

The Natural World as Sacred Presence: An Ecospiritual Reading of *The Man with the Compound Eyes*

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Abstract— *In the Anthropocene, due to rampant anthropogenic impact on ecological systems, a divide has occurred between human and nonhuman worlds, where the former exerts its power on the latter. This hierarchical relationship between them has proved detrimental to both. To challenge and dismantle this uneven paradigm, I discuss the scope of ecospirituality—which regards the nonhuman world as sacred—in promoting a harmonious relationship between humans and other-than-humans. This spiritual approach emphasises the collective evolution grounded in interconnectedness and interrelation among all life forms. Influenced by the ecological philosophies of Thomas Berry and Thomas Clarke, I argue that ecological space is sacred for the islanders of Taiwan, with whom they communicate and stay in communion. I foreground their familial relationship with the natural world, highlighting coexistence rather than domination. Besides, I contend that the islanders deem nonhuman objects as agential entities that help shape their realities. Moreover, I examine Wu Ming-Yi's depiction of 'ecological memories' as a way to underscore the geological and temporal scales at which transformations in the nonhuman world become perceptible.*



Keywords— *agency; anthropocene; ecospirituality; ecological world; harmony; islanders; nonhuman; sacred*

I. INTRODUCTION

In his essay, "Imagining Earth," G.M. Haugen (2013) writes, "[w]ho would we become if we *honored* the other-than-human world as if it matters to them and to us?" (p. 143 my italics). In the Anthropocene, which has exposed the large-scale anthropogenic deterioration of the natural world, posing such a question may seem startling, as humans treat the nonhuman world merely as a resource and means of sustenance. To "honour" nature is to regard her presence, not as "useful" for humans, but as an invaluable entity that sustains human beings. It, thus, transforms the human-nature relationship where companionship and co-harmony between the two originate and predominate. The current environmental crisis reveals the consequences of exploiting the nonhuman world and hence lays bare the necessity to revive the human-nonhuman relationship. By revering nature, we perceive the innate essences in different objects

of nature and the interconnections and interrelations that exist between humans and nature. This reunion between the two makes Thomas Berry (1991), a cultural historian and priest, announce that we are at the termination phase of the Cenozoic era—that consists of the last 66 million years of Earth's history and extends to the present—and moving into the nascent ecozoic era that "...require[s] a spiritual discipline that involves a change from our anthropocentrism to a biocentrism and a geocentrism (p. 42). It manifests that the collective whole of the natural and the human worlds makes life possible on the Earth, and that humans cannot limit being in harmony with each other but have to develop harmonious relationships with all life forms as they all co-exist and co-evolve with each other. To bring stability to the already degraded planet, "we have to understand that the universe is in us as we are in the universe" (Clarke, 1991, p. 58). This human-nonhuman embeddedness indicates that

one's existence depends on the other and that this relationship thrives as long as humans understand and value the universe that lies beside them. Focusing on the human-nature bonding, Thomas Berry (2009) emphasises, “[t]here is no such thing as a “human community” without the earth and the soil and the air and the water and all living forms. Without these, humans do not exist. There is, therefore, no separate human community. Humans are woven into the larger community. The larger community is the sacred community” (p. 43). The human world and the ecological world are, thus, a collectivity where each entity is valuable, precious, and equally important, because of which the balance in the two worlds is maintained. Considering nonhumans as members of the larger community is to see them as material agents that play essential roles in the functioning of ecological systems that sustain the human world. Through this understanding, our relationship with the outside world is not materialistic but spiritual, where nature becomes holy and pious as she is entangled with our universe, and any harm to her becomes sacrilege. Drawing attention to the revered world of nature, Wangari Maathai (2010) writes, “we all have a need to feel at ease and in harmony with ourselves and the environment within which we live.” While Maathai advocates for the harmony between humans and nature, Thomas Berry and Thomas Clarke move forward to regard the nonhuman world as sacred and on par with humans. Putting these ideas together, they not only emphasise the strengthening of the human-nature relationship but also seek to address the ecological problems that are an outcome of human encroachment into the natural world. Drawing on these writers in general and the concept of ecospirituality in particular, I examine how the ecological space becomes sacred for the coastal islanders of Taiwan and their relationship with the natural world. I also study the value of nonhuman life forms for these islanders, who consider them agential entities.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

As far as the survey of literature goes, Sana Shahzadi and Sadia Akram explore climate catastrophes and environmental disruptions by employing the theoretical framework of ecocriticism, while mainly drawing on Garrard's ideas of apocalypse, pollution, and Earth. They also focus on eco-anxiety and solastalgia as these manifest in the various characters in the novel. Their concerns also extend to environmental changes brought about by anthropogenic activities. Kanyu Wang et al., through Ivakhiv's tri-ecological morphisms theory, study a multifaceted network of island ecology. He further investigates the ecological disruptions in coastal Taiwan and their impact on the islanders, emphasising the mental suffering

and identity crisis in the characters who eventually learn to adapt and adjust to the environmental and social challenges. Justin Prystash studies how *The Man* engages in the reciprocal aesthetic enmeshment that occurs between nonhumans, humans, and inorganic objects. He also focuses on nature from a plastic point of view, while drawing on speculative realism. Besides, he examines the Daoist aesthetics and its connections with the novel. Darryl Sterk delineates the man with the compound eyes as representing a technologically mediated vision of nature. He showcases that the man is a technologically advanced figure who inspires a sublime aesthetic. Robin Chen-Hsing Tsai investigates how the characters in the novel respond affectively to the environmental crisis in the period of the Anthropocene using the new materialism of the Brian approach.

III. ECOSPIRITUALITY AND THE ECOLOGICAL WORLD

Ecospirituality is a faith-based approach that regards nature as sacred to develop a familial bond between humans and nature. Spirituality, in essence, is “the way one relates to or with the sacred” (Wheeler, 2022, p. 1). This traditional mode of conceiving the sacred seeks the sacred in a higher authority like God or other higher being “that transcends us” (p. 2). Ecospirituality, on the other hand, designates our “immediate presences” (nature) as the sacred. The sacred, thus, is not something that lies beyond us but beside us. “The historical roots of ecospirituality,” says Kate Rigby (2016), “are found in the native traditions of the people who were colonized in the East.” These people lived in harmony with nature, worshipped her and paid respect to her. Ecospirituality, thus, views humans as imbricated within nature, where both are co-dependent and co-evolve. For R. Wheeler (2022), ecospirituality “...describes how one relates to the sacred within the context of our natural, global, or even cosmic ecosystem (homes) of which we all form a part” (p. 1). It augments our “awareness” of the presence of nonhumans in our environment and encourages their acceptance and appreciation as beings possessing unique characteristics. Experience forms an essential component of ecospirituality as it is through our experience of the nonhumans that we comprehend their true value, worth, and place in the world and our lives. Such an experience deepens our relationship with them. Other spiritual concepts, like ecomysticism, eliminate the differences between two entities when clubbing them together. Ecospirituality retains the individual differences of entities while bringing them together, as it regards the concealment, assimilation, or suppression of these differences as the annihilation of individualities of things (or inherent

essences of things). It is because of these individual essences of things that an ecosystem can function and maintain stability. It, thus, celebrates the differences and similarities in things. Ecospirituality is, hence, a perception according to which both humans and nonhumans are connected, and it is the interdependence between the two that makes their survival possible. It gives a central role to myths and legends in helping humans realise their union with nonhuman forms of life. Ecospirituality debunks the hierarchical structure of human knowledge where the nonhuman world is merely held to serve human needs. It lays bare the interdependence and interconnectedness between all life forms. It, thus, theorises the ways and means through which humans can preserve and respect the natural world. According to Virginia Jones, an environmentalist, “[e]co-spirituality is about helping people experience ‘the holy’ in the natural world and recognise their relationship as human beings to all creation.” Ecospirituality helps embrace everything in the world, microcosmically. It is to accept the natural world as it is, learn to adapt to the damaged world, and put in efforts to save the nonhuman world.

Humans have been conceiving the natural world as separate from the human world, the Cartesian duality that proved noxious for the former, and in the Anthropocene period, humans witness its impact on their lives as well. Sanctifying the natural world, then, aims not only to bestow respect on it but also to develop a consciousness of the importance of the existence of nature in our lives. Highlighting the value of ecological systems, Thomas Berry (2009) maintains that “[w]ithout the outer world as it is, we would have no inner world or imagination” (p. 166). Assigning sacredness to the outer world is an acknowledgement of the fact that humans totally rely on the nonhuman world in their day-to-day life. Bringing holiness from the divine to the mundane indicates that the presence of ‘ordinary’ objects of the world is as crucial for sustaining life as the presence of ‘sacred’ objects. It, hence, makes it apparent that anything that enables human existence can be called sacred in nature. Noting this renewed relationship between humans and nature, M.H. Talukder (2014) states, “[a] companionship with nature demonstrates a higher mental capacity to view nature differently, which is more intimate, emotional, and place-based” (p. 125). The world behind us is not a static one, but an active and responsive one that helps us create our subjective world. What emanates from our communion with the natural world is that our formation as humans is incomplete without the presence of the former. We evolve both subjectively and collectively only due to the presence of and our involvement, and association with the outer world.

IV. THE REVERED ECOLOGIES OF THE ISLANDERS

On the fictional island of Wayo Wayo, lives a community of people who barely know the presence of other continents on Earth. Their language is created by the first Sea Sages out of “...the sounds of seabirds” (Wu, 2014, p. 168). The religion that they follow is formed by their sages under the guidance of their god, Kabang. In their belief system, value and regard for nature are of paramount significance. The sages of Wayo Wayo—the Earth Sage and the Sea Sage—possess all the knowledge of the land and the sea, respectively. Throughout their lives, they transfer this knowledge to the disciples who are deemed fit to become the next sages of the land. This transfer of invaluable knowledge related to the land and the sea to future generations indicates the islanders' deep connection with nature. It is this indigenous knowledge that enables the people to adopt sustainable ways of living, predict the weather, and Atele'i, the protagonist of the novel, to build a *Talawaka* (boat) for himself and learn the techniques to survive on the sea. The indigenous knowledge, thus, plays a pivotal role when it comes to meeting the environmental challenges. This knowledge abounds in spiritual teachings where both human and nonhuman share equal value. In particular, it brings forth the sanctity and value of different nonhuman beings for the islanders. Furthermore, the Wayo Wayoan people consider some of the beings as avatars of the Kabang. For them, “[t]he *asamu*...was a black-and-white fish sent to spy on people and to test them. For this reason, it was counted among the creatures that couldn't be eaten” (p. 10).

Set in Taiwan and a small island of Wayo Wayo, a fictional creation of Wu Ming-Yi, the novel, *The Man with the Compound Eyes*, portrays various communities of people who hold the green world in high esteem. Showing reverence for nature is not only an individual act for these people, but also a collective decision they consciously make. Of course, this decision-making does not take place in a formal meeting among people, but is an outcome of observation of and introspection about nature. The sages of the island go through these processes of learning throughout their lives, which they ultimately transmit to their children. The Sea Sage “could...foretell the mood of the sea, knowing whether it would be fair or foul, in high spirits or low, and presage precipitation and ocean flow...[H]e had to listen carefully to the news brought back by every seabird, every gust of wind and every little shell” (Wu, p. 167). Under the guardianship of the sea sages, the boys learn about the sea until they turn into their youths “and until the youths endured the rite of passage and become men” (p. 10). Turning boys into men is not just a physical transformation, but also attaining maturity through learning that qualifies

them to be the next sages. Thus, for these boys, reaching the stage of sagehood is not circumscribed to mere learning, but to the realisation of the value and significance of nonhumans in their lives.

The most important lesson that sagehood yields to the sages is getting acquainted with the art of loving nonhumans. It helps them forge a strong bond with other-than-humans and even prevents them from causing any harm to the latter. It allows them to co-exist with others in peace and harmony. Comprehending the need for a balanced relationship between humans and nonhumans, the Earth Sage advises the children of the island that “[y]ou must love the land, my children, and ring it with your love. For the land is the most precious thing on this island. It is like a rain, like the heart of a woman... In all the world, the only thing worth trusting in are the land, the sea, and Kaban, my children” (Wu, p. 11). Their love for the land, the sea, and other things makes these nonhuman entities sacred for them. These things are not mere ‘objects’ for them, but they hold them to be ‘subjects.’ They put their trust in them as they do in any fellow human. Trusting in these nonhuman subjects might mean that the people believe the subjects assist them in living on the island. The trust in these subjects is, therefore, the confirmation of people's awareness of “[t]he arresting gazes of nature...” (Sterk, 2016, p. 190), bringing the two together. Through the awareness of the intersubjective gaze, people are able to appreciate and honour the presence of nonhumans. It is evident from the fact that the “[p]eople believed that dying while gazing at the sea was the grace of Kabang. Their lifelong dream was to arrive at the moment of death with an image of the ocean in the ocean of the mind” (p. 13). Thus, the people's honouring of the sea is manifested by their desire to die before the sea to be redeemed by it. Even in death, they do not part from nature but become one with her.

Corey Byrnes (2014), in his review of the novel *The Man* writes, “Wu's portrait of the people and traditions of the fictional Wayo Wayo is lovingly detailed, but it also bears the mark of a primitive romanticism so retrograde as to seem ironic.” Byrnes is right that these people's traditions and way of life are ‘primitive’ when we compare them with the progressive cultures of ‘Haven’ in the novel. But the moment we reflect on what cost this ‘progress and development’ comes, we begin to question the very concept of ‘primitive’ and ‘cultured.’ The centuries of ‘progress and development’ have taught humans how to exploit resources of the Earth, eliminate forests, alter weather patterns, and so on and so forth. So the problem lies more in how we gauge the progress of a culture than the traditions of a culture themselves. At one level, the Anthropocene itself questions the ‘force’ of human reasoning, which has affected the deterioration of the environment so much that it has reached

the brink of the sixth extinction. How could a nation be deemed ‘progressive’ if its ideals of progress cause annihilation of its existence? Wu, thus, returns to the Earth approach advocating for the way of life which regards nonhumans as an integral part of human existence. Through this approach, he underscores the fact that when it comes to survival, it is not the survival of one particular community or race or of nature alone, but rather co-survival or co-existence of all life and non-life forms present on Earth.

The Wayo Wayoan people live their lives in accordance with the commandments of their God, Kabang, who makes them aware of the importance of living in harmony with nonhumans. Kabang set out guidelines for them

I can allow you an island, but your numbers must never exceed the trees growing thereupon. You will lose the ability to subsist in the sea for more than a short length of time, and you will be exiled from the vast, shoreless, open ocean. As prisoners on the island, you will know isolation and the fear of drowning. Once a friend, the sea will become a foe. It once gave but now it will take. Yet you must still rely on it, trust in it, worship it (Wu, p. 166 original italics).

The commandments people receive have less to do with their God than with their relationship with the nonhuman world. To maintain that relationship, they have to keep their population in check. They cannot overconsume resources or strike any other imbalance. The transgression, on the other hand, will jeopardise their existence on the island. The very sea that sustains them will submerge them. These dire prognostications by Kabang will be the repercussions of ecological breakdown at the hands of which human and nonhuman beings will have to suffer. In order to prevent this breakdown, the islanders have to stay connected and live in communion with their natural environment.

The inhabitants of this small island consider the nonhumans as alive and cogent. They hold them to be active members of their community. They converse with the forest, the stars, the sky, and the clouds, understanding them to “be the avatars of *Dihanin* (the host of spirits) (Wu, p. 109). Thus, these nonhumans are not material beings for them, but are glorified to be the incarnations of divine beings. Adding this attribute to nonhumans increases their significance for the people and nourishes their relationship with the former. It, besides, helps them to develop familial bonding with other-than-humans. When Anu, Dahu, Hafay, Sara, and Detlef visit the Forest Church, a forest owned by Anu, they sense it to be a lively place. They visit this place to connect with nature, to know it closely, and to attain peace in its company. For Anu, plants and animals are fellow species which have dignity and deserve respect. While introducing

his guests to the Forest Church, he warns them that “[t]here might be big brothers and sisters here, so we need to poke the grass with a stick as you go along... A big brother or sister is a poisonous snake. We must not just say ‘snake.’ That would be disrespectful” (p. 260). Assigning the name of brother or sister to nonhumans bridges the gap between humans and nature, long established by Western philosophical traditions. It makes them conscious that humans are not the only beings who share the space on the Earth, but other species also have an equal claim on it. The Forest Church is, thus, symbolic of humans reviving their relationship with nonhumans, acknowledging their ecological values and discovering their role in sustaining them, and finding ways to co-exist in harmony.

For Taiwan islanders, plants and animals are like their family members. They seriously take into consideration their protection and preservation. The patch of land that Anu gives the name of Forest Church was one intended by a builder to “build a columbarium on it” (Wu, p. 260). But Anu buys it to keep the forest flourishing. He prevents the forest ecosystem from breaking down due to its demolition by capitalists and allows humans to recognise their interconnection with the ecological world. When Anu takes Detlef to one of the caves of the Forest Church, he tells him that the cave does not know him and suggests that he get acquainted with it (p. 262). Thus, for Anu, awareness of what we think about nature is equally important as awareness of what nature thinks about us. With this consciousness in mind, in the Forest Church, Hafay “felt she had finally found a vessel that could contain her, a shell in which she could live like a hermit crab” (p. 262); Detlef “had never been so impressed as he was now of what the power of nature, so much greater than his own, was capable of” (p. 264); and for Anu, “the mountain is our holy land...” (p. 268). Hafay finds her true abode in the forest, a place she feels in sync with. Detlef is astonished at the supremacy of nature when he witnesses its regenerative powers. And Anu is so fascinated by the beauty of the forest that he declares it to be holy. Each character goes through the epiphanous moments where they discover and recognise nature's hidden powers that bring them closer to her.

V. HUMAN COMMUNION WITH OTHER-THAN-HUMANS

The characters of the novel are ecoposthumans who not only regard their connections with the natural world but also feel disheartened at the violence perpetuated against it. It is not only at the surface level that the characters are connected with other-than-humans, but they also relate to them at an emotional level as well. When Sara sees the sea filled with human trash, she feels agonised because “what

hurt the sea hurt her personally” (Wu, p. 201). It indicates that nonhuman entities have become a part of the inner psyche of the islanders. They realise that the inner, often invisible systemic disruption of ecosystems impacts their survival and visible violations of ecological systems, like plastic pollution, affect them on both physical and psychological levels. In other words, they find themselves interconnected and interrelated with the ecological world. These ecoposthumans have higher levels of empathetic sensibilities, because of which they feel for both life and non-life forms. When Alice sees garbage scattered around the sea, she is deeply moved by the changed state of it. Relating to the grief of the sea, she says, “...having spent time with the sea on a daily basis, I can feel its emotions. Now the sea seems to be made out of pain and misery” (p. 173). Thus, the ecospiritual way of thinking of ecoposthumans helps them to relate emotionally with nonhumans. It makes them feel and question the human destabilisation of nature. It heightens the sense of their responsibility to care for and protect the well-being of the Earth.

For various characters, nature does not exist for a few people or nations, but belongs to the whole of humanity. For Amundsen, “...every sea was “*our sea*,” “*our Indian ocean*,” “*our Atlantic*,” “*our Pacific*” (Wu, p. 232 original italics). It showcases the oneness of the Earth where humans and nature are a collective whole. Detlef may be suggesting that water in the ocean and seas is in a continuous flow. The water that passes into the Indian Ocean reaches the Pacific Ocean, which then flows to other areas. Just naming an ocean after a particular country does not make it their possession. Everyone has an equal claim on it. However, this claim is not in terms of owning it, but to be a part of this broader system, which makes life possible for all life forms. It is also in terms of humans behaving as responsible eco-citizens of the Earth. This is true for Amundsen, who leaves his profession of hunting whales to become their saviour. He tells her daughter, “Sara, I renounce my identity as a seafaring hunter. The time has come. I really feel I must relinquish my former identity. I have to try to make a change or I will feel that I have lived my life in vain” (p. 239). He, instead, joins an international organisation that stands against the killing of seals. He takes part in campaigns and protests highlighting the need to save aquatic animals.

The zeal for speaking for the welfare of animals is also found in Sara, a marine biologist from Norway. She primarily comes to Taiwan to study the impact of the trash vortex on marine animals. She cannot bear the violent killing of whales in the sea. She reprimands Detlef for his support of whale hunting. She bluntly tells him that “the reason you think it is no big deal is because you have never seen a mink whale bleed to death right before your eyes”

(Wu, p. 198). Sara's concern for nonhuman life forms shows her true devotion and love for them. She even wants whalers to change their profession so that whales can be saved. Her sincere regard for them provokes Detlef to question his beliefs about nature and finally compels him to accept their innate value. There is a class of characters who are always conscious of nature's significance for them. They include Dahu, who acts as a volunteer to clean up the shore from the accumulated trash; Alice, who rescues a cat from drowning in a flood; Sara, who opposes the hunting of water bodies; Anu, who risks his life to protect a forest; and the man with the compound eyes, who challenges the human-centric notions that disregard nature. However, there is another class of characters who gradually grow accustomed to the value, status, and existence of the natural world. These include Amundsen, who spends most of his life hunting animals in forests and oceans, while he learns that hunting is an act of cruelty against the animals and nature. Detlef, who seriously considers leaving his job of digging tunnels, is inspired by Sara's profound love and empathy for nature. The journeys of these characters shift from ignorance of the value of the natural world to the knowledge and acknowledgement of the sacredness and usefulness of other life forms on the Earth.

VI. NONHUMANS AS AGENTIAL BEINGS

Ghosh (2016), in his nonfiction text *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*, extensively discusses the agency of nonhumans, by which he means that "...dogs, horses, elephants, chimpanzees, and many other animals possess intelligence and emotions" (p. 86). They act independently and significantly influence humans. For Jane Bennett (2010), nonhumans not only have the capacities (she calls vitality) to obstruct human will and designs, but they also possess powers "...to act as quasi-agents, forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own." These nonhumans become 'actants' in Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory. For him, "an actor is an entity that modifies another entity in a trial (2004, p. 237). They (actor/actant/nonhuman) have the agency to act, to impact systems, and the capacity to bring changes in a course of action. Although these writers slightly differ in their theorisation of the agency of nonhumans, their central focus remains on the vibrant and cogent nature of nonhumans, which escape human control and are potent enough to shape human reality. Wu reveals this aspect of nonhumans through the enigmatic character of the man with the compound eyes, who is a ubiquitous figure overseeing the actions of all other characters. He is fully aware of the potency of nonhumans in sustaining and regulating themselves, forging a web of relations with other beings—

humans and nonhumans—thereby driving considerable changes in their reality. The man's omnipresence and prescience are, thus, symbolic of the ever-presence of nonhuman forces in the lives of the characters. These forces, like the storms, floods, trash vortex, Forest Church, toss Atele'i on the coast of Taiwan, displace Alice and Hafay from their homes, and attract people like Dahu to clean up the beach and unify the characters like Hafay, Dahu, Umav, Detlef and Sara to seek comfort in nature (Forest Church).

The man with the compound eyes is simultaneously aware of the interdependence existing between humans and nature and the agency of the latter. Speaking about the importance of nonhumans, he tells Thom

No life can survive without other lives, without the ecological memories other living creatures have, memories of the environments in which they live. People don't realize they need to rely on the memories of other organisms to survive. You think that flowers bloom in colorful profusion just to please your eyes. That a wild boar exists just to provide meat for your table. That a fish takes the bait just for your sake. That only you can mourn. That a stone falling into a gorge is of no significance. That a sambar deer, its head bent low to sip at a creek, is not a revelation ... When in fact the finest movement of any organism represents a change in an ecosystem (Wu, p. 281).

The man initially refutes the human notion that memory is the domain of humans only. Rather, he believes that nonhuman beings in the natural world also possess memory. It is because of their memories that enable the functioning of ecosystems. Memory helps nonhumans to remember the particular conditions of a place fit for their growth and survival, as the man says, "[m]igratory birds remember the seacoast, whales remember the boat that harpooned them, and seal pups that manage to avoid annihilation will remember the murderous coat-clad, club-carrying creature that chased them. I kid you not; they'll never forget. But only human beings have invented a tool to record memory" (Wu, p. 279). This thriving of nonhumans in a desired place indirectly sustains humans as well. With the termination of the "ecological memories" of nonhumans, all life forms would cease to exist. The man, besides, critiques the anthropocentric view of nature existing for the sake of humans. Plants, animals and other things in nature are entities that lead independent lives. We may put them to our use, but they are not merely to serve us. Each of them exists for itself, but each is connected to the other in a way that a slight change could hinder their web of relationships. Wu, thus, puts forward a 'Gaia' kind of view of the Earth where all life forms are interconnected. Wu highlights the gap that

exists between humans and animals due to human unwillingness to accept that the latter have evolved cognitive abilities to think and remember. Just because they cannot record their memories, something humans are enabled to do, does not mean they have no importance of their own. Can one's significance be solely gauged by one's ability to record memory and not by just having the ability to remember? The author, thus, problematizes the relationship of (human) memory with its record-keeping (writing) that prioritises human life over nonhumans, whose memory is outrightly disregarded.

The man with the compound eyes compares human writing to nature, assuming that "the world reconstructed in writing approximates even more closely what you call 'the realm of nature.' It is an organism" (p. 279). By this comparison, Wu highlights the evolving system of writing and nature: the human record of events or theorisation of concepts evolves over time; the same is true of nature as well. It functions like an organism whose every part grows and works in tandem with others. Like writing induces novelty and innovation in knowledge, nature also produces newness within the entities inhabiting its realm through its self-evolving mechanism. The analogy further alludes to the idea of human culture as evolving through the means of writing and nature that of its inherent laws. The author, thus, implies that nature is not dead, mute, or inert as it has been considered for centuries. It is alive, ever-growing, and working according to its own laws. By introducing Thom to the memory of nonhumans, the man enlightens him about the secrets of the natural world. The analogy could also mean that humans measure their progress through the development of knowledge (of science and technology). But how could humans measure the progress of nature if they are ignorant of its laws? The author, hence, invites the reader to set foot into 'the realm of nature' where progress is measured at a geological time scale. At this scale, the evolution of nature takes place at a very slow pace. When Thom falls off the cliff, he seeks the help of the man to save him, but the man shows complete indifference to his pleadings, telling him that "[t]he only reason for my existence is that I can merely observe, not intervene" (Wu, p. 282). He seems to speak on behalf of nature, for whom human events, which take place in a very short span of time, have no significance for it. These moments are so minuscule that they barely attract her attention. Inversely, for humans, the progress of nature is so slow that they fail to comprehend its evolution. It can be said that Wu's introduction of "ecological memories" of nonhumans is his technique to make the characters understand their (nonhumans') slow growth and regard their presence.

VII. CONCLUSION

In sum, the novel, read through an ecospiritual lens, offers the answers of co-existence and co-harmony between human and nonhuman forms of life to the problem of the Anthropocene crisis. Inspired by the ecological writings of Thomas Berry and Thomas Clarke, I found out that the characters hold nature in high esteem. Further, the analysis reveals that the coastal islanders of Taiwan consider nature sacred and maintain a familial relationship with it. They slowly grow conscious of the natural environment, nourish their companionship with the nonhuman world and see themselves entangled within it. Through their communion with the natural world, they learn its importance in their lives and work actively to preserve it. Moreover, the characters feel love, empathy, and mercy for nonhuman lives. They do not believe in the hierarchical human-nature relationship, but in the one in which both co-become and co-evolve. The characters in the novel take any cruelty against animals personally and work painstakingly to grant them rights that would guarantee their safety. By recognising the interdependence and interconnectedness between the two, the characters refrain from activities that might harm this relationship. Besides, the coastal inhabitants see nonhuman life forms as lively, cogent, and responsive. Storms, floods, and typhoons are regarded as entities that carry agency. These entities put the lives of characters in jeopardy, thus threatening their survival. Further, animals are seen as sentient and intelligent beings, challenging traditional human notions that associate these attributes solely with humans. These animals play a vital role in shaping human reality. Without their presence, humanity in general would cease to exist. Finally, the paper views Wu Ming-Yi's portrayal of 'ecological memories' as a strategy to foreground geological and temporal scales at which ecological changes become understandable.

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