

Imagining Trans-Indigenous Solidarity in Contemporary Taiwan: Syaman Rapongan and Wu Ming-Yi

Nicolai Volland

Wu Ming-Yi's 吳明益 (b. 1971) acclaimed ecofuturist parable *Fu yan ren* 複眼人 (*The Man with the Compound Eyes*, 2011) has been read primarily as a tale of environmental crisis, of marginal characters in a marginal setting trying to cope with the consequences of anthropogenic climate change. Often overlooked is that Alice, the female protagonist of *The Man with the Compound Eyes*, is the only ethnically Han character of any consequence in the novel. All others—from Atile'i, the youth from fictional Wayo Wayo island, to Alice's friends Dahu and Hafay—are members of different Indigenous groups. Indigeneity, then, has been a central concern in Wu Ming-Yi's fiction, even though Wu himself identifies as Han Chinese and is not a member of Taiwan's *yuanzhumin* 原住民, or Indigenous peoples. His literary works, accordingly, are not usually classified as "Indigenous literature." The centrality of Indigenous characters in his works, however, marks Wu Ming-Yi as an important and influential voice in discourses about Indigeneity in contemporary Taiwan, and his works are helpful to illuminate important trends and shifts in the discourse of Indigeneity in Taiwan today.

The Indigenous literatures of Taiwan began to attract critical attention in the 1990s, following Taiwan's "Aboriginal Rights Movement" (*yuanzhumin yundong* 原住民運動). Much of this first wave of writing revolved around questions of identity, cultural memory, and histories of resistance

NICOLAI VOLLAND is Associate Professor of Asian Studies and Comparative Literature at Penn State University. His research focuses on modern Chinese/Sinophone literature and culture, Taiwan literature, and oceanic/archipelagic studies. He is the author of *Socialist Cosmopolitanism: The Chinese Literary Universe, 1945-1965* (2017) and he is currently completing work on a monograph tentatively called *Modern Chinese Literature and the Sea*. He is a past president of the Association of Chinese and Comparative Literature (ACCL).

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or loss.¹ Kuei-fen Chiu argues that autoethnography was a prominent feature of Indigenous literature in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, pointing to the prevalence of first-person narrators and the strategic use of words (either Romanized or transcribed into Chinese characters) from Indigenous languages as markers of alterity in a Han-centric political and cultural system.² Thus, Topas Tamapima 拓拔斯·塔瑪匹瑪 (b. 1960) depicts the situation of marginalized Bunun hunters caught between rapidly eroding traditions and modernity; Liglav A-wu 利格拉樂·阿鳩 (b. 1969) foregrounds the alienation of the Paiwan people; and Syaman Rapongan 夏曼·藍波安 (b. 1957) uses his semi-autobiographical stories to reclaim his Austronesian ancestry and his oceanic environment.

Over the past decade, however, Indigenous literature in Taiwan has significantly expanded in scope. Indigenous experiences, Wendy Wang writes, have become “fundamental to comprehending Taiwan’s past and envisioning its future.”³ Writers and critics alike have increasingly turned their attention to more complex issues, probing the intersection of Indigeneity with a range of other critical discourses and, in the process, transforming Taiwan’s Indigenous literature. For instance, Indigenous stewardship of their homelands has given rise to ecocritical concerns that have drawn global attention, such as in the work of Syaman Rapongan (Sterk 2021; Shernuk 2021). Once a predominantly male business, Indigenous literature has also been transformed by writers drawing attention to feminist and queer themes, such as in the more recent work of Liglav A-wu or in the writings of Dadelavan Ibau 達德拉凡·伊苞 (b. 1967) and Apyang Imiq 程廷 (n. d.) (Caron 2023). And Indigenous fiction in Taiwan also increasingly ventures into the realm of the speculative, imagining the futures—utopian or dystopian—of the writers’ own communities, Taiwan, and our planet (Chang 2024). Together, these works—and critics’ engagement with them and the issues they foreground—have pushed the boundaries of Indigenous literature and redefined both what Indigenous literature is and what Indigeneity means in Taiwan.

One area of increased interest in Taiwanese fictional writing is the relationship between different ethnicities—not along the Han-*yuanzhu* axis that has dominated earlier Indigenous literature but the encounter between different Indigenous groups. In this essay, I will scrutinize the question of trans-Indigenous contact, collaboration, exchange, and solidarity.⁴ As I will demonstrate in what follows, some of Taiwan’s most critically acclaimed and productive writers propose to understand Indigenous histories and identities not in isolation from each other but rather as evolving intertwined and dialogic processes. Communication of this kind occurs across ethnic lines of kinship, such as in Wu Ming-Yi’s *The Man with the Compound Eyes*, where we meet Bunun and Amis characters, as well as the fictional Austronesian protagonist Atile’i. Occasionally, however, writers also propose solidarities of a larger, more abstract kind that challenge accepted

¹ A seminal work in this context is Sun (2010). See also Balcom (2005).

² See Chiu (2009). The first wave of research on Taiwan’s Indigenous peoples, Chiu points out, was conducted by anthropologists.

³ See Wang (2025). Some of the debates underlying this shift are discussed in Lin (2023). Compare also Chang and Hsieh (2025).

⁴ I am using the terms “trans-Indigenous” and “trans-Indigeneity,” following Chadwick Allen (2012, xiv), as a way to “acknowledge the mobility and multiple interactions of Indigenous peoples, cultures, histories, and texts.”

notions of ethnicity and Indigeneity. Below, I will first scrutinize Syaman Rapongan, Taiwan's foremost Indigenous author today, and especially his novel *Mei you xinxiang de nanren* 沒有信箱的男人 (*The Man without a Mailbox*, 2022). The essay then turns to Wu Ming-Yi's *Haifeng jiudian* 海風酒店 (*The Sea Breeze Club*, 2023). I propose to read the latter as a creative rewriting of *The Man with the Compound Eyes* that offers a take on Indigeneity that is significantly more complex than that of his earlier book. Both Wu Ming-Yi and Syaman Rapongan challenge existing notions of ethnicity and highlight the evolving understandings and meanings of Indigeneity, in Taiwan and beyond.⁵

Desert (and) Island(s)

Over three decades of writing, Syaman Rapongan has established himself as Taiwan's best-known Indigenous author. Belonging to the Tao people 達悟族, he is a native of Orchid Island (Lanyu 蘭嶼, known as Pongso no Tao to its Indigenous inhabitants), an outlying island twenty-five miles off Taiwan's southeast coast. Syaman Rapongan started publishing semi-autobiographical short stories in the 1990s and has since embarked on a prolific literary career that includes volumes of short fiction, multiple novels, as well as nonfiction (Volland *forthcoming*). The culture, history, and experiences of his native people occupy a central role in Syaman Rapongan's work. Early stories, such as "Haiyang chaoshengzhe" 海洋朝聖者 ("The ocean pilgrim," 1995) and "Leng hai qing shen" 冷海情深 ("Cold sea, deep feeling," 1997), introduced readers to a way of life closely intertwined with the ocean, taking them on spearfishing trips among the coral reefs off Orchid Island's coast and alerting them to both the challenges to Indigenous ways of life brought about by modernity and the environmental threats to the oceanic ecosystem caused by industrial-scale fishing and unscrupulous exploitation.⁶ Syaman Rapongan is, hence, also one of Taiwan's foremost authors of oceanic fiction (Volland 2022; Wu 2023).

In his more recent novels, Syaman Rapongan casts his gaze beyond the immediate horizon, working to connect the Tao people and their maritime culture with other Austronesian peoples across the Pacific Ocean. Both *Da hai fu meng* 大海浮夢 (*Big Ocean, Floating Dreams*, 2014) and *Da hai zhi yan* 大海之眼 *Mata nu Wawa* (*Eyes of the Ocean*, 2018) recount his travels across the Southern Pacific in search of shared kinship with other seafaring peoples. Connecting with people across the vast archipelagoes of the central and south Pacific, the author not only draws attention to these groups' migratory histories and the shared cultural and linguistic ancestry that connects them back to prehistoric Taiwan. Syaman Rapongan also engages in trans-Indigenous diplomacy and the promotion of solidarity based on shared histories and cultural traditions, as well as common threats to their livelihoods from economic inequalities and anthropogenic climate change.

⁵ Trans-Indigenous imaginaries in Taiwan literature are not limited to Syaman Rapongan and Wu Ming-Yi. Another prominent example is Dadelavan Ibau's 2002 visit to Tibet. See Dadelavan (2021). Compare Shernuk (2021).

⁶ These themes are central also to *Tiankong de yanjing* 天空的眼睛 (2012). See Rapongan (2026).

Syaman Rapongan's 2022 novel, *The Man without a Mailbox*, appears at first sight a return to the microcosmos of Orchid Island. Much of the book recounts the history of the author's native island through the lens of a multigenerational family, from mythic beginnings through the arrival of the first Western explorers to the Japanese colonial period. Modernity arrives on Orchid Island during the first half of the twentieth century in the form of Japanese police officers and schools. The islanders are mostly spared the bloodshed of the Pacific War, but they are in for a rude awakening after the Japanese surrender. In what the Tao consider a cruel and absurd joke of world history, the newly arriving masters who replace the repatriating Japanese—with a two-year delay—are not, as widely expected, the victorious Americans but a ragtag band of Chinese soldiers who claim that Orchid Island would henceforth be part of the Republic of China. Syaman Gulalaen, one of the novel's protagonists, is incredulous: "He didn't understand the outside world; at least from what he'd seen with his own eyes, the Americans had defeated the Japanese and not the Jiguke 基固客, so why were the Jiguke now coming, and not the Americans?" (Rapongan 2022, 196). The newcomers speak in tongues, incomprehensible to even the bilingual among the Tao. Someone eventually determines that they must be from China—*Chūgoku* 中国 in Japanese—and "Jiguke" they are henceforth called by the Tao; the final character *ke* 客, or guest, unambiguously marking the new rulers as outsiders who do not belong to an island that had long defined itself in relation to neighboring islands to the south administered by the Philippines.

The novel's final chapters, however, render this insider/outsider binary problematic. As the Republic of China slowly builds its footprint on Orchid Island and the number of Chinese administrators and settlers increases, the homogeneity of the "Jiguke" breaks down. Among the new arrivals on Orchid Island—policemen, missionaries, schoolteachers, soldiers—are two Uyghur men who had come to Taiwan with the Nationalist Party in 1949. Ackbar Mitis 艾克拜爾·米提斯 is known to his students as Teacher Liu 劉老師. He becomes the mentor of young Zhou Yun 周雲—the son of Syaman Gulalaen, who has shed his birth name, Lomabiq 洛馬比克, as required by the school authorities. At his workplace, Ackbar is careful to hide his ethnic identity. The only rem(a)inder of his origin is the first name he chose for himself: The jiang 疆 in Liu Jiang 劉疆 stands for his native Xinjiang 新疆. His friend Badir 巴迪爾 is a squad leader of the Nationalist army unit stationed on Orchid Island. A veteran of many battles big and small, he speaks Chinese with "an authentic Northern Shaanxi dialect" (Rapongan 2022, 240). It is only in private that he and Ackbar feel comfortable to switch into Uyghur.

The Uyghur men's positionality on Orchid Island is precarious, forcing them into a double life. At a raucous National Day reception, the school's employees—including Ackbar—are made to listen to the platoon leader's drunken toast: "Come, come, come! Mr. Principal, and all you teachers, you've come, just like our platoon, to this godforsaken island to enlighten the most backward, last wild people of our Chinese race. We all rely on you to discipline the kids of these mountain compatriots, so that they'll leave behind this backward society as soon as possible. Come,

come, come, have a drink!”⁷ In public, Ackbar and Badir have to acquiesce to the racist, Han supremacist ideology promoted by the government and its representatives on Orchid Island. Worse, both men are aware that they are complicit in the forcible assimilation of the Tao into the Republic of China. It is only in private conversation, in the safety of Ackbar’s teacher dormitory, that both open up about their past and their role in the present. Badir has been serving in the armed forces for a quarter century; he joined the Nationalist armies in the 1940s and has fought ever since, against an ever-changing array of enemies—always the enemies of those in command, never his own enemies: “I’ve come to the point where I no longer know for whom I fight, and for whom I live” (Rapongan 2022, 251). The characters’ nagging self-doubts are paired with a pervasive homesickness, for the snow-fed streams of the Tianshan mountains, for the rolling prairies, and even for the fierce, bone-chilling northern winds of the Xinjiang winter.

Ackbar and Badir are cut off not only from their homeland but also from their relatives, their loved ones. In 1949, during the Nationalist retreat, Ackbar and his girlfriend had fled from city to city, but he had lost track of her in the wild chaos on the pier when attempting to board a ship for Taiwan. Ackbar never saw his beloved again. In the confidence of a late-night conversation, Badir asks Ackbar if he ever tried to write to his relatives back home to let them know his whereabouts. “That, how’d that be possible!” Ackbar responds. “Old brother, and tell me, where is ‘home’? Where’d I even get an address? ... A letter ... writing to whom?” (Rapongan 2022, 253). The novel’s title, at this moment, acquires new meaning. The cross-Strait confrontation between “Old Chiang” and “Old Mao” has cut off family ties and communication for millions of people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait. Ackbar and Badir have become, literally, men without mailboxes—they have no addresses that would be available to those dearest to them, a world away in the vast expanses of the ethnically diverse lands of Xinjiang. In this way, they join the Tao islanders, the novel’s original “people without mailboxes”: The division between a scriptless Indigenous culture and the script-based cultures of both Japanese and Chinese rulers is a fault line that Syaman Rapongan stresses throughout the book. Without writing, the Tao have no need for mailboxes. Toward the novel’s end, they are joined by the two Uyghur men, who also have no mail to wait for—albeit for different reasons.

Syaman Rapongan strategically constructs equivalences between the situations of the Uyghur men and the Tao fishermen—marginalized subjects within the Han-dominated political and ethnic order. These equivalences form the basis for solidarity across ethnic lines. Together, Ackbar and Lomabiq watch the village’s boats leave for the fishing grounds at nearby Lesser Orchid Island (小蘭嶼). The fishermen in their traditional boats are a sublime sight, reawakening the sense of ethnic pride slumbering deep within Ackbar, who feels himself transported back to the boundless prairies of Inner Asia. But just as Xinjiang is out of bounds, Little Orchid Island is controlled by the ROC navy, and the Tao fishermen need a permit to access the fishing grounds that used to be theirs for many generations. “The Tao consider the ocean to be open; the Chinese regard it as closed” (Rapongan 2022, 260). The Chinese nation-state(s) on both sides of the Taiwan Strait have erected

⁷ Ibid. “Mountain compatriots” (*shandi tongbao* 山地同胞) was the Nationalist government’s summary term for ethnic minorities.

borders, creating spatial regimes that compartmentalize and regiment traditional geographies built on epistemologies that are incompatible with the demands of modern governance. The ideological division that cuts across the Taiwan Strait and that has dominated modern Chinese historiography is, accordingly, less relevant to the marginal ethnicities populating the border regions than the imposition of borders on these regions in the first place. Oceans and deserts, the prairie and the subtropical island, hence become interchangeable, creating the conditions for trans-Indigenous solidarity.

The solidarity between the Tao villagers and the multiply displaced Uyghurs, however, remains tenuous. It is under constant threat from the vagaries and the internecine violence of the intra-Chinese conflict from which the novel's Indigenous characters try to stay away. In 1966 and 1967, indoctrination campaigns warn Chinese officials and the armed forces to watch out for "traitors" and Communist spies. To the Tao, the KMT ideology is sheer nonsense: "the Communist spies 匪諜, after all, are Han Chinese, too" (Rapongan 2022, 238). Until they are not, that is: In the book's final chapter, we learn that Badir, the platoon leader and Ackbar's only close acquaintance, has been arrested and accused of Communist connections. The novel ends with a farewell meal Ackbar prepares for Zhou Yun/Lomabiq, his star student, who is about to depart for Taidong to attend middle school—escaping the narrow confines of Orchid Island, moving ahead in the Han-centric world of Taiwan, but also further weakening his ties to his Indigenous culture. During their dinner, Ackbar just barely suppresses his own sorrow: Badir has been executed the very same day, and Ackbar himself is packing up to leave Orchid Island. At nightfall, he and Lomabiq wander the winding mountain road outside the village, where in the wind they hear the voices of the Japanese soldiers who were killed or who killed themselves on Orchid Island in 1945. At their parting, Ackbar promises to write to his student, yet Lomabiq reminds him, "Teacher Liu, I live in a straw hut, without a house number, and without a mailbox." But then he corrects himself: "Teacher Ackbar, the ocean is my house number and my mailbox!" (Rapongan 2022, 273-274). In a hostile political environment, overt expressions of solidarity are under duress, but they can live on in a symbolic realm. It is significant that in his last address to his mentor, Lomabiq switches to Ackbar's Uyghur name. The solidarity of Indigenous subjects marginalized by the Chinese nation-state(s) is tentative, but the very possibility of such a vision itself is, for Syaman Rapongan, empowering.

The Cave with Two Entrances

The Man with the Compound Eyes, Wu Ming-Yi's second novel, has become an international sensation. Translated into a dozen foreign languages, it has also attracted significant critical attention.⁸ The book's themes—planetary crisis and personal grief, ecofuturism and a philosophical inquiry into the relationship of humans and nature—resonate beyond borders. Indigeneity features prominently in the book: With the single exception of Alice 阿莉思, all the

⁸ The novel has been most often read as an ecofuturist parable. See, for instance, Chou (2014); Tsai (2019); and Huang (2019). The literature on Wu Ming-Yi is too large to list here. A good point of departure is Berry and Chiu (2025).

main characters of *The Man with the Compound Eyes* are Indigenous.⁹ There is Atile'i 阿特烈, the youth from fictional Wayo Wayo Island; Dahu 達赫, the leader of the town's Search and Rescue team and Alice's close friend; and Hafay 哈凡, another intimate friend of Alice's and the owner of the town's pub, the Seventh Sisid. Whereas Atile'i's ethnicity remains in the realm of fiction, the novel identifies Dahu as Bunun 布農族 and Hafay as Pangcah (Amis 阿美族). The ties forged between a woman caught in a deep personal crisis and her Indigenous counterparts plays out before the background of an unfolding ecological disaster. The novel's Indigenous protagonists unite as victims of technologically driven ecocide engineered by Taiwan's mainstream Han society in collaboration with European advisers. Hafay, Dahu, and Atile'i all see their sources of livelihood erased but find resilience in their bonding with each other, across ethnic lines and national borders. Their cooperation can be seen as a classic case of trans-Indigenous solidarity.

Wu's 2023 novel, *The Sea Breeze Club*, revisits many of the issues central to *The Man with the Compound Eyes*. In many ways, *The Sea Breeze Club* can be considered a variation on a theme, if not an actual rewriting of the author's earlier novel. The differences between the two books, however, are as instructive as their similarities and allow us to document Wu's evolving thinking about and engagement with the problems of Indigeneity in contemporary Taiwan. While *The Man with the Compound Eyes* is set in the near future, Wu's latest novel retells events of the recent past, identifiable as the late 1980s and early 1990s, the boom years of Taiwan's economic expansion. In *The Sea Breeze Club*, the threat to the lives of the people in remote Eastern Taiwan does not originate in an abstract and futuristic trash vortex propelled by the Pacific's oceanic gyres but rather the more concrete and familiar one of a giant cement plant that is to be built, by government decision, on the outskirts of a small town and on land owned by the area's Indigenous inhabitants.¹⁰ The techno-modernist regime ensures that environmental impact surveys, consultation with local stakeholders, and compensation schemes are all adhered to, but only pro forma: The decision to build the giant, polluting plant has been made in faraway Taipei, and whatever resistance some of the Indigenous locals put up (supported by university-educated activists from Taipei with lots of passion but little patience and short attention spans) will be futile.

Indigeneity is central to *The Sea Breeze Club*, both as a form of identity and as a label that classifies the locals as second-class citizens who can be easily coopted or, if need be, overruled. The state's planners are skilled in pushing their projects through, and they are dismissive of local forms of identification. Wu Ming-Yi showcases the Han technocrats' habitual contempt for the Indigenous mountain dwellers when an official sent from Taipei keeps lumping together the Truku (Taroko 太魯閣族) with the Atayal 泰雅族, ignoring the village leader's protestations (see Wu 2023, 219-220). What is at stake in this exchange is the right to define ethnic identity. The Truku had long campaigned for recognition as a separate ethnic group; their request was finally granted in 2004. In the passage, which is set in the early 1990s, the official is upholding government policy

⁹ On Indigeneity in Wu's novel, see Sterk (2023); and Visser (2024).

¹⁰ The model for the giant plant in *The Sea Breeze Club* is the Taiwan Cement Corporation's Heping 和平 plant, built in the 1990s, together with an affiliated coal power plant and a harbor facility, near the village of Aohua 澳花.

that deprives Indigenous groups of the right to determine their own ethnicity. And the government's developmentalist incursions into the homelands of Taiwan's Indigenous peoples are just the latest in a long series of violent measures to coerce and control the island's Indigenous peoples. The Truku living in the hamlet of Haifeng 海豐 are, in fact, a displaced people to begin with. The Truku, readers learn, originally lived deep in the mountains. After a protracted and bloody conflict with the Japanese colonial forces, the Truku had to give up both their right to carry guns (a heavy blow for a group of subsistence hunters) and resettle to new lands on the coast, where they were easier to control.¹¹ The forced buyout campaign to build the cement factory, hence, is making the local villagers a multiply displaced population, ordered to move once again and cut off from their remaining hunting grounds by the wire mesh fences that surround the factory grounds.¹²

The main protagonist of *The Sea Breeze Club* is Tunux 督努, a young man from a family of Truku hunters. After a failed effort to establish a foothold in Taipei (where many young men from Indigenous groups carve out a living playing music in fashionable bars), Tunux has returned to Haifeng working odd jobs and hunting with his dog, Idas. He becomes the face of the protests against the cement plant, representing all of the contradictions the villagers face: He is appalled by their displacement and the loss of ethnic identity but lured by the promised economic gains and profits; he wavers between hope and despair—what chance does a small Indigenous community with little education and sophistication stand against determined government agencies? And he makes friends with an influx of well-meaning activists, but unlike them he cannot leave once their cause fails, and he needs to navigate the village's increasingly fractious politics. Haifeng itself is a microcosm of the lives and the challenges facing Taiwan's Indigenous groups. There is petty corruption; and more and more villagers accept, hesitatingly, the government's compensation offers when the futility of their resistance becomes obvious. The muscle cars some of the young men buy with their compensation checks roar through the main street for a few weeks; they fall silent when their owners cannot afford the fuel anymore, after the compensation is all used up. Predictably, the plant is built by immigrants from Southeast Asia rather than with local labor, and the project's international advisors prefer commuting from Hualien's five-star hotels over living in Haifeng itself. Readers see both the resistance against the project and its eventual construction through the eyes of Tunux, the novel's Indigenous protagonist.

Wu Ming-Yi complicates the Indigenous/Han binary, however, with the character of Xiuzi 秀子. The novel starts two decades before the main events, with a strange encounter of symbolic significance. The young Tunux observes a puppy that has gotten itself entangled with a plastic rope around his neck; yet the dog runs away when Tunux tries to free it. Tunux follows Idas all the way into a cave, deeper and deeper into the mountain. At the same time, Xiuzi flees her parental home; her father, an alcoholic erstwhile sugarcane worker rendered invalid by an accident, plans to sell

¹¹ See Wu (2023), 172–176. The Truku War of 1914 was an Indigenous uprising against the Japanese colonial government that followed a series of clashes in the early colonial period and was preceded by an 1876 uprising against the Qing administration. See Hong (2016).

¹² Later in the same chapter readers meet some of the last Truku living deep in the mountains, in defiance of successive government orders to resettle.

the girl to a man “who reeks like a Taiwan stink snake.”¹³ At night, she sneaks out of the house, following a hobbling, three-legged animal she has seen in a dream to the entrance of a cave. Spooked by bats she, too, penetrates deeper and deeper into the mountain, where she meets Tunux. In the complete darkness, the children feel each other’s presence and confide in each other. Xiuzi speaks in a dialect that is recognizable as Hakka, and the novel later confirms that she is from a desperately poor Hakka community.¹⁴ Inside the mountain, the children reach an unusual pact: Since each is suffering in their respective homes, they will exchange roles, and leave the mountain on each other’s side. Little Xiuzi hence turns up in Haifeng, and Tunux emerges in Xiuzi’s village, on the other side of the mountain. Not until several days later do the children reveal their names and the names of their home villages, and local policemen escort them back “home.” The children’s attempt to take each other’s place is, hence, unsuccessful—their respective identities cannot be easily swapped. In official nomenclature, the Hakka, like the Hoklo, are classified as Han Chinese; they are not considered an Indigenous group. The secret meeting in an unlikely and highly symbolic location,¹⁵ however, establishes a bond between Tunux and Xiuzi and raises the possibility of solidarity between the two protagonists: Both are from poor, marginalized communities that are culturally distinct from mainstream society, both come from groups with their own traditions and identities, and both speak languages distinct from both Mandarin and Taiwanese. In this way, Wu Ming-Yi puts pressure on the notion of Indigeneity itself and on its definition in twenty-first century Taiwan.

The bond that the opening of *The Sea Breeze Club* establishes between Xiuzi and Tunux proposes innovative ways of thinking about Indigeneity. In particular, Wu Ming-Yi critiques the binary between Indigenous and non-Indigenous subjects. What, the author seems to ask, if Indigeneity is not a stable and monolithic notion but rather a position on a broader spectrum of identities with permeable boundaries, a notion that allows for fluidity and hybridity? Wu Ming-Yi develops these ideas later in the novel when Xiuzi, after her first unsuccessful attempt to flee her abusive parents, runs away for good as a teenager. Left pregnant by an irresponsible Han university student, Xiuzi is taken in by an Indigenous woman who gives her shelter; there she gives birth to her daughter, Xiao’ou 小鷗. The people she has stumbled upon, deep in the mountains (even though not *inside* the mountain), are the last remnant Truku who have lived there for decades, in defiance of successive governments’ resettlement policies. They take in Xiuzi and treat her no different from their own daughter, who is of Xiuzi’s age. Does Xiuzi, then, cross the border and become an Indigenous subject by adoption? Wu Ming-Yi, skirting the risks of romantic adumbrations of Indigeneity that themselves are part of mainstream discourse, stops short of suggesting so. Instead, Xiuzi leaves the Indigenous couple that had sheltered her and moves to Kinmen to work as a karaoke singer. She eventually ends up back in Haifeng, where she takes over

¹³ Wu (2023), 19. The snake is a king ratsnake, colloquially known as *chouqingmu* 臭青母, the name Xiuzi uses.

¹⁴ Wu Ming-Yi offers the Hakka pronunciation of some terms in the dialogue scenes involving Xiuzi and her parents. See, for instance, Wu (2023), 11, 12, 13, 100.

¹⁵ The “cave” itself acquires greater symbolic significance when Wu Ming-Yi identifies it as an organic part (literally!) of the dying Truku Indigenous mythology. The mythical world intervenes both to protect vulnerable Indigenous subjects, human and nonhuman alike, and to enable the imagination of solidarity.

a local establishment, the eponymous Sea Breeze Club, and turns it into a karaoke parlor. Now going by the name Yuzi 玉子, she remains an outsider in Haifeng, and she and Tunux do not resume the relationship that the first chapter had raised as a possibility. Xiuzi/Yuzi and Tunux do mirror each other, however, in their pragmatic outlook on life in a multiethnic community where boundaries between different groups are fluid.¹⁶

The union of Tunux and Xiuzi is not consummated romantically but is proposed as a theoretical and practical possibility. Both characters belong to marginal groups that are culturally distinct, characterized by their alterity from mainstream Han society, and subject to exploitation by the state. Just like the resistance against the government and its technocratic apparatus, the bond between the two protagonists acquires symbolic significance even in its failure, for the challenge it poses to the dominant epistemologies and classificatory regimes and the possibilities it raises. The Hakka are an outlier within a system built upon rigid ethnic categories, and the novel uses the character of Xiuzi to question the impermeability of the lines demarcating Indigeneity in contemporary Taiwan. Wu Ming-Yi underscores the significance of such acts of symbolic transgression in the final pages of *The Sea Breeze Club*. Set in the present (i.e., twenty-five years after the novel's main event, the construction of the cement plant), we meet Xiuzi/Yuzi picking up Xiao'ou from prison, where she has served a one-year sentence for arson. The cement plant, readers learn, had thrived for twenty years but closed when the local resources were depleted. To cover up the postindustrial ruins, local officials had built a tacky theme park and museum that glorified the region's Indigenous peoples and hailed the plant's benefits for the local community. Enraged by the blatant lies of the museum display and its naïve commodification of Indigenous culture, Xiao'ou returns at night with a canister of gasoline and burns down the offending site. Her act of resistance is, of course, futile, belated by a quarter century. But in the context of the novel's theorizing about solidarity beyond official ethnic lines, it is highly significant that the revenge for centuries of violence enacted against Taiwan's Indigenous peoples comes from Xiao'ou—a character who is non-Indigenous by official standards but whose being has become deeply intertwined with the lives of the Indigenous community in which she has been brought up, and of which she has become a part.

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Indigenous literature is an essential part of Taiwan's diverse literary field, and Taiwanese Indigenous authors have attracted increasing critical attention. In recent years, both Indigenous authors such as Syaman Rapongan and non-Indigenous writers like Wu Ming-Yi have explored new directions in their fiction, reconsidering the meaning of Indigeneity both in Taiwan's multiethnic society and globally. As I have shown in this essay, this new wave of writing pushes back against the characterization of Indigenous groups as isolated or standing in juxtaposition to a dominant "mainstream" culture and society. In works such as *The Sea Breeze Club* and *The Man*

¹⁶ Wu Ming-Yi offers a hint at the possibility of ethnic mixing in the character of Wiling Waran, who is of mixed Truku and Han parentage.

without a Mailbox, Indigeneity is considered not marginal but occupying its own centers, epistemologically and socially. In both novels, Indigenous groups are interconnected with others in similar conditions—groups that find themselves incongruent with the technocratic, developmentalist, and economically driven modern (nation-)state and its epistemic regimes.

In the work of Syaman Rapongan and Wu Ming-Yi, the Tao and the Truku emerge as part of a global, transnational Austronesian diaspora, yet the two writers take different critical approaches in their pursuit of the possibilities of Indigeneity in twenty-first century Taiwan, as well as globally. Syaman Rapongan speculates about the possibility of an alliance between Uyghurs and Tao characters, members of groups that appear, at first sight, to be as different as can be, but that share precarious positions on the ethnic margins of two competing Chinese states. Their alliance deconstructs the notion of marginality and exposes it as myth. The solidarity between Teacher Ackbar and his student Lomabiq implodes the dominant ideology; the solidarity remains fleeting at the novel's end but carries the potential for future flourishing, as Lomabiq grows into adulthood. Throughout *The Man without a Mailbox*, however, Syaman Rapongan appears to be operating within the epistemic parameters of Indigeneity as conventionally understood. Wu Ming-Yi, in contrast, subjects the very notion of Indigeneity to close scrutiny. In this sense *The Sea Breeze Club* moves decisively beyond his earlier work. The possibility of trans-Indigenous solidarity fully emerges only in *The Sea Breeze Club*. This later book decides to problematize the notion of Indigeneity through the character of Xiuzi/Yuzi, whose complexity is indicated by her double naming and her identification as Hakka, a population occupying an in-between status within the ethnic order itself. Multiple transgressions of the supposed borders of Indigeneity—scenarios in fact—occur in the novel: from Tunux and Xiuzi's pact inside the mountain to substitute for each other; to Xiuzi's quasi-adoption by an Indigenous couple; to the eventual consummation of Indigenous resistance by Xiuzi's daughter, Xiao'ou, through an act of intergenerational justice.

The Sea Breeze Club suggests two possible meanings for the *trans-* in trans-Indigeneity. On the one hand, Wu Ming-Yi proposes solidarity across ethnic boundaries by questioning the notion of Indigeneity as an inherently stable and monolithic entity and re-envisioning it as a fluid and malleable spectrum. At the same time, the author speculates about the possibility of actually crossing these lines, however fluid they are—of *becoming* Indigenous. Wu's novel remains tentative at best in this respect; nowhere in the text does Xiuzi lay claim to being Indigenous; her daughter's quest for intergenerational and interethnic justice is as far as Wu Ming-Yi goes. This reticence is understandable, as Wu undertakes these thought experiments as a Han author writing *about* Indigenous subjects. *The Sea Breeze Club* is careful to avoid the pitfalls of romanticizing Indigeneity or promising facile solutions. As a resident of Eastern Taiwan with significant involvement in local activism, Wu is careful to respect the autonomy—including epistemic autonomy—of his neighbors and his Indigenous characters. In *The Sea Breeze Club* he nonetheless suggests innovative ways to think *with* and *beyond* Indigeneity. Trans-Indigenous solidarity, both novels suggest, is changing the meanings and logic of Indigeneity in the contemporary world.

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