

Representing Postcolonial Water Environments in Contemporary Taiwanese Literature

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In contemporary literary studies, Taiwan, a politically marginalized island in the Pacific Ocean, is mostly known for its literary contribution to the contextualization of postcolonial history in the Asia-Pacific region. Taiwan underwent complex historical phases of colonization under the rule of the Japanese Empire (1895–1945) and the Kuomintang (hereafter KMT) military regime (1949–87).¹ In recent years, Taiwanese literature addressing domestic environmental problems has also been on the rise. It is the crossing of these two domains—the postcolonial and the environmental—that perhaps best characterizes the new dynamic of contemporary Taiwanese literature. This chapter investigates the representation of postcolonial water environments in the literary works of Syaman Rapongan 夏曼藍波安² (1957–), an Indigenous Tao writer and activist, and Fang Hui-chen 房慧真 (1976–), an independent journalist who specializes in environmental and social issues. I argue that this increased attention to environmental issues sheds new light on the postcolonial history of the Asia-Pacific region. Moreover, I suggest that the new environmental dimension of Taiwanese literature, which emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s, may be able to provide an alternative perspective for other similar postcolonial states in the region (e.g., South Korea, Malaysia, and the Philippines), allowing them to revisit their colonial experience and potentially contributing also to the development of an original postcolonial environmental discourse stemming from the regional particularity of the Asia Pacific.

Given Taiwan's specific geographical features (i.e., an island surrounded by oceans featuring high mountains and abundant streams and waterfalls), themes that revolve around oceanic or water imaginary have become estab-

lished as a major literary convention in the last few decades. Quite a few contemporary authors, such as Liao Hung-chi 廖鴻基 and Lu Ze-zhi 呂則之, apply this convention in their literary creations. Yet, not all of them make explicit attempts to articulate issues relating to postcolonialism and environmentalism. I have thus chosen to conduct a comparative study of Syaman and Fang, for both authors are considered writer-activists, politically dedicated to fighting social inequality and environmental injustice. Syaman's semi-autobiographical literary essays and Fang's essay collection underline the urgency of approaching the problem of heavily polluted water ecologies through a postcolonial lens. Scrutinizing their literary representations, I argue that the legacies of colonial developments in Taiwan during the Japanese imperial rule and KMT (neo)colonial occupation, as well as of the U.S. neoliberal domination over the Third World economy in the Asia Pacific, continue to produce negative impacts not only on the water environment themselves but also on the Indigenous Tao people and the Taiwanese population as a whole.

Colonial Ruination: Contextualizing Taiwan's Water Environmental History

The present chapter advances a postcolonial ecocritique of Taiwan's "colonial ruination." "Colonial ruination," as Ann Laura Stoler presents the concept, is what people are *left with* and continue to endure in their everyday life in the colonial aftermath (9). As such, it is "an ongoing corrosive process that weighs on the future" and, within that process, a political project that "lays waste to certain people, relationship and things . . . in specific places" (9). For example, the substantial changes of the geographical, cultural, and economic features of Taiwan caused by Japanese exploitation of the agricultural industries (mainly water-intensive crops, such as rice and sugar) continue to affect negatively the lives of Indigenous and postcolonial peoples in Taiwan. As Leo T. S. Ching notes, following the arrival of Sakuma Samata (the fifth Japanese governor-general) in Taiwan in 1910, a series of actions such as land expropriation and forced relocation of Taiwanese aboriginals were immediately put in practice. "The goals of the Japanese," Ching explains, "were to confine the aborigines and incorporate them into standard administrative units, to restrict their hunting activity, to encourage rice cultivation and finally, to exploit the abundant forest, timber and the camphor resources" (134–35).

These negative environmental changes and cultural dynamics are also underlined in Williams and Chang's *Taiwan's Environmental Struggle*. The two authors draw particular attention to the Japanese government's exploitation of Taiwan's water resources and the environmental repercussions thereof.³

From this historical perspective, the colonial ruination that remains part of Taiwanese life is inseparable from the exploitation that occurred under the Japanese colonial occupation and the KMT military rule. As mentioned earlier, given Taiwan's specific geographical features, exploitation is often linked to water environments. In his essay collection *Jia li shuibian name jin* 家離水邊那麼近 (So much water so close to home) (hereafter *Jia*), the renowned Taiwanese ecological writer Wu Ming-yi 吳明益 foregrounds this issue through the example of the Mugua River 木瓜溪. As Wu recounts, during the Japanese occupation of Taiwan, the colonizers constructed several hydroelectric power plants, exploiting both the water resources of the Mugua River and the human labor of the local Indigenous population (*Jia* 76–77). The exploitation did not cease after the termination of Japanese rule. On the contrary, the Taipower company⁴ further expanded the construction of dams and hydroelectric power plants in order to meet the development needs of the west coast as well as of the heavy industries promoted by the KMT government (76–77).⁵ Wu refers to Yang Guai-san's 楊貴三 article, which explains how hydroelectricity generation upstream and quarrying and irrigation downstream have, over the past one hundred years, led to the drying up of the abundant flow of the Mugua River, resulting in a great loss of aquatic biodiversity (82).

Colonial ruination, as Stoler further elaborates, is *not* simply the direct result of a colonial or imperial project. Ruination can also be the legacy of its underlying mechanisms—via the transfer of the colonial capitalist system to the neoliberal/neocolonial exploitation of the Third World—which continue to operate in contemporary postcolonial states (Stoler 18). Colonial ruination can therefore be found in an ongoing impetus for the postcolonial state to engage in such political projects as the importation of hazardous industries from the First World or the designation of land for industrial farming, chemical waste disposal, and nuclear waste storage. Degraded water environments in Taiwan generally result from these sorts of political projects, which occurred above all during the period of U.S. financial investment in the development of Taiwan's neoliberal economy. This fits perfectly with Stoler's conceptualization of colonial ruination. During the Cold War period, the U.S. geopolitical strategy and military agenda to counterbalance the growing

influence of Communism in the Asia-Pacific region secured a political alliance with the Republic of China (Taiwan). Since the establishment of the U.S. Military Assistance and Advisory Group in 1951, Taiwan had “benefited and enjoyed” U.S. nonmilitary economic aid as part of its political agreement. Between 1951 and 1965, the United States offered \$1.5 billion in nonmilitary aid to Taiwan (approximately \$100 million per year), and this large sum of economic aid constituted about 40 percent of capital formation in Taiwan (Wang 325–28). According to Peter Chen-main Wang’s research, most of this aid was spent on communication, electricity, and transportation, which helped to advance agricultural and industrial development (325–28). These economic investments were generally perceived as great benefits to Taiwan, given that they created the conditions for Taiwan to rise as an industrial power and thus enjoy the “economic miracle” of the 1960s and 1970s.

Nonetheless, from an environmental point of view, the disastrous impacts on natural environments and public health linked to this artificially generated growth, bankrolled by the United States, are now considered a case of irrevocable “colonial ruination” affecting the Taiwanese population in general. Wu Ming-yi has pointed out that the “generous” financial investment from the United States was also intended for Taiwan to quickly make the transition from an agriculturally based Third World economy to an industrially based developing economy (“Shengtai” 234). From 1966 onward, Taiwan was transformed into a labor-intensive and export-oriented economy. Wu notes that textile and electronic appliance manufacturing businesses—both of which are highly toxic industries—were the foundation of Taiwan’s industrial economy, supporting its export-focused model (234–35). He further cites Jane Ives’ *The Export of Hazard* and argues that America had strategically planned to move these polluting industries to its Third World allies, where environmental regulations were either non-existent or much more relaxed (Wu, “Shengtai” 235). Taiwan, as one of America’s Third World allies, was determined to accept the export of hazardous industries. Although Wu does not provide a specific example, his argument is well supported by the case study presented by Williams and Chang. As these scholars show, Radio Corporation of America (RCA) pioneered its investment in Taiwan in the late 1960s and moved its production line of black-and-white televisions from Memphis to Taoyuan (Williams and Chang 44–45). The company used organic solvents to clean and degrease mechanic components. Since there were no enforced environmental rules, RCA simply discarded the used solvents into sewers and toilets or threw them out onto the grass without any treatment, causing significant

degradations to neighboring water environments and also posing threats to people's health (45). Williams and Chang conclude that two of the solvents used are believed to be carcinogens and that "for more than two decades, workers and residents in the neighbourhood had been drinking and using the water, and claimed higher than normal rates of cancer" (45).

We therefore understand that colonial ruination can be found not just in what is physically left over but also in an ongoing impetus in the postcolonial state to engage in certain political projects, as demonstrated above. In the following analysis, I will show that the works of Syaman and Fang articulate issues that are essentially linked to these sorts of political projects. Furthermore, while Stoler's concept of "colonial ruination" is useful for providing a postcolonial ecocritique of Taiwan's water environments, this chapter seeks also to link this concept to Syaman Rapongan's proposed notion of "nomad body," an unstable and liminal subjectivity brought about through violent changes to an individual's external surroundings that force the individual to confront and articulate heterogenous values (modern/colonial and traditional/Indigenous) arising from different spatialities and temporalities. I will further show how this "nomad body" is represented not only by Syaman and his fellow Tao people but also, albeit in a very different context, by the marginalized urbanites as depicted in Fang's writing. These two theories not only provide an appropriate framework for the study of both literary works but also allow for a better understanding of the postcolonial exploitation of water environment and its negative effects on the local inhabitants, in both rural and urban Taiwan.

The "Nomad Body" as Colonial Ruination: Syaman Rapongan's *Hanghaija de lian*

This section looks into the human ecology that is directly linked to the production of colonial ruination. To this end, the concept of "nomad body," drawn from Syaman's semi-autobiographical work, represents a significant form of colonial ruination, particularly as it occurs at the interface between colonial exploitation and the degradation of water environments. I also suggest, however, that the concept of the nomad body does not apply exclusively to Syaman's work and that it should not be limited to understanding the formation of Syaman's aboriginal subjectivity in a liminal space, as suggested in Lee Yu-lin's 李育霖 reading of Syaman's writing. Instead, this concept may be

broadly applied to the study of other texts that portray the liminal subjectivity of various populations (e.g., migrant workers, social outcasts, and urban Indigenous people), who occupy or reside nearby degraded Taiwanese water habitats.⁶

A nomad body is constituted by a liminal subjectivity that arises from an individual's specific bodily experiences in relation to violent changes in their external surroundings. These experiences prevent the individual from consolidating subjectivity in a homogeneous manner and also prevent the individual from occupying a specific point of reference in the process of subject identification. On the contrary, the individual is condemned to occupy an ambivalent state as regards his or her subjectivity. As Syaman's daughter once said to him:

Father, for us (the modern), you have torn your body to earn little money. Yet, your spirit follows the values of our grandparents (the tradition). Most of the tribesmen of your generation have already given up on maintaining this way of life. I can see that you are so tired and so exhausted!⁷ (*Hanghaijia* 9)

Dwelling on his daughter's words, Syaman replies, "My nomad body vacillates between these two different rhythms of life, unable to settle with the heterogeneity of these incompatible values" (9). As Syaman describes, his body is torn between two different temporalities and two different sets of values. It is torn between the modern and the traditional and between the desire to earn money to support his family in a modernized world and the longing to continue the traditional aquacultural work that is accompanied by so much hardship.

In *Hanghaijia de lian* 航海家的臉 (The face of a navigator) (hereafter *Hanghaijia*), Syaman and the Tao people he describes well illustrate these features of the nomad body. Being a Tao writer, Syaman attempts to connect with a fading culture on the brink of disappearance. He portrays a tribal society that is gradually being replaced by the knowledge and economic production of modernity (Lee 182). This tribal society is overwhelmed by technology, and to a certain extent, it is also environmentally degraded by wastes and pollutions (182). The subjects, the Tao people and Syaman himself, therefore undergo *a constant search for their possible existence* (i.e., a desire for life or an urge to survive) *in a liminal space* (182–83). This liminal space is determined by the crisis that the subject experiences, be it *a cultural crisis* staged in a confrontation between the Tao tribal values and the value of modernity

or *an ecological crisis* that threatens the integral existence of the Tao people and their natural surroundings. Experiencing these crises thus obliges the subject to *become a nomad*, oscillating between the incompatible conditions and modes of his or her survival. In *Hanghaijia*, Syaman presents the sorrows of his wife and his own frustration vis-à-vis both a dying culture and their urge to survive as a family:

My wife, she understands the pain of not having flying fish at home, and yet she adores eating fish.⁸ . . . A vague idea of preserving our traditions and priding ourselves with these traditions has been clouded by the infinite amount of everyday worries that occupy her mind. . . . Both her heart and her mind were torn between the choices of our traditional tribal economy and the capitalist economy of modern society. She cries out with anger, “ah . . . for the body that comes after us, for our gold (i.e., child),⁹ stop being so stubborn. . . . I need a life with a pay.” . . . Apparently, everything that is passed down by our ancestors can no longer keep up with a reality underlined by payments and salaries. I stand under the waterfall nearby a taro field, trying to cool down my frustration with the water. Next day at dawn, I carry my axe to the mountain to cut down some wood [for building the fishing boat]. . . . While I sit on the pile of wood that I cut down, I murmur to myself, hoping that a salary is not the only answer to our happiness. (79–80)

This scene presents a liminal space determined by a cultural crisis that the subject experiences and that turns both Syaman and his wife into nomad bodies oscillating between the incompatible conditions of their family’s survival and the pursuit of a traditional tribal lifestyle. As Syaman points out, they are subjected to the violent change imposed on a tribal system that must rapidly adapt itself to modern capitalist society. While the wife’s body desires the taste of flying fish and her mind wants to feel the pride for having those fish on the drying rack, her desires are denied, first of all, by the conditions set up within the capitalist economy, and second, by the imperial debris of postcolonial Taiwanese society’s fractured relationship to water. The “torn heart and mind” of Syaman’s wife characterizes the nomad body. Here, this nomad body can be seen as the individual inhabiting these incompatible temporalities simultaneously, thus producing a heterogenous subjectivity.

It is also important to understand how the aboriginal subjectivity is transformed into a liminal one. According to Lee Yu-lin, Syaman’s memoir writing about his tribal life and culture does not serve naively to advocate the preser-

vation of the Tao's aboriginal culture, nor does it function as an ethical call for environmental protection; instead, it is a *process of involvement, a full engagement* of the political, social, cultural, and ecological dimensions of postcolonial life (183). In that sense, Syaman's actual experiences in the tribe and his writing about them become a medium that helps us to think about alternatives of coexisting with these struggles, thus offering new possibilities in this liminal space and new potentialities for the nomad body in postcolonial Taiwanese society (183). One can see that the subjectivity that arises in Syaman's works does *not* follow a process of subject identification, which is often enclosed within an individual, nor does it seek a homogenous logos (183–84). On the contrary, this subjectivity can only be found in a *pre-personal* context, and it is an *opening out* toward the natural environment (especially an opening out toward the water ecologies that occupy the center of the Tao's holistic conception of nature), as well as toward different aspects of society, such as the affirmation of ethnicities, social interactions, or individual relations to the state apparatuses (184). The *pre-personal* context, in the Tao's worldview, can be interpreted as that form of perception we share with nonhuman beings and is accessible either through dreams or when one is immersed in a natural environmental or working with and in nature (e.g., axing wood to make canoes, catching fish, sleeping on the beach, etc.).¹⁰ In many traditional oral tales documented by Syaman, the protagonists have the ability to communicate with nonhuman beings (flying fish, cetaceans, crabs, or rocks), but this agency relies also on passing through one's "ancestors," understood not as specific individuals but rather in the collective sense of all those who came before oneself. When Syaman talks of "*everything that is passed down by our ancestors*," he invokes a pre-personal symbolic realm contextualized by the Tao tribal culture and their ways of living with the surrounding oceans. The subject (Syaman) has to undergo a process of struggle and reconsider their relations with society—in a confrontation with the economic pressures arising from modern capitalist values. In the meanwhile, he must also *open himself out* toward his natural environment—as he stands under a waterfall or sits on a pile of wood. This *opening out* toward the environment does not represent a desire to evade liminality by choosing one or the other branch of the dilemma he faces. Again, it is an attempt to fully engage himself in the *pre-personal* context, while accepting to live with these struggles.

The nomad body therefore oscillates between the modern and the traditional, the nation and the tribe, technology and nature, the colonial and the postcolonial. And, in fact, these confrontations would not have arisen

if there had not been a neoliberal exploitation of Orchid Island, as Syaman underlines in *Hanghajiia*. Colonial ruination is not necessarily a direct consequence of a specific colonial project, for it can also be the result of a general capitalist legacy, which exploits the colonized region or Third World country. In *Hanghajiia*, Syaman emphasizes the exploitation of the marine systems that was carried out on Orchid Island in the 1980s. This decade is well-known as an era in which Taiwan's economic growth surged, and its economy was subsequently included as one of the "Four Asian Tigers." This "economic miracle," as Syaman notes, came at the price of the "total destruction of [Orchid Island's] marine ecosystem," bearing in mind that it was seen very much as peripheral in the eyes of the Taiwanese government (*Hanghajiia* 164–65). During this period, Taiwanese businessmen had exploited Tao divers as cheap marine laborers in order to meet the growing demand of the fishing industry and aquarium tourism. When their catch supplies could not meet market demand, raft teams of Taiwanese fishermen were dispatched to spray a "sodium cyanide mixture"¹¹ to poison tropical fish or to use underwater dynamite to kill them (164). These devastating methods led to a significant amount of dieback on some coral reefs (i.e., coral bleaching), and the clear ocean gradually turned muddy white, which put further strain on Orchid Island's marine biodiversity (165). Syaman's description compels us to see the direct link between the legacy of colonialism and socio-ecological degradation. Taiwan's economic success, it turns out, cannot be dissociated from the environmental price paid by other people on the periphery. This is most visible on the damaged coastline and the destroyed marine biodiversity of Orchid Island. However, the cheap Tao laborers mentioned above also exemplify colonial ruination, given that the surplus value generated by their work is appropriated by the beneficiaries of this same economic system. We can further compare the cheap Tao laborers to Syaman and fellow tribesmen. Between having a better quality of life supported by higher incomes and a life that depends on maintaining the traditional tribal economy and fishing culture, these Tao laborers have also involuntarily become nomad bodies.

Degraded Water Environments, Social Outcasts, and Colonial Ruination—Fang Hui-chen's *Heliu*

Starting her career as a journalist in her late thirties, Fang Hui-chen quickly moved from being a news agent of a local tabloid in Taiwan to becoming

a senior reporter for what is currently Taiwan's largest online independent media outlet, *Baodaozhe* 報導者 (The reporter). Unlike academically trained reporters, Fang, in her writings, often shows her conscientiousness and attentiveness to issues that relate to individual suffering, environmental exploitation, and social or cultural inequality. I now turn to Fang's essay collection *Heliu* 河流 (River) (2013) to show how her ecofeminist approach and her sophisticated skill of image-text composition directly bring together the issues of environmental and social injustice in Taiwan. Although Fang never describes herself as an ecofeminist, her literary writing draws a parallel between the patriarchal commodification and exploitation of the female body and the human domination of nature. This approach echoes the thinking of some ecofeminists, "which [attempts to unmask] and tries to dismantle the abstract framework of the supremacy, oppression, commodification" (Ranjith and Pius 18).¹²

Similar in style to George Orwell's *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1993), in which the author recounted his own life experiences on the margins of society, Fang's *Heliu* sharply captures the lives of "unwanted" people in the busy urban areas of Taiwan. Like Syaman, Fang interweaves her portrayals of the outcasts with depictions of degraded water habitats. She carefully presents the homeless people, the economic migrants from Southern Taiwan, the city-squatting aboriginals, the Hongkongnese or Taiwanese prostitutes, and the Tanka people,¹³ who reside at the riverside of the Tamsui River 淡水河 and the Keelung River 基隆河 in Taipei. To a great extent, Fang's description of their lives and her choice to focus on the highly urbanized Taipei city can be read as a reaction to the colonial legacies manifest in the form of both the neocolonial capitalist economy and degraded water environments.

In one of the essays, "Fudao senlin" 浮島森林 (Floating forest island), Fang portrays the female sex workers and the environments in the Wan Hua 萬華 district. As she tells us, Wan Hua, situated along the Tamsui River, specializes in the sale of Chinese herbal medicine, while also being the most notorious area in Taipei for men to seek sexual pleasure. A double connotation is evoked here: Wan Hua not only provides cures for one's physical health; it also offers remedies for the sexual desire of urban loners. And these cures are available only via exploitation of the environment and of female bodies. In a sense, Fang's emphasis on the marginalized female prostitutes reaffirms the ecofeminist view on the links between the exploitation and commodification of both nature and women's bodies. The chapter begins by recounting various individual life stories of the prostitutes in Wan Hua. A mentally handicapped

aboriginal girl voluntarily takes up prostitution in order to provide a living for her aged father (Fang 45). The wife of a middle-age couple serves a “customer” while her handicapped husband guards the door with their only child (46). A divorced Hongkongnese woman in her late fifties comes to Taiwan to be a migrant sex worker because she could not bear to bring shame to her family (46–47). The portrayal of these marginalized prostitutes outlines the (in)visible social and economic inequalities in the urban life of Taipei; moreover, the author also interweaves these portrayals with the theme of degraded water environments. Toward the end of this chapter, Fang writes:

Most of the traditional herbal medicines that are sold in the shops on the “Green Grass Lane” [in Wan Hua] come from the floating island that is not far from the [Tamsui] river side. . . . On the island, people grow their vegetables, cultivate their herbal plants. . . . The nutrients of the soil come from the discarded waste water. However, the herbal plants that grow out of this island are the most famous “life-saving” cures. . . . The prostitutes in Wan Hua are the same. They float, they sway, unable to find a place to settle. . . . They are exiled to the margin of the world . . . yet blossom the most resilient flowers from the dirtiest and the most polluted soil. (47–48)

The “nomad bodies” (i.e., the marginalized prostitutes) described by Fang also try to navigate a liminal space determined by the crisis of social displacement. Nevertheless, the way Fang’s writing relates to the production of colonial ruination is very different from that of Syaman. In *Hanghaijia*, both the Tao people and Syaman himself are subjected to direct exploitation in a neocolonial economic system, as well as to the loss of marine biodiversity. Fang’s writing, on the other hand, presents rather a metaphorical comparison between the marginalized female sex workers and the degraded urban water environments, thus articulating an ecofeminist critique of the commodification of nature via female bodies.

Furthermore, the two elements found in Fang’s writing, the degraded water environments and the marginalized population, work together to produce an unconventional aesthetic representation that calls for a reimagining of our relationship with the polluted environment. Looking at the formal features of her book, one immediately sees Fang’s attempts to bring these two elements to the fore through both image and textual arrangement. Photographs are inserted between the texts, producing a cinematographic effect. For instance, a shot of an empty street with several manhole covers outside a

window is spread across three pages and inserted between two chapters. The awkward visual effect, presenting half of the photo on the first two pages and the other half on the following page, renders a continuity of the image and of the stories told. The photograph also seems to suggest that, under these manhole covers, the currents of the filthy watercourse and of the lives of the marginalized urbanites run together through the path of the essays. By means of this specific image-text arrangement, Fang's writing displays a fluidity that resembles the flow of water, calling to mind how a filmmaker might roll the camera to shoot the actual life of the people she portrays.

Another technique that Fang experiments with to produce cinematographic effect involves placing text over an image. In figure 1, for example, a text box is placed directly on an image of a footpath in Taipei, giving the effect of a cinematic voice-over. While the image outlines the fast movement of cars, scooters, bike riders, and pedestrians in the hustle and bustle of the city, the written text turns the reader's attention to the slow pace of the marginalized urban Indigenous population who reside at the bank of the Danhan River 大漢溪, a polluted stream at the periphery of urban Taipei. Fang further notes that, unable to afford the expensive cost of living in the city on their minimum wages, these people were in perpetual conflict with the city government for the land they "illegally" occupied over the last thirty years. In the photo, however, both the marginalized Indigenous people and the river are nowhere to be found. What dominates the image is the overground rail track, moving the metropolitan urbanites forward at great speed. This contrast can be interpreted as Fang's specific style of making the invisible (i.e., the urban Indigenous people and the polluted Dahan River) visible.

In fact, despite that the book is called "River," very few pictures are actually images of river. They are scenes of urban life—the empty street, the spiral-shaped stairs, the shop signs spilling out onto the streets. In an unusual manner, these images together offer an ensemble effect that resembles the continuity of water flow. In short, Fang's deliberate design produces an unconventional aesthetic representation that is both powerful and striking and that allows readers to acknowledge the concealed polluted watercourses and the marginalized population often imperceptible in daily life.

Fang also employs a specific symbolic reference in her writing—sewage or concealed water channels—to represent the link between the invisible people and the hidden pollution of the waterways. Sewage can be easily read as a signifier for the marginalized outcasts and the hidden pollution, representing the buried legacy of colonial ruination. Fang presents the particular

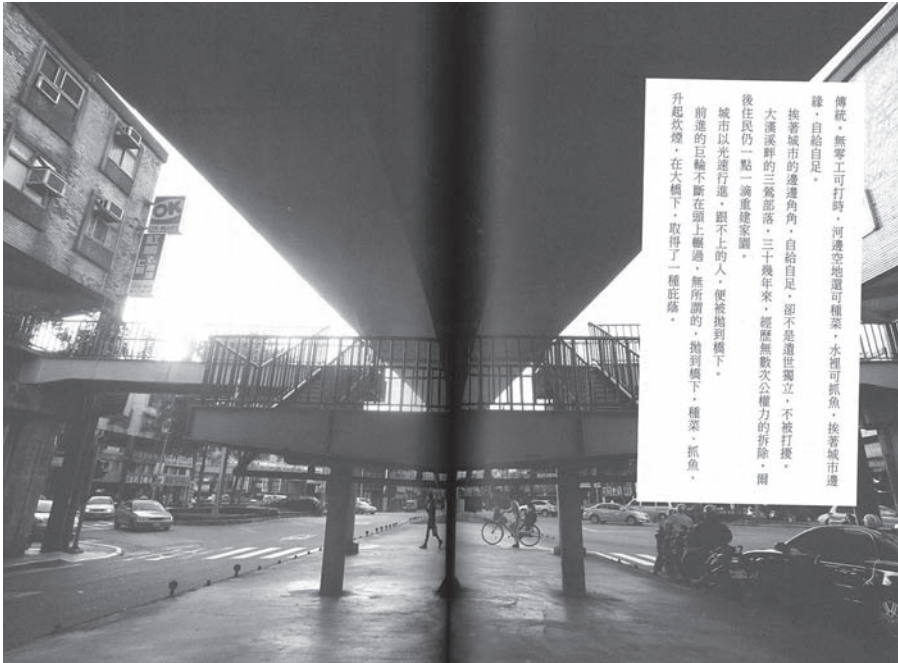


Fig. 10.1. Scanned image of a skywalk footpath in Taipei with text on page 82 and 83 of Fang, Hui-chen 房慧真 *Heliu* (River), Yinke wenxue, 2013. Reproduction permission courtesy of the author, Fang Hui-chen 房慧真.

case of urban development at Shezi sandbank 社子沙洲, showing that the logic of an obscure city project reflects a neocolonial exploitation of marginalized economic minorities. Located at the confluence of two rivers, Shezi sandbank was originally formed by the earth that was washed down from the Tamsui 淡水 and Keelung 基隆 Rivers. However, as a result of its geographical features and lowland location on the periphery of Taipei city, it was designated as a site for the processing of all the sewage emitted from Taipei's city center. But it is not only the unclean wastewater that is washed down to Shezi. Being a lowland area, Shezi is also liable to flooding and eventually became an area where low-income populations reside. Shezi's economic activities gradually stagnated, and no further urban planning was considered necessary to transform or improve the quality of life there. Shezi then turned into a place that gathers most of the "unwanted people"—sex laborers for the city loners, gangsters of the underworld, and economic migrants coming

from Southern Taiwan who cannot afford the expensive housing costs of the city center (Fang 52). Commenting on an obscure development proposal for turning Shezi into a red-light district, Fang writes, “As always, rubbish and scraps of leftovers as well as the used dirt in construction sites are all washed down to the island with wastewater emitted in the city” (52). Even though the proposed project has never been realized, one can see a general lack of government enthusiasm or effort to consider alternative ways to improve the environment and well-being of Shezi’s inhabitants.¹⁴ In a sense, when Fang mentions the “rubbish and scraps of leftovers” washed down to Shezi, she is referring not only to the actual waste that is dumped on the island, for the rubbish and scraps carry also metaphorical meanings relating to those marginalized workers or prostitutes deserted on the urban periphery.

A final thing that needs to be highlighted about Fang’s writing is the structure of her collected essays. In several individual essays of her book, Fang starts with a detailed depiction of certain marginalized characters but ends with unusually ghastly scenes that demonstrate the awful degradation of the water environments. In doing so, she raises a variety of environmental issues related to the water habitats she describes, including direct water pollution, environmental degradation resulting from dam construction, and the problem of excessive general waste. Referring once more to the example of Shezi sandbank, Fang points out that the wastes and used earth from construction sites piled up on the island are mostly the result of the government’s failed urban planning. The mouth of the Keelung River is always filled with floating pollutants. According to Fang, the main reason for this is the dam built upstream, which means that clean water is intercepted for city use; and then from the midstream onward, the water quality deteriorates rapidly (55). In the downstream sections, wastewater emissions from factories and households are “poured” into the river en masse (55). Since the ownership of certain parts of Shezi sandbank is unclearly defined, private companies often casually dump the used earth from construction sites without obtaining legal permission (54). These observations of Fang demonstrate that it is usually the marginalized urban outcasts who suffer the most from water pollution. The pollution of the watercourses in cities and its effects on human inhabitants can be read as a form of ruination that remains obliquely linked to the colonial legacy of Taiwanese society (i.e., the neocolonial capitalist system). In view of the above, we can see that the specific structural arrangement of Fang’s text calls for ethical and political reflection on the part of the reader regarding the degraded water environments of urban areas. From the exhibition of invisible

watercourses through particular text-image arrangements to the emphasis on social inequality in her portrayals of degraded urban water environments, Fang's writing not only presents the social outcasts and the polluted waters as forms of colonial ruination but also, more importantly, calls on the readers to reimagine how we might live with these colonial ruinations in the context of contemporary capitalist society.

Through its application to the literary works of Syaman and Fang, the concept of "colonial ruination" proposed by Ann Laura Stoler takes on a concrete form. The colonial ruinations depicted in these texts, be they destroyed coastline, damaged marine biodiversity, or polluted city watercourses, are in one way or another connected to the colonial legacies manifested most visibly in the capitalist economic system. These (in)visible colonial ruinations are not only what people are left with and have to endure, for they have also turned the people into part of the colonial ruins. As seen in Syaman's and Fang's works, the exploited Tao laborers, the discriminated sex workers, and the marginalized urban aboriginals are rendered "nomad bodies" by socio-ecological degradations, and their subjectivity thus lingers on in a liminal space. Through these authors' literary representations, I have mapped out the exploited human and natural ecology that arises in the continuation of Taiwan's colonial past to its neocolonial present.

This chapter not only demonstrates that a new ecocritical literary approach for revisiting the (post)colonial history of Taiwan is on the rise but also shows that this ecological perspective can offer a more comprehensive understanding of how the colonial mechanism and its legacies are correlated with regional specificities, in this instance the marine and river environments of Taiwan. The specific attention to water environments gives a new ecocritical lens that incorporates some specific features of the Asia-Pacific region and thus avoids seeing "nature" as a homogenous category. Apart from Syaman and Fang, more and more contemporary Taiwanese writers, such as Wu Ming-yi or Wang Jia-xiang 王家祥, have adopted this new approach. And some of them have also obtained international recognition for the writing they have produced.¹⁵

To conclude, as mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, I consider that Taiwanese literature's greatest contribution to the contemporary literary world is its contextualization of the colonial and postcolonial experiences in the Asia-Pacific region. This can be understood at two different levels. First, by incorporating an ecological perspective that highlights the *water environments* so often present in postcolonial Taiwanese literature, this new

approach can further shape other works of ecoliterature produced in the region, especially in those countries that have shared similar colonial experiences. For example, Taiwan and Korea both endured long-term Japanese imperial occupation until the end of World War II partially as a result of their valuable natural resources, and they also underwent American neocolonial and economic control in the Cold War period largely for geopolitical reasons. Although there are studies of Korean water policy reforms that examine river basin development and its negative environmental impacts during the Japanese imperial occupation,¹⁶ little discussion of water environments has taken place in the literary domain. In this regard, the examined Taiwanese ecoliterature might be able to lend itself as a model. Second, the theoretical concept of the “nomad body,” which emerges from Taiwan’s Indigenous ecowriting, can also form part of a strategy of decolonial reading and so could potentially be applied to other Indigenous ecocriticism from other Pacific archipelagos. Researching this new literary paradigm would thus appear to have significant potential with regard to the development of an alternative ecocritical theory stemming from the regional particularity of the Asia-Pacific countries.

Notes

1. Regarding the Kuomintang military regime, in 1949, the Republican government of the Kuomintang 國民黨 (Nationalist Party), led by Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek 蔣介石, retreated to Taiwan after losing the battle against the Communist Party in Mainland China. After the immediate takeover of Taiwan, the Kuomintang authoritarian one-party state ruled under the “Order of Martial Law” (*Jieyanling* 戒嚴令) for nearly forty years. This period, also known as White Terror (*Baise kongbu* 白色恐怖), left a strong mark on contemporary history, and it stands as one of the longest martial law periods in the world.

2. The name Syaman Rapongan 夏曼·藍波安 in Tao language actually means “the father of Rapongan.” In Tao culture, when one becomes the father of a firstborn child, he will no longer be known for his given name but only be referred to as “Syaman (the father) of . . .” The grandfather of the firstborn will also be referred to as “Syapan (the grandfather) of . . .” As neither Syaman nor Rapongan stands for the author’s family name, in the chapter, I choose to reference the author as Syaman, but readers should note that in other publications the same author might be referred to as Rapongan.

3. Williams and Chang’s research points out the Japanese exploitation of Taiwan’s natural resources, including agricultural goods, forestry, and water habitats initiated by the Japanese and further expanded under the KMT regime. The exploitation continues to burden the future of the Taiwanese. They further state that the Japanese government’s interests in forest and water resource exploitation in the inner mountain area of the island—building dams to satisfy electricity or irrigation needs and constructing freshwater lakes (e.g., Sun Moon Lake) for recreational purposes—led to serious environmental repercussions that have recently provoked political controversy in Taiwan. See Williams and Chang 15–16.

4. Taipower company, also known as Taiwan power company, is a government-run electric company in Taiwan. During the KMT military regime, heavy industries were the key focus of the government's general economic plan from the 1950s to the 1960s, which explains the huge demand for electricity.

5. It is important to note that the development of heavy industries in Taiwan had many negative impacts on the environment, as were experienced also by many other developing countries during the postwar era. It should be highlighted that these heavy industries were largely financed by the U.S. government because the Americans had a geopolitical interest in the Asia-Pacific region, especially in countries like Taiwan, South Korea, and the Philippines. This point will be further elaborated in the following paragraphs.

6. This point will be more fully discussed when we move on to the literary analysis of Fang's writing.

7. The original text is written in Chinese. The passage quoted here has been translated into English by the author. This applies to all other quotes from Syaman Rapongan's and Fang Hui-chen's works, unless specified otherwise.

8. Catching flying fish is one of the traditional tribal economic activities of Tao people. In Tao culture, to become a *real* man, it is essential for a Tao man to show that he has the ability to bring home fish. As Syaman denotes, a drying rack full of flying fish in one's backyard demonstrates the presence of a *real* man in the household. Before sailing out for the fish hunt, the man also needs to prove that he has the skills to build his own ship from scratch, with fine woods he selects and cuts down. Syaman Rapongan, *Hanghaijia de lian*, 78–79.

9. In the Tao language, both the terms “the body that comes after us” and “our gold” mean one's child or children.

10. In Syaman Rapongan's work *Tiankong de yanjing* 天空的眼睛 (Eyes in the skies) (2012), an example of Syaman himself being invited by a cetacean to go on a journey under the water is presented in the preface. The cetacean, whose name is Bawon 巴甯 (meaning “sea waves”), came to Syaman in his dream. Syaman was surprised that Bawon knows his childhood name, but the cetacean told him that he learned it from Syaman's great-grandfather. Other similar examples of a protagonist sharing the world with nonhuman beings are also evoked in *Kavavatanen No Ta-u Jimasik* 八代灣的神話 (The mythology of Badai Bay) (2011).

11. Cyanide fishing is a method of collecting live fish mainly for use in aquariums. It involves spraying the sodium cyanide mixture into the desired fish's habitat, thereby paralyzing the fish.

12. Reshma Ranjith and T. K. Pius further point out that, in ecofeminism, the theoretical challenge is often presented via an exposure of the colonization of nature and marginalized humans, as well as of the commodification of women and nature. See Ranjith and Pius 18.

13. Tanka people are known as *Danjia* 蜆家 in Chinese. They are boat people originally from the southern coast of China, sometimes referred to as “sea gypsies.”

14. A satirical web post from the Collective of Sex Workers and Supporters lampooned the irresponsible proposal from one of the former Taipei mayor candidates, who claimed he would transform Shezi into the Las Vegas of Taiwan if he were elected. See Miss GoGo 嬋's web post, “Shezi Dao Bian Lasi Weijiasi Songzhuxi Baodao Weilao” 社子島變拉斯維

加斯宋主席賣刀未老 (Shzei Island becomes Las Vegas, Chairman Song is not yet over the hill).

15. For example, Wu Ming-yi's *The Stolen Bicycle* (2017), which addresses the (post) colonial history of Taiwan through an environmental perspective, was long-listed for the 2018 Man Booker Prize. His cli-fi (climate fiction) *The Man with the Compound Eyes* (2014) (originally published in Chinese in 2011), which imagines the occurrence of environmental apocalypse in Taiwan provoked by the Great Pacific Trash Vortex, also won the French literary prize Prix du Livre Insulaire in 2014.

16. See Choi et al. 9.

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