

## RESEARCH ARTICLES

# Island, Identity, and Trauma: The Three Ecologies of Wu Ming-Yi's 'The Man With the Compound Eyes'

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Following Ivakhiv's tri-ecological perspective, we undertake an analysis of Wu Ming-Yi's ecological science fiction *The Man with the Compound Eyes*, which skillfully delineates a multi-faceted, three-dimensional network of island ecology via anthropomorphic, geomorphic, and biomorphic images. Through a sci-fi imaginary event in which a colossal trash vortex collides with the east coast of Taiwan, the book effectively unveils three profound ecological crises: the harrowing contamination of the island and oceanic ecology; the looming peril to ecocultural identity, stemming from the destruction of inhabited places; the psychological trauma inflicted by the encroachment of ecological colonization. Simultaneously, the work thoughtfully underscores humanity's latent capacity for ecosophy and presents a vision of an 'ecological posthumanism'.

## I. Introduction

As ecological concepts have gained widespread recognition, Chinese ecological literature has experienced remarkable growth. Striking the delicate balance between literary artistry and ecological themes can prove to be a formidable challenge, yet Wu Ming-Yi's novel *The Man with the Compound Eyes* masterfully accomplishes this feat. Over the past decade, this literary gem has not only garnered widespread acclaim in Taiwan and mainland China but has also achieved the distinction of being the first Taiwanese work to be acquired by Random House, the globally esteemed publishing powerhouse. The numerous translations of this novel into languages such as English, French, Italian, and Spanish stand as testaments both to its literary excellence and to its validation within the worldwide publishing and reading community.

Born in Taipei in 1971, Wu Ming-Yi is a noted multidisciplinary artist, writer, painter, biological investigator, and environmental activist. His father was a grocer who eventually settled in Taipei after working in Japan for many years, while his mother dedicated herself to the role of a housewife and nurturing several children. Wu embarked on his academic journey by pursuing advertising studies at Fu-Jen Catholic University and later graduated from National Central University with a doctorate in Chinese Literature. Since his graduation in 2000, he has been teaching literature and creative writing in the

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Chinese Language and Literature Department at Dong Hwa University. Wu's distinctive writing style is a product of the unique cultural milieu in Taiwan, where Chinese, European, American, Japanese, and other influences converge. His background as an ecologist further enriches his literary and scientific prowess. Long before the publication of *The Man with the Compound Eyes*, Wu had already carved a niche for himself as one of the eminent nature writers within the Chinese-speaking community. His reputation was solidified through his early book-length literary essays centered on butterflies, namely *The Book of Lost Butterflies* (2000) and *The Way of Butterflies* (2003), both of which earned coveted spots on several "Best of the Year" literary lists. Nevertheless, his thirst for creative achievement remained unquenched. He subsequently introduced his inaugural novel, *Routes in the Dream* (2007), and such narrative works as *The Magician on the Overpass* (2011) and *The Stolen Bicycle* (2015), the latter of which clinched the prestigious Booker Prize in 2018.

*The Man with the Compound Eyes* is a compelling work of fiction featuring two central protagonists. Fifteen-year-old boy Atile'i hails from Wayo Wayo, an island nestled somewhere in the vast expanse of the Pacific Ocean. As the second son of his family, he is tasked with a voyage as a solemn offering to the Sea God, a tradition deeply ingrained in his tribal customs. Serendipity leads him to a surprising encounter with a drifting trash vortex in the ocean, ultimately securing his survival. Meanwhile, on the eastern shores of Taiwan, literature professor Alice is grappling with the weight of depression. Her life has been marred by tragedy, with the loss of her son to a venomous snakebite many years ago, the abandonment of her husband during a hiking expedition, and the relentless encroachment of rising sea levels that have left her once-beloved home in ruins. Consumed by grief, Alice creates a surreal, imaginary world where her son continues to grow and where she envisions him embarking on hiking adventures alongside her estranged husband, both tragically lost. Amidst her emotional turmoil, thoughts of suicide intermittently invade her mind. However, the course of her life takes an unexpected turn when a collision between the trash vortex and the Taiwanese coast disrupts her plans. It is in this turbulent moment that the paths of the two protagonists, Alice and Atile'i, converge. Their unlikely friendship becomes a lifeline, helping them navigate their most challenging times. Interwoven with the narratives of Alice and Atile'i are the stories of those whose lives have been touched by the tsunami, ranging from impassioned environmentalists to Taiwan's indigenous peoples, all under the enigmatic watch of the man with the compound eyes.

The unique narrative of this fiction has captured the attention of numerous scholars, many of whom employ Martin Heidegger's concept of "worlding" to delve into the novel's exploration of the local and the world dimensions. A prime example of such scholarly engagement is found in Shiu-huah Serena Chou's work, titled "Wu's *The Man with the Compound Eyes* and the *Worlding of Environmental Literature*." In this article, Chou examines Wu's

novel through the lens of ecocriticism's transcultural perspective (Chou, 2014). While some scholars probe into their investigations within the framework of ecocriticism to uncover the novel's ecological significance and historical contribution to ecological literature, Lin-chin Tsai takes a unique approach. Tsai focuses on contemporary ecocriticism theories, in tandem with the philosophical insights of Jacques Rancière, particularly his concept of "redistribution." Tsai argues that the novel actively engages in global production of environmental literature by performing what he terms "ecological redistribution" (Tsai, 2019). Meanwhile, researchers from Taiwan are also dedicated to forging the identity of the island through the dissemination of Taiwanese literature on a global scale. Dingru Huang, for instance, in his paper published in 2019, contends that Wu Ming-Yi provides an alternative perspective for understanding and contextualizing Taiwanese literature. Huang introduces the concept of "Weak Anthropocentrism" to describe Wu Ming-Yi's self-critical stance, which transcends the overarching teleology of globalization and points towards an ecological temporality beyond it (D. Huang, 2019). An aesthetic exploration is a viable avenue for analysis as well. Andolfatto (Andolfatto, 2023) concentrates on the unique depiction of trash in the novel and compares the similarities and disparities in the representation of waste in Wu's work and Chen Qiufan's *The Waste Tide*. In addition, Sterk (2016) explores the video-mosaic gaze exhibited by the man with the compound eyes as a postmodern ecological sublime. While we derive valuable insights from these studies, we acknowledge that the novel's richness transcends exhaustive analysis of its multifaceted dimensions. Thus, our approach in this paper diverges towards a deeper interpretation of the work. Specifically, we employ Adrian Ivakhiv's tri-ecological morphisms theory to dissect the visual compositions within the novel. Beyond the superficial images and narrative contours, our investigation seeks to uncover how the work intertwines innate, social, and environmental ecologies by applying Guattari's three ecologies theory.

The excellence of *The Man with the Compound Eyes* lies in its seamless integration of pressing ecological concerns that are relevant to our contemporary world. These include issues such as island ecologies, the sense of belonging in local communities, the preservation of indigenous identities, the plight of ecological refugees, and the haunting presence of traumatic memories. In the center of the novel lies a pivotal ecological event: the collision of a massive trash vortex with the island of Taiwan. The narrative unfolds a three-dimensional ecological network as eco-philosopher Adrian Ivakhiv has called (a) anthropomorphic images, represented by characters like Alice, Atilé'i, Hafay, Dahu, and the man with the compound eyes; (b) biomorphic images, embodied by entities such as the cat Ohiyo, the sperm whale transformed by the second son, and the hunted seals; and (c) geomorphic images, including such locations as Wayo Wayo island, trash island, Taiwan island, the tunnel, the sea, and the forest church. What lends dynamism to this intricate network is the transformative impact of the trash island's arrival on Taiwan's eastern

coast, disrupting the original ecological equilibrium. The novel provides two significant clues to signify this change: Atilé's drift at sea and the spiritual awakening experienced by Alice. As the trash island collides with Taiwan, these two protagonists' paths converge, sparking the climactic moment in the story. Drawing upon the insights of French philosopher and psychoanalyst Félix Guattari's "three ecologies"—environmental, social, and mental or psychological—Ivakhiv divides the realm of artistic "world-making" into three distinct dimensions: geomorphic, anthropomorphic, and biomorphic (Ivakhiv, 2013, p. 10). These dimensions respectively pertain to the establishment of territoriality, which serves as a relatively stable backdrop framing event (the geomorphic); the cultivation of social bonds, subjectivity, and the mutual recognition of agency (the anthropomorphic, though not restricted solely to human agents); and the generation of a lively and enigmatic vitality that exists between the other two (the biomorphic or "animamorphic") (Ivakhiv, 2013). It is evident that *The Man with the Compound Eyes* masterfully constructs the three ecologies of the island through the tumultuous trash event and the shaping of these three ecological "morphisms." In the following sections, we will elucidate the three ecologies presented in the work through a) the geographical features and natural challenges of the island, b) the complex interplay of topophilia and identity dilemmas, and c) the exploration of ecological refugees and the haunting specter of traumatic memories. Building upon this foundation, we will unravel the underlying inclination toward ecoposthumanism subtly embedded within the narrative.

## II. Island geography and natural plight

Compared with continental ecology, island ecology possesses a distinct and remarkable uniqueness. Due to their formation and relatively autonomous evolutionary trajectories, islands frequently serve as pivotal case studies for investigating ecological shifts and biological evolution, exemplified by the renowned expedition of Charles Darwin to the Galapagos Islands (Graham et al., 2017). Moreover, when contrasted with the intricate ecological networks and niche complexities observed on continents, island ecology exhibits a simplified structure, rendering it more susceptible to species invasions, species extinctions, and environmental fluctuations. Even with a cursory examination of the ecological devastation that occurred on Easter Island, one can readily discern the fragile nature of island ecosystems amid the diverse geographical landscapes of our planet, underscoring the urgency of their protection. From a humanistic perspective, one of the paramount values in elucidating the ecological challenges faced by islands lies in their capacity to offer a poignant metaphorical framework. Islands serve as a powerful reminder that Earth itself represents but a solitary island of life within the vast cosmos. Its ecological vulnerability, when juxtaposed with the prevailing realities of industrialization, urban expansion, and population growth, mirrors the precarious fates of Easter Island and the fictional Wayo Wayo Island. As expressed by Guattari, "the earth is undergoing a period of intense techno-scientific transformations. If no remedy is found, the ecological disequilibrium this has generated will

ultimately threaten the continuation of life on the planet's surface. Alongside these upheavals, human modes of life, both individual and collective, are progressively deteriorating" (Guattari, 2000, p. 27).

*The Man with the Compound Eyes* presents a series of captivating geomorphic images, with three islands standing out prominently: Wayo Wayo Island, Trash Island, and Taiwan Island. Each of these islands embodies distinct characteristics and island archetypes. Wayo Wayo Island, a small fictional creation by the author, serves as a notable example of the imaginative world crafted within the narrative. "Kabang created the island for them to live on, as if placing a small, hollow clamshell in a tub of water. [...] As on any island, there was never enough fresh water on Wayo Wayo. The only sources were rain and a lake at the center of the island. [...] The island was so small that most people could set out after breakfast walk all the way around and return not long after lunch." (Wu, 2013) Clearly, this island stands in stark contrast to the fleeting reefs that ebb and flow beneath the ocean's surface. Abundant with freshwater sources, flourishing flora, migratory avian species, and an array of aquatic life in its proximity, this landmass serves as a sanctuary for the indigenous Wayo Wayo community. Regrettably, the island's severe ecological constraints have birthed a relentless practice known as the "second son's voyage," a thinly veiled strategy designed to curb population growth. Situated in splendid isolation amidst the vast expanse of the Pacific Ocean, the island's ecological carrying capacity proves woefully inadequate for sustaining its burgeoning populace. To safeguard against overpopulation and preserve the island's delicate ecological equilibrium, a grim mandate has emerged: every family must adhere to the decree that their second-born sons be consigned to the sea. Of the three islands, Wayo Wayo stands out as the smallest, thereby rendering it the most abstract and metaphorical in essence. It serves, in part, as a symbolic representation of our planet, an island teeming with life amidst the vast cosmic expanse. The harsh decree of sacrificing the second-born son, though undeniably cruel, starkly illuminates the unyielding realities of nature's constraints. While religious traditions often extol the virtues of fertility, echoing the Biblical directive to "be fruitful and multiply," the global population has burgeoned over millennia, with an especially dramatic surge in the last century, ultimately surpassing the eight-billion mark by 2022. In this profound narrative, Wu Ming-Yi adeptly exposes the intricate interplay between the burgeoning human population, the contemporary way of life, and Earth's capacity to sustain it, all encapsulated within the ecological boundaries of Wayo Wayo and its heart-wrenching practice of eliminating second-born sons. Wayo Wayo emerges as a poignant metaphor for the Earth, a planet where humanity grapples with the sobering ecological limits of our habitat.

The second geomorphic image, the trash island, is possibly a reference to the "Great Pacific Garbage Patch," which serves as the author's primary inspiration for crafting this fiction. In theory, the trash island could not reach the eastern coast of Taiwan. However, the author skillfully introduces a science-fantasy element through the region's tectonics, where continuous earthquakes play a

pivotal role. These seismic events disrupt the trash island's original quasi-static state, leading to a dramatic collision with Taiwan Island, a crucial driver of the novel's plot development. It is imperative to acknowledge that the trash island is a consequence of contemporary human industrial production. Shockingly, an estimated 75-86% of the actual garbage present in the Pacific Ocean originates from discarded industrial plastic fishing gear, as highlighted by Lebreton et al. in 2022 (Lebreton et al., 2022). The introduction to this island comes through Atile'i's observations: "Apparently boundless, the island was made not of mud but of a multihued mishmash of strange stuff, and there was a weird smell hanging in the air [...]. Atile'i soon discovered that there were many sorts of colored bags all over the island. They were different from the burlap bags of Wayo Wayo in that they could hold water." (Wu, 2013). Within the novel, a startling revelation unfolds as plastic products persistently float in the sea, resisting degradation and eventually coalescing into an island. This grim phenomenon results in a tragic toll, with numerous fish and seabirds perishing due to ingestion or accidental entanglement in plastic debris.

The author vividly portrays the devastating ecological repercussions inflicted upon Taiwan, once a pristine and thriving island, when the trash island washes ashore. This catastrophic event leads to the extinction of marine life, the obliteration of the submarine freshwater system, the submersion of roads, the destruction of homes, the loss of basic living security for vulnerable groups, the shattering of people's idyllic lifestyles, and the victimization of both coastal creatures and residents. Ironically, the trash island not only becomes a lifeline for Atile'i, saving his life, but also serves as his means of reaching Taiwan. This trash island serves as a poignant metaphor for the broader themes of human industrialization and consumer culture. It serves as a stark reminder that the refuse from our daily lives, seemingly inconsequential when discarded, does not simply vanish into thin air but inevitably returns to haunt us at some point in the future.

The third island in *The Man with the Compound Eyes* is Taiwan, a place that holds particular significance for author Wu Ming-Yi, who resides there. Taiwan Island, substantial and fertile, occupies the 38<sup>th</sup> position in terms of size among the world's islands, boasting a diverse topography, a dense population, and a wealth of biodiversity. Historically, Taiwan had been one of the renowned "Four Asian Tigers," recognized as a new industrial powerhouse marked by a high level of industrialization and urban development. In the context of demographics, Taiwan is predominantly inhabited by Han Chinese, comprising 97% of the population, with the remaining 3% consisting of indigenous residents and descendants of Japanese heritage. However, Taiwan's status is characterized by ongoing geopolitical contestation, stemming from its complex history marked by conquest and dynamic demographic shifts. Taiwan stands differently to both Wayo Wayo and the trash island, as it represents a piece of land enriched by human cultivation, boasting a wealth of historical and cultural treasures. Its culture is a tapestry woven from diverse influences, encompassing China, Japan, Europe, and the United States, as well as its

indigenous peoples. This island has undergone a rapid period of economic growth and industrialization, yet it grapples with the fallout of industrial pollution. In the novel, readers witness the heartbreaking destruction of Alice's grandmother's oyster fields by a chemical plant, and the villagers endure the tragic burden of cancers and other inexplicable illnesses. In the eastern reaches of Taiwan, where the story unfolds, the 13<sup>th</sup> longest tunnel in the world is excavated, designed to trim travel times by a mere half hour.<sup>1</sup> The author poignantly draws a parallel between tunnel excavation and the piercing of a mountain's heart, symbolizing the profound ecological toll exacted by such endeavors. In recent years, Taiwan has seen a growing chorus of voices advocating for ecology over unrestricted economic development, a vital theme echoed in the novel. The indigenous people in the story struggle to adapt to urban life and ultimately return to their native lands, seeking solace and serenity by obtaining loans to construct a "forest church," a sanctuary of banyan forest where humans and trees coexist harmoniously—a poignant reflection of their quest for inner peace.

In the contemporary landscape, Taiwan occupies an important position within the global industrial framework, particularly in industries like semiconductors and chemicals. Its trajectory is significantly shaped by the influence of European and American politics and capital. In the current international political context, Taiwan finds itself in a delicate balancing act between China and the United States. While Taiwan's cultural tapestry undeniably encompasses Chinese, Indigenous, Japanese, European, and American elements, it also embodies a distinct facet of Chinese culture, interwoven with the complex legacies of colonialism and the poignant residue of Indigenous cultures lost in a metaphorical "one hundred years of solitude."<sup>2</sup> These multifaceted factors contribute to a profound sentiment akin to an "Atile'i-style second son complex" on the island of Taiwan, characterized by an overwhelming sense of exile, sacrifice, and abandonment without a clear refuge. This sentiment serves as a central metaphor in the novel. The feeling of exile originates from Taiwan's unique geography but transcends its geographical confines, manifesting primarily as an identity dilemma intertwined with broader social and environmental issues.

## II. Topophilia and identity dilemma

The second type of ecology Guattari discusses is social ecology, wherein the dominance of capital over life emerges as the predominant social framework governing the contemporary world. In such a framework, marginalized groups find themselves deprived of the natural environments upon which their

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1 It is worth noting that, when *The Man with the Compound Eyes* was written and published, Taiwan's tunnel held the global ranking as the fifth longest and ninth longest in Asia.

2 The Qing government ceded Taiwan to Japan following its defeat in the Sino-Japanese War in 1895. Taiwan, as an island, is akin to a vulnerable second child. While the Republic of China reclaimed Taiwan in 1945, the Kuomintang lost its seat in the UN in 1971, leaving Taiwan's geopolitical standing in a precarious balance. In this regard, Taiwan found itself in a remarkably delicate situation. Drawing inspiration from Gabriel García Márquez's renowned work, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, which reflects on a century of isolation in South America, we contemplate that Taiwan's circumstances parallel this sense of one hundred years of solitude within the Asian context.

survival depends, relegated to the status of surplus populations within urban landscapes. This perspective finds resonance in the works of Chinese-American human geographer Yi-fu Tuan, particularly *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values* and *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. Tuan articulates the notion that genuine “places,” imbued with the imprint of human emotions, can only emerge from spaces that have been personally experienced (Tuan, 1990). Notably, East Asian culture leans towards a more sedentary and topophilic civilization, a marked departure from the restless maritime cultures of Western Europe and North America, which have their roots in Greco-Mediterranean traditions. Traditionally, agricultural civilizations have idealized the concept of harmony between humans and nature. However, the inexorable march of industrialization and urbanization has severed people from their ancestral “home places” and polluted these sacred connections. A poignant example can be found in the novel where the desalinization of submarine groundwater disrupts the original ecosystem and the circulation of ocean currents. The village where Alice’s grandmother resides, once a source of sustenance through oyster farming, witnesses a grim transformation due to the construction of chemical plants. The contamination of seawater has led to a decline in oyster populations, and a multitude of villagers now grapple with cancer and unexplained ailments. This plight underscores the vulnerability of Indigenous communities who have not only lost their physical homes but also their cultural identities.

As a result of the rapid industrialization and urbanization of Taiwan since the 1960s, cultivated lands and forests have been encroached upon, displacing the Indigenous people who originally inhabited these areas. Many of them have been forced to relocate to urban edges normally. Even those with higher levels of education struggle to assimilate into urban life and often find themselves relegated to menial jobs within the city. The term “Gaoshan nationality” was coined during the Kuomintang’s takeover of Taiwan to distinguish Indigenous Taiwanese from the military and mainland elites. Unfortunately, their political and cultural identities became even more marginalized amidst the tide of industrialization. The novel sensitively portrays the lives and challenges faced by various Gaoshan characters, including Hafay, Dahu, and Millet. When Hafay and his tribe failed to secure a foothold in the city, they returned to their ancestral homeland, constructing modest shelters in secluded corners. However, the relentless pace of urban development coupled with the impact of climate change brought unprecedented disasters, leading to the swift and tragic extermination of this Indigenous tribe in a devastating flash flood. This heartbreaking story underscores the intersection of natural and man-made catastrophes. Guattari emphasized “In any case, the hyper-exploitative New Industrial Powers, such as Hongkong, Taiwan, South Korea, etc., depend on these zones for their development” (Guattari, 2000, p. 31). In other words, Guattari viewed slums and similar areas as sacrificial pawns in the pursuit of new industrial power and progress.



On the surface, the issue at hand revolves around the challenge of Indigenous peoples integrating into the evolving social order. However, upon deeper examination, it becomes apparent that this struggle is rooted in an identity crisis stemming from the processes of industrialization and urbanization. While this dilemma resonates with many individuals, it is especially pronounced within Indigenous communities. Their predicament can be dissected into three primary dimensions. First and foremost, Indigenous communities are often dispossessed of their ancestral lands, compelling them to relocate. Secondly, their traditional ways of life often clash with the rapid pace and demands of urban existence, rendering them surplus in the urban landscape. Furthermore, the absence of formal education opportunities hampers their ability to establish a stable foothold in urban environments, relegating them to the lowest rungs of the societal ladder. This unfortunate cycle perpetuates itself, preventing subsequent generations from achieving upward mobility.

In this case, the Japanese director Takahata Isao's film, *The Raccoon War*, could be seen as an intertextual companion to *The Man with the Compound Eyes*. Within the narrative of *The Raccoon War*, a community of magical shape-shifting raccoon dogs grapples with diverse challenges while striving to protect their forest habitat from the encroachment of urban development, albeit ultimately in vain. Subsequently, a select group of clever raccoon resorts to magical transformations into humans, embarking on a life of freedom among the human populace. Some among them eke out a modest existence by participating in daily performances at an amusement park, while others must scavenge around garbage bins and engage in battles for survival, tragically succumbing to urban traffic due to their lack of familiarity with city life. This narrative is nothing short of a powerful metaphor, emphasizing that *The Man with the Compound Eyes* and *The Raccoon War* share an intertextual relationship, shedding light on the predicament of Indigenous communities who find themselves displaced amid industrial civilization and urbanization. This unsettling situation is a prevalent consequence of the rapid development experienced in East Asia over the past few decades. Importantly, it is not solely the Indigenous population that bears the brunt of urban industrialization; the adverse effects ripple out to encompass a significant portion of those residing on the urban fringes. This broader demographic is not only impacted physically but also experiences profound social and psychological damage. These observations seamlessly segue into the realm of Guattari's "mental ecology."

### III. Ecological disaster and traumatic memory

The tragedy that befalls the protagonist, Alice, extends beyond the loss of her son and husband; it encompasses the vanishing of her most cherished possession, the Seaside House. In today's world, a paramount lifeline for an independent intellectual woman might not be wedlock but rather "a room of her own"—a concept borrowed from the renowned feminist writer Virginia Woolf's seminal work, *A Room of One's Own*. The novel dedicates an entire

chapter to the meticulous depiction of the Seaside House, a property exclusively owned by Alice. Together with her husband, she designed this house, drawing inspiration from the aesthetic of a Nordic architect. This architecture harmonizes seamlessly with its natural surroundings: perched at the water's edge, its solar panels deftly track the sun's trajectory across the sky, while its expansive windows forge an intimate connection with the boundless sea. However, over the ensuing decade, rising sea levels inexorably transform the Seaside House from a coastal sanctuary into a dwelling submerged in the turbulent aftermath of a collision between the trash island and Taiwan.

Wu Ming-Yi does not extensively explore Alice's emotional turmoil following the loss of her home. However, "the most astounding sound is not audible" (Poon, 2020). Her persistent reluctance to abandon her residence serves as a reminder of the profound sorrow concealed beneath her silence. Drawing parallels with Frantz Fanon's characterization of Africans as "the wretched of the Earth," whose anguish stemmed from Western colonialism, one can categorize Alice and others like her as "ecological refugees" to a certain extent. These are individuals who have been uprooted from their natural habitats and homes due to climate change, chemical pollution, and the ominous presence of the trash vortex. In this broader context, the indigenous populations of Wayo Wayo Island, the coastal communities of Taiwan, and the Gaoshan Indigenous people, long disenfranchised by the relentless march of industrialization and urbanization, are all casualties of ecological colonization perpetuated by capitalism. Their suffering, whether physical or psychological, vividly exemplifies the stranglehold that capital exerts over human existence. This narrative underscores the significance of traumatic memory. Typically, literary portrayals of trauma have been associated with warfare, such as World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, or the Gulf War. However, it is essential to recognize that life-altering events and environmental catastrophes can also inflict profound psychological trauma. Trauma therapy, initially conceived to address the mental well-being of soldiers, must adapt to address the complex aftermath of life changes and environmental disasters.

Wu demonstrates a remarkable talent for delving into the intricacies of psychological trauma in his writing. Alice has already weathered the agonizing storms of love's betrayal and the heart-wrenching loss of her son. The cumulative weight of these harrowing experiences casts a formidable shadow upon her heart. The final blow, represented by the devastation of the villa submerged in the sea, becomes the proverbial straw that breaks the camel's back. While the novel may not explicitly explore the psychological turmoil experienced by secondary characters in the face of environmental upheaval, subtle external descriptions hint at the profound impact of climate change and the menacing presence of the trash vortex. These elements have inflicted substantial and enduring psychological scars on individuals, the healing of which may span decades.

Compared with Alice's spiritual pain, the plight of vulnerable Indigenous communities is undeniably more severe. Their suffering extends beyond the devastation of their homes and material losses; it encompasses the profound loss of an entire way of life, a tragic consequence of ecological disaster. In the novel's denouement, the minuscule island of Wayo Wayo falls victim to the overwhelming might of military forces seeking to eradicate the trash. Despite the prescient warnings of the Sea Sage and the Earth Sage regarding the island's impending demise, their foreknowledge proved futile. They never partook in the conveniences ushered in by industrial, urban, and consumer civilizations; instead, they tragically became unwitting victims ensnared in the suffocating grip of a garbage siege.

The story unveils a pressing issue of ecological justice, a paramount concern confronting contemporary human society. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as the era of military colonization recedes into history, a new manifestation of colonization has emerged—environmental or ecological colonization. The Western world has not only outsourced a significant portion of its environmentally polluting industries to Asia, but has also directly dispatched its waste to regions such as China, India, Taiwan, Korea, and Indonesia. This dual action allows Western capital to reap profits in the East while burdening this region with environmental degradation, waste, and health concerns. This dilemma represents an urgent challenge within the global landscape of environmental governance. Throughout this process, the West exploits Eastern labor forces and their ecosystems through capital operations. Wayo Wayo Island is not a mere fictional construct; it echoes real-world locales like Bikini Island, the desolate “trash towns” on China's eastern coast featured in Jiuliang Wang's documentary film *Plastic China*, chemical enterprises in Japan and Taiwan, and even the Maldives—all of which bear the brunt of the perils inflicted by urban-industrial civilization and Western capital. Wu Ming-Yi, with his unassuming narrative style, subtly exposes this predicament, underlining its inherent cruelty. Though the issue remains unspoken, the work implicitly casts a critical eye on modern industrial production and consumer capitalism. Within the context of ecological colonization, both nature and humanity suffer profound physical and spiritual wounds.

#### IV. Eco-posthumanism and the man with the compound eyes

*The Man with Compound Eyes* casts a somber shadow throughout its narrative. Its pages are drenched in an atmosphere of pessimism, depression, resentment, and despair, leaving most of its characters mired in passive subjectivity. This sense of helplessness is a direct consequence of the three ecological dilemmas that loom large within the story. Yet, the novel's impact extends beyond the unveiling of wounds and problems; it offers glimpses of potential avenues for mitigating these ecological challenges or, at the very least, halting further harm. In the finale, several characters unite in song, delivering Bob Dylan's 1962 classic, *A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall*, a choice laden with prophetic undertones as it underscores the looming ecological catastrophe. It may also signify the tipping point where the Chinese idiom—things will

develop in the opposite direction when they reach the extreme—finds its resonance, echoing predictions of an impending crisis. Astutely noted by scholars like Huang (P. I. Huang, 2015), the novel harbors a potent post-humanist message. While it concludes in song, it underscores that resolution hinges upon ecological enlightenment and eco-posthumanist action. However, both enlightenment and action are fundamentally reliant on humanity, an insight the novel amplifies through the ecological pursuits of Amundsen and others, as well as the ecological enlightenment embodied by the enigmatic man with the compound eyes.

Posthumanism encompasses a multitude of dimensions, with fiction offering a revealing lens through which to explore two key facets. First, it involves breaking free from the environmentally unfriendly lifestyles perpetuated by industrialization, capitalism, and consumerism. Second, it entails a rejection of anthropocentric ethics. Within the realm of the novel, numerous characters undergo transformative journeys toward an eco-posthumanist existence. Among them, Amundsen stands out as one of the most emblematic figures—a former whaling captain who relinquishes his butcher's knife in favor of embracing radical animal protectionism, a choice that ultimately exacts a heavy toll on his life. Detlef, previously a tunnel engineer, experiences a profound awakening, recognizing that tunnel construction through mountains amounts to a senseless intrusion into the heart of nature with limited meaning to human beings. Consequently, he opts to redirect his life's path, dedicating himself to coastal ecological preservation while forsaking his former profession. Dahu and Hafay, both Gaoshan people, abandon their unfulfilling urban lifestyles to return to the sanctuary of the "Forest Church," where they embark on careers as environmental educators. Professor Alice, in a journey of personal healing, gradually recovers from the shadow of betrayal, grief, and the loss of her home. Her newfound purpose is kindled through her efforts to rescue Ohiyo and Atile'i, whose companionship helps her overcome her trauma and inspires her to author ecological works. These characters can aptly be described as ecological posthumans, for they have liberated themselves from the trappings of urbanization, industrialization, and consumerism. They have transcended the confines of anthropocentrism and wholeheartedly embraced the transformative power of ecological reform. Herein lies the vivid demonstration that eco-posthumanism is not a mere theoretical construct; it finds concrete expression in each individual's unique journey as they reshape their lives to harmonize more deeply with the natural world.

Within the text, the most striking and pivotal character undoubtedly emerges as the man with the compound eyes, serving as the primary catalyst for the novel's classification within the science fiction genre. His enigmatic presence is shrouded in mystery, surfacing only at moments when human logic and rationality falter. The man with the compound eyes makes his initial appearance during a vital scene wherein Hafay's mother desperately searches for her boyfriend, who has tragically succumbed to a flash flood. It is during

her slumber that he imparts cryptic guidance, blurring the line between the subconscious and reality. A second instance of his cryptic intrusion occurs during the excavation of a tunnel, his sudden apparition accompanied by an eerie, otherworldly sound. This uncanny appearance further cements his enigmatic persona. The third encounter with the man with the compound eyes takes a profound turn, as he assumes the role of both instigator and caretaker during Alice's husband's perilous rock-climbing expedition. In a pivotal narrative twist, he leads Alice's husband, Whom, to an imposing solo rock face, coaxing him into a daring, blind ascent. Following Whom's tragic fall, the man with the compound eyes engages him in a compassionate dialogue akin to that of a hospice caregiver, marking an emotionally charged moment in the novel. The fourth and final encounter transpires when Alice embarks on a journey to retrace her husband's climbing route. At this juncture, he intervenes once more, guiding her toward a profound realization about the constructed realm of her mental memory world, ultimately aiding her in regaining her path and purpose: "I discovered his eyes weren't like human eyes. They were more like compound eyes of countless single eyes, the eyes of clouds, mountains, streams, meadowlarks and muntjacs, all arranged together. As I gazed, each little eye seemed to contain a different scene, and those scenes arranged to form a vast panorama the likes of which I had never seen." (Wu, 2013, p. 186). Intriguing and enigmatic, the man with the compound eyes stands as a central figure whose presence defies easy explanation, weaving a tapestry of science fiction elements throughout the narrative.

Much like the small screen in the monitoring room, the protagonist possesses omniscience, but he remains devoid of omnipotence, able to observe every facet of the world's happenings yet unable to enact any intervention. This portrayal serves as a poignant metaphor, mirroring the contemporary plight of ecologists, environmental journalists, and communicators. Their role mirrors that of the protagonist: to illuminate ecological issues across various media platforms. They grapple with concerns and despair akin to the man with the compound eyes but find themselves impotent in directly resolving these challenges. Their most potent recourse lies in disseminating ecological concepts through communication and education, influencing policymakers' environmental decisions, and awakening humanity's ecological consciousness. After getting out of depression, Alice channels her experiences into the creation of two novels. One bears the title *The Man with the Compound Eyes*; the other is named the same, echoing the author Wu Ming-Yi, who also penned two works under the same name. Thus, the man with the compound eyes simultaneously represents the author himself, one who possesses a comprehensive understanding of the entire narrative yet refrains from undue interference in the unfolding events and character developments within the novel.

## Conclusion: Towards ecosophy and eco-posthumanism

Through the lens of Ivakhiv's tri-ecological morphisms theory, it becomes evident that Wu Ming-Yi masterfully weaves a tapestry of human, geographical, animal, and botanical images. These elements intersect and engage with one another, propelled by the inexorable forces of Taiwan's eastern coast and the looming specter of the trash island. In the aftermath of the catastrophe, individuals from all walks of life unite in a collective endeavor to cleanse the coastline, evoking parallels with the resolute humanity depicted in Camus' *The Plague*. Furthermore, each participant undergoes a transformative introspection, adapting to his or her altered circumstances. With the profound insights gleaned from Guattari's Three Ecologies theory, Wu Ming-Yi's narrative transcends the creation of a mere physical world, extending into the profound realms of environment, society, and mentality. Through the author's adept storytelling, the fiction seamlessly integrates a myriad of tales set within the three islands, underpinned by profound ecological concepts. This narrative approach alludes to an ecosophy, in the spirit of Guattari, emphasizing a nuanced perspective and practice of eco-posthumanism, or the emergence of a new humanity deeply attuned to ecological concerns.

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