Cosmopolitanism and Indigenism: The Uses of Cultural Authenticity in an Age of Flows

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Literary Praxis and Cultural Inheritance

In an age of vibrant flows and border crossings, the notion of inauthenticity seems essential to conceptualizing the cultural production of our time. The U.S.-based scholar Shu-mei Shih identifies the paradigm of inauthenticity as a survival tactic for cultural production in a geopolitically marginalized society like Taiwan. This paradigm is interpreted as a response to the current insignificant status of Taiwan in global literary and cultural studies. Shih points out that for most of the international academic community, humanities scholarship in and about Taiwan remains mostly out of sight. To make its way into international exchanges, cultural workers and critics often resort to what Shih calls the paradigm of inauthenticity.

A distinctive feature of this paradigm is the aggressive deployment of the idiom of globalization to undermine the authority of “the original.” With its celebration of cultural inauthenticity, this paradigm shows “a form of eager and urgent loquaciousness that tries to prove not only that [the artists and critics from Taiwan] know Western theories but also that defying the Western-centric universalism of these theories does not lead to an argument about local particularity and authenticity.” Such a paradigm of inauthenticity is neither Sinocentric nor Western-centric, on the one hand, and yet it refuses “local particularity and authenticity,” on the other hand.

Shih’s argument about the paradigm of inauthenticity is persuasive and certainly captures the cultural ambience of Taiwan in the post-Martial Law era, when grand narratives were eyed with suspicion in a society undergoing rapid, tremendous transformation. Without trying to invalidate this paradigm, this paper examines two models of Taiwan literature that run counter to it, namely the paradigm of Taiwanese...
new literary history

160

Cosmopolitanism and the paradigm of indigenism. Both operate with a great emphasis on the notion of cultural authenticity. The celebrated poet, Yang Mu, and the indigenous writer, Syaman Rapongan, will serve to illustrate these two paradigms. While Yang Mu’s vision of “Taiwanese cosmopolitanism” addresses the use(fulness) of Chinese cultural heritage in the production of Taiwanese literature, Syaman Rapongan calls for de-Sinicization so as to recuperate indigenous cultural tradition. In spite of their differences, however, both writers engage the notion of “authenticity” by taking up positions as heirs to a cultural heritage that they seek to reaffirm through their creative writing.

Though seemingly opposed to each other, the two paradigms underscore the important role of inheritance in literary/cultural production. Inheritance, à la Jacques Derrida, implies responsibility: “There is no inheritance without a call to responsibility.” An heir reaffirms the cultural heritage that she or he chooses to inherit. It is the heir’s responsibility to keep this heritage alive. Engaging the issue of cultural authenticity, these two paradigms ask difficult questions, such as “What does it mean to identify oneself as an heir to a cultural tradition that is considered oppressive and overpowering to one’s native culture?”; “What constitutes ‘cultural authenticity’ in an age of ceaseless change and border-crossings?”; “What material stakes may be involved in the evocation of the notion of authenticity in literary praxis?” While the paradigm of cosmopolitanism suggests that the locus of cultural authenticity is to be found not in the place of origin but in the place of practice, the paradigm of indigenism ties the survival of authentic cultural tradition to the “landedness” of indigenous cultural practices. Both paradigms give great weight to the power of place. The “landedness” of cultural practices is taken to be what empowers cultural heritage and gives it continuous life. These two paradigms, as illustrated by two prominent writers from Taiwan, demonstrate how the untimely question of authenticity may help shed light on some of the critical issues in global literary and cultural studies.

Taiwanese Cosmopolitanism and Chinese Cultural Tradition

“Cosmopolitanism” is usually taken to be the key to the poetics of Yang Mu (C. H. Wang), the recipient of the 2007 International Prize for Literature Written in Chinese and one of the few writers from Taiwan who enjoy a prestigious status in Chinese literary studies. A poet well versed in Chinese classical literature (particularly the Book of Poetry)
and Western classical literature (Old English literature, medieval European literature, Romantic poetry, and the poetry of W. B. Yeats), Yang Mu is a prolific writer and translator. Lisa Lai-Ming Wong comments on the cosmopolitan outlook of his art in her important book on Yang Mu: “He has modernized versification not only by experimenting with new forms and vers libre, but also by making old forms, such as the sonnet and yuefu, new. The urbanity and mobility exhibited in his poetry illustrates his modern cosmopolitan outlook on the world.”

Cosmopolitanism certainly is a term fraught with different meanings for different people. In the political sphere, cosmopolitanism investigates “the emergence of new forms of right in the sphere of inter-societal relations.” Political cosmopolitanism addresses the rights and responsibilities of world citizens. The external manifestations of cosmopolitanism include “international laws, international organizations such as the UN, international courts, global forms of governance, the idea of human rights, declarations and conventions on human rights, and mechanisms for securing peace between nations.” A cosmopolitan outlook is usually understood as the subjective aspect of cosmopolitanism, a form of consciousness that suggests “world openness.” Thus, cosmopolitanism designates “an intellectual ethic, a universal humanism that transcends regional particularism.”

Yang Mu’s works indeed are characterized by such a cosmopolitan world openness. His writing is often noted for its skillful interweaving of allusions to Chinese and Western classics. As Lisa Wong points out, “Yang Mu’s poetic achievement does in fact lie in his blending of the Chinese and Western literary traditions.” Michelle Yeh similarly stresses the rich multicultural resources that buttress Yang Mu’s poetry: “At the most obvious level, Yang Mu’s biculturalism can be seen in his wide-ranging imagery, references, and motifs, which straddle China and the West. He draws not only on classical Chinese poetry and prose but also on Western literature and culture. Allusions abound in his work, including references to ancient mythology (Narcissus, Athena), religion (‘Theology,’ the Bible, Crusaders, Easter), history, and, of course, literature (Virgil, Marlowe, Dryden, Wordsworth, Emily Dickinson).” Feeding on Chinese as well as Western literary and cultural traditions, Yang Mu’s creative writing exemplifies cosmopolitan art par excellence.

This cosmopolitanism of Yang Mu, however, should be carefully differentiated from the pursuit of “transculture” or “globalized culture” that informs the paradigm of inauthenticity as discussed by Shih. The notion of “roots” and “inheritance” are essential to the cosmopolitan practice of Yang Mu. Born in a provincial town in the Eastern part of Taiwan and having spent most of his life teaching in Western academic
institutions, Yang Mu writes with a high self-consciousness of his own identity as a Taiwanese poet. In an essay originally published in 1983, Yang Mu defines Taiwanese cultural tradition as informed by a strong sense of modernity and cosmopolitanism. In “A Further Exploration of the Origin of Taiwanese Poetry,” published in 2004, he stresses the importance of Chinese cultural heritage for Taiwanese literature right after his remarks on the cosmopolitan character of this literature. The Chinese cultural heritage is identified as a major referent in modern Taiwanese poetry, which continuously inspires Taiwanese writers with words, images, and imaginary space to provide a solid foundation for their literary creation.

It is essential, Yang Mu argues, that Taiwanese writers take Chinese literary and cultural tradition as an inheritance, making it part of the Taiwanese cultural tradition. Thus, Yang Mu defines himself as an heir, choosing to inherit the Chinese cultural heritage by “declar[ing] [his] admiration, [his] debt, [his] gratitude—as well as the necessity to be faithful to the heritage for the purpose of reinterpreting it and endlessly reaffirming it.” It is not a “nonauthentic multiculture” that is celebrated here as the defining characteristic of Taiwanese culture. Rather, Taiwanese cosmopolitanism defines Taiwanese writers as legitimate heirs to “authentic” Chinese cultural tradition even if they advocate the independence of Taiwan rather than unification with mainland China. What is implied here is a radicalization of the concept of “authenticity.”

The implication of the crucial role of Chinese cultural heritage in Yang’s literary paradigm of Taiwanese cosmopolitanism begs for a closer examination. Yang Mu’s urging that Taiwanese writers reaffirm Chinese cultural heritage was made amidst the call for de-Sinicization that began to gather momentum in the 1990s in Taiwan. Given the tension between Taiwan and China and the heated debate on the sovereign status of Taiwan on the island, what does it mean for a Taiwanese writer to claim to be an heir to Chinese cultural tradition? To be an heir, in Derrida’s view, is to reaffirm the heritage of one’s choice, which means to respond to “a double injunction, a contradictory assignation.” It means “not simply accepting this heritage but relaunching it otherwise and keeping it alive.” “Reaffirming” in the Derridean sense is “to select, to filter, to interpret, and therefore to transform; not to leave intact or unharmed, not to leave safe the very thing one claims to respect before all else.” Reaffirming heritage as an heir means critical appropriation rather than mere mechanic reproduction: “This inheritance must be reaffirmed by transforming it as radically as will be necessary.”
In Derrida’s view, inheritance should never be taken as a “given.” To keep the heritage alive, the heir needs to take up the challenge of a double injunction—that is, to both continue and interrupt. For Derrida, inheritance signifies not simply a link to the past; it is also an attempt to herald the future. The responsibility of an heir is to give cultural heritage “life” and therefore turn “what comes before” into “what is to come”—in other words, “an event” as defined by Derrida, “the unforeseeable future-to-come.” As Julie Chandler Hayes so succinctly puts it: “And yet the to-come is neither an idealizing abstraction nor a ‘datable future,’ but rather ‘a demand, an expectation, a hope, desire.’ To remain forever ‘to come,’ à venir, is to remain an ‘event’: singular, incalculable, ready to interrupt and transform the present.”

Yang Mu’s call for Taiwanese writers to inherit Chinese cultural tradition can best be understood in this Derridean sense of inheritance. In contrast to the paradigm of indigenism that we will discuss in the following section, Yang Mu’s Taiwanese cosmopolitanism views Chinese cultural heritage as an asset. Situated in the contemporary sociopolitical context of Taiwan’s troubled relationship with China, this move implies the rejection of the nativist definition of Taiwanese culture exclusively in terms of native cultural heritage.

On the other hand, however, the emphasis on the link between Taiwanese literature and Chinese cultural tradition should not be mistaken as an expression of Chinese identification. It is noteworthy that Yang Mu has rejected numerous invitations to visit China. He makes it quite clear that he would undertake that trip only on condition that the hundreds of missiles currently deployed along the coast of mainland China and pointed at Taiwan are disarmed. Indeed, in the celebrated poem “The Lost Ring—for Chechnya,” Yang Mu utilizes a newspaper report about Russia’s violent crackdown on the separatist Chechnya to speak for the similarly precarious position of Taiwan vis-à-vis China. The poet’s ingenious use of intercontextuality, as Lisa Lai-ming Wong remarks, “allows the narratives of independence to be voiced by real and fictional speakers of different cultures.” The use of Chinese classical literature in a poem such as “The Lost Ring—for Chechnya” illustrates that the claiming of Chinese cultural tradition does not necessarily lead to the endorsement of Chinese identity. Yang Mu’s paradigm of Taiwanese cosmopolitanism should not be confused with the paradigm of Sinocentric diasporism that informed many Chinese-Malaysian writers like Li Yong-ping in the previous decade.

A brief comparison may prove illuminating. Born in Malaysia, Li went to Taiwan to study in the late 1960s. The publication of *Chronicle of Chiling* in 1986 established Li as one of the most important writers based
mostly in Taiwan. Like Yang, Li draws heavily upon Chinese literary tradition in his creative writing. Chronicled of Chi-ling is noted particularly for its virtuosic performance of the Chinese language. As David Der-wei Wang remarks, the Chinese-Malaysian writer sought to impress his readers with a type of writing that was spectacularly “Chinese.” This infatuation with the perfection of Chinese, which is now considered a trademark of Li’s writing, was intended to purge the literary language of Western influences prevalent in Taiwanese modernist literary production at that time. A strong critique of Western imperialism, rather than cosmopolitanism, was the underpinning rationale for claiming the Chinese heritage.

In addition to anti-Westernization sentiment, the stress on writing in a “perfect Chinese literary language” reflects an anxiety over the jeopardized Chinese identity of “overseas compatriot students”—a designation of students born in places outside the Chinese territory. The ability to write in perfect Chinese was deemed proof that they were “authentic” Chinese in spite of their birth outside China. As I argued elsewhere, “Writing in becoming Chinese genre and language was implicitly understood as a ritual required for becoming Chinese. It was taken to be the only way to re-claim their Chineseness that was suspected to be seriously diluted in growing up outside the Chinese homeland.” In other words, claiming Chinese heritage through writing, for many Chinese-Malaysian writers at that specific historical juncture, was an attempt to reclaim their precarious Chinese identity. In the postcolonial Malaysian context, these writers’ insistence on their Chinese identification is also a resistance to the Malaysian state’s suppression of Chinese culture and language.

Insofar as the paradigm of Sinocentric diasporism defines literary practice mainly in terms of the relationship to origin, this paradigm tends to be “genocentric” as defined by Sau-Ling C. Wong, or “Chinacentric” as discussed by Shu-mei Shih. While “genocentrism posits the meaning of life in diaspora primarily if not exclusively in terms of relationship to origin: descent (Greek genesis), race/descent/generation (genea), kind (genus),” the specific version known as Chinacentric diasporism “forever looks back at China as its cultural motherland or the source of value, nationalist or otherwise.”

Compared to this paradigm of Sinocentric diasporism, Yang Mu’s paradigm of Taiwanese cosmopolitanism has a quite different ideological orientation and cultural agenda in its claiming of Chinese literary and cultural heritage. As mentioned earlier, Yang Mu identifies himself as a Taiwanese poet. If Yang Mu can be taken, as Wong contends, to represent “a native Taiwanese voice,” his paradigm of Taiwanese cosmopolitanism suggests that the “native Taiwanese voice” need not be confined to the
expression of “native” culture only. According to Chen-chen Tseng, “Like Joyce and Yeats, Yang Mu is firmly determined to write in the most eloquent and elegant Chinese, thus outshining writers from Mainland China. He did succeed and in grand fashion.”

The Taiwanese cosmopolitanism that Yang Mu practices in his writing is akin to what is called “rooted cosmopolitanism.” This form of cosmopolitanism proposes that “cosmopolitans begin from membership in morally and emotionally significant communities (families, ethnic groups) while espousing notions of toleration and openness to the world, the transcendence of ethnic difference and the moral responsibility for and incorporation of the other.” Rooted cosmopolitans hold that “patriotism (or attachment to the nation or state) does not necessarily imply ethnocentrism,” and that “cosmopolitanism should not be confused with the negation of national identity.” Refusing essentializing particularism, Taiwanese cosmopolitanism is “cosmopolitanism” to the extent that it espouses the notion of openness to the other(s). At the same time, it is distinctively “Taiwanese,” for it insists on local bonds and socially situated practice of this cosmopolitanism. Drawing upon Shu-mei Shih’s useful discussion of the concepts of “roots” and “routes,” we should note here that the “roots” in Yang Mu’s rooted cosmopolitanism refers to place-based connection rather than ancestral origin.

Rather than being a mimicry that exploits the notion of inauthenticity to produce a disturbing effect on the authority of Chinese cultural heritage, Yang Mu’s writing seeks to stage a virtuosic display of this heritage. Yet his cosmopolitan writing reaffirms Chinese cultural heritage as an inheritance by “launching it otherwise.” The point is not to reach back nostalgically to ancient China so as to defend Chinese identification against competing identity positions that were emerging in post-Martial Law Taiwan. Inheriting Chinese cultural heritage means for Yang Mu a proaction against the pitfalls of nativist fundamentalism. The celebration of pure Chineseness that characterizes Li Yong-ping’s literary writing is missing in Yang Mu’s works. It should be noted that Yang Mu’s poetry is praised not just for its linguistic craftsmanship and erudition in Chinese classics. As mentioned earlier, abundant references to Western classics are interwoven with citations of Chinese classics in his work. For example, the poem “Temporality Proposition,” a philosophical reflection on time, is structured by a dense intertextuality between a Chinese myth, a poem of farewell by the famous poet Li Bai, Yeats’s “Byzantium” poems, and Goethe’s “Wanderer’s Nightsong.” As Lisa Lai-ming Wong remarks, “by his artistic and strategic interweaving of well-known texts from disparate cultures, Yang Mu succeeds in addressing issues of regional or universal interest from a transnational perspective.”

Yang Mu’s dense interweaving of cultural references of very diverse national and cultural origins—from Greek mythologies, Renaissance English and European literary classics, and Irish literature to Chinese classics such as *The Book of Poetry* or *Chu Elegies*—obviates any misinterpretation of Yang Mu’s Taiwanese cosmopolitanism as Sinocentric, even though Chinese cultural heritage does occupy a prominent place in his work. Pointedly demonstrating his mastery of Western, Chinese, and Taiwanese literary traditions, Yang Mu claims all these cultural heritages as his own. He defines himself as an heir to all these traditions, which he then draws upon to shape the “future-to-come” of literary Taiwan.

**Implications of Taiwanese Cosmopolitanism**

The implications of Taiwanese cosmopolitanism are profound. First, it identifies the notion of inheritance as essential to the formation of Taiwanese literature. In contrast to the paradigm of inauthenticity, the paradigm of Taiwanese cosmopolitanism gives the responsibility for cultural heritage more weight than postmodern free play or postcolonial mimicry. Secondly, this paradigm demonstrates clearly how Chinese literary tradition can be brought into play for non-Sinocentric literary creation in the Chinese language. It radicalizes the notion of cultural authenticity by delinking it from the place of origin. This point deserves further elaboration as it involves the specific cultural history of Taiwan in the postwar era. At a time when the Communist China launched the Cultural Revolution to uproot what it perceived as the corrupting influence of Chinese cultural tradition, the KMT government in Taiwan claimed to be the stronghold of that tradition. The legitimacy of their claim was built upon a whole set of cultural policies that aimed at the continuity of the tradition of Chinese culture and education. The fact that traditional Chinese characters, rather than the simplified characters now commonly in use in mainland China, remain the official written language in Taiwan speaks volumes about the specific position of Taiwan in relation to the Chinese cultural tradition.

Thirdly, such a paradigm demonstrates a form of cosmopolitan writing that engages cultural otherness without losing sight of place-based identity. It shows the possibility of nonessentialized local particularity that is always needed for the socially situated practice of cosmopolitanism. Finally, the paradigm, by deliberately choosing the Chinese cultural heritage as an inheritance, resists the foreclosure of any given, prescribed narrative. Taking up the position of an heir, then, the writer opens up the possibilities of a future that is, in Derrida’s words, “the ‘free,’ the
incalculable, the unforeseeable, the undecidable, the event, the arrival, the other.” Yang Mu envisions a cosmopolitan Taiwan that makes use of Chinese cultural tradition without falling prey to Chinacentrism.

Paradigm of Indigenism: Translation with Abusive Fidelity

Taking up a stance markedly different from Taiwanese cosmopolitanism, the paradigm of indigenism underscores indigenous writers’ responsibility to recuperate their jeopardized cultural heritages through de-Sinicization. Whereas Yang Mu positions himself as a legitimate heir to Chinese culture, indigenous writers in Taiwan tend to challenge the hegemony of Chinese culture and take upon themselves the responsibility of rejuvenating indigenous cultural heritages in their creative writing.

With its stress on de-Sinicization, the paradigm of indigenism is invested with poignant political meanings in contemporary Taiwan. In the Taiwanese nativist narrative, “indigeneity” is often seen as standing for the quintessentially Taiwanese. The indigenous voice is taken to represent the authentic Taiwanese voice. In literary practice, indigenous writers often highlight the otherness of indigenous culture when they engage the Chinese language in literary production. A common tactic is to use indigenous words in romanization to disrupt the smooth flow of Chinese in the construction of a literary text. With romanized indigenous words or the literal translation of indigenous cultural expressions into Chinese, indigenous writers thus throw into sharp relief the untranslatability of indigenous culture and the symbolic violence of the Chinese language and culture in cultural production in Taiwan.

Many scholars have pointed out that the notion of translation is the key to an interpretation of this body of indigenous literature in the Chinese language. An indigenous writer who deploys these tactics is often seen as occupying the position of a translator who is self-consciously practicing what Lawrence Venuti calls “abusive fidelity.” Abusive fidelity rejects fluency in favor of resistant strategies that “can help to preserve the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text by producing translations which are strange and estranging, which hinder those [dominant] values from enacting an imperialistic domestication of a cultural Other.” Making every effort to mark the traces of cultural otherness in translation, abusive fidelity is predicated on the notion of authenticity. It is an heir’s homage to cultural heritage.

John Balcom, who wrote the introduction to the first English anthology of indigenous literature from Taiwan, offers an adept summary of the characteristics of indigenous literature as follows:
Quite often the native language of an author impacts or “interferes” with the style and grammar of his or her writing in Chinese. (In terms of word order, the Austronesian languages are largely V-S-O as opposed to the Chinese S-V-O structure.) Therefore, even when reading an award-winning story such as Topas Tamapima’s *The Last Hunter*, the native speaker of Chinese will find the work almost fluent, but not without some awkwardness. In the case of Adaw Palaf, Mandarin structures are so distorted that what is printed on the page often means the opposite of what is intended. Reading such texts is a slow process that requires a good deal of unpacking on the reader’s part.52

Thus, when reading a Chinese text written by an indigenous writer, the reader is often forced to engage the question of indigenous otherness. Balcom points out that “one wonders to what extent the violations of Chinese grammar are a conscious subversion or in fact a remaking of the language.”53 In the hands of a self-conscious indigenous writer like Syaman Rapongan or Walis Norgan, writing is virtually synonymous with translation, for the traces of indigenous otherness are carefully preserved in the Chinese texts. Thus says Syaman Rapongan in a 2007 interview: “The phrases the Tao elders use are highly metaphorical, which has had a great impact on my writing. For example, to say ‘the sun of an old man is low’ means he is aged or dying; the stars are ‘the eyes of the sky’; ‘men being looked down upon by the wind’ refers to lazy men resting on the porch.”54 The mission of the writer then is to resuscitate fading tribal cultural heritages against all odds. It is by underscoring the heir’s fidelity to authentic indigenous culture that indigenous writers seek to empower their own Chinese writing. In other words, indigenous writing is defined as “indigenous” and therefore “different from” nonindigenous writing exactly because of its claim of being faithful to “authentic” indigenous cultural specifics.

What deserves particular attention, however, is the fact that many indigenous writers have been estranged from their tribal cultures in an increasingly modernized world. The indigenous cultural renaissance that began to burgeon in the 1980s urged indigenous intellectuals to reconnect with their mother cultures. Many indigenous writers not only write with a sense of urgency as indigenous cultural practices decline, but they are also highly conscious of the fact that they have lost touch with their own cultural tradition and need to relearn it.55 This means that the indigenous identity of the writer is not a fait accompli but something to be regained.56 In his writing, Syaman Rapongan reveals how hard he works to prove to his tribal people that he is a Tao indigene by demonstrating his mastery of traditional skills, such as fishing and boatmaking.57 Thus, although “authentic” indigenous culture remains a quest rather than a possession, the indigenous movement and indigenous literature
Cosmopolitanism and indigenism as its offshoot would be meaningless if the notion of authenticity were completely obliterated.

Posited as the sine qua non of indigenous writing, the notion of authentic indigenous culture certainly invites close scrutiny. It goes without saying that “authenticity” is an extremely suspect term in an age of incessant flows and change. As James Clifford points out, given the fact that local traditions are constantly disrupted by various forces of modernity, indigeneity cannot exclusively be about “primordial, transhistorical attachments (ancestral ‘laws,’ continuous traditions, spirituality, respect for Mother Earth, etc.).” It would be problematic to understand indigenous cultural heritage as linked to a static, authentic, ancient tradition resisting foreign influences. However, this argument does not mean that indigenous traditions no longer exist and that they should be taken as pure fiction. Traditions survive through and as “particular combinations of heterogeneous elements, old and new, indigenous and foreign.” What is the key to the persistent inscription of traditions into the present time? Clifford argues that one of the enduring constraints is “landedness”—the power of place.

Rapongan’s indigenous writing is a powerful testimony to Clifford’s argument. The distinctive use of a so-called sea vocabulary based on Tao indigenous culture is a trademark of his style. Indeed, the writing of Rapongan can be considered as essentially topographical, saturated with rich sea images drawn from the materiality of living in a specific place—that is, Orchid Island. His vivid descriptions of the Tao indigenous way of life—including spear fishing, boat making, ecological knowledge of Orchid Island and its surrounding natural seascape as well as landscape, and his story telling about sea adventures in times past and present that pass down survival tips to younger generations—are closely linked to the particular geocultural specifics of Orchid Island. As long as indigenous people on that island continue their sea harvest practice, indigenous epistemology and tradition will endure. Thus, the authenticity of indigenous cultural heritage should be understood as a historical, material production of the dialectic of tradition and transformation.

Insofar as writing is the ritualistic translation of indigenous culture in decline, the “going native” practice of indigenous writing/translation can be interpreted as “melancholic translation,” as defined by Rey Chow. If a translator is often taken to be a traitor who betrays the original, then the “untimely native” is a faithful melancholic rather than a traitor. Freud defines “melancholia” as a symptom of grieving. A melancholic is one who continues to be identified with the lost object and tries to maintain that former love relation. Drawing upon Freud’s concept of melancholia, Chow argues that writing that insists on maintaining the
traces of inassimilable racial others is fundamentally “melancholic.”

A melancholic writer evokes the spectral presence of the oppressed racial/ethnic other in order to strive for justice “on behalf of the original (that is, injured) native (condition).” A melancholic writer who chooses to “go native” often seeks “to restore to such a native or original condition (what has been demeaned or immolated) its unfinished life experiences.” Rather than being a traitor who betrays the “cultural” original that he or she tries to translate into the language of the dominant group, the melancholic indigenous translator-writer positions himself or herself as an heir who is truly faithful to the immolated indigenous cultural heritage.

It would be an oversimplification if we see indigenous melancholic translation as nothing more than romantic nostalgia. The refusal by the indigenous writer to erase the traces of indigenous otherness in a Chinese-language text is a gesture that is made to assert the value of indigenous culture in a modern world. A comparison to modern African literature may shed light on the issue. Kwaku Addae Gyasi remarks that “the problematic of modern African literature lies precisely in the issue of language and its relation to the notion of translation.” The same remarks and viewpoints also hold true for indigenous literary writing in Taiwan. In African literature studies, “translation is . . . defined to encompass the process through which African writers incorporate oral and traditional literary techniques such as proverbs, repetition, folktales, etc. into the foreign medium.” In postcolonial African countries, the Africanization of European languages in African literary writing poses a challenge to the historically established authority of European languages.

We see something similar happening in indigenous writing in Taiwan as well. Melancholic translation challenges cultural hegemony and calls into question the hierarchization of cultures. As Chow points out, linguistic nativism and cultural pluralism are actually intertwined. Melancholic translation evokes a vision of the equivalence of cultures. Understood in this manner, indigenous writing can be conceptualized as a “relevant,” “seasoned” translation. As defined by Derrida, “relevant” translation is a translation that gives a different taste—in fact, more taste—to the original; it “seasons” the original text and makes the translation “tasteful.” Indigenized Chinese writing gives a different taste to the Chinese language that the indigenous writers work with, so as to resuscitate and make visible their tribal traditions.

To sum up, the paradigm of indigenism demonstrates several important features. First, indigenous cultural heritage is seen to buttress indigenous literary production. In practice, writing is often undertaken as a performance of translation that refuses to domesticate indigenous cultural otherness. Such abusive fidelity aims at producing the effect of de-Sinicization and implies a critique of the symbolic violence of the
dominant language. Insofar as abusive fidelity is essential to indigenous writing, the notion of “authenticity” remains indispensible. For “fidelity” makes little sense if authentic cultural heritage is taken to be pure fiction. The insistence on marking the indigenous otherness in Chinese-language text suggests a vision of cultural pluralism. This paradigm is invested with a strong cultural agenda that calls for an abolition of the hierarchy of cultures.

Literary Paradigms and Material Structural Constraints

In spite of the stress on cultural otherness that characterizes the paradigm of indigenism, it would be an oversimplification to understand this paradigm simply in terms of resistance to dominant culture. It is important to bear in mind that an indigenous writer, as a translator, mediates across cultural boundaries. The role of the writer is closer to that of a native informant than the aboriginal, for “by definition the aboriginal qua aboriginal, as inhabiting ‘the inaccessible intimacy of the least . . . self conscious way of life,’ cannot function as an informant.”72 The aboriginal is more like the subaltern in the sense defined by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. The language used by the aboriginal would be quite different from that used by the translator-informant.73

Insofar as translation is the key to the practice of indigenous writing, the field of indigenous literary production cannot possibly be the site of aboriginality. Indigenous oral tradition, rather than indigenous literary production in Chinese, is probably where one should locate such aboriginality. In other words, indigenous writing, as a literary practice in the Chinese language and in written form, is inevitably “cosmopolitan” to a certain degree. Translation inevitably involves cosmopolitan practice—openness to cultures other than one’s own. The parallel to the literary practice of Native American literature is illuminating. To paraphrase Arnold Krupat’s remarks on Native American literature, indigenous writing is made possible by its engaging in literary expression which is to some degree like Chinese literary expression while also to some extent unlike it.74 The indigenous writer as translator cannot but be a cosmopolitan indigene, one who goes beyond the exclusive reliance on indigenous local knowledge or ethnic epistemes to carry out cross-cultural literary transactions. That these indigenous writers are capable of writing and publishing in the Chinese literary market already indicates the class gap between indigenous writers and common indigenous people. Compared to the underprivileged aborigines in their tribal hinterlands, indigenous writers are indeed cosmopolitans. They are what James Clifford calls “traveling natives.”75
Interestingly, although indigenous writers are cosmopolitan indigenes rather than aborigines, very few actually choose to draw attention to the cosmopolitan character of their writing. On the contrary, they highlight indigenous elements in their writing. To some degree, this apparent free individual choice is determined by structural constraints. As Craig Calhoun reminds us, cosmopolitanism “is a matter of institutions” and “what seems like free individual choice is often made possible by capital—social and cultural as well as economic.” As Syaman Rapongan portrays in the novel *Black Wings*, indigenous people generally have little access to educational resources. Claiming to be cosmopolitan scarcely serves their interests when they seek recognition in a literary market dominated by nonindigenous writers who have accumulated much more cultural capital through literary training. Indigenism, rather than cosmopolitanism, is more likely to serve as a means of empowerment for indigenous writers. Upholding indigenism offers indigenous writers a good niche wherein to compete in the field of cultural production.

For indigenous writers who have much less capital than their nonindigenous competitors, indigenous cultural heritage is a valuable cultural resource and legitimizes creolized writing by indigenous writers as a viable literary practice on its own terms. Very much like lipogrammatical writing, indigenous literature expands the expressive possibilities of the Chinese language. The Chinese language in indigenous writing is thus “a language that looks like [Chinese] . . . but which, on closer inspection, is structured according to a further, quite peculiar rule.” Cosmopolitanism apparently “is not free-floating, not equally available to everyone, not equally empowering for everyone.”

In addition to enhancing the competitiveness of indigenous writers in the literary marketplace, literary representation of indigenous cultural heritage may also be tied to the practical need of boosting indigenous cultural tourism. In other words, resistance to hegemonic literature may not be the only reason to produce indigenous literature. Syaman Rapongan’s writing on Orchid Island demonstrates this point. As mentioned earlier, Rapongan’s works paint the life and world of indigenous people on this small island off the southeastern coast of Taiwan. Celebrated as a writer of the sea, he charms his readers with fascinating portrayals of the indigenous way of life. Indeed, Orchid Island is promoted as an idyllic place for tourists to go to get away from boisterous urban routines.

In real life, Orchid Island is plagued by serious economic problems. Job opportunities are extremely limited on the island. As a result, many young indigenes choose to go to Taiwan as temporary laborers to make ends meet. Even so, the unemployment rates remain high. Take the statistics released by the government in 2008 as an example. The un-
employment rate of the Tao indigenes in 2007 is as high as 18%, far surpassing the rate of 7.92% for other indigenous tribes and 5.03% for other Taiwanese ethnic groups. For many indigenes who stay on the island, cultural tourism is considered a promising source of income.

Situated in this context, the revival of indigenous cultural heritage is more than an identity issue. It addresses very practical concerns. Rapongan’s literary writing, as a ritualistic translation of indigenous Tao cultural heritage, should be seen as part of this economic structure. Its idyllic representation of Orchid Island serves as part of the literature used to reinforce the impression of the island as a positive escape from modern life routines. It indirectly services the cultural tourism industry that many local people work hard to boost. Inheritance and the future-to-come of Orchid Island acquire a different implication here, one that is more related to the survival of indigenous people and their traditions in an increasingly modernized world.

Conclusion

On the surface, the two Taiwanese literary paradigms discussed in this essay are radically opposed to each other. Taiwanese cosmopolitanism seems to advocate cultural openness. In contrast, indigenism stresses resistance to hegemonic cultural forces and is marked by a strong genocentric profile. The former adopts a cosmopolitan outlook and urges Taiwanese writers to claim Chinese cultural heritages as their inheritance, whereas the latter seeks to exorcise the influence of Chinese cultural tradition so that the oppressed, declining indigenous culture can come alive again. It seems that these two literary paradigms could not be more different from each other.

However, closer examination reveals that the two paradigms have much greater commonality than differences. Each paradigm proposes an instructive model of literary production that emphasizes local connection and a place-based identity. For the paradigm of Taiwanese cosmopolitanism, the locus of cultural authenticity resides not in the place of origin, but in the place of practice. We detect here a radical argument about cultural authenticity in spatial terms. The paradigm of indigeneity, on the other hand, suggests that cultural authenticity survives in spite of all the cultural transformations over time because local cultural practice is first and foremost geoculturally specific. “Landedness” provides the key to the survival of cultural tradition over time. Although seemingly distinctive and different, these two paradigms ask the same question: “What constitutes cultural authenticity if culture never remains static?”
Both paradigms give great weight to the power of place. It is the “landedness” of cultural practice that is seen as empowering cultural heritage and giving it life.

Finally, Taiwan’s politico-culturally specific role in continuing traditional Chinese education after World War II throws into sharp relief the historical and material conditions that give rise to literary practice(s). Literary paradigms are not free choices. They are socially situated practices, deeply implicated in complex sociopolitical structures. Also, they deal with very practical concerns. Engaged in implicit exchange with each other, each of these two literary paradigms has a specific cultural agenda that heralds the future of literary Taiwan. The evocation of the notion of cultural authenticity in these paradigms is conducted in the hope of yielding material consequences in the real world. The untimely question of “authenticity” raised by these two Taiwanese literary paradigms reminds us of the place of cultural heritage in a time of growing globalization. Therein, perhaps, can be found a place for Taiwan in global humanities studies.

I would like to thank the National Science Council in Taiwan for supporting my research. An early version of this paper was presented at the conference “Culture in Translation in Hong Kong,” 2011. I thank Zhang Min-xu for help with the preparation of the manuscript.

NOTES

1 See Shu-mei Shih, “Globalisation and the (in)significance of Taiwan,” *Postcolonial Studies* 6, no. 2 (2003): 144. Although the reason for the invisibility of Taiwan in international humanities studies is complex, Shih’s observation is fairly well grounded. Statistics on recent international publications in the field of East Asian studies or Chinese literary studies testifies to the marginality of Taiwan in international humanities studies. Publications that appeared over the last ten years (2000–2010) in *The Journal of Asian Studies* and *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique, and Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*—three prominent international journals that favor East Asian humanities studies or Chinese literary studies—speak volumes. Humanities studies that touch upon Taiwan constitute but six out of 255 articles published in *JAS*, only fifteen of the 253 in *Positions*, and sixteen of the 127 appearing in *MCLC*.

2 Shih, “Globalisation and the (in)significance of Taiwan,” 152.

3 Martial Law in Taiwan was lifted in 1987.


5 Yang Mu is often noted for his strong transcultural profile. Born in Taiwan in 1940, he studied in the English department of Tung-hai University in Taichung, earned a master of fine arts degree (English: Creative Writing) from the University of Iowa in 1966 and a PhD degree in Comparative Literature from the University of California, Berkeley, in 1971. He is Professor Emeritus of Comparative Literature at the University of Washington and Chair Professor of Taiwan Literature at National Chengchi University in Taiwan.
COSMOPOLITANISM AND INDIGENISM

8 Fine, *Cosmopolitanism*, xi.
16 The question about Taiwan’s sovereignty and its relationship to China is a thorny issue. So is the question of identity. Take a look at a question in a 2011 poll on identity conducted by the TVBS—a TV station in Taiwan known for its support of pro-China policies: “In our society, some people think that they are Chinese while others think that they are Taiwanese. What do you think you are?” The poll result: 72% Taiwanese, 17% Chinese, 11% don’t know/refused to answer. (http://www.tvbs.com.tw/FILE_DB/DL_DB/ rickliu/201102/rickliu-20110201165030.pdf, accessed December 1, 2012). A discussion in English of the poll can be found at the following url address http://michaelturton.blogspot.com/2011/02/tvbs-on-identity-and-independence.html.
17 As we shall discuss in more detail in the following, the paradigm of indigenism emerged in the cultural sphere as a response to the call for de-Sinicization.
27 It can be argued that, as a reviewer of this article points out, what is “Chinese” here can be understood as a cultural concept rather than political identity.
29 Li came to Taiwan in 1967 at the age of twenty. He spent six years in the U.S. to earn his PhD degree. He then started his teaching career in Taiwan and has lived there ever since. He is now a naturalized citizen of Taiwan.
new literary history


36 Shih, “Against Diaspora,” 40.

37 It should be noted that many younger generation Chinese-Malaysian writers practice a kind of diasporic writing with a strong critique of China-centrism. Kim-chew Ng is a case in point. See Chiu, “Empire of the Chinese Sign,” 604–11.

38 Wong, Rays of the Searching Sun, 20.

39 I would like to thank Dr. Chen-chen Tseng for this insightful comment in one of our exchanges about Yang Mu’s works.


42 Shih, “Against Diaspora,” 46.

43 I refer here to Homi Bhabha’s celebrated notion of “colonial mimicry.” The interventional power of mimicry stresses its difference from the original or the mainstream culture: “colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite.” See Homi Bhabha, The Location of Culture (New York: Routledge, 1994), 86.

44 Wong, Rays of the Searching Sun, 106.


48 See Walis Norgan, “Taiwan yuanzhumin wenxue de qu zhimin” [The decolonization of Taiwan indigenous literature], in Taiwan yuanzhumin banyu wenxue xuanjijijinglun yuan [An Anthology of Chinese-language Indigenous Literature in Taiwan: Commentaries], ed. Sun Dachuan (Taipei: Ink Books, 2003), 127–51. Indigenous languages in Taiwan do not have written forms. Indigenous culture thrives on oral tradition. Since there are more than ten indigenous tribes in Taiwan and the total indigenous population is less than four hundred thousand (about two percent of the total population in Taiwan), indigenous literature is mostly written in Chinese. As the indigenous readership is very


52 Balcom, “Translator’s Introduction,” xvi. This anthology includes selected representative short stories, essays, and poems by indigenous writers from different tribes in Taiwan. See Balcom, “Translator’s Introduction,” xxii.


57 Rapongan, *Lenghai qingshen* [Smitten with the Ruthless Sea], 55.


64 Chow, “Translator, Traitor,” 573.


68 Gyasi, “Writing as Translation,” 80.

69 Gyasi, “Writing as Translation,” 86.

70 Chow, “Translator, Traitor,” 574.


79 Calhoun, “Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism,” 434.


81 See “97nian yuanzhumin jiuye zhuangkuang diaocha baogao” [Report on indigenous employment in 2008] (Taipei: Council of Indigenous Peoples, Executive Yuan, 2008), 2. I am deeply grateful to Dr. Yu-yueh Tsai from the Institute of Sociology, Academia Sinica, Taiwan for this valuable piece of information.