Indigenous Culture under Taiwanese Modernity:
Cultural Translation in Tian Yage’s Short Stories

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Abstract

Confronted with the decline of indigenous traditions as a result of multi-colonization, the Beinan writer Sun Da-chuan laments in 1991 that the Taiwanese aboriginal cultural decline is irreversible. While this might not be the case with all the twelve aboriginal ethnic groups, it foretold a dismal future that was generally anticipated. A cultural revivalist movement ensued, with some aboriginal intellectuals returning to their tribes to re-learn their cultural heritage and collect oral histories from the elders. Retrospectively, this revivalist movement signifies both a construction of cultural identity vis-à-vis the center and a cultural revival within the tribe. Although the articles and books published by these intellectuals may have more Han readers than aboriginal ones, the work of some intellectuals in the tribe helps preserve and revive rituals, dances, stories, legends, and festivals. These intellectuals find their cultures threatened by modernity in the form of (1) capitalism, which leads to pollution of their land and their impoverishment, and (2) the nation-state, which assimilates and destroys their culture through the State Apparatuses. At the same time as they are attacking modernity and reclaiming cultural identity, however, all of them are themselves at the crossroads between past and present, between traditional tribal knowledge and modernity. Writing in mandarin Chinese rather than their native tongue, they are furthermore putting themselves in the position of translator in multiple senses. Cultural translation is thus an issue faced by indigenous intellectuals under modernity and tied up to the issue of indigenous culture under Taiwanese modernity. This paper seeks to explore how a precursor to Sun Da-chuan, the Bunun writer Tian Yage (Tuobasi Tamapima) deals with this theme in three of his short stories “Tuobasi Tamapima,” “The Last Hunter,” and “The Wake,” and how the narrators of these stories negotiate between two languages, cultures, and epistemologies through cultural translation.

Key words: indigenous culture, Taiwanese modernity, cultural translation, Tien Yaco (Tuobasi Tamapima)
During a parliamentary election campaign in December 2007, the Kuomintang (abbreviated to KMT) presidential candidate Ma Ying-jiou surprised many people when he condescendingly addressed an aboriginal community which had lived on the margins of Taipei for more than thirty years: “I’m treating you like humans…. Since you have come to our city, I will give you a good education.” Although both the KMT and the KMT-affiliated media tried to exonerate him, the clearly racist remarks cannot but reveal a Han’s or more specifically a Mainlander’s ethnocentrism and discrimination against indigenous peoples. Gone is the familiar Ma who often speaks a simple phrase in different aboriginal languages as well as Minnan and Hakka to show his endorsement of multiculturalism and multi-ethnicity. As the Democratic Progressive Party presidential candidate Hsieh Chang-ting pointed out, when one says “I’m treating you like humans,” one means: “you’re actually no humans.” Apart from Ma’s implicit animal metaphor, which suggests the barbarous/civilized, you/we binarisms, it is worth noting that Ma duplicates an old KMT discourse that valorizes urban modernity and disparages indigenous cultures as backward and primitive. Speaking in the tone of a former mayor of Taipei, Ma implicitly refers to the aborigines as the “mountain people” (a derogatory term one uses during KMT’s rule) whom he would only reluctantly allow to “trespass” on the terrain of civilization (i.e. “our city”) on condition that they receive a “modern” education. One major irony about this incident is that most of aboriginal legislators and legislative candidates failed to speak out against Ma’s racism, a reticence that indicates their submissiveness and compliance to, if not complicity with, the KMT. Partly because the KMT ruled Taiwan from 1945 to 2000, many aboriginal politicians have depended for their power on the KMT, although it is the Democratic Progressive Party (founded in 1986) that has helped raise concerns about native histories and cultures and insisted on racial and ethnic equality. One may even say that some of these aboriginal politicians are token figures who have internalized the KMT’s ethnocentrism and discrimination against aborigines.

The incident is a backlash against the Aboriginal Movement which began in the early 1980s and which succeeded in 1994 in renaming in the Constitution as “aborigines” from the derogatory “mountain people.” The act of self-renaming signifies the attainment of subjectivity on the part of indigenous peoples. After the issue of ethnicity has dominated for twenty years and people’s views on indigenous people have changed due to the success of the Aboriginal Movement, observes Hsieh Shih-chung, Ma’s remarks both outraged and discouraged the activists because he retained the old KMT thinking of the binary opposition of Han people vs barbarous peoples (Hsieh 2007). Ma’s racism also reveals the difficulty of demanding aboriginal rights and reviving indigenous cultures under Taiwanese modernity. The indigenous
peoples had been partially colonized by the Dutch, the Spanish, the Ming Chinese loyalists, and the Qing Chinese successively before they were colonized by Imperial Japan and later the KMT. The Dutch and the Spanish incorporated Taiwan into their modernity project in the early seventeenth century, whereas the Qing China did not start to modernize Taiwan until the last ten years of its rule from 1885 to 1895. But it is Imperial Japan that first carried out a comprehensive, systematic modernity project, which included instilling notions of the nation-state by reconstituting the population into modern subjects. Japanese colonial modernity underlined the nation-state, capitalism, modern medicine and hygiene, technological progress, agribusiness, modern education, modern military forces, and discourses such as science, medicine, biology, and anthropology. Native cultures were generally viewed as inferior; native folk beliefs, be they aboriginal, Minnan, or Hakka, were deemed as superstitious. Although anti-Japanese on the surface, the KMT, which fled to Taiwan in exile from China in 1949, continues the Japanese modernity project to a great extent, with very similar emphases. One major difference is that the KMT’s claim of the nation-state projected an imaginary unified China, which was untenable in reality. Another major difference is that the KMT marginalized and further assimilated aborigines by banning their languages in public discourse and destroying their cultures and historical memories (Sun 2000).

Confronted with the decline of indigenous traditions as a result of multi-colonization, the Beinan writer Sun Da-chuan laments in 1991 that the Taiwanese aboriginal cultural decline is irreversible (Sun 1991). While this might not be the case with all the twelve aboriginal ethnic groups, it foretold a dismal future that was generally anticipated. A cultural revivalist movement ensued, with some aboriginal intellectuals returning to their tribes to re-learn their cultural heritage and collect oral histories from the elders. Retrospectively, this revivalist movement signifies both a construction of cultural identity vis-à-vis the center and a cultural revival within the tribe. Although the articles and books published by these intellectuals may have more Han readers than aboriginal ones, the work of some intellectuals in the tribe helps preserve and revive rituals, dances, stories, legends, and festivals. These intellectuals find their cultures threatened by modernity in the form of (1) capitalism, which leads to pollution of their land and their impoverishment, and (2) the nation-state, which assimilates and destroys their culture through the State Apparatuses. At the same time as they are attacking modernity and reclaiming cultural identity, however, all of them are themselves at the crossroads between past and present, between traditional tribal knowledge and modernity. Writing in mandarin Chinese rather than their native tongue, they are furthermore putting themselves in the position of translator in multiple senses. Cultural translation is thus an issue faced by
indigenous intellectuals under modernity and tied up to the issue of indigenous culture under Taiwanese modernity. This paper seeks to explore how a precursor to Sun Da-chuan, the Bunun writer Tian Yage (Tuobasi Tamapima) deals with this theme in three of his short stories “Tuobasi Tamapima,” “The Last Hunter,” and “The Wake,” and how the narrators of these stories negotiate between two languages, cultures, and epistemologies through cultural translation.

Tian Yage (Tuobasi Tamapima) is renowned for his aboriginal short stories collected in *The Last Hunter* (1987) and *Lovers and Prostitutes* (1992). Both collections of short stories show concerns over problems confronted by indigenous people living in the tribe or in the city, such as the loss of hunting ground, the dominant society’s discrimination against and exploitation of indigenous people, the loss of population due to migration to cities, the younger generations’ assimilation into mainstream culture, the cultural gaps and conflicts of values between old and younger generations, the conflicts between men and women, and prostitution. At the same time, these stories also delve into indigenous people’s traditional beliefs, ceremonies, taboos, and mythologies. Although many stories are set in the tribe, the relationship between the tribe and the city is a theme covertly or overtly treated in nearly all the stories. That the city represents the center of colonial modernity whose influence has penetrated the tribe is another implicit theme throughout the stories. The first story of *The Last Hunter* entitled “Tuobasi Tamapima,” for instance, portrays the first-person narrator as a college student coming back to his tribe with city habits; the story seems autobiographical because the author’s aboriginal name is Tuobasi Tamapima. Although his voice is subdued among multiple communal voices when he boards a truck, it is his voice that frames the whole story. At the outset, the narrator is mistaken for a Han by an old sentry. Although he immediately tells the old man his true identity, he gloats over the mistake: “I have become so white that people don’t recognize me as a mountain fellow. So I’m superior to my people in the tribe” (Tian 1987:17). Obviously he has internalized Han values and disparages indigenous values; here “white” is a social register that refers not only to the color of skin but also speech and manners. He displays similar split consciousness as the truck approaches his tribe. Contrasting the sight of the dim and quiet tribe with that of the shining and boisterous city in his memories, he regrets coming back. Only the thought of his mother welcoming him urges him to go home. If the author uses his Bunun name in place of his Han name to show his true identity, he shows that he is a modern aboriginal intellectual plagued by split consciousness.

In this story, the conflict between the city and the tribe is one between modernity and indigenous beliefs and values. The narrator is evidently attracted more to the city and its values despite his critique on them. Apart from presenting the
narrator’s divided consciousness, the story also depicts the heteroglossia on the truck, with a spectrum of positions on modernity. The driver, who used to show his gift for hunting and sniping when young, now hates farming life and makes a living by driving a second-hand truck. He had attended a military school in order to get a watch and a handbag and had obtained a pension when he was discharged, the sight of which money became a spectacle when he returned to the tribe. Whereas tribal people used to exchange one thing for another rather than using money, money is aligned with modernity together with notions of commodity. That the pension the driver had earned after so many years of work in the military can only afford him to buy a second-hand truck indicates the aborigine’s poverty in money economy. Despite differences among them, younger generations on the truck like money, commodities, and modern conveniences, whereas old men tend to have reservations about modern ways of lives. Hunter Omas not only dislikes young people who have lost the ancestor’s ability to run and chase after animals bare-footed but considers money the filthiest thing in the world. He believes that indigenous people should stick to traditional life of farming and hunting rather than receive education or work in factories, for he thinks they cannot compete with city people in academic performance and are often mistreated when they work in factories. As far as ecological issues are concerned, he argues that stopping hunting is against nature, that the hunter only helps balance the animal’s lives in the woods. He attacks the Forestry Bureau for destroying the animal’s home despite that it has established national reserves. He tells a story about a group of monkeys discussing over being forced to move constantly because the old forest is replaced by plantation forest, which deprives them of hiding places and food. Thus, Hunter Omas’s criticism on the KMT’s policy for depriving aborigines of their hunting rights entails contesting epistemologies about how to keep ecological balance.

To the people on the truck the narrator serves as the translator of the laws of the government while at the same time to the reader he also supplies knowledge unobtrusively about what these people think of the institutions and Han people by presenting their speech and thought. Take the conversation on cutting trees for example. Hunter Dian, who shares Hunter Omas’s beliefs in traditional values, cannot make out why he is charged with stealing national property by the Forestry Bureau simply because he cuts a tree in the wilderness. The narrator explains that it is now stipulated that those precious trees belong to the Forestry Bureau, which alone has the right to cut trees. To avoid violating the law again, the narrator cautions him against cutting trees outside aboriginal reserves. Staring at the narrator, Hunter Omas objects by saying that before those who speak Mandarin came, those trees belong to the forest and one can always cut trees to make furniture. The narrator then muses to himself
that he is unable to make these elders understand the spirit of a democratic country, for they have been free to hunt, fish, and farm ever since they were born; they were taught to abide by the tribesman’s customs rather than national laws. It is worth noting that Hunter Omas calls the narrator “college student,” criticizing him for talking nonsense. The elders show contempt for the narrator because he represents city values to them. They believe that one should defend oneself against the invasion of other tribes or peoples. On the other hand, although the narrator endorses city values mostly, he is also attracted to tribal values from time to time. While he mentions the ban on hunting, he recalls his dream to become a hunter when young and wishes to hear more hunting stories. Later on a drunkard mimics the face of a contemptuous Han looking down on everyone on the truck, then mimicking Dian begging for the mercy of the narrator. Whereupon the latter reflects that since Dian did not know the law, he should not have been punished. Such reflection indicates that the narrator negotiates between tribal values and city values. To the extent that the reader may not be familiar with Bunun tribal values, the narrator also serves as a translator for him/her.

A number of important issues are raised and discussed by riders on the truck, which give us a picture of the problems confronted by indigenous people. When a young woman expresses her intention to send her son to school, the narrator feels reassured that he can at least expect respect from younger generations who know the value of intellect and education. Implicit here is his critique on the elders for naively believing that aborigines can survive by insisting on the old ways, when the outside world has undergone tremendous changes. On the other hand, the narrator cannot help being attracted to indigenous tradition to some extent, especially the stories about hunting, taboos, and mythologies. In recording instead of giving his answer or solution to the debates between Taiwan modernity and indigenous culture, the narrator both invites the reader to participate in the conversation and serves as a translator between two languages and two cultures. Again, this is an idiosyncratically implied role the narrator of most stories takes, as can be seen in the fact that while the stories are mostly written in mandarin Chinese, they blend some Bunun terms and phrases whose meanings are explained in the endnotes. Interestingly, some of the conversations in the stories are spoken in Bunun but presented in Chinese, which means that they are translations by the narrator. Moreover, the use of multiple communal voices in this story, which recurs in stories such as “Die of Regret” and “The Wake,” carries significance in cultural translation. On the one hand, it conjoins indigenous oral culture with the modern form of short fiction. On the other, it indicates that indigenous identity is defined in relation to the indigenous community, which in turn, being heterogeneous itself, sustains indigenous culture vis-à-vis dominant culture.
In many stories, Tian presents how indigenous people are placed in a dilemma today. If traditionally a Bunun man is either a hunter or a farmer who takes pride in his physical strength, in the story “The Last Hunter” Tian shows how the encroaching modernity threatens his world. The hunter Biaz goes to the forest after a fight with his wife Pasulang but has difficulty finding his preys due to the decrease of animals in number. What’s worse, in order to avoid accusations of poaching and owning an unlicensed gun, he has to bribe a police officer by giving him the best of his game. Biaz sticks to the traditional role of a hunter and a farmer, despite that he had hated his traditional father for giving him a hard life when he was young. At the urge of his wife, he had once tried to earn more money by getting a temporary job as a worker, yet he was unfairly laid off after working diligently for five days for a Han. As his experience outside the tribe makes him feel cheated and humiliated, he stops getting temporary jobs again although his wife keeps nagging at him. Feeling safe and content in the tribe, he comes to realize that, with the intervention of the nation-state, even the tribe is no longer a self-sustaining paradise. A great proportion of forest is turned into national property so that what used to be traditional hunting ground becomes off limits. Biaz is no longer allowed to hunt freely like his ancestors because the government has banned hunting in the national forest and laid down gun and powder control regulations. Moreover, land development has brought along humans, roads, and cars, which has intruded upon the living space of animals and forced them to run away to higher mountains. Even in his own woods, animals are decreasing so rapidly that he has no use of his hunting skills. If he used to feel proud that he is a great hunter, he is faced with the possibility that one day he may have neither preys nor hunting ground.

Although Biaz remains too optimistic and confident to linger on that thought, the narrator suggests otherwise for the tribe is under the influence of modernity. For one thing, the need of money presents itself as a new value in place of the traditional one that puts a premium on self-sufficiency and self-reliance within the tribe. Whereas aborigines used to emphasize endurance and physical strength, Pasulang is typical of present-day aborigines who complain about the cold house and scant clothing. Thus in order to have a better living condition in winter, many people would find temporary work down the mountains after the harvest. For another, the nation-state is embodied in the Mainlander police officer who disparages Biaz as a “savage” and charges him with breaking the law by his very act of hunting. Evidently speaking from a Han chauvinistic point of view, the officer denigrates aborigines as cruel, lazy, dirty, backward, uneducated, unlawful, and shameless. On top of all these humiliations, he threatens Biaz by saying that “All you hunters should be put into jail to be educated.” (Note that his remarks display the same racism and
ethnocentrism as Ma Ying-jiou’s understatements, which is not surprising given that both men are products and agents of KMT ideology.) He undermines his own rhetoric, though, when he turns out to be a hypocrite who suggests that Biaz bribe his way out by giving him the best of his game. The depiction of the police officer generally fits the impression that under the KMT’s rule, only those civil servants who had been guilty of grave misconduct or are physically ill are sent to the mountains. It is worth noting that the police officer judges the aborigine’s degree of education and civilization by his/her command of Mandarin Chinese. Likewise, he demands Biaz’s Chinese name and ignores his tribal name. In so doing, the officer denies not only the values of indigenous cultures and languages but the subjectivity of indigenous people. One may say that the police officer embodies the KMT’s assimilation policy toward aborigines.

The narrator plays an important role in cultural translation. Due to his bilingual background, he is able to serve as a translator between the two cultures and languages. In portraying Biaz, the narrator shows us how his concerns, fears, and joys are tied to aboriginal taboos and beliefs as well as to the changing world that encroaches on him. Unable to find the real cause of Pasulang’s miscarriage, Biaz blames it on her “impatient womb,” while Pasulang blames it on Biaz’s “maladjusted seed,” witch family, and ancestor’s curse. In bluffing with a fellow hunter, Biaz declares that the population of animals in the forest remains the same since, unlike men, they are free from vasectomy; in so saying he makes fun of the government’s family planning program that encourages men to undergo vasectomy. The irony is that he does not know that even though animals can escape vasectomy, they are still under the influence of modernity in the form of land development and plantation forest. When Biaz runs into the police officer, the narrator depicts Biaz as both terrified by the officer’s unkindness and amused to see the officer’s nose resemble that of a mountain boar looking for food. Judging from the officer’s greed, his observation proves correct. The narrator also presents the officer’s fear of Biaz’s physical strength and crescent sword as he threatens him with jailing, Biaz’s compromise due to his fears of jail and Pasulang’s leaving him, and Biaz’s curse on the officer in Bunun. By juxtaposing Biaz’s secret insistence on coming back to hunt (even without a gun) with the officer’s suggestion that Biaz never be a hunter again, the narrator shows us the tension between tribal values and city values.

Apart from money economy and assimilation policy through school education and law enforcement, the KMT’s modernity project also underlines the military forces with which to defend itself against the invasion of the Communists. We have discussed how in “Tuobasi Tamapima” the driver had been willing to attend a military school in exchange for a watch and a handbag. In “The Wake,” Tian delves into the
relationship between indigenous people and the military institutions through the death of a young aboriginal soldier. Starting with the ill omen the dead soldier’s father gets right before he receives the bad news, the story shifts to the night of the funeral and the multiple voices which probe into the cause of the death. Three different versions of how and why Idik died are offered. The first one, provided by Idik’s close friend, attributes his death to his troubled love relationship with a promiscuous Atayal woman. The second one, offered by his uncle, ascribes his death to the pressures of military training, especially the shooting orders that coerce him into killing people. The third one, provided by the village officer who accompanies Idik’s father to get his dead body and based on information from the military, attributes his death to emotional problems that lead to his possible disobedience to his superiors. Both of the first two versions mention that Idik had confided in a woman his wish to commit suicide, although neither woman is present to confirm it, whereas the third version wavers between seeing him as a suicide and considering him as killed by his superiors due to his disobedience. Young people tend to think that Idik kills himself because of his painful breakup with his girlfriend, whereas elders believe the real cause is that he is unable to resolve the conflict between the shooting orders and his own ethics.

Despite their differences, these views shed light on Bunun ethics and conceptions of masculinity inflected by Christianity. According to his uncle, Idik’s ethics is molded by traditional Bunun beliefs in loving people on this land and inflected by Christian beliefs in universal love. Taiwanese modernity, which in the form of the nation-state stresses military forces and coercion, has compelled him to go back on his ethics. On the other hand, Idik’s uncle may have broadened the Bunun notion of “people on this land” here to include other tribes and peoples. This suggests that Bunun ethics is under the influence of Christianity, which in turn shows the heritage of colonial modernity for it was missionaries who came alongside the European colonizers to convert aborigines. As far as notions of masculinity are concerned, traditionally Bununs put a premium on valor and manhood. Idik, however, is effeminate. To his uncle, Idik is tender, conscientious, kind-hearted, cowardly, and timid; to his close friend, he is shy, quiet, and a bit sissy when he speaks. According to the village officer, his apparently grief-stricken superior says that Idik demonstrates first-rate performance during military training, that he is diligent but quiet. His superior supposes that Idik should not have been afraid to speak because he spoke Mandarin Chinese with an accent. While it is debatable whether Idik re-masculinizes himself in the army or his superior re-masculinizes him after his death, a crucial issue is the possibility of his committing suicide. Since it is generally believed that no one has ever heard of a Bunun man killing himself, even for a Bunun man to express the wish to do so is deemed as unmanly.
A relevant issue is whether one should always take care not to break taboos. As old people discuss over Idik’s death, an old woman raises doubt about whether one is allowed to bring home a suicide so that friends and relatives can bid farewell to the departed. In response an elder announces that since suicides are bad deaths, they can neither be brought home nor be buried well. The elder even accuses Idik’s parents of violating the Bunun taboo, given that Idik is a suicide. The harsh words drive Idik’s mother to cry out loud; after she turns to whimper, Idik’s father has to retort to the elder by insisting that Idik could not have been a suicide because Idik’s mother had given him a bamboo necklace to protect him from evil. Nevertheless, Idik’s father does not seem to be convinced of his own statements. It is likely that Idik’s parents break taboo out of their love and grief for Idik. In fact, Idik’s parents had violated taboo before by eating piglets which died of miscarriage—a violation that is believed by the family to bring curse on them so that Idik’s mother had suffered two miscarriages before she gave birth to Idik. They gradually stop believing the curse after Idik is born, however. Early on old people had talked about taboo. Some taboos are respected, while others are deemed as odd, constraining, and superstitious. The change in attitudes toward taboos on the part of older generations indicates the influence of modernity. Nonetheless, some elders believe that violating taboo will bring bad luck to the tribe. Thus, Idik’s father’s insistence on Idik’s not being a suicide leads to an elder’s lament about the younger generations’ tendency to break taboo. Such an ongoing negotiation over the issue of taboo is a negotiation between the values of indigenous culture and those of modernity.

The wake is centered on two important rituals: First, Idik’s mother drives Idik’s soul out of the tribe by thrashing a bunch of reeds at the corners of the house and the coffin as well as the ground as she walks along the path toward the setting sun; and second, the relatives and family friends sing an elegy in Bunun eight-note chorus to both celebrate human life so the dead Idik may be sent to heaven and to console the souls of Idik’s parents, family, and friends. And yet most young people from Idik’s family cannot sing in Bunun eight-note chorus. Instead, they choose to watch the videotapes of Japanese wrestlers’ matches. In their excitement about the matches, they almost forget they are mourners at the wake for Idik, that early on they had dug a hole in the public graveyard for Idik’s coffin to be placed in. The juxtaposition of the ritual performers with the videotape viewers is telling of the generational gap and the tension between indigenous culture and modernity. Television and the mass media in general constitute a powerful means of modernity, even more powerful perhaps than school education because it apparently aims at entertainment rather than instruction. Without stepping outside the tribe, younger generations may become a modern Taiwanese subject by watching television, while at the same time they may disconnect
themselves with Bunun oral tradition. As it turns out in the story, they can neither sing old Bunun songs nor tell Bunun stories.

As in the story “Tuobasi Tamapima,” heteroglossia prevail in the story “The Wake” with different people speaking and telling stories. Since the wake is a Bunun social occasion for mourners to share stories about and sing elegies for the dead, it is a culturally important event for Bununs to relive and reenact their oral tradition. Aside from performing rituals, the mourners also tell each other Bunun stories, mythologies, legends, and taboos. Performativity is integral to oral tradition. Since it is not written down, there may be different versions of the same story. Even old people may forget and need to check with an elder about the details of a taboo. Sadly, except for the village officer, the young mourners in the story do not join the talk after the elegy. Finding himself ignorant of the old legends, stories, and taboos, the village officer is eager to learn but wishes that they could all be written down to be better understood and preserved. The old people disagree, however, pointing out the problems with a written law. An old minister argues that only when one breaks taboo do the old people explain it and then one learns about it, whereas a written law is something given and oppressive, allowing for no negotiating ground. An old woman remarks that textbooks have already replaced old people, so that young people are no longer interested in either taboos or old people. Pointing her fingers at the viewers of the wrestlers’ matches, she observes that school education has reduced the opportunities for old people and younger generations to get together. In the eyes of old people, then, school education and television are threatening to indigenous traditions because they render the latter obsolete.

Like the third-person narrator of “The Last Hunter,” the third-person narrator of “The Wake” serves as a translator between two cultures, two languages, and two epistemologies in an unobtrusive way. The narrator sometimes narrates partially from different individuals’ points view and sometimes from the point of view of the community. By presenting the inner thoughts of Idik’s father and the village officer, for instance, the narrator not only contrasts the views of different generations but helps negotiate and translate between different positions. Idik’s father is traditional but does not refrain from breaking taboo sometimes, whereas the village officer receives school education, is unfamiliar with indigenous culture, but seems interested to learn about the latter. Thus, depending on whether the reader is a traditional or a modernized Bunun, he/she can identify himself/herself with Idik’s father or the village officer while seeing how his/her own position is critiqued by other positions. Most important of all, the narrator presents the multiple voices of the community and shows the power of indigenous oral culture. Though often disparaged as inferior because they have no written language, indigenous cultures in fact have rich oral traditions.
that entail epistemologies quite different from cultures that privilege writing. Significantly, the very form of the story “The Wake” succeeds in re-inscribing oral tradition in writing by not only transcribing speeches of diverse individuals but also presenting how stories invite stories, and legends invite legends in an ongoing development. The interaction and role-exchange between storyteller and listener distinguish the story from the novel. As Walter Benjamin notes in his “The Storyteller,” whereas the novelist has secluded himself in writing, the storyteller “takes what he tells from experience—his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale” (Benjamin 146). The same story is told and retold in different ways, carrying the traces of the storytellers. Always a repetition with a difference, the layers of retellings constitute a web that contain collective memories and experiences and show the living power of oral tradition.

It is noteworthy that the ongoing debate in the story “The Wake” between writing and oral expression ends in an ambivalent “both/and.” On the one hand, the debate ends with the advice by an unidentified voice that “So we should get together more often and live together. If we don’t want to abandon Bunun ways of living, we can’t leave our tribe. In the past, taboos and legends are in the charge of the chief of the tribe. Now we depend on ourselves for the knowledge of them; the village head is not in charge of them” (Tian 1992: 11). The stress on reviving the community and oral culture in the tribe is made more urgent by the social change under modernity, with the chief of the tribe replaced by the village head. On the other, since this story, like other stories by Tian in the two collections of short stories, is presented in written form, the narrator still endorses writing. As the translator between two cultures and two languages, then, the narrator suggests that indigenous people depend on the tribe for the revival of their culture and heritage while at the same time they cannot survive without knowing how to cope with modernity. To the extent that younger generations receive compulsory school education, they are compelled to become modern subjects, which makes it even more difficult for them to cherish indigenous cultures. Just as the tension between indigenous culture and modernity is inevitable, so the modern aborigine is caught in split consciousness. The modern aborigine cannot have indigenous identity without problematizing the barbarous/civilized, backward/modern binary oppositions that underwrite modernity. At the same time, the modern aborigine needs to know both indigenous cultures and modernity well so he/she can negotiate between them. The aborigine needs to have a double vision so that he/she may critique the values of each with those of the other.

In conclusion, set in the late 1980s or early 1990s, Tian’s three stories show an acute awareness of the problems with which indigenous people are confronted under
Taiwanese modernity. While the multiple communal voices manifest diverse positions, the narrator, either first-person or third-person, serves as a translator between dominant culture and indigenous culture, between Chinese and Bunun. Although the stories are written mainly in Chinese, Bunun words and phrases are blended in the narrative from time to time. Moreover, some conversations and interior monologues are in fact translations by the narrator, since they are originally spoken or thought by characters in Bunun. Thus, while indigenous people are forced to use Mandarin Chinese, the narrator is re-writing the language to make it a new indigenous language. Aside from that, the narrator re-inscribes indigenous oral tradition in writing by transcribing stories and legends the characters tell each other. In so doing, the narrator underlines his aboriginal identity without losing his claim to a modern Taiwanese subject. One may say that the narrator is implicitly re-conceptualizing the modern Taiwanese subject by demanding that ethnic diversity be taken into account, although he seems to put greater stress on reviving indigenous tradition. Tormented by split consciousness sometimes, the narrator as the translator paradoxically embraces both indigenous culture and modernity so he may survive.

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