CHINA

Balcom, John, and Yingtsih Balcom, Editors, translators. *Indigenous Writers of Taiwan: An Anthology of Stories, Essays & Poems*. Modern Chinese Literature from Taiwan. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005. xxiv + 194 pages. Map, translator's introduction, notes on the authors. Hardcover US$29.50/£19.50; ISBN 0-231-13650-1.

With this volume Professor John Balcom and his wife Yingtsih have placed the literature of the indigenous nations of Taiwan on the map as far as the English reading public is concerned. This is very much to their credit.

In view of the lack of familiarity with the Austronesian nations of Taiwan in the English-speaking world, one would have wished for a more adequate introduction to the cultures and languages of the twelve (not nine, as is indicated in the translators' introduction) nations (xi).

These nations speak languages of the Austronesian language family, and their peo-

ples are said to have lived in Taiwan for at least fifteen thousand years (xv). I do not know one reputable archaeologist who would commit to this dating, and even Hsu Wen-hsiung, who is quoted as one of the sources, writes: "Nonetheless, the present-day ethnographic diversity of Taiwan's aboriginal inhabitants as well as the spatially and temporally varied archaeological evidence do not allow one to write with confidence about the island's prehistory" (1980, 4–5).

The ethnographic background provided in this volume is too general to be of use, and it contains some inaccuracies, including antiquated population figures and statements like "The Atayal believe in spirits and unnamed supernatural powers called *utux* as well as spirits of the dead" (xiii). One wonders how they can be unnamed, if they are called *utux*? This statement should read: The Atayal venerate *utux*, the spirits of their ancestors, who they believe to be endowed with superhuman powers.

The Paiwan, a nation with a population of 67,284 (2004) and a very distinctive culture, are dismissed in six-and-a-half lines in this introduction.

The historical outline, while sufficient in general, covers barely one page, short shrift of the most crucial period in the ethnohistory of these peoples. There is no detailed recording of the life- and mind-changing measures forced on the indigenous peoples by the Japanese colonial authorities, as outlined in the complaint of the Alliance of Taiwan Aborigines (ATA) to the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations in 1993 (Alliance of Taiwan Aborigines to the United Nations) and a photo documentation in Chinese and English (Anonymous, 49 pp.) entitled "We Want to Tell the World."

I do not wish to waste more space by dwelling on other inadequacies of the ethnographic and historical background portions, and will rather proceed to the more productive discussion of indigenous literature (xviii–xxii). The author divides the literature of and/or about the Austronesian peoples into three stages.

The first stage (xviii) covers the traditional oral literature as recorded by linguists and ethnographers. The most prominent of these collections (nearly three hundred myths, traditions, and stories) was published by Ogawa Naoyoshi and Asai Erin in 1935. At this stage, the Austronesian peoples were the subjects of studies by others. In the last two decades indigenous writers and scholars have continued to collect what remains of the oral literature.

The second stage (xvii–xix) is not as easy to define because it includes not only works by Japanese and Han writers based on the oral literature of the Austronesians, but also original work about the life and plight of the indigenous peoples. In other words, at this stage, others gave voice to the as yet voiceless.

The author also points out a distinction between *shandi wenxue* (山地文学), glossed as aboriginal literature, and *yuanzhumin wenxue* (原住民文学), indigenous literature made by Wu Chin-fa. Aboriginal literature, according to this definition, is writing about the indigenous peoples by non-indigenous writers, whereas indigenous literature is written by indigenous writers in Chinese. While this distinction is justified, I do not think the English terminology—aboriginal versus indigenous—is meaningful. The Chinese terminology contrasts mountain literature with indigenous literature and although a simple upland/lowland dichotomy has proved inadequate even in prehistoric contexts, it is at least not tautological.

Indigenous literature constitutes the third stage. The literature of this stage began to unfold after the lifting of martial law in 1987 and in consequence of the social, political and cultural upheavals of the 1970s and 1980s, characterized by a trend of political and cultural Taiwanification, as contrasted with the previous mainland orientation.

Austronesian peoples took the newly found regionalism one step further to resist the authority of the dominant Han culture. Identity politics and minority rights emerged as prominent foci in the public discourse. Much of the indigenous literature focuses on identity issues, the erosion of culture due to dual assimilation policies—first to Japanese, then to Chinese cultural conventions—and nostalgia for the old ways (xvii–xix).

The translators/editors remark that ironically this literature is written in Chinese, the language of the "oppressor," and results in the Austronesian peoples defining themselves by the logic of the dominant Han culture. Originally, and before the radical changes that ensued as a result of Japanese colonial policies, this logic did not apply in relation to nature. Some writers warn that the Austronesian peoples should look to themselves and their own cultures and languages in order to establish their identities. Some state that they have only found themselves when they return to their roots. On the other hand, most of the writers argue that there simply is no audience in their native languages, although some of them do publish bilingual books. I would add that in the recent past, at least one generation was forbidden to learn and use their native language in school and, therefore, failed to transmit it adequately to the next generation. Furthermore, it should not be forgotten that in Japanese colonial times they were forced to speak Japanese and identify with Japan. In this way, grandparents who are fluent in their native language and remember at least broken Japanese literally do not share a common language with their grandchildren who have grown up with Mandarin only.

The author (xxi) takes note of the fact that questions of "authenticity" might arise in view of this situation. He argues that a language offers a worldview and the writers stand in two worlds, their own indigenous culture and the dominant culture, albeit in a marginalized position. The author also speculates about whether the violations of Chinese grammar prevalent in this literature are a conscious subversion or a remaking of the language. These works, he continues, also contain an extensive indigenous vocabulary, which is often, but not always, explained. I would have thought it was up to the translators/editors to provide these explanations, which are found somewhat wanting in this volume. Balcom continues: "Despite the boom in indigenous culture, experts are generally pessimistic about the future of the Austronesian peoples. The cultural gap between the generations is expanding. In view of the ongoing acculturation policies, customs and languages are disappearing at a rapid pace. What remains of indigenous culture is sold as an exotic commodity to tourists" (xxi).

Taking into account the activities of the indigenous rights and cultural revival movements and holding on to the hope that President Chen Shui-bien will keep his promise to negotiate with the Austronesian nations on a nation-to-nation basis to establish autonomous regions, much in the same way as happened with Indian land in the USA, I am not quite as pessimistic about the future.

Compared to a five-volume anthology of works by indigenous Taiwanese writers published in Japanese (Shimomura 2000–2005), the anthology under review is a modest beginning. The selection of texts is fairly representative of the nations and includes mostly short stories, essays, and poems also contained in the Japanese anthology. That anthology has the advantage of including comments by experts, whereas the Balcoms appear to struggle with terminology, such as their indiscriminate use of "tribe" when they mean real or fictitious descent line or autonomous village with respect to ethno-territorial segments. Another perennial source of confusion is the transliteration of indigenous names and expressions, which has not been unified in over one hundred years of research. While this is in no way the responsibility of the Balcoms, for a person such as myself who is used

to indigenous village names, it is difficult to identify villages that are cited by their Chinese names in an unfamiliar transliteration.

In fact, even I have pondered about the effect that writing in Chinese might have on indigenous literature. These writers love and respect nature and connect to their natural environment and traditional way of life on a very deep level. They are able to portray nature through brilliant imagery. They evoke such a vivid sense of their natural and human surroundings that anyone who has ever been there will surely experience an immediate recall of these landscapes in their mind's eye and a nostalgic longing in his/her heart. Even people who have never visited Taiwan and never met the Austronesian peoples will appreciate their intuitive connection with nature and be struck by expressions of their helpless grief for traditions and a glorious way of life lost forever.

I do not have the expertise to judge how much of the power of expression of the original languages is lost by writing in Chinese, but it cannot all be lost if these mental images survive two translations, first into Chinese and then into English and/or Japanese. Reading both versions, the Japanese and the English, I do feel that they mostly rely on their own traditional imagery and less on Chinese literary conventions. I base this conviction on my study of the worldview of the Atayal as expressed in their traditional mortuary ritual and its spiritual background, which summarizes Atayal life and death in a grand vision, distinguished by an austere, but poetic beauty of its own.

In the present selection, these images are particularly vivid in the stories of the hunters and my personal favorite, "Out of the Brush," the story about headhunting, a cultural necessity maligned and misunderstood by most. There again it might have been helpful had the editor explained to the reader that the defining moment of a headhunter's strategy occurs when the headhunter rises suddenly from the underbrush to ambush an unsuspecting passer-by.

There are many tales in the selection about the daily struggle to make ends meet in a new capitalist economy that does not cut the indigenous peoples any slack. There is also a profound longing for the old way of life and for past glory lost forever. During the Japanese colonial period, the realization that turning back to the old ways was no longer an option caused a split in the individual and collective self-understanding of the Atayal as suggested by Nakamura (2003, 96) that seems to paralyze the Atayal to this day. Nevertheless, among the Truku at least the activists among them have recovered their vigor. It is evident that the traditional social and value systems, the worldviews of individual nations, determined their reaction to the changes forced on them. There are essays indicating total social and cultural marginalization, especially of the older generations who do not speak Mandarin and who hover uneasily between their traditional worldviews/religious beliefs and Christianity. This brings me to a very strange passage in the context of the story "Elegy" by Lekal (Amis): "While most of the villagers had converted to Christianity or Catholicism, only she [the seer, healer] steadfastly believed that it was the ancestral spirits who protected the village" (59). And to think that I spent all my life in the belief that Catholicism was the core of Christianity! While this passage may be contained in the original text, it should have merited a corrective comment by the editor, unless he shares this revisionist view of history.

One last minor gripe. The Austronesian peoples are artistically gifted and have their own design systems and a color palette of yellow, red, and green; I am disappointed this tradition was not utilized in the design of the dust cover.

While these shortcomings grate on a person who has done research on the Austronesian peoples of Taiwan for half a century, they may not irritate the general reader quite as much. I, therefore, recommend this volume to any reader interested in the world of

indigenous peoples who, in spite of having been displaced and marginalized, preserve a poignant memory of their days of glory and fight to restore their dignity to find their place in an unfamiliar social and cultural environment. It is not my intent to discourage the Balcom team by my discontent and I hope they keep introducing more indigenous literature from Taiwan to the English-speaking world.

REFERENCES CITED

Alliance of Taiwan Aborigines to the United Nations
n. d. Report of the Alliance of Taiwan Aborigines to the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations, 19–30 July 1993, Geneva Switzerland. <www.taiwandocuments.org/ata.htm>, accessed 22 October 2006.

Anonymous
n. d. *We Want to Tell the World.* (Photo document). Taipei.

Nakamura Masaru 中村勝
2003 台湾高地先住民の歴史人類学 [Historical anthropology of the Highland Peoples of Taiwan]. Tokyo: Roku'in Shobō.

Ogawa Naoyoshi 小川尚義, Asai Erin 浅井恵論
1935 原語による台湾高砂族伝説集 [Myths and traditions of the Formosan native tribes]. Taipei: Taihoku Teikokudaigaku Gengogaku Kenkyūshitsu.

Shimomura Sakujirō 下村作次郎 et. al., translators
2000–2005 台湾原住民文学選 (Anthology of indigenous literature of Taiwan), 5 volumes. Tokyo: Sōfūkan.

Erika Kaneko
Japanese Research Group on the Indigenous Peoples of Taiwan