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# The Openness of Death: (Re)constructing Indigenous Identity in Post–martial Law Taiwan

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## Abstract

This article presents a set of interrelated close readings of works by four Indigenous Taiwanese cultural producers—the Puyuma writer Sun Dachuan, the Atayal painter Anli Genu, the Truku sculptor Labay Eyong, and the Atayal director Laha Mebow. I discuss the important symbolic role Taiwan's Indigenous population has played in the development of a Taiwanese national imaginary and how this has affected Indigenous cultural expression. I argue that rather than trying to root out the improper intrusion of this 'outside' force into Indigenous cultural life, the works of these four cultural producers instead show how Indigenous identity can flourish through an honest navigation of the relationship brought about by that intrusion. They present an understanding of Indigenous identity in Taiwan as convoluted and changing, never fully in possession of itself but not any less authentic for that. My theorisation of this builds on Sun Dachuan's notion of 'the openness of death', which he uses to highlight the need for Indigenous culture to transform itself in dynamic relation to the wider context in which it is embedded.

## Keywords

indigeneity – indigenous literature – identity – film – art

When President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) made her famous formal apology to the Indigenous communities of Taiwan in 2016, she stated that she was

'representing the government' (Tsai, 2016). As president of the Republic of China (中華民國, ROC), and leader of the pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party (民主進步黨, DPP), founded a year before the end of martial law in 1987, it might seem obvious which government she was talking about. But she apologised not only for crimes against Indigenous peoples committed since the end of Kuomintang (國民黨, KMT) one-party rule, nor even solely for atrocities committed since Taiwan was brought under the jurisdiction of the ROC following Japan's defeat in the Second World War. She apologised for crimes carried out by every settler government that had ever ruled on the island, from the Dutch colonists of the seventeenth century up to her own administration. Melissa Brown (2004: 13) has suggested that the new nationalist discourse that came into full bloom on the island in the 1980s worked to differentiate Taiwan from mainland China by 'constructing Taiwanese identity as an amalgam of Aborigine and Han ancestry'. In Tsai's apology, however, it seems that the Indigenous population is not just one part of a hybridised identity, but stands, metonymically, for the nation *tout court*. As Benedict Anderson (2006: 26) famously suggests, the imaginary collective that makes up a nation 'is conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history', and the only solid community here is the Indigenous population to whom the apology is addressed. Only by apologising to them on behalf of disparate governments can Tsai suture discontinuous periods of rule into a unified narrative of national history.

Critiques can certainly be made of the way Indigeneity is instrumentalised for the purposes of Taiwanese nationalism, and I address some of these below. But in this article, I want to explore how Indigenous cultural producers in Taiwan have themselves represented and theorised the relationship between Indigenous identity and this wider nationalist interest in Indigenous culture. Their work offers up something more than 'critique', taken as a catch-all term for various hermeneutic techniques that aim to unearth the hidden operations of ideology and power. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2003: 123) noted at the turn of the millennium that such critique is, at base, paranoiac. As Rita Felski (2015: 114) writes, it 'first sniffs out the guilt of others, only to engage, finally, in an anguished flurry of breast-beating and self-incrimination, a relentless rooting out of concealed motives and impure thoughts'. The four Indigenous cultural producers I look at here (a writer, a painter, a sculptor, and a filmmaker) work in a rather less anxious affective register. All their work demonstrates, this article argues, that there exists what I call (for reasons explained below) an obligatory entanglement of Indigenous identity with the national political culture of the ROC Taiwan. But rather than working to root out the improper intrusion of this outside force into Indigenous cultural life, the works show

how Indigenous identity can only flourish through an honest navigation of the relationship brought about by that intrusion. This is a relationship fraught with inequalities—economic, political, epistemological—and honesty requires a critical confrontation with them. But this is ancillary to what I take to be the main aim of these works, which is to demonstrate how terrains of unequal power can be navigated to facilitate authentic Indigenous self-expression.

Beginning with an exploration of how the new political landscape post-1987 affected Indigenous cultural practice, I turn to the writings of the Puyuma essayist, editor, and politician Sun Dachuan (孫大川, Paelabang Danapan, b. 1953)<sup>1</sup> to explore the idea of obligatory entanglement, a notion I develop out of Sun's (2010: 103–104) writing, particularly his idea of 'the openness of death' (死亡的敞開性), and further develop in conversation with the work of Karen Barad (2010: 265). Comparing his own work as a writer working in the Chinese language with his great uncle's conversion to Christianity in the 1950s, Sun turns to the imagery of the resurrection to suggest that for Indigenous culture to survive it must adapt and transform itself. In exploring these ideas, I reference the work of the Atayal Christian minister and painter Anli Genu (賴安淋, Lai Anlin, b. 1958), whose work offers visual support to Sun's arguments by linking Indigenous cultural revival to the image of the cross. I then turn to discussions of Truku visual artist Labay Eyong's (林介文, Lin Jiewen, b. 1982) 2012 sculpture series *My Traditional Costume is Not Traditional* (我的傳統服飾不傳統) and Atayal director Laha Mebow's (陳潔瑤, Chen Jieyao, b. 1975) 2011 film *Finding Sayun* (不一樣的月光: 尋找莎韻) to further my argument about the relationship between Indigenous self-expression and Taiwanese national identity. In my conclusion, I suggest that while the works I analyse do seem to eschew the 'critical' in Sedgwick's and Felski's sense, an engagement with the openness of death is nevertheless part of a cultural politics through which the Indigenous communities of Taiwan have been able to win a certain amount of power in the national conversation.

As is often the case, the order in which I present my argument here traces my own process of discovery in reverse. It was with the works of these and other Indigenous artists that I began, and the wider social and political context with and against which they articulate themselves emerged as an important point of connection as I thought about them and their relationship to each other. My aim in writing has been to find a hermeneutical approach that could communicate this insight. Sun Dachuan's writing offered an explicit

1 As most of Sun's work is published under his Chinese name, I use it throughout the article. Otherwise, I use Indigenous names and give the Chinese name only in the first instance. Translations of all Chinese-language sources are my own.

theorisation of Indigenous cultural production's relationship to this context, and the works of Labay Eyang, Laha Mebow, and Anli Genu were selected as interlocutors because they seemed useful case studies for fleshing out ideas that emerged through a close reading of Sun's work. No hermeneutics is exhaustive, and the picture I present here is necessarily partial. I have achieved a good balance of genres, genders, and generations, but only three of the sixteen (officially) recognised Indigenous groups are represented—to have achieved breadth in this regard would have been impossible without compromising depth. Much is left out, besides: biographical details and details of each cultural producer's oeuvre are raised only where they are useful for elucidating my analysis. Furthermore, while I do offer a history of the emergence of the Indigenous rights movement and Indigenous cultural revitalisation, I do not offer an in-depth history of Indigenous literature, art, and film. A biographical or art-historical approach would no doubt have uncovered insights that I have missed, but the same is true in reverse. This essay is part of a broader nexus of scholarship, both already in existence and waiting to be written, just as the works I write about are not isolated objects but nodes in a wider and growing network of Indigenous cultural production. My hope regarding both is that, however partial it may be, I offer here a fresh view on these two interconnected fields.

### **1 All Things Shall Be Made New: Sun Dachuan, Anli Genu, and the Resurrection of Indigenous Culture**

While Tsai's apology itself was historically novel, the ceremony surrounding it was quite typical of Taiwanese politics since democratisation. It opened with a group of Paiwan tribespeople performing a ritual outside the Presidential Palace, where they announced their and the other Indigenous attendants' arrival before entering and being greeted by Tsai. This was followed by a ritual performed by a Bunun spirit medium in the hall where the apology was to be issued, in which she called upon her ancestral spirits to bless the meeting and the future of Taiwan and its Indigenous population. Finally, representing the vast majority of Indigenous Taiwanese who are Christian, six Indigenous clergymen conducted a group prayer in which they asked God to bless Taiwan and its Indigenous peoples, along with the new president and her new government. Such political deployment of Indigenous rituals is something that has been common in Taiwanese politics since the 1990s. As Michael Rudolph (2015: 347) writes, because of 'their role as indexes demonstrating Taiwan's

historical, cultural, and political uniqueness, Taiwan's aboriginal rituals were rediscovered in the 1990s not only by activists, but also by the Taiwanese government'. State funding for projects that aimed to revitalise Indigenous rituals that had fallen out of fashion became widespread, and this financial investment in Indigenous cultural practice reflected a growing investment in Indigenous culture as a means of accruing political legitimacy. This was not merely a DPP-led affair; in the 1990s, the KMT was the party in government. Chien-Min Yang (2014: 162) writes that then president and KMT chairman Lee Teng-hui (李登輝) 'strategically endorsed the burgeoning Taiwanese consciousness', which we might note included support for Indigenous cultural expression, as a means of gaining support from those who might be more likely to vote DPP.

Taiwanese national consciousness should not be thought of, therefore, as the purview of only one political faction, nor even one side of a binarised unification/independence debate.<sup>2</sup> As Scott Simon (2010: 728) notes, regarding their engagement with Indigenous culture, the main difference between the pan-green DPP-led camp and the pan-blue KMT-led camp is that the latter's 'candidates have better success at getting elected'. This is in large part the result of deep roots in the community that the party developed over the 40 years in which it had a monopoly on power, which finds physical manifestation in the People's Service Stations they operate within Indigenous townships (*ibid.*, 732). Nevertheless, political cachet only began to accrue to traditional Indigenous cultural practice within Taiwanese national culture because of the Indigenous rights movement, which, as Kun-hui Ku (2005: 99) observes, 'emerged within a larger opposition movement in the early 1980s' and of which the DPP was a direct outgrowth. This is something Sun Dachuan (2010: 106) notes, too, though he places the origin further back in time:

Having been baptised into 'nativist consciousness' in the 1970s and 'opposition culture' in the 1980s, the Indigenous movement seems to be flourishing. It has encouraged many Indigenous youths to return and

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2 According to Yang, in the 1990s most people living on the island considered themselves to be both Taiwanese and Chinese, though in the first years of the millennium the number of people identifying as solely Taiwanese overtook the number who felt themselves to have a dual identity. By this time, fewer than 10 percent of the public in Taiwan identified their national identity as being solely Chinese (Yang, 2014: 74, 108). Rather than unification versus independence, the important political question seems to be the extent to which a Taiwanese national identity and a Chinese national identity are mutually exclusive. But all parties must appeal to an electorate that overwhelmingly identifies themselves as, *mutatis mutandis*, Taiwanese nationals.

seek after tribal memories that disappeared long ago; it has ignited the flames of hope, giving everyone the opportunity to re-evaluate the fate of their own community.

The opposition movement itself did not emerge *ex nihilo* in the 1980s, for either the Indigenous or Han people of the island. While it was in that decade that the vocabulary of international Indigenous rights emerged in Taiwan, shaping Indigenous self-understanding and political tactics, it was cross-fertilised with a much longer lineage of local identity and resistance movements, both cultural and political.<sup>3</sup> This shared history seems to make the entanglement of contemporary Indigenous cultural revival and Taiwanese national identity an incontrovertible fact.

Rudolph uses this fact to critique contemporary Indigenous identity movements as both elitist and inauthentic. Drawing on Yunfang Qiu's (邱韻芳) research into the revival of Indigenous rituals among the Truku in the 1990s and early 2000s, he states that 'aboriginal intellectuals studied aboriginal concepts in the same way as researchers from the outside and translated them in a way that could be understood by the Han ... [while] ordinary people in the communities could no longer grasp [them]' (Rudolph, 2015: 368). Rudolph does not offer page numbers for this citation, but, if one looks in more detail at Qiu's work, this appears to be a rather one-sided presentation of what she observes. Only a page on from the section Rudolph seems to be drawing upon, Qiu shows how these same intellectuals responded to this problem: they developed a new thanksgiving ritual (*Mgay Bari*) to replace the 'Ancestral Spirit Ceremony' (祖靈祭) that had failed to find success among the Truku because it did not seem to have any real relationship to the existing community. Qiu (2013: 229)

3 The first of the two movements Sun refers to here is the nativist (本土) literary movement that is traditionally dated as beginning in the 1970s, though some of its earliest examples come from the late 1960s. It was a response by native-born Taiwanese to the modernist literary experimentation of contemporary Mainlander authors. Angelina C. Yee (2001: 93–95) presents the stories published by Pai Hsien-yung (白先勇) throughout the 1960s and gathered in his 1971 short story collection *Taipei People* (台北人) as an example of the latter, while she offers two stories published in 1967—Huang Chun-ming's (黃春明) 'Days Looking at the Sea' (看海的日子) and Wang Zhenhe's (王禎和) 'Oxcart for a Dowry' (嫁妝一牛車)—as exemplary early examples of the latter. While Sun emphasises the opposition movement of the 1980s, this itself had longer historical roots. Chi-Chieh Tang (2007: 119) suggests that the opposition movement of the 1980s and the eventual democratisation of Taiwan were only made possible because of the violent conflict of the Kaohsiung Incident and the open trials (conducted in part because of US government pressure) that followed, which launched the opposition outside the party (黨外, *dangwai*) movement that had developed in the 1970s to mainstream media attention for the first time. The *dangwai* would eventually evolve into the DPP.

writes that promotional materials related to *Mgay Bari* make clear that those within the movement to revitalise Indigenous rituals were ‘trying to further strengthen the group’s collective subjectivity by constructing a festival that they thought was better suited to contemporary Truku culture and which was not just a tradition recorded in books’. They themselves responded, it seems, to the very weakness Rudolph diagnoses.<sup>4</sup> That a large-scale ritual that might act as a tourist attraction was seen as the best way to strengthen the group’s collective subjectivity certainly points to the fact that outside interest in Indigenous culture played a role in shaping its development. But then one must ask the extent to which any community, especially a minoritised community, can hope to maintain its identity in isolation from the wider culture in which it is embedded.

This is precisely the topic that Sun Dachuan (2010: 94–95) takes up in an essay written in 1990, with reference to his great uncle, the ‘last chieftain [頭目, *toumu*] of our tribe (the Puyuma of Binlang)’:

He seemed to be conscious very early on that the disintegration of the tribe could not be avoided. Because of this, he encouraged my older brothers and sisters to study, while also persuading people in our ethnic group, including my mother, to accept the Catholic faith (one of the reasons was that Catholicism would bring modern knowledge but without getting rid of many of the tribe’s rituals).

For many years, Sun experienced his great uncle’s conversion as a betrayal, one which plunged him and the rest of his community into an identity crisis (Sun, 2010: 100). But, as he came to understand the historical context in which his great uncle made that decision, it transformed his understanding of the event. In the 1950s, when this conversion took place, the KMT had begun to implement its strategy of 山地平地化 (*shandi pingdihua*), which aimed to make the less assimilated Indigenous communities that resided in mountainous regions (*shandi*) more like the Sinicised Indigenous people that resided in the plains (*pingdi*). Multiple policies contributed to this approach, as Tomonori Sugimoto (2018: 291–292) enumerates: Indigenous languages were forbidden,

4 The cultural producers I analyse here are certainly vulnerable to the charge that they are members of an ‘elite’. All are university-educated. Sun Dachuan, Anli Genu, and Labay Eyong spent periods studying abroad, and Laha Mebow worked in the film and television industries for many years before starting out as a director in her own right. These are conditions that enable their work, and no doubt inform it to a certain degree. But commonalities of Taiwanese Indigenous experience in general are interrogated in their work, and it is these commonalities on which I focus my attention.

women were exhorted to stay home, farming was encouraged to replace traditional hunting practices, and ‘the state also extensively intervened in realms such as hygiene, medicine, and marriage, deeming Indigenous customs to be backward, risky, wasteful, and even life-threatening’. In such a hostile environment, conversion was the only option available to preserve the tribe in any form, and Sun’s great uncle, rather than sticking to moribund traditional lifeways, ‘decided to get his people to open out towards the “future”’ (Sun, 2010: 104).

It is important to underline here that Sun does not intend to excuse the dispossession of Indigenous communities in Taiwan or elsewhere. His use of inverted commas around future ought to alert one to the fact that he does not subscribe to the kind of teleological evolutionary narrative of progress that works to justify colonialism by placing the supposedly civilised colonising culture at a more advanced stage than the ‘uncivilised’ natives.<sup>5</sup> The future here is simply the ability to go on at all, and the moribundity of tradition is a marker not of the value of tradition in itself but of its ability to survive in a particular environment. What I have translated as ‘open out’—敞開 (*changkai*)—plays on the imagery of resurrection, which in this same essay, Sun links to the ‘openness [*changkaixing*] of death’. Making a direct link between the fading of Indigenous traditions and biological death, Sun, drawing on existentialist Christian theology, argues that death is an integral part of life, and he makes the Heideggerian point that it is through knowledge of death that humankind is differentiated from animals. As he writes, “death” seems to have an “openness”, which enables us to open out to our true “selves”, to the “other”, to the “future”; it gives us the courage and momentum to march towards the mystery of Being’ (Sun, 2010: 104). And it is the figure of Jesus that Sun uses as the ultimate symbol for this vision: ‘Jesus’s “revolution” set out from what life is in itself [生命本身], cutting off all entanglements [糾葛] with outmoded traditions’ (Sun, 2010: 104).

However, to paraphrase Matthew 5:17, Jesus did not come to break with a tradition, but to fulfil one. And it is precisely the idea that his great uncle’s fidelity to the Puyuma people was expressed through what appeared to be a break that Sun is driving at here. At one point in this same essay, he compares

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5 Johannes Fabian (2014: 17) presents perhaps the most famous version of this argument in his book *Time and the Other*, where he states that anthropology ‘contributed to the intellectual justification of the colonial enterprise’ by promoting ‘a scheme in terms of which not only past cultures, but all living societies were irrevocably placed on a temporal slope, a stream of Time—some upstream, others downstream’. The idea of *shandi pingdihua* follows this logic, as the KMT saw the need to move the mountain Indigenous further up the stream of development.



the difficulties faced by Indigenous communities in the mid-twentieth century to the coming of night: ‘Night must come in the end ... rather than “opposing” the night, the only thing we can do is to prepare a lamp, to shine a light in the darkness ... Great Uncle chose in those years to prepare a lamp’ (Sun, 2010: 100). So, conversion is at once a break from tradition and a way out of the darkness, a death but also a resurrection—a means of going on. That a break might be a point of connection links to the idea of ‘cutting together/apart’ that is at the heart of Karen Barad’s (2010: 265) notion of entanglement, which can be used to supplement Sun’s own suggestion that resurrection entailed a break with the entanglements of tradition. Barad describes entanglement as a double movement that both connects and separates, and they suggest that it possesses an ‘hauntological nature’. This notion of hauntology is, of course, derived from Jacques Derrida’s *Specters of Marx*, where he uses it to highlight something ghostly (haunting) about the nature of being (ontology). Everything, for Derrida (2006: 30–31), ‘is enjoined ... ordered, distributed in the two directions of absence, at the articulation of what is no longer and what is not yet’.

The Presbyterian minister and Atayal artist Anli Genu’s 2009 mixed media painting *My Cross* (我的十字架) is useful for further elaborating this point. In the piece, Atayal weaving motifs and portraits of ancestors (their tattoos reveal them as people from the past since facial tattooing is no longer practised) are painted onto eight canvases—four square ones positioned above four rectangular ones, hung vertically so that from the empty space between the canvases three crosses emerge. The image of the cross itself is already temporally complex, hinting at once to a past event (the resurrection of Christ) and a future promise (Christ’s return and the resurrection and judgement of all humankind) to create a symbol which grounds a community of believers in the present. This already hauntological entwining of past, present, and future is further enhanced by the fact that the cross is made literally from empty space, an absence on which representations of Atayal past (the tattooed faces) and ongoing (weaving) traditions appear to hang. If the cross, as Anli Genu (2015: 7) suggests, ‘is loss and gain, suffering and rebirth’, then the gaps between the representations of Indigenous life might be taken at once as the fissures that years of settler colonial violence have rent in Atayal tradition and the positive force that draws the images together. The overall impression is of an Atayal identity that is in the process of dynamic transformation in relation to the past and the promises of the future. Standing back from the canvases, as one’s eyes move from the paintings to the empty space between them, the crosses seem almost to pulsate as they come in and out of focus; the idea of identity as a dynamic process is almost literalised.

It is precisely this kind of cutting together/apart in relation to tradition that Sun uses the idea of the resurrection to underline. Just as Christ's death and resurrection is thought to inaugurate a new epoch while still carrying forward the Jewish covenant with God, so conversion becomes a way of carrying tradition forwards while transforming it into something entirely new—a break (death) that is also a continuation (resurrection). The idea of the openness of death becomes a way of justifying his great uncle's conversion as a practical move when faced with the existential realities of 1950s Taiwan, in which the disintegration of Indigenous life was a reality, and even the goal of government policy. But what relevance does this model have when government policy turns from an outright rejection of Indigenous cultural life to the celebration and encouragement, both financial and political, of Indigenous rituals? Rudolph's critique of the revival of Indigenous rituals points to the problem many Indigenous culture makers in this new era face—the 'outside' support and interest in Indigenous life threatens to taint cultural production, marking it as inauthentic because it is targeted at those outside of the community. But it is this entanglement with the Han majority that Sun is angling at above when he suggests that an engagement with the openness of death also entails engagement with the other. This dovetails neatly with the idea of hauntology. 'To live', Derrida (2006: xvii) writes, 'is not something one learns ... from oneself, it is not learned by life, taught by life. Only from the other and by death.' Living, for Derrida, means an engagement with the real conditions of existence, and this means acknowledging that just as the present is always dispossessed of itself by virtue of the ever-(non)present past and future, so too the 'self' is always dispossessed in relation to the 'other' through and with which it is defined.

In standard parlance, the 'other' is taken to be in a weakened position, ontologically, in relation to some 'self'. As Barad (2010: 265) writes, 'Othering, the constitution of an "Other", entails an indebtedness to the "Other", who is irreducibly and materially bound to, threaded through, the "self."' For this reason, Barad asserts, '[e]ntanglements are relations of obligation—being bound to the other' (ibid.). This is an attempt to construct an ontology of selfhood that would necessitate an acknowledgement of obligation by those in positions of power to those against whom they have constructed themselves historically through denigration and prejudice—as white is constructed through black, man through woman, or civilised Han through Indigenous Taiwanese.<sup>6</sup> But,

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6 In *Becoming Taiwanese*, Evan Dawley (2019: 6) notes that the process by which Hoklo-speaking Han settlers first came to develop a sense of themselves as Taiwanese 'involved self-definition in contrast to, and interaction with, the island's Indigenous populations'.

when thinking from the perspective of the ‘othered’ themselves, this notion of obligation shades into the more negative meaning of obligatory. The fate of the Indigenous people of Taiwan is bound to the wider political culture of the ROC whether they choose it or not. Yet in some ways Sun’s solution to this obligatory entanglement is not so different from Barad’s injunction: one must face the reality of one’s entanglement with the other. In this instance, however, no debt is owed; it is simply a necessity, an obligation in a less ethical and more existential sense.

In the case of Anli Genu, we can see his engagement with Christian motifs as part of a conscious engagement with the dominant discourse of the (Han) other within the community of the Presbyterian Church. As Ching-ling Wang (2016: 39) observes, Anli Genu ‘grew up with a conscious awareness of the Charismatic Nativisation Movement [本土化靈恩運動], which points to the important role national liberation theology played within the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan, beginning in the 1960s and coming into full view in the 1970s and 1980s. As Kai-li Chiu (2014: 244–247) notes, three declarations published by the Church throughout the 1970s all made clear its commitment to national self-determination for the people of Taiwan.<sup>7</sup> Central to the Presbyterian Church’s project has been the theology of *Chhut-Thâu-Thin* (出頭天), which aims ‘at liberating people from colonial oppression and empowering the colonized and the oppressed to acquire political subjectivity’ (Chiu, 2014: 8). Chiu suggests that the relationship of this theology with the Indigenous people of the island is complex, for its notion of self-determination has not always included the self-determination of Indigenous communities. She theorises the work of Indigenous Christians within the church as taking part in ‘postcolonial deconstruction and reconstruction of the canonical notion of *Chhut-Thâu-Thin*, instead of altering, falsifying, or corrupting the dominant ideology’ (ibid., 391). Rather than rejecting it altogether, the aim is instead to extend the notion of self-determination to include the self-determination of Indigenous people within and as part of the self-determination of the Taiwanese nation. Viewed in this context, the resurrection motif of *My Cross*—which is found in much of Anli Genu’s work—appears to be entangled with the wider discourse of national liberation within the Presbyterian Church, at once connected to and separate from the theological-political aspirations of its Han members.

For Sun’s great uncle in the 1950s, the Puyuma were facing destruction (death) at the hands of the other (the Han). Facing the other and the possibility of death

7 Those three declarations were: ‘Public Statement on Our National Fate’ (國是聲明) in 1971, ‘Our Appeal’ (我們的呼籲) in 1975, and ‘A Declaration on Human Rights’ (人權宣言) in 1977.

were, in this instance, one and the same thing. Being open to that entanglement is what allowed the tribe to continue, in whatever transmogrified form. The point of the story of Sun's great uncle's conversion to Christianity is that facing the entanglement of self and other, and the reality of Indigenous dispossession at the hands of that other, is what enables the 'true marrow of culture' to be carried forwards despite the fleeting transformations to its 'outward signs', to borrow Anli Genu's (2015: 7) words in the artist's description of *My Cross*. And as Sun was writing about this at the beginning of the 1990s, when the work of Indigenous rights activists and the opposition movement as a whole were beginning to bear fruit, he cautions that the same remains true. Indigenous communities remain fragile, their numbers growing ever smaller (Sun, 2010: 106), and in such a situation it is necessary for the Indigenous community to face the reality that they are a minoritised population within a wider national culture. For this reason, while he acknowledges the importance of developing Indigenous language use, he stresses in a direct address to young Indigenous people the importance of 'opening out into Chinese-language [漢語, literally 'Han-language']' (ibid., 107). Instead of being cowed into silence because you cannot express yourself in your mother tongue, he suggests, 'use your greater, more flexible control of Chinese to precisely and vividly speak aloud and write down the entire spectrum of personal and Indigenous experience'.

Indigenous Chinese-language literature was just getting off the ground in Taiwan at the time Sun was writing, with the first mainstream success for an Indigenous writer coming only in 1986 when Tulbus Tamapima (Tian Yage, 田雅各, b. 1960) won the national Wu Zhuoliu Literary Award for his book *The Last Hunter* (最後的獵人). Encouraging young Indigenous writers to build on such success, Sun's exhortation to them is that they not hem themselves in with anxiety over authenticity and instead embrace the reality of their entanglement with the Chinese language and use it to their advantage. In 1993 he would become the founding editor of the important literary and cultural journal *Indigenous Voice Bimonthly* (山海文化雙月刊), which provided a space for them to do precisely this. The journal, as Kuo-ming Hsu (2010: 58) writes, 'created the concrete conditions for the existence of Indigenous literature, pushing forward the literary movement, bringing together literary society and cultural identity politics and constructing a network for the production of indigenous literature'. The magazine was a commercial endeavour, geared towards an audience beyond the Indigenous community. But Sun suggests that the exigencies of survival in the contemporary commercial environment of Taiwan do not take away from Indigenous people the ability to meaningfully engage with their own culture. As he writes regarding Indigenous rituals: 'revitalisation ... is, in part, connected to tourism and, because of this,

festivalisation [節慶化] and carnivalisation [嘉年華化] are trends that are difficult to avoid' (Sun, 2005: 267). By 'festivalisation' and 'carnivalisation' he means turning Indigenous rituals into events for outside consumption, rather than quotidian aspects of life within the community. But the reality is that this trend also enables, as he writes, 'a dialogue with the sources of our existence' (ibid.). The entangled nature of identity means that it is always emerging through relations of self and other, as well as between past, present, and future. What grounds authenticity is not continuity, Sun suggests, but an honest engagement with that entanglement, through which identities are always being made and remade anew.

## 2 Touching Indigeneity: Labay Eyong's *My Traditional Costume Is Not Traditional*

Labay Eyong's sculpture series, *My Traditional Costume is Not Traditional*, as its title makes clear, engages directly with questions of Indigenous authenticity. The series comprises five sculptures constructed from knitted elastic—two are subtitled *Seediq Bale? (A Real Person? 真正的人)*, while the other three are called *Very Sensitive (好過敏)*, *Indigenous Protest (原住民的抗議)*, and *Worrying About the Nation (擔心國家大事)*. Labay Eyong has herself described the series retrospectively as a work in which 'a contemporary Indigenous youth explores questions of self-identity' (IA&A at Hillyer, 2022). In each, hands emerge like organic growths from knitted fabric; the latter three are cast onto rods or wires, while the two *Seediq Bale?* structures are garments to be worn on the body, and have no silver supports. When the works were first exhibited, as part of the Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Art's 2012 exhibition *Life Finds A Way (那路很會彎)*, they were shown with photographs in which Labay Eyong herself wore the two *Seediq Bale?* garments, as well as wearing *Indigenous Protest* as a hat and *Worrying About the Nation* on the shoulder.<sup>8</sup> Taken as a series, they tell a complex story about Indigenous identity and its relationship to the 'other', one which links in neatly with the idea of entanglement and the openness of death.

Guangqin Ying (2013) describes the series in a way strikingly reminiscent of the idea of cutting together/apart, suggesting that it encapsulates 'the contradictory relationship between tradition and creation, rejection and acceptance, stability and change'. Rather than offering a choice between these

8 If she wore *Very Sensitive*, I have found no photos of it. Photographs of her wearing the other sculptures can be found in Ying (2013).

alternatives, in the works they all exist at once. Take *Indigenous Protest*, in which a hand emerges from a knitted circle with its middle finger raised. In the context in which it was first exhibited, it addressed itself to a majority Han-Taiwanese audience with a display of radical separation—a ‘fuck you’ that drew a firm line between the Indigenous artist who both made and wore the garment and the Han viewer. Yet, because the metal rods onto which the hand is cast sweep backwards, extending beyond the knitted structure, the sculpture has a sense of movement that pulls the finger not out towards the audience but back towards the hand. It is as if a middle finger is being lowered or, perhaps, as if the hand is beckoning. This tension is at the heart of the series. The name plays on interest in ‘traditional’ Indigenous culture, indulging and frustrating it at the same time. But, importantly, the title works not only to frustrate the expectations of the viewer but indicates a sense of distance from Indigenous tradition on the part of the artist too. And it is precisely the entanglement of these two things, the outside gaze and the artists’ relationship to Indigenous tradition, that the series probes.

This can be seen quite clearly in the two *Seediq Bale?* garments, whose titles reference a film released a year before their first exhibition, the 2011 two-part action-drama *Warriors of the Rainbow: Seediq Bale* (dir. Wei Te-sheng). Based on an actual historical Indigenous uprising against Japanese colonial rule, the Musha Incident (霧社事件) of 1930, *Seediq Bale* is frequently read by commentators as a work that uses an Indigenous uprising as a metaphor for Taiwanese nationalism. Jih-fei Cheng (2020: 41), for example, describes *Seediq Bale* as a ‘Hollywood-style Indigenous historical epic that employs viscerally violent choreographies of the flesh to stage Taiwan’s independence movement’. What he refers to as violent choreographies of the flesh are scenes of gory conflict, including scores of decapitations, most importantly those of the Japanese forces occupying Taiwan. As Liang-ya Liou (2016: 21) writes, the film’s exploration of ‘identity politics ... includes Seediq identity ... and its relationship to the film’s implied Taiwanese [national] consciousness’.<sup>9</sup> Liou is careful to point out that this relationship is not simple (ibid., 44) and the excess of violence carried out by the Seediq in the film makes it difficult to read as a moral tale of the righteous overthrow of evil colonialists by innocent victims. The director and screenwriter Wei Te-sheng (魏德聖) has stated that he ‘wasn’t interested in stereotypical good guys and bad guys’, and hoped instead to focus

9 Interestingly, Liou (2016: 36) also makes a link with the appearance of a fatherly ghost in *Seediq Bale* and Derrida’s use of Hamlet in *Spectres of Marx*. As the film is not the focus of my analysis, I will not attempt to draw out how this argument relates to my own, but I note it here for others who might be interested in drawing out the connection.

on the moral complexity of the history with which the film dealt (Rayns, 2022: 273–274).

Nevertheless, in that same interview he also states that when he wrote his first draft of the script in 1996, he was thinking about how the Musha Incident was connected to the Hong Kong handover—making a clear link between resistance to Japanese imperialism and the threat of mainland Chinese encroachment. As Darryl Sterk (2020: 3) states outright, Wei ‘is a Taiwanese nationalist, and Taiwanese nationalists ... have appropriated the Musha Incident, interpreting it as a national allegory’.<sup>10</sup> The film was massively popular among Taiwanese audiences, and its importance as a representation of Taiwanese national identity can be gleaned from the fact that both the then opposition leader Tsai Ing-wen and presidential incumbent Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九), as reported in the *Economist* (2011) just after the film’s release, ‘set aside their sniping to sit down to a screening together’ in the midst of a contentious election. It is to this context that the two *Seediq Bale?* garments speak, and they, like *Indigenous Protest*, play with their implied relationship to a Han viewer. Anyone who has seen the film will be familiar with the idea that ‘a man whose hands cannot be cleaned of bloodstains [from headhunting] is a real man’ and ‘a woman whose hands cannot be cleared of callouses [from weaving] is a real woman’. To be ‘*seediq bale*’ means to be a real (*bale*) man or woman (*seediq*), and by turning this firm claim to identity within the film into a question—is she ‘*seediq bale?*’—Labay Eyong presents a very different understanding of the relationship between Indigenous identity and Taiwanese identity politics.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> In the section of this quote I have elided, Sterk links this with the importance of the Musha Incident for Chinese nationalism. As he writes, the KMT re-narrated ‘it as an episode in the Chinese national resistance against the Japanese’ (Sterk, 2020: 2). Michael Berry’s (2008: 53, 107; 2022) work, as both writer and editor, offers a panoramic view of the history of representation of the Musha Incident from the Japanese colonial era up to the twenty-first century.

<sup>11</sup> *Seediq* means person, but ‘real person’ lacks the positive normative meaning that ‘real man’ and ‘real woman’ carry in English. While the Musha Incident involved Indigenous peoples now classified as Seediq, the word *seediq* means ‘person’ not only among the Seediq but among the Truku and some Atayal, all of whom were once categorised as belonging to the same ethnic group. In fact, when the campaign among the Truku for official recognition as a group distinct from the Atayal first began, there was debate in the community as to whether they might draw their ethnic borders more widely by taking the name Seediq (Qiu, 2013: 188). That a Truku artist would engage with the film as pertaining to her identity is therefore no surprise, and we might think about the way these different Indigenous groups differentiated themselves through official government recognition as pointing once again to the complex entanglement of Indigenous identity and the wider political culture of post-martial law Taiwan.

The interrogative nature of the piece is expressed not only in its title but in its form. The way hands emerge from the garments seems to invite, or at least gesture towards, touching—hands reaching out to both touch and be touched. Sedgwick (2003: 14) writes that ‘the sense of touch makes nonsense out of any dualistic understanding of agency and passivity’, and this dynamic meeting with the viewer, who is at once probed and probing, creates a sense of identity emerging through an engagement with the other. Touch is central to all the pieces in the series, not only because of the hand motif, but because the knitted elastic from which they are made is pronouncedly textured. As Renu Bora (from whom Sedgwick develops her ideas on touch) observes, while texture is technically a quality all things possess, it is usually rough things that are thought to be textured. ‘Smoothness’, he writes, ‘is both a type of texture and texture’s other’ (Bora, 1997: 99). Texture, even if no touching actually takes place, always engages the sense of touch. Bora (ibid., 96) suggests it is a quality that exists ‘on the borders of touch and vision’, to which Sedgwick (2003: 15) adds aural perception—specifically, ‘the brush-brush of corduroy trousers or the crunch of extra-crispy chicken’. This sense of texture as a liminal meeting place of the senses ties in with the way that touch is always a meeting of self and other, in which relations of passivity and activity are in constant flux—what you touch touches you and vice versa.

The *Seediq Bale?* garments can be read as such a liminal meeting place for the artist’s own identity and the presentation of Indigeneity in Wei Te-sheng’s blockbuster. While the influence of Japanese colonialism on the cultural identity of certain Indigenous characters is a minor subplot, Seediq identity in the film is for the most part presented as uncomplicated, something in need of defending but certainly not requiring revival or resurrection. While the story of resistance that the film stages may well give pride of place to the Indigenous past in Taiwanese history, Indigenous life itself is presented as eternal in a manner that is almost outside of time. This leaves little room for the complex situation of Indigenous people in the present, whose torqued identities Sun Dachuan analyses with such acuity. It is here that Labay Eyong’s textured hands intervene, drawing attention to the way that Indigenous identity is always experienced in the present, in some fundamental way, through an engagement with the ‘outside’ gaze, especially that of the Han-Taiwanese viewer. *Seediq Bale* is itself a striking example of this gaze, and by referencing the film she does not simply critique it but shows how it is woven into her own experience of her Truku identity. The metonymic function many view the Indigenous Taiwanese to play in the film, standing in for the nation in an allegory for self-determination, is complicated and transformed, but not disavowed. She shows how this symbolic function impinges on her identity, which cannot but



respond to this 'outside' nationalist interest in Indigenous culture. She meets that gaze halfway, reaching out into the openness of death by acknowledging her imbrication with the 'other', and thereby allowing Indigenous culture to live anew in the present.

Ann-Elise Lewallen (2016: 51) observes that among Ainu communities in Japan the most important thing is not identity as a matter of fact—what she calls 'being Ainu'—but identity as a matter of fashioning. She calls this 'becoming Ainu', the process of which 'is said to be therapeutic and liberating'. Engaging with traditional weaving practices is an essential component. Labay Eyong's choice to work with textiles ought to be understood in a similar light. As she states, her grandmother wove all the time as 'she was very worried because no one in the later generations knew how to weave' (Su, 2020), and so she took it upon herself to learn traditional Truku weaving practices after her grandmother's death. Making works to be exhibited in art galleries is a far cry from the quotidian weaving of her ancestors, and yet in this way she has been able to resurrect a tradition and open it out towards the majority Han public. And this opening out towards the Han 'other' has enabled her to open out towards herself and the wider Indigenous community as well. Her 2016 artwork *Woven Path* (織路), for example, was a collaborative project involving 30 Indigenous weavers and is now a public work of art on display at Xincheng Railway Station. As she herself states, later projects such as this built on a foundation laid by *Traditional Costume*: 'The symbol of the hand has become more and more complete .... Without the interrogative stage of *My Traditional Costume is Not Traditional*, I don't know how my work would have matured' (Su, 2020).

### 3 Mourning and the 'Outside' Gaze: Laha Mebow's *Finding Sayun*

Laha Mebow's directorial debut *Finding Sayun* also engages with a film in which Indigenous people are used to represent Taiwan, and its link with the idea of the openness of death might be even stronger, for it deals directly with questions of mourning and loss. The film in question is a popular piece of Japanese wartime propaganda, *Sayon's Bell* (サヨンの鐘, *Sayon no kane*), directed by Shimizu Hiroshi (清水宏). It tells the supposedly true story of an Atayal girl who, in 1938, drowned while helping her Japanese schoolteacher cross a river on his way to go and fight in the Second Sino-Japanese War. It is an example of many popular narrative and visual reconstructions of this young Indigenous girl's death, a story which, as Pei-yin Lin (2012: 145–146) describes, was used by the Japanese colonial authorities as an example of Japan's

civilising influence and of Indigenous Taiwanese loyalty to the imperium. In its original context, the figure of Sayun served the purpose of creating a Taiwanese identity that legitimated both the island's separation from China and Japanese colonial rule.<sup>12</sup> As Chris Berry (2019: 231) writes, *Sayon's Bell* is a 'prime example of the colonial era model of using Indigenous Taiwanese to symbolize Taiwan identity in the form of obedient and tamed mascots for Japanese imperialism'. Berry (ibid., 229) notes the clear parallel between this and the way Indigenous Taiwanese came to be viewed as symbols for Taiwan's distinctiveness in the post-martial law era, and in this context, as Sterk (2014: 213–214) summarises, the story of Sayun was rediscovered. This initially took the form of scholarly interest in demythologising the Japanese narrative but eventually grew into a new tourist industry. A bridge was built over the river in which Sayun drowned and a Sayun Memorial Park was constructed.

In *Finding Sayun*, a Han-Taiwanese assistant director, Xiao Ru (小茹), comes to visit the tribe (relocated since Sayun's time) to scout locations and actors for a sequel to the original Japanese film, which can tap into the market created by the renewed interest in Sayun's tale. Sterk (2014: 211) suggests the film has three aspects: it is at once a 'metafilm, a village documentary, and a quest for identity in the primitive past'. His analysis divides the film up into acts, each of which aligns with one of these aspects (ibid., 215–221). The first act is focused on Xiao Ru trying to lay the groundwork for making the film, but, as production stalls, the film moves onto the second act, which simply documents—albeit in fictionalised form—the quotidian lives of the villagers. The final act comes when Xiao Ru accompanies an old man (阿公, Agong) and some boys from the village on a trip up the mountain to the tribe's ancestral village, where Sayun lived and from which they were forced to relocate. Sterk's act structure is a useful heuristic, and his understanding of the film in general accords with my own in broad-brush terms. But to a degree his analysis, while illuminating, simplifies the entanglement of filmic styles in *Finding Sayun*. Rather than moving successively through distinct genre-specific acts, I suggest, it simultaneously cuts various styles together/apart, getting at the hauntological truth of identity, which is extended through time and the other in such a way that it can never be pinned down and represented once and for all.

Sterk's assertion that *Finding Sayun* is a metafilm is undeniable. It is a sequel to *Sayon's Bell* that is about making a sequel to *Sayon's Bell*. Such a film, which pretends to be what it actually is, can be linked to the stories of self-impersonation that Wendy Doniger (2004) identifies across human

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12 Because Sayun is the transliteration of the name given in the English title of Laha Mebow's film, I use it throughout unless referring directly to the Japanese picture.

cultures, from ancient Indian literature to Hollywood screwball comedies. Her analysis suggests that such stories reveal the importance of impersonation to authenticity. Rather than merely being a lie, impersonation can, she suggests, ‘tell a deeper truth, masquerading as ourselves reaffirms an enduring self (or network of selves) inside of us’ (203). *Finding Sayun* tries on three different ways of telling its story about telling a story, and it is from this network that the ‘true’ story emerges. First, there are regular ‘realist’ scenes in which the intervention of the camera is invisible. Second, there are flashback scenes that show Sayun in a reconstructed past, all of which are colour-corrected to give them a golden hue. Finally, there are scenes which are framed to appear as if they are raw footage from Xiao Ru’s DV camera. It is these scenes that, stylistically, are the most metacinematic, and it is with this style that the film opens. But it is the way that all three styles, which recur throughout and whose use cannot be parsed into distinct acts, speak to each other that produces the film’s overall effect.

What emerges from this conversation can best be decoded, I propose, by turning to one of the film’s major subplots, which is about the process of mourning. Just after the opening DV sequence, which is a brief selection of villager interviews conducted by Xiao Ru, a scene shot in the ‘realist’ style shows Xiao Ru accidentally filming an Indigenous man falling to his death. Later, the audience watches as Xiao Ru shows the man’s widow, Xiao Lan (小蘭), this footage. Viewing it allows Xiao Lan, who up until this moment has been in an almost catatonic state, unable to eat or engage in any meaningful conversation, to finally accept her husband’s death and begin to move forwards with her life. In its portrayal of this grieving process, the film presents the audience with a quite orthodox Freudian dichotomy between mourning and melancholia, which we might link, respectively, to an acceptance and a refusal of what Sun calls the openness of death. Melancholia is said to result from a failure or inability to mourn (Freud, 1981: 245). As the psychoanalysts Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok (1994: 127) write, it occurs when ‘we refuse to mourn ... [when] we shun the consequences of mourning even though our psyche is fully bereaved’. The subplot clearly models these two different reactions to loss, and what is most interesting is that it presents Xiao Lan’s ability to move out of melancholia into mourning as being made possible by the intervention of Xiao Ru’s camera.

The subplot suggests on the personal level what Kuo-ming Hsu (2016) observes in his study of the ethnographic films of the Han anthropologist Hu Taili (胡台麗). He argues that Hu’s interventionist and self-reflexive style—her films include footage of Indigenous people watching footage of themselves—allows ‘the person filming ... [to] become a vector and catalyst “mediating”

between the people being filmed and those same people's own culture' (278). This can also be linked to the film's final sequence, when the audience, just like Xiao Lan, are shown footage from Xiao Ru's digital camera, footage that also brings them directly into contact with the reality of loss. In an extended sequence of the supposedly raw DV-footage, we are shown Agong and the Indigenous boys' journey to the tribe's ancestral village, a journey Agong has been inspired to make because of Xiao Ru's probing into the past. When they arrive at the site of the former village, the camera pans over the now empty landscape as Agong weeps, thanking his parents for everything they did for him and telling them that the tribe continues to honour their memory. What emerges from this moment is a profound sense of connection with the past, which emerges as a present absence. And this hauntological cutting together/apart of the past in the present is simultaneous with a cutting together/apart of Xiao Ru's gaze and the experience of the villagers. For it is her camera that records this event, mediating the audience's engagement with the past just as with Xiao Lan's grief.

If we take the personal subplot to be a key for decoding what is going on here, we might contrast the hauntological non-present past in this scene with the historical reconstructions we get throughout the film. They, it could be suggested, give a view of the past as something accessible, a melancholic refusal of loss that this footage, like the footage of Xiao Lan's husband's death, forces the audience to acknowledge. This melancholic refusal to accept the loss of the past finds its corollary in the fact that these scenes, like the 'realist' scenes and in contradistinction to the DV-footage, do not highlight the intervention of the camera at all, even though they all occur when villagers provide a story of the past for Xiao Ru—an engagement with the past as mediated by the 'outside' gaze as the DV sequences. However, though the film complicates the viewer's relationship to these historical reconstructions, it never disavows them. As Sterk (2014: 222) writes, with reference to a picturesque mural in the centre of the village that bears a remarkable chromatic resemblance to the flashbacks, such idealised fantasies of the Indigenous past are 'mundane, an authentic part of ... [the] village'. We might link this continued presence of the idealised past with the changing role of incorporation in psychoanalytic theory. As Judith Butler (2020: 20) observes, incorporation was once thought to be inimical to mourning, a melancholic response that denied the loss of an object by setting it up unconsciously inside one's own mind. But, later, Freud came to see this melancholic response as itself fundamental to the process of mourning, not merely its antithesis.

Mourning, in other words, does not transcend melancholia but sublates it. Similarly, the film's metacinematic collage of styles does not transcend or

obliterate the idealised reconstructions of Indigenous life but works to weave them into a more complex picture of Atayal identity. For Doniger (2004: 205), the self emerges through the failure to be something else: 'only by trying in vain to be something else can we become who we are'. But *Finding Sayun* does not try and fail to be something other than what it is, and nor do any of the characters within it. It is, rather, all the different things it masquerades as all at once. The golden-hued nostalgic images are a part of Indigenous experience and do not exist in antagonistic relation with the DV-footage and the 'realist' scenes. The DV-footage highlights forcefully the intervention of the camera, and as such it highlights the constructed nature of the other scenes too, but it does not thereby transcend them. None of the styles, by itself, tells the 'truth' of Indigenous experience, but cut together/apart they get at the truth of Atayal identity as it emerges in the present, complexly entangled with the past and the 'outside' gaze through which that relationship with the past is mediated. This is not, it should be cautioned, to take away from the deeply personal and private nature of Agong's communion with his former home. To a certain degree, in fact, the privacy of the event is maintained only because the audience—whether Indigenous, Han, or otherwise—is unable to disavow the reality that they are viewing it as 'outsiders'. It is Agong's experience, and not theirs. And I would like to suggest that it is precisely at the level of audience identification that the film develops its picture of Atayal identity.

If mourning is about acknowledging the reality of a loss, what the film does is tie mourning together with an acknowledgement of the insuperable entanglement of identities and perspectives that makes up the lifeworld of the Indigenous characters it depicts. This carries through the whole film but reaches the height of complexity in the final DV sequence because of the multiple identifications that are enjoined upon the audience. On the one hand, the audience identifies with those on screen, and the subplot, which has shown an Indigenous woman watching footage of her own loss captured by the very same camera, further encourages this audience's identification with the Indigenous characters. On the other hand, the audience is quite literally identified as Han. Within the film's diegesis, the footage we are watching is being presented to the proposed film's Han-Chinese director by the Han-Taiwanese Xiao Ru. But this is intrinsically undermined by the fact that the audience knows it is an Atayal director who is behind the camera. Sterk (2014: 218–219) suggests that because Laha Mebow grew up in urban Taiwan and not in the village where the movie is set, Xiao Ru can be read 'as an avatar for the director ... an outsider who did not grow up in the village but wants to learn more about it'. But the multiple, cross-cutting identifications in this final sequence hint at something more complex than this.

A sense of 'outsider-ness' is not confined only to Xiao Ru—the Indigenous boys who also make the journey with Agong point out that they do not have the same connection to the ancestral village as him because they never lived there. And this generational divide is mirrored in Agong's own relationship to a past he mourns and to which he can never return. There is no 'inside' Atayal identity in the film because it is convoluted and changing, never fully in possession of itself but not any less authentic for that. The Amis Indigenous rights activist Isak Afo (2016: 107) writes that the process of constructing Indigenous identity and community in Taiwan 'is dynamic, and it is open to different influences and possibilities'. This includes the influence of the 'outside' gaze that Laha Mebow's metacinematic mediation on Indigenous identity and its relationship to the past brings to the fore. The sense of openness and unpredictability in Isak Afo's words is reminiscent of Butler's (2020: 21) description of mourning, which 'has to do with agreeing to undergo a transformation (perhaps one should say *submitting* to a transformation) the full result of which you cannot know in advance'. The suggestion that mourning requires submission points to the limiting effects of grief on anyone's agency—there is ultimately no choice but to accept loss. Like obligatory entanglement, in this context the idea of submission points to a fundamental power imbalance that lies at the heart of Indigenous Taiwanese experience. But, as with all the Indigenous culture makers analysed here, while Laha Mebow does not shy away from the fact of injustice, her focus is on modelling how Indigenous identity can live in the present despite it. This requires facing squarely the reality of one's dispossession in relation both to time and to the other—embracing, as Sun would put it, the openness of death.

#### 4 Conclusion

One might sense, perhaps, a certain political quietism in this approach. Embracing the openness of death might well be read as accepting the status quo. But it is always from the status quo that one must depart. This is something Amia Srinivasan (2019: 148–149) points out in an analysis of the political efficacy of genealogical critiques of precisely the kind that in the introduction I, drawing on Felski and Sedgwick, mocked as paranoid. Critique can be useful, and paranoia is sometimes well founded. To use Srinivasan's own example, describing the world as produced by a conspiracy of male power might be paranoid, and it might seem to foreclose the possibility of the world existing in any other way, but it is a necessary starting point for beginning to imagine the world in new, feminist ways. It is the radical effect such re-descriptions can

have on one's view of the world that makes critique such an attractive tool for politics, but it is precisely this same performative power that Sedgwick (2003: 124) suggests points to critique's limits. If the power of critique lies in what it can do, then it can be viewed as one technique among many that seek to transform the world by re-presenting it in particular ways.

What the cultural producers I have analysed here seek to do is provide representations of Indigenous flourishing to demonstrate how Indigenous peoples in Taiwan can fashion identities for themselves despite historical and contemporary injustices. Such models enable other Indigenous peoples to relate to their identity in new ways, and they also reach out to transform the wider national culture. In fact, the works I have analysed here would suggest any delineation between Indigenous identity and its wider context would be a misnomer—this is what entanglement is all about. When Xiao Ru shows Xiao Lan the footage of her husband dying, and when she follows Agong up the mountain, it is not only the Indigenous peoples who are changed but Xiao Ru herself. Indeed, it is only through her relationship with the Indigenous characters that Xiao Ru distinguishes herself from the mainland Chinese cameramen and director with whom she is working on the film. Interest in Sayun may well have been bolstered by Taiwanese nationalist interest in Indigenous history, but, *Finding Sayun* seems to suggest, this is not enough to differentiate the Han of Taiwan from their ethnic siblings on the mainland. Interest must be coupled with action, the film intimates, echoing Barad (2010: 266), who suggests that 'differentiating is a material act that is ... about making connections and commitments'.

In her apology, Tsai did make material commitments to Indigenous people. Throughout the entire speech she shared the stage with the Tao anti-nuclear activist Capen Nganaen (夏本·嘎那恩). She promised a formal investigation into the dumping of nuclear waste on Orchid Island, where the Tao make their home, and stated monetary compensation would be offered to the tribe. Capen Nganaen has since rejected offers of compensation as insufficient, even calling Tsai a liar because, though an investigation was conducted, nuclear waste remains on the island (Lin, 2019). But hypocrisy and delays in politics do not take away the significant fact that by 2016 it was apparent that if the Indigenous Taiwanese were to represent Taiwan, then the Taiwanese government must represent the interests of the Indigenous communities. Any critique of hypocrisy can only get off the ground if Tsai's government, as a Taiwanese government, is seen to have failed in its duty to represent the Indigenous people of the island. By emphasising the entanglement of their own identity with the wider political culture of the island, and by actively intervening in that entanglement, the cultural producers analysed in this

article can be viewed as a part of the movement that has made that duty—that obligation—undeniable.

### Notes on Contributor

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