedestal among top-selling international authors such as "Haruki Murakami and David Mitchell" draws attention to the potentials of Wu's novel rising from the confines of national/local literature to the wider space of Goethean *Weltliteratur* (see Markstein <<http://www.randomhouse.co.nz/blog/magic-realism-futuristic-fairytale-ecological-disaster-novel-you-decide-112.aspx>>). For scholars and critics, Wu expands skillfully the scope of ecocritical studies through local enactment of a shared transcultural and hence universal experience. Qihua Chen, for instance, celebrates Wu's detailed description of the impact of the global economy on the immediate, local environment in his review "自覺" (Awakening) in *世界文學* (World Literature) (57), a recently launched academic journal whose founding editor Xide Wu (吳錫德) argues that "literature has long been globalized because of human migration" (6; unless indicated otherwise, all translations are mine). Mapping Wu's novel onto a transnational framework of environmental literature, Chin, in the same vein as Heise, foregrounds a more inclusive conception of not only the world, but also of the various culturally embedded forms of environmentalism.

Wu's novel, as Yuxiang Hao also points out, offers "a new mode of ecological thinking" that "does not belong to any current existing category, be it nature/ecological literature, Indigenous literature, fantasy, environmental justice literature, or philosophy fiction," and, again, is compatible with the metaphysical prose of Jorge Luis Borges (100). Since its 2011 publication, the reviews of Chen and Hao are the only two critical studies on Wu's novel published. Both reviews follow Markstein in her celebration of Wu's lucid stylistic/thematic intervention into the representation global ecology. *The Man with the Compound Eyes* presents an interesting case for the understanding of ecocriticism's transnational turn. As an award-winning novel possessing an increasing international outlook, *The Man with the Compound Eyes* received little critical attention even among Taiwanese/Chinese literary critics who have access to the novel in its original language. The fact that critics and scholars are slow in elucidating the novel raises pertinent questions about whether a text articulating global (ecological) exigencies could rightly be considered "transnational" or ecocosmopolitan.

In her "World Literature and the Environment" Heise coined the term "environmental world literature" to situate narratives of environmental struggles and human-nature relations within the structure of world literature (404). The four major "tasks" or "analytical categories" of environmental world literature, as Heise makes clear, include the investigations of 1) narratives which inspired environmentalism beyond their own context of origin, 2) literature that enjoys a transnational readership, but undertakes "nature" indirectly in the sense of the self and the nation, 3) globally-circulated writings which address human relations to the environment explicitly, and 4) translations of neglected works on ecological crises of the last half-century ("World Literature" 404). In the recent research of Heise and other ecocritics, one witnesses in particular a consistent attempt to engage in this "fourth task" of uncovering environmental literature of non-English language cultural systems to underline the importance of cultural difference in formulating an alternative approach to environmental global ecology. The urgency to turn to non-English language representations as a vehicle for formulating a macroscopic environmental perception permeates ecocritical studies. For instance, Lawrence Buell's "Ecoglobalist Affect" advances "ecoglobalism" as "a whole-earth way of thinking and feeling about environmentality" (227) and in her *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet* Heise speaks similarly of an "ecocosmopolitanism" that "fosters an understanding of how a wide variety of the natural and cultural places and processes are connected and shape each other around the world, and how human impact affects and changes this connectedness" when she re-assesses narratives of hybridity, diaspora, and marginality" (21). A global scope of concern for environmentality, in the words of Patrick Hayden, can be understood as a form of "world environmental citizenship" that is "concerned about the common

good of the human community and places particular emphasis on the fact that we are all citizens belonging to both local environments and a single global environment" (147).

For the attentive reader, the ambition of Wu to tackle the global aspects of the environment as both a material reality and an ecocritical approach is made clear when Wu tampers with the topoi of transnational environmental discourse. In *The Man with the Compound Eyes*, Wu appropriates popular images of transnational diasporic citizenship. Reading islands as contact zones and whales as spirits of ancestors or extended family members, he evokes recurring themes of ecocosmopolitanism such as memory, traumatic history, and planetary community. A charitable reading would be to say that these displaced and fragmented images help construct a narrative of postmodern pastiche. The unresolved contradictions, however, appear as signs of sloppiness when a careful reader finds that while Wu invests in a reality of disjuncture, he holds on to modernist assumptions of science and onto an exclusive, transcendent notion of truth.

In *The Man with the Compound Eyes*, a novel developed from his 2003 short story of the same title, Wu takes on the transnational plot in an already culturally hybrid and racially complex postcolonial Taiwanese ecological setting in the opening chapters of the novel. "H" or "Haven" in Darryl Sterk's translation, is the allegorical city of Hualien in Taiwan. A slightly disguised landscape of the university town where Wu commuted from Taipei 180 kilometers away to teach creative writing and environmental literature, H is a tourist site east of the Central Mountain Range. Through protagonist Alice's resentment of the cliché reading of Haven as the "last virgin land," Wu builds his conception of "the local" around the themes of global capitalist expansion as part of the border project of reconstructing an environmental globality characterized by discontinuities, multi-linearity, and multiplicity: "Originally, Alice reflected, this place had belonged to the Aborigines. Then it belonged to the Japanese, the Han [Taiwanese] people, and the tourists. Who did it belong to now? Maybe to those city folks who bought homesteads, elected that slimeball of a mayor, and got the new highway approved. After the highway went through, the seashore and the hills were soon covered with exotic edifice, not one of them authentic, pretty much as if a global village theme park has been built there as a joke ... Folks in the local cultural scene liked to gush about how Haven was the true 'pure land,' among other cheap clichés of native identity ... What should it really be like? ... What was it really like?" (17-18).

Haven is the home of the ecologically disenfranchised whose nostalgia for an "authentic" past holds them apart from the transnational capitalist network of commodification, objectification, and exploitation in which they are trapped. Alice, for instance, is a Han widow who struggles to cope with the loss of her Danish husband and son in a mountain hike; Atile'i is a social outcast of the fictional Wayo Wayo island where the second son is banished because of land scarcity; Dahu is an Indigenous Bunun "taxi driver, mountaineer, amateur sculptor, forest conservationist and a volunteer of some east-coast NGOs" who studies forestry but fails to practice the traditional tribal art of hunting (20); and Hafay is an Indigenous Pangcah bar owner who returns to Haven after years of nomadic life as a migrant worker in Taipei (113-24). Through a heady mélange of references to colonialism, urbanization, and the tourist industry as modes of economic globalization, Wu captures Hualien's histories of appropriation and displacement. He underscores "the local" as a nodal point of a complex web of economic and ecological exchange (although always in negative terms as the encroaching forces of modernity) that can only be experienced and perceived in fragmented remains in isolation through personal, subjective experience rather than on the basis of objective evidence.

In *The Man with the Compound Eyes*, globality also manifests itself through the image of a planetary ecocommunity. Ecocosmopolitan belonging is closely linked to the subjective experience of memory, a memory that is always already located in the currents of collective thought. In fact, the central plot of the novel revolves around the struggle of Alice or her friends to "remember" as a way of making sense of their experience of the massive environmental assemblage, such as the transborder tsunami that wiped out Wayo Wayo (47-50) and later flooded Alice's Norwegian-style beach home (71-75). Wu associates repeatedly transnationalism with hyperobjects in order to suggest the limits of a metalanguage or a metanarrative in encompassing the entirety of the world. The following conversation between Dahu and his daughter, Umav, over the Great Pacific Garbage Patch is one of the many examples in the novel that explicates the "impossibility of a metalanguage" (Morton 2-3): "This is unbelievable, Dahu thought. He told Umav, 'There's a trash island floating this way.' 'What trash island?' 'It's made of stuff like this,' said Dahu, yanking at the plastic table cloth. 'We keep throwing this kind

of thing in the ocean. Gradually a heap of garbage formed, and when it got big enough it turned into an island.' 'Are my slippers on the island?' 'Possibly.' 'What about your binoculars?' 'Probably.' 'What about Mummy's headband? Dahu didn't reply. Umav found a headband somewhere when she was very small. He knew it was Millet's as soon as he saw it. It was a little thing he had forgotten to throw out, maybe on purpose ... But it floated off somewhere in the flood. Dahu thought Umav had forgotten all about it" (123). On a phenomenological level, the "trash island" in the novel emerges in the experience and consciousness of the individuals as a returning ghost of the past. For Wu, the perception of and the emotion for the global are always something intimately personal, though the subjective experience of such, like individual memories, never returns without being part of one or other kinds of collectivity. Like the suppressed and silenced memory of Dahu, the Great Pacific Garbage Patch appears ephemeral to human perception as a result of its hyper-dimensional spatial existence, but, despite its vast temporal and spatial scale, the presence or substance of that trash island is always felt and etched in fragments in the psyche, the body, and the practices of everyday life. Like recurring memories, which always persist to shape one's life by haunting it, the Great Pacific Garbage Patch distorts one's experience of life and death: "sometimes people aren't alive but it doesn't necessarily mean they've died. That's the way it was for this couple, and they became the voice of the stream" (108).

For Wu, however, the collapse of the memory/reality divide brought forth by the experience of globality through the "trash island" only further justifies the need to restore the order of the interconnected ecosystem. According to the "man with the compound eyes," a ghostly, authorial figure, "because humans are unusually completely unconcerned with the memories of other creatures. Human existence involves the willful destruction of the existential memories of other creatures and of your own memories as well. No life can survive without other lives, without the ecological memories other living creatures have, memories of the environments in which they live. People don't realize they need to rely on the memories of other organisms to survive. You think that flowers bloom in colorful profusion just to please your eyes ... That a stone falling into a gorge is of no significance. That a sambar deer, its head bent low to sip at a creek is not a revelation ... What in fact that finest movement of any organism represents a change in an ecosystem" (281). In this passage, the man with the compound eyes prophesizes the fate of humans through theories of ecological sciences. Here Wu evokes two widely-employed ecological metaphors: the use of plant ecologist Frederic Edward Clements's "climax community" underscores the equilibrium state of a biotic community in its entirety and the adoption of meteorologist Edward Lorenz's "Butterfly Effect" warns of widespread consequences of a small event. The existence of a sentient being is closely associated with his/her memory—i.e., with the sensory perception that helps build his/her identity. Interestingly, as a node of a complex web of relations, an individual's existential value also depends upon his/her perfect balanced relationship with "the world out there." The notion of an idealized community where the members co-evolve across spatial and temporal scales towards an endpoint of stasis reinforces the well-known "climax community" and "ecological succession" theories of Clements and early twentieth century ecologists. Thus, "change" becomes a sign of "disturbance," and "aberration" is always human-induced. "The end of the world" similarly suggests the outcome of "the age of asymmetry," a time when the world itself becomes human-induced hyperobject (Morton 2). Morton claims that "hyperobjects have already ushered in a new human phase of hypocrisy, weakness, and lameness:" hypocrisy "results from the conditions of the impossibility of a metalanguage," weakness "from the gap between phenomenon and thing, which the hyperobject makes disturbingly visible," and lameness "from the fact that all entities are fragile (as a condition of possibility for their existence)" (2). A planet characterized by "change" fails to suggest for Wu liberation from the breakdown of traditional order and boundaries. The recognition of hyperobjects, instead, only further brings about the need for control and by no means encourages a direct engagement with environmental catastrophes of great scale. The "butterfly effect" thesis and chaos theory reinforce the ripple effects of human activities on the global ecology, but unfortunately they neither help Wu acknowledge "change" as the norm of the planet nor emancipate him from the apocalyptic myth associated with the coming of the hyperobjects.

As Morton also reminds us, revisiting the ontology of hyperobjects "causes us to reflect on our very place on Earth and in the cosmos" (15). In *The Man with the Compound Eyes*, the man with the compound eyes does not appear until the last chapters. He operates not only as an omnipresent eye-witness to the fatal accident of Alice's husband and son during their mountain hike but, more im-

portantly, as an authorial voice that entertains alternative epistemological possibilities to "what it means to exist, what Earth is, what society is" (Morton 22). Falling off a cliff, Jackson is filled with memories of a mysterious man who has eyes "as if innumerable tiny ponds have converged into an immense lake" (255): "all [Jackson] sees is the man's compound eyes, which seem to change from moment to moment in hallucinatory permutations and combinations. And the scene in each of the tiny ommatidia (radial units composing compound eyes) that compose every compound eye is completely different with each passing instant. Watching carefully, the man's mind is helplessly mesmerized by the instantaneous images playing in each ommatidium: it could be an erupting undersea volcano, might be a falcon's-eye view of a landscape, perhaps just a leaf about to fall. Each seems to be playing a kind of documentary" (276). The man with the compound eyes, as a symbol for the totality of the environment constituted by separate, independent units, celebrates the planet as being an autonomous superorganism of coexistence and coordination in the sense of Adamson's "multinaturalism," Taylor's "Gaia-like superorganism," and the planetary approach of environmental problems.

The mosaic vision of the compound eyes claims multiplicity through diversity, concluding a novel of multiple strands of cultures coming into contact. The diversity in Wu's writing, however, entails an overall teleology of the superorganism, one in which individual agency, rather than hybridity, is sacrificed. Although the compound eyes imply diversity, they also, like the age-old climax community metaphor for the planet earth, highlight a relation in which each individual organism is bound to its interaction with one another within an ecological hierarchy. In suggesting ecological holism, the man with the compound eyes becomes a weak ending that hastily closes Wu's ambitious take on global/local conflicts (which include questions of dream/history, authenticity/hybridity, and translation/untranslatability) that he sets out to explore. To claim—as Markstein, Chen, and Hao do—that this transnationally circulated novel is a work of "world literature" is to overlook the inherent nature of the transnationalization of environmental literature. The editorial blurb of Ursula K. Le Guin for *The Man with the Compound Eyes* problematizes how one conceptualizes the reading of Wu as an international writer within the genre of world literature: "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. Completely unsentimental but never brutal, Wu Ming-Yi treats human vulnerability and the world's vulnerability with fearless tenderness" (<<http://www.grayhawk-agency.com/#!latest-english/c208n>>). For Le Guin, the immediate visibility of Wu as an author of "world literature" in Western literary production and distribution is facilitated by a desire for alterity, although for Le Guin this difference remains mostly aesthetic. As Heise asserts, "in spite of widespread resistance to processes of globalization in environmentalism and ecocriticism, however, the concept of diversity has functioned as a means of recuperating the oppositional stance associated with the transnational subject" ("Transnational" 383). As in the concepts and contexts of world literature, ecocriticism's global turn reveals the interest in a new theoretical model that, while embodying the complexities of a shared universal experience of post-national modernity, offers local (regional/ethnic) traditions as alternatives (on world literatures, see, e.g., Damrosch; Tötösy de Zepetnek and Mukherjee). Through what Chen, Hao, Markstein, and Le Guin recognize as a hybridization of magic realism, science fiction, and postmodern fiction, Wu's novel presents an aesthetic response to transnational environmental experience that is considered local, unique, and hence worthy of international emulation. Their unanimous celebration of Wu's literary style, however, only further leaves one contemplating how it negotiates between the universal and the particular conceptually.

The local/vernacular differences exemplified in Wu's narrative is grounded in a cosmopolitanism made possible by his adaptation of Euro-American ecological science and the transnational indigenous movement, which, paradoxically, also made his text "transnational" and "worldly" for his local readers. The global turn results not so much from the need for the available knowledge of non-Western or non-mainstream cultures as alternative solutions, which often grows out of the lingering colonial sentiment for the culturally Other, but simply from the desire of the underrepresented people to address their immediate environmental concerns. Simon C. Estok writes that "an ecocriticism exclusively focused on American relationships with the land responds to a very specific set of needs, and to import this theory wholesale onto other nations characterized by different sets of relationships and needs will continue the neocolonialism of 'this burgeoning field' ... The obliviousness to diverse global spaces is serious enough, but the out-and-out erasure of such spaces ... becomes downright alarming, for erasure can-

not ever be quite dissociated from silencing" ("Discourses" 93). More importantly, Estok adds that "while the dimensions of the 'environmental crisis' are clearly global, responses grow out of local systems with varying cultural valencies" ("Partial Views" 4). Multiplicity is a major accomplishment of Wu, who presents a "compound" approach to the experiences of globality through diverse local cultural traditions as a way of resisting silencing and erasure. His endeavor, however, is complicated by his in-between position as a marginalized Third World male writer/professor of dominant Han Taiwan culture. He has a privileged position as a cultural mediator who translates but fails to capture the potentials and problematics of a transnational sense of culture. In fact, his novel is burdened with exotic characterizations where his critical judgment is blinded by his desperation for new theoretical possibilities. In *The Man with the Compound Eyes*, self-reflexivity is constantly undermined by stereotypical overgeneralization of nearly all cultures.

In the chapter where Rasula schemes to run away to search for her boyfriend, Atile'i, for instance, Wu first depicts an Indigenous woman who defies patriarchal traditions: "'Yina, why aren't women allowed to go to sea?' 'This is the rule of the ancestors, the law of nature. Women can only go to the seashore to collect shellfish. But you must never forget that shellfish with spines are not to be touched.' 'Why did they make this rule, and what if one breaks it?' 'Oh, my dear Nana [the Wayo Wayoan word for daughter], you well know that a girl who breaks this rule would turn into a spiny urchin which none would dare approach.' 'Have you actually ever seen someone change into a spiny urchin?' 'There are urchins everywhere'" (85). Rasula's strength, however, is subjugated quickly to her gender role when Wu writes later on that "pregnant and untrained in the operation of a *talawaka* [boat/canoe], Rasula was unable to pit herself against the wind. Nor could she 'feel the direction of the wind with testicles'" (87). Evoking an Indigenous spirituality that accentuates oneness between humans (Wayo Wayo women) and nonhumans (shellfish), this passage is one of the many examples in which the topic of globality is approached locally and in which diversity means new possibilities. His exoticization of Pacific islanders and indigenous ways of knowing is motivated by his desire for change. More importantly, the urgency to recover local traditions as the transnational that we find exemplified in Wu's novel initiates discussion over the structure of Indigenous knowledge, as well as of the politics of cultural translation and consumption (on this, see also Chou).

In conclusion, I call attention to the translation process through which non-Western writers adopt foreign cultural traditions in local resistance movement. I argue that writers such as Wu appropriate and transform Western imagery and scientific theories to reinforce the cultural legitimacy of their own positions. In Wu's *The Man with the Compound Eyes*, we find the impulse of a non-Western writer to adopt Western environmental vocabulary as a way of modernizing and aligning the local with the global. The globalized local or localized global in Wu's novel reveals a cosmopolitan sense of the world and the readership of *The Man with the Compound Eyes* reveals the worlding of ecocriticism as a process of cultural adaptation and translation.

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