

## Taiwanese Mountain Area as Place/Landscape Presented in *Seediq Bale*

Chin-ching Lee\*

### Abstract

In “Some Principles of Ecocriticism,” William Howarth writes that nature and culture “constantly mingle, like water and soil in a flowing stream” (69). Lawrence Buell, while considering the future of environmental criticism, expresses a clear belief that “the environment” refers to both “natural” and “human-built” dimensions of the world. The two critics suggest, in effect, that the built environment, as well as the natural aspects of the land, be discussed.

The environment is thus permeated with diverse power relations among people, and with interactions between man and his surroundings. This expanded notion considers the environment as “landscape” – a compound term in which “land” refers to the surface of the earth while “scape” means “to shape” from the outside. The term, then, implicitly refers to man’s collective effects on the environment; the land is made and modified to serve as the infrastructure for human existence. Another idea related to land ethics is “place,” which, according to Tim Creswell, allows not only for being understood through the lens of social and cultural conflicts, but also for discussions of value, belonging and attachment (20).

This paper is intended to discuss the ideas of place and landscape in *Seediq Bale*, and to investigate diverse relations between men and the environment. *Seediq Bale*, a film released in 2011, is about the conflicts between the aboriginal people in Taiwan and Japanese colonizers. The film is set in the mountain areas in Taiwan. The mountain area becomes a land shaped, abused and changed for Japanese imperial benefits. It is, however, a “place” for the aboriginals, a land not constructed by a seamless, coherent identity, but one containing a variety of conflicts and attachments. The mountain area in the film becomes a social construct expressing a sense of (un)rootedness, the oppression of people, and the exploitation of nature. Japanese colonial hegemony therefore causes environmental racism, which is a form of racial oppression connected to and supported by natural exploitation.

**Key words:** place, landscape, environmental racism

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\* Lecturer, Department of English, Da-yeh University.

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## 《賽德克巴萊》中所呈現的台灣山區地景/地方

李晶菁\*

### 摘要

威廉霍爾在「生態批評的基本信念」一文中，主張自然與文明其實是「如同潺潺流水中的泥與水一般，相互交融」。勞倫斯貝爾在思考環境批評的未來時，也明確的主張：所謂環境，應包含渾然天成與後天改造兩個層面。這兩位批評家都認為：土地的「自然」與「人為」面向都必須納入考量。

因此在討論環境議題時，會發現「環境」其實內涵了人與人之間的權力關係，以及人與周遭的各種互動。這樣的觀念擴展下去，即衍伸出兩個對環境的觀點。一是「地景」(landscape)，此為複合字：land 指地表萬象，scape 指的是外來的「形塑」。「地景」一詞泛指：土地為人類存在的物質基本結構之際，人類集體對環境的影響。另一個對土地倫理的觀點是「地方」(place)。根據克瑞斯威爾的定義，「地方」這個概念不只可以觀看其內部社會文化的衝突，也可以討論位於其中的價值、歸屬、和情感依附等。

基於上述觀念，筆者意圖討論電影「賽德克巴萊」中「地方」、「地景」的呈現，以及探討其中人與環境不同的關係網絡。此電影於 2011 年上映，其中探討原著民和日本殖民者之間的衝突。電影以及史實事件發生在中台灣的山區：這山區在日本帝國利益環視之下，已成為一個被形塑、被壓榨、且因此面貌改變的「地景」。然而，對原住民而言，這山區是一個「地方」：內部並非共享平和且單一的身分，而是一個有內在衝突以及情感依附之地。電影中的山區因此成為一個社會建構，內含了紮根與失根的矛盾、對人的壓迫、以及對環境的迫害。日本殖民霸權造就了「環境種族主義」；而所謂的「環境種族主義」，乃指種族壓迫及環境破壞之間相輔相成的關係。

**關鍵字：**地方，地景，環境種族主義

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\* 大葉大學英美語文學系講師。

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## I. Nature vs. Culture

When Michel Foucault proposes that life is inevitably “governed by certain numbers of oppositions...for example...between cultural space and useful space,” he does not mean that we should get stuck in binary oppositions (23); instead, he suggests getting within and with-out dichotomies to obtain diverse perspectives. The example that Foucault mentions – the opposition between cultural space (culture) and useful space (nature) – has a long tradition that defines and justifies human domination over nature. In fact, the definition of the word “culture” has changed over time to take on a more anthropocentric value. Etymologically speaking, “culture” at first referred to “a cultivated field or piece of land” (Bate 3); its inseparability from land was implied. The word later referred derivatively to “tillage, the working over the soil” (ibid), such that man’s labor and technology to enhance agricultural production are implied. “Culture” has ever since been associated with the advancement of society, wherein intellectual and spiritual works bring civility and satisfy moral needs, while science and technology satisfy material demands. The etymological development of the word “culture,” which Jonathan Bate discusses in his introduction to the interrelationship between romantic poems and nature, uncovers the rudimentary unity of culture and nature, while simultaneously explaining the gradually developed binary, opposing notions of culture vs. nature in modern life and thinking.

On the other hand, according to the *Online Etymology Dictionary*, in the thirteenth century the word “nature” referred to the “restorative powers of the body,” or the “bodily process.” From the late fourteenth century on nature is associated with the “material world beyond human civilization or society.” Once nature is related to “useful space,” its material reality is noted. However, when discussing ecocriticism Peter Barry repudiates the notion of linguistic or social constructionism; he also denies nature as a reality that transcends conflicts or human intrusion. He thus defines nature as “a site of struggle” (Barry 254). This change in word definition (culture), and the refusal to trap nature in either a linguistic construct or into daily materials, shakes and complicates the culture-nature binary opposition.

Such intricate interaction between culture and nature, as well as the interaction within each one, presents an anthropocentric opinion. Anthropocentrism, the notion of human domination over, and exploitation of, nature, develops along with civilization. In other words, the culture-nature interaction has a long tradition that is sustained by established narratives. The two primal origins of western civilization, Greek mythology and the Bible, justify such human domination over a non-human sphere. From the moment Prometheus brings fire to help humans with their self-protection and accommodation, the burgeoning civilization starts developing in an anthropocentric direction. Christianity also features the domination of nature. In the Garden of Eden, God allows Adam and Eve to name all the animals and then declares them as subject to humans, which not only builds up religious authority, but degenerates nature into a backdrop for human survival. Lynn White blames *Genesis* for anthropocentrism, which initiates the hierarchy of man over animals and causes the unbalanced relationship between culture and nature. Such hierarchies can be found in *Genesis*:

The Lord God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.’ So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man [Adam] to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field

(I.ii.18-20).

Naming is a symbol of power and manipulation, and these verses from *Genesis* justify human domination over nature. In medieval painting, therefore, nature is found as a backdrop for religious motifs, which is further developed into a stratification of the “Great Chain of Being” – a belief committed to theology and to human domination over nature. The Great Chain of Being embraces the ultimate authority of God, as well as the philosophy that nature is in service of man.

Later on, when Rene Descartes (1596-1650) advocates the mastery and possession of nature within the grasps of *res cogitans* – mind and rationality become the driving forces behind science and ideas. As Alexander Pope, in “An Essay on Man,” claims that “the proper study of mankind is Man,” so the notion of human beings as separate from, and superior to, nonhuman nature is declared. The Age of Enlightenment in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, therefore, not only embraces a Cartesian vision of the world, which stresses the authority of human reason over nature, but asserts the need to study nature scientifically so as to justify human domination over nature. Culture and nature become opposing notions that are distinguishable and irreconcilable. Hegel thus proposes art to differentiate humans from animals, and to make up for the deficiency of natural beauty in humans (Bate 122). Culture is considered a strategic need for improving nature.

The development of the culture-nature dichotomy discloses values that are history-laden. Lawrence Buell points out that the nature-culture distinction is anthropogenic, starting with nomadism and settlement millennia ago (3). The dichotomy is thus a necessary lens through which the human modernization process is perceived. However, the notion that nature is constructed and stratified within can be found in works as early as Chaucer’s “Parliament of Fowls.” Here the natural world is constructed in service of gender and class hegemony. The idea of nature as a social construct invites critical examination of the power relationship within. William Howarth therefore insists that nature and culture mingle constantly (7); Gary Snyder, likewise, proclaims that “nature...is everywhere, and ...is almost always intermingled with the form of culture” (6-7). This development denies a sharp dichotomy between nature and culture; the term “environment” is thus rendered more comprehensive, including both cultivated and built landscape as well as natural and wilderness areas. This more inclusive perspective of the environment promotes the understanding that “nature and culture [are] interwoven rather than...separate sides of a dualistic construct” (Wallace & Armbruster 4). Human beings, as biohistorical creatures, thus shift attention to the concerns of human interaction with the environment from scientific, economic, political and religious perspectives.<sup>1</sup>

This human relationship with the environment can be understood through the human use of nature: man’s ambition to control nature is likely to extend to controlling other humans. In this sense, power relationships within nature are a focus in environmentalist studies. Indeed, as Alexander Willson mentions, “the whole idea of nature as something separate from human experience is a lie” (13). Humans can be seen as *a part of* and *apart from* nature: the former view focuses on nature and culture as symbionts, while the latter focuses on the benefits of humans and those of the environment being differentiated. As culture generates economic and political concerns, nature turns out to be “a site of power struggles, displacements, and contestation” (Norton 274). An analogy can be found in Raymond Williams’ refusal to consider rural life a simple, natural, and unadulterated Golden Age. He claims rural life cannot be trapped in a dualistic opposition of the city as evil, with peace and harmony in the country. The binary oppositions of culture/nature,

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<sup>1</sup> Richard G. Botzler and Susan Armstrong, in *Environmental Ethics: Divergence and Convergence*, propose that environmental ethics “is not limited to ethical inquiry, but also imbedded in a larger matrix of aesthetic, religious, scientific, economic and political considerations” (2).

humans/surroundings, and city/country are thus shaken to include more inconsistency and interaction within each dichotomy.

## II. Place, Landscape, and Power Relationship in Land Ethics

When focusing on land in this study, two terms must be avoided to make the critical focus clear: ecocriticism and setting. Cheryll Glotfelty defines ecocriticism as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” (xviii). However, the prefix “eco” connotes natural surroundings, so the built environment is excluded. This reiterates the dichotomy of nature vs. culture, and curtails the environmental concerns of the earth. Environmentalism is a more inclusive term comprehending both the natural and built surroundings, in which culture and nature are ingredients, and conflicts and unbalanced power relations are discussed. As for “setting,” it implies “the physical environment serv[ing] for artistic purposes merely ... [and] ancillary to the main event” (Buell, 1995, 85). Therefore, “land,” instead of “setting,” is a proper term so as not to be deprecated as a backdrop.

Literary works offer imaginative situations regarding the interaction and interdependence of humans and the environment. When Lawrence Buell considers the environment “more simulacra-mediated than context-responsive,” he is actually pointing out that the environment is constantly consumed and refashioned rather than a permanent fixed given (2001, 5). Michael Bennett thus proposes to incorporate urban and degraded landscapes into the environmental discourse, so as to advance its ecopolitical prowess without reinforcing the nature-culture dualism (22). Environmental criticism thus takes into consideration “the fate of place,” which, as coined by the same book title by Edward Casey, is the primal concern of ecopolitics and ecopoetics: with the former addressing environmental exploitation and conservation while the latter delineates a textual world with specified settings.

When considering place as a main concern in environmental discourse, Buell proposes that world history is actually “a history of space becoming place...through inhabitation” (2005, 63-64). In fact, place is characterized by ownership, as well as by meaning, when people are attached to it (Cresswell 1). This ownership of, and attachment to, a place coincides with Yi-fu Tuan’s idea of “topophilia,” which refers to “the affective bond between people and place” (4). In other words, place is characterized by people’s subjective and emotional sense of attachment. Once a sense of place is built up, value and identity are established, although they are likely to be threatened or eradicated.

Attachment to a place leads to rootedness in this place, and a collective identity among its people. This place attachment is possible since places are constructed through memories and affections, and are therefore intersubjective. Memories and affections collaborate to set up place attachment; thereby, a place “is seen, heard, smelled, imagined, loved, hated, feared, revered” among people over time (Walter 142). On the other hand, rootedness in a place implies that place is “time-thickened” (Crang 103), with the past and the present binding people together on that very spot. Therefore, place is never a “pause” of the sort proclaimed by Tuan (8), because place is not only associated with security and stability. Tuan defines place as “one of stability and permanence” (29), and “an enclosed and humanized space...[with] a calm center of established value” (54). Tuan’s definition neglects the fact that place is constituted in events, in memories, and in attachment. Doreen Massey claims that places do not have a single identity, but are instead contained within constellations of social relations and conflicts. Therefore, place is “extroverted, which includes a consciousness of its links with the wider world, ...intergrat[ing] in a positive way the global and the local” (Massey 69). Likewise, Edward Casey considers

place “eventmental, something in process, something unconfined to a thing” (337). In other words, place and memory are interwoven; both are constructed, open to events, and resistant to pause and stability. Place is eventmental and progressive, with conflicts within. It is not a pause, nor a natural given.

When place is attachment, memory and events accumulated, it is an area “in which... the constitution of *social relations* are located and with which people can *identify*” (Agnew 263, emphasis mine). John Agnew’s definition pinpoints two elements that are buried in place: social relations and identity, and these two can integrate the study of place with that of power relations. In this sense, place is, on the one hand, inseparable from the concrete region where it is set, while on the other, it delivers “open and porous networks of social relations” (Massey 121). In other words, place refers not only to topography, but also to relations. Similarly, Michel Foucault proclaims that people do not live inside a void, but within “a set of relations that delineate sites...irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another” (23). Place is thus to be perceived through the lens of social and cultural conflicts; social relations concerning race, gender and class are the primal focus. Place is socially constructed within the context of unequal power relations: of domination and exploitation. Never is place a bounded stasis; instead, it is “the product of processes,” and this is of tremendous importance for human existence and cultural development. It is therefore impossible to think of a world without place, in which there are still material realities and constructed interrelations.

Place is therefore made up of sets of social relations at a particular location. It is a convergence of place attachment, history/memory, geographical materials, and interrelations. Due to all of these, place can never be a seamless, coherent identity. However, when human interaction with nature is conducted for profit, instead of for need, place is contained within the oppression of subalterns,<sup>2</sup> as well as the exploitation of environmental surroundings. Lance Newman therefore claims that nature writing is “a dynamic tradition of response to the rise and development of the capitalist ecosocial order” (18). The interrelation between humans and the nonhuman environment is social-mediated: place thus transcends the fixed, bounded locus and is an open location undergoing continuous events and conflicts. Buell (2005) therefore considers place-making as “a culturally inflected process,” in which nature and culture, as well as humans and nonhuman location, are seen as “a *mutuality* rather than as separate, irreconcilable domains” (67, emphasis mine).

Attachments and interactions between people and place are thus of tremendous importance. As previously mentioned, place is the location people get involved with and attached to. Another similar term, “landscape,” is “an intensely visual idea” (Cresswell 10). Firstly coined for painting, “landscape” refers to the actual countryside. The word “landscape” is formed by combining two words: land and *scape*; the former is a definite portion of the earth, while the latter, *scape*, is “shape...which indicates collective aspects of the environment” (Jackson 7). The word “landscape” therefore implies the visual shaping of the land; in other words, people are seeing the complexity of the world. This term later develops into “a composition of man-made spaces on the land...which evolves not according to natural laws but to serve a community” (Jackson 8). Landscape thus implies a land with topographical material in service of communal demand and consumption.

Since landscape refers to the shape of land, visual perspectives and political

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<sup>2</sup> “Subalterns” is a term coined by Antonio Gramsci (1891-1933). According to Gramsci, the dominant class achieves economic superiority and cultural hegemony; social institutions are thus structured according to their will. However, “subalterns” refers to those socially subordinated groups that lack the hegemony and authority of the dominant class.

manipulation are emphasized, rather than attachments and involvement. Cresswell thus finds in landscapes “the view...outside of it,” insisting that “we do not live in landscapes – we look at them” (11). Landscape serves as a backdrop for human perception and existence – an anthropocentric knowledge of the topography that serves as the infrastructure for human production and consumption. In summary, place and landscape offer two diverse attitudes toward land: the former is contained within attachment and engagement, while the latter delivers consumer benefits.

When Thoreau regards man as “an inhabitant, or a part and parcel of Nature, rather than a member of society” (99), he is stuck in the binary opposition of culture and nature. However, his proposal of being a mere inhabitant denies human ownership of land. Aldo Leopold later holds a similar idea when he sees humans as “plain members and citizens,” rather than as conquerors of the land-community (413). Human inhabitation on land shows the connection and attachment between humans and the environment. Place discourse thus encourages reciprocal relationships, while landscape functioning as an infrastructure for consumer needs and production inevitably discloses conflicts and an unbalanced power relationship within. Be it place or landscape, however, “land” is a common concern.

Some critics point out the divergences lie in “postcolonial ecocriticism”: ecocriticism “priorit[is] extra-human concerns,” while post-colonialism focuses on “the interests of disadvantaged human groups”<sup>3</sup> (Huggan & Tiffin 17). “Land,” however, is the common concern of environmental and colonial discourses: environmentalism focuses on the exploitation of land, while colonial discourse oppresses and abuses new land and its inhabitants. With land as the site of oppression and conflicts, environmental racism combines racial exploitation with environmental concerns, that “the oppression of one is connected to, and supported by, the oppression of the other” (Curtin 145). In this “biotic community,” humans are “ecologically and environmentally embedded” (Buell, 2005, 8); exploitation of the environment and the oppression of people are often connected to each other.

The two discourses – environmentalism and colonialism – have land as a common concern. Land as a landscape is produced and consumed, while land as a place is to be attached to and involved with. Robert Pogue Harrison, when discussing English rural countryside, mentions that deruralization occurs due to “humankind’s consuming encroachment upon wild woodlands” (71). Henri Lefebvre, when discussing the irreversibility of natural space, proclaims that nature is “reduced to materials on which society’s productive forces operate” (187). Harrison’s concern of deruralization and Lefebvre’s worry about nature’s irreversibility both point to the fact that land is being appropriated to produce value, and to satisfy the capitalist demands through domination of the land and of the people on it. Land as a place or a landscape is therefore important in environmental studies.

### III. Film Analysis

The discussion above delineates the idea of nature as both a given and a construct; besides, any location can be regarded as either a place with attachment within, or a landscape with biased perspectives from outside. These ideas will be included in discussing the film, *Warriors of the Rainbow: Seediq Bale*--a historical epic released in 2011. It is based on a calamity – the Wushe Incident – that occurred in central Taiwan in

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<sup>3</sup> Graham Huggan, in “‘Greening’ Postcolonialism: Ecocritical Perspectives,” points out that “postcolonial critics have been insufficiently attuned to life-centered (eco- or biocentric) issues and concerns” (702).

1930. The Seediq are an aboriginal people in mid-Taiwan's interior highlands. In this mountainous interior, the Seediq led a traditional life, hunting for animals, and tattooing their faces to make possible their afterlife with their ancestors. However, the Treaty of Shimonoseki ceded Taiwan to the Japanese government in 1895. During the colonial period that followed, the Japanese army tried to plunder natural resources from the island, and abused people by trapping them into forced labor and sending them into a spiral of alcoholism. In the face of the intrusive imperial coercion, the indigenous people on this land banded together for a rebellion. This uprising was led by Mouna Rudao, Chief of the Mahebu village of the Seediq people. Mouna Rudao tried to protect his land and people from Japanese persecution; but not until a right moment would Mouna Rudao form an underground of alliance of six clans, then lead his people into this desperate rebellion plotted. The initial uprising took the Japanese by surprise, and was almost successful. This surprise attack was on the day of a school sports meeting, when many high-ranking Japanese officials would attend. After the massacre, the Japanese soon tried all mean to crush the rebellion, using aircraft, bombs, even poison gas, though the last was in breach of international conventions. Taiwan mountain area is obviously "a site of struggle," to take Peter Barry's term (254).

(a) *the mountain area as a **place** for the aboriginals*

The David-versus-Goliath film begins with young Mouna Rudao hunting in the forest, and feuding with one man from another Seediq tribe, Temu Walis – the two clans have been quarrelling for hunting grounds for a long time. Specifically, the opening scene exhibits the lush forest of Mount Chilai, where narrow paths, ancient trunks, giant trees, waterfalls and creeks all embellish the already green local world. The aboriginal lifestyle presents an ideal land ethic like that proposed by Leopold – humans as "plain members and citizens" in their natural environment, in which the "intrinsic value" of the surroundings is recognized and respected (413). Their land ethic advocates human responsibility toward nature, denies anthropocentric commercial goals, and proposes a symbiosis between humans and land, between culture and nature. In addition, the beginning scene sketches the Seediq being made of warring clans, who earn their valor through head hunting. Their tattooed faces and impressive athleticism present the collective Seediq characteristics. On the other hand, however, complicated internecine tribal rivalries are outlined too. Therefore, during the Japanese colonial reign, some of the Seediq are resigned to defeated subservience; their fighting spirit has been diluted by servitude. Others, like the film's hero Mauna Rudao, secretly organize rebellion for survival and freedom. The mountain area inhabited by the indigenous tribes is a *place* with inherent tribal rootedness, attachment, also diversities and conflicts.

Just as Arthur J. Ray's portrayal of Canada's indigenous people, the places where their ancestors lived and their spiritual roots lie are of vital importance for their self-definition. Metaphors from surroundings or narratives from their traditional legends all indicate that the land is integral to their past, present and future – the land is their history book (1). In other words, for an ethnic group, "the concept of a homeland may be a fundamental basis...to assert some special *privileges* in, even *ownership* of, an area" (Norton 276, emphasis mine). To build up a sense of place and rootedness in the film, and to present the mountain area as a place/hometown for Seediq people, some strategies are adopted within the film: including reiterative social practices, legends, and language. Once a sense of place is set up, and tribal privileges in the place guaranteed, the uprising against Japanese colonial exploitation is expected and justified.

Tim Cresswell stated that "place is constituted through reiterative social practice – place is made and remade on a daily basis" (39). Mike Crang, from a cultural geography

perspective, also proposes “continued repetition of particular sorts of behavior...to be associated with particular places” (103). In other words, place is where people share collective experiences over time. Rituals are thus a required ingredient of place, especially for ethnic people, so as to build up self-identity and to claim their privilege and ownership of the land. In the film, some rituals are mentioned and practiced – songs and dances are displayed, while other rituals are forbidden by the Japanese colonial state, such as head-hunting, facial tattoos etc. These rituals are ways for individuals to build up their collective ethnic identities, and to grant them a sense of place.

Songs and dancing are channels for Seediq people to address their values, to voice their common fury against their persecutors, and to present their common wish to fight the suppression they encounter. For example, since the Seediq tribes are of patriarchal system, women are relegated to background, as passive observers only. Dancing is thus presented with two genders, but women’s part in the ritual confirms the tribal society being made of two genders but dominated by the male only: the traditional dancing ends with Seediq men’s capoeira. Not only dancing, but songs are adopted in the film to present their collective identity and concerns. Mouna Rudao and his father’s ghost sing a canon by the river, clearly delivering their common concerns regarding their hunting ground – the land to which they have always been attached:

Reminisce on the people from the past,  
 Here I am  
 I used to guard these mountains and forests bravely.  
*These are our mountains,*  
*These are our creeks.*  
 We’re the true Seediq Bale.  
 We go hunting in the mountains.  
 We share food in our clan.  
 We fetch water from the creeks.  
*I’m willing to give my life for these.*  
 Oh, creek! Be quiet.  
 Sisin babblers are singing.  
 Sing us a beautiful song please.  
 Sing for our people.  
 A song of our ancestral spirit.  
 I’m willing to give my life too.  
 When the lightening rifts the rock.  
 A rainbow appears.  
 And a proud man emerges.  
 Who is this man so proud?  
 It’s your offspring.  
 A Seediq Bale (emphasis mine).

Mountains and creeks are worth fighting for, and just after the duet Mouna Rudao determines to revolt against the Japanese colonizers. Mike Crang connects music and songs with “feelings of belonging...[which] promote the idea of a particular regional identity” (91). The song, following the tune of an ancient tribal melody, builds up regional identity and advances a sense of place that pushes people to retrieve the ownership of their land.

On the other hand, face tattooing is forbidden according to Japanese “civilized” practices. In fact, it is taken not only as a reiterative ritual in a regional place, but as a token of adulthood, manhood and warriorship. Young males in the Seediq tribes have to undergo a rite of passage to become adults. Usually the rite refers to hunting for foes’

heads or wildlife despite any challenges or jeopardy. The successful hunting gives them the right to have their faces tattooed, so as to become “Seediq Bale”—heroes of the tribe in the tribal language. When tattooing the young, as may be seen in the film, the tribal elder recites the following incantation: “You’ve offered blood sacrifice to our ancestors’ spirits. I hereby tattoo the marks of manhood on your face. From now on, you shall abide by our ancestral spirit, guard our clan and our hunting grounds. On the rainbow bridge, our ancestors’ spirits await the reunion with your valiant soul.” Indeed, facial tattoos are so significant to the cultural identity that the film opens with the admonishment of Mouna Rudao’s father: “A man who’s never decapitated an enemy, or a woman who’s not good at weaving, is not qualified to have their faces tattooed.” Beheadings and basket-weaving—the repetitive tribal rituals—make possible facial tattoos and then bring honor to the individuals, also sense of attachment and rootedness to residents in the place. Face tattooing is therefore a tie that unites an individual with his or her ethnic identity, a means to locate the individual in his or her hometown, and a route to lead the individual to a legendary space over the rainbow bridge where all real Seediq people, the real heroes, will meet.

In addition to the rituals and traditions mentioned above: [head] hunting, dancing, songs, face tattooing, and legends, language is also a key for collective identity. The mountain area is represented as a hometown for the Seediq people by the common language spoken in the film/place. Throughout the film, two languages are spoken: Seediq and Japanese; this is unprecedented in Taiwanese cinematic history. The two languages spoken in the film are used to address the historical reality of Taiwan being a Japanese colony, and to present this mountain area as being inhabited by Seediq people, and being dominated by the imperial invasion. Norton William claims that language is of vital importance to individual and group cultural identity because “it is both a means of communicating and also a symbol or emblem of *groupness*” (291, emphasis mine). Anthony Vital, in “Toward an African Ecocriticism,” suggests taking into account “how language both shapes and reveals such interactions because different languages permit varieties of understanding [social history and natural world]” (90). Therefore, we may discover that the director of the film, Wei Te-Sheng (魏德聖), had the actors speak Seediq and Japanese on purpose to disclose the coexistence and conflicts between these two languages, between two cultures, and between two perspectives toward the land/mountain area in Taiwan.

When Graham Huggan talks about ecocriticism and postcolonialism, the alliance between the two is said to “preserve the aesthetic function of the literary text while drawing attention to its social and political usefulness, its capacity to set out symbolic guidelines for the material transformation of the world” (14). In *Seediq Bale*, “the material transformation of the world” occurs to the land, which is the site of the conflicts not only between various aboriginal clans, but between aboriginals and the Japanese. Therefore, seeing the changes occurring to the land, Mouna Rudao states in his native tongue, Seediq: “Post offices? Stores? Schools? Do any of those things make our lives easier and better? Instead, we’re made to see how impoverished we are.” The cultural intrusion into their place exploits their nature and degrades the aboriginals into alcoholism and slavery. Schools are set up as an ideological manipulator, in which the imperial thinkings through the colonizers’ language are instilled. Two languages are spoke on the land, in this mountain area of Taiwan: Seediq and Japanese. But the two languages become primal indicators, telling us the ups and downs, the waxes and wanes, of intrusive and aboriginal culture.

As a language makes possible the collective identity, so it preserves the need of collective survival. The conflicts among clans display that place is never constructed into

a seamless, coherent identity with a homogeneous core. Therefore, in the film, the two clans respectively led by Mouna Rudao and Temu Walis have been feuding with each other for years, quarreling for hunting grounds, and seeking revenge upon each other for their conflicts to appease their hatred. But their common language, Seediq, still constructs a shared identity that the Japanese consider “savage.” As a result, despite the controversy over their hunting grounds, Temu Walis is shocked when he sees Mouna Rudao’s clanswomen hang themselves to conserve food for the warriors. He later says that he will fight for his ancestors, instead of for the Japanese being massacred in the Wushe Incident. In fact, throughout the film, Temu Walis, though close to the Japanese, speaks Seediq; his identity as an aboriginal rather than a Japanese is consolidated by the language he speaks.

(b) *the mountain area as a landscape for the imperial Japanese:*

Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, in discussing postcolonial ecocriticism, claim that “to assert one’s right to live in a place is not the same thing as to dwell in it... assertion is possession, not belonging, and dwelling implies an at-homeness with place” (82). In the film, the aboriginals adopt various rituals to consolidate their at-homeness with, and attachment to, the place. The colonizers, however, try any mean necessary to assert their possession of the mountain areas and to appropriate natural resources there. Right after the beginning hunting scene, the aboriginals are portrayed as low-wage, abused, logging laborers to show that the Japanese imperial power has intruded into the place. The Japanese characters in the film are mostly caricatured as either militaristic generals shrieking at their defeats, or sniveling clerks who abuse but fear the Seediq. The mountain areas are no more inhabited by “plain members and citizens” only, but also by conquerors who try their best to satisfy their consumer and commercial needs.

Therefore, though the concept of homeland consolidates the inhabitants’ advantage in a place, colonial power intrudes, and gradually deprives inhabitants of ownership of the land. Indeed, the clash (re)presented throughout the film is the discord of two languages hierarchically intersecting. The colonizers adopt language—Japanese—as a way to emigrate imperial culture into the Taiwanese mountain areas. Language is considered a strategy of subjugation to civilize the “savages”. Besides, the Japanese colonial power also attempts to transform the place into an inhabited landscape. Lines of Japanese buildings are set up in the mountain area, which are drastically diverse from the aboriginal buildings. Due to the cultural intrusion, the aboriginals’ identity is likely “to be threatened, contaminated, diluted or indeed even ‘destroyed’ by outside forces” (Crang 163). Therefore, in the film, Seediq kids have fewer chances to experience hunting, to fight for hunting ground, and to undergo the ritual of face tattooing as a mark of a heroic adult. When Mouna Rudao finds a new generation of Seediq losing ties to tradition, he calls for a revolt against the Japanese to stop cultural annihilation, and to retrieve tribal dignity. Another example is Dakis Nomin, a Seediq youth, who takes up a Japanese education and name, becomes a policeman, but regards his identity with ambivalence. He is thus hesitant at Mouna Rudao’s harsh question: “Dakis, when you die, are you entering a Japanese shrine? Or the heavenly home of our ancestors?” Torn between the expectations of clansmen and the intimidation of the Japanese, Dakis finds himself being an “other,” getting displaced in his hometown and discriminated in the Japanese colony. He laments his wretchedness, saying: “We don’t want to be savages, but however hard we try to dress up like the Japanese, we’ll always be seen as uncivilized people.” He cannot consent to his ethnic identity or the dominant intrusive power; nor can he deny any. He has assimilated into Japanese culture, but still retained his own sense of aboriginal identity. Hara-kiri is thus his only way out of this torment of ambivalent dilemma.

Indeed, different languages deliver diverse interpretation of, and interaction with, the

environment. The Seediq interprets nature as an organic entity to coexist with. To the imperial intruders, however, the mountain area is a treasury of bountiful woods and despised laborers. Woods are thus appropriated and laborers are abused. In the film, Japanese perspectives of the mountain area as a landscape display two sharp opposing images: either a tranquil utopia or mysterious black woods. For example, a Japanese policeman, Kojima Genji, often beautifies the same mountain area; he perceives the mountain area as a misty place with cherry blossoms, and as a ground for teaching his son hunting skills. On the other hand, the forbidding land seems daunting to the Japanese colonizers because their adversaries, the Seediq people, know it too well. Mouna Rudao uses guerilla tactics against the Japanese, with mountains and rivers casting their enemies into disadvantage. The aboriginals' being so familiar with the forest discloses the Japanese's ignorance of it, and how they are scared of the place. One Japanese officer states, with fear and confusion, regarding their vain efforts to defeat the Seediq in guerrilla warfare: "Those savages played hit and run. They are like ghosts. They easily ran over the ragged mountain paths that we barely walked properly on. We never knew where they came from or where they disappeared to. They were unpredictable." The Japanese colonizers see the mountain area as a landscape to be appreciated or mystified. For Seediq people, the mid-Taiwan mountain area is a hometown/place; however, for the Japanese, it is a landscape to be manipulated by the oppression of people and in which to exploit nature. The languages spoken in the film serve to assert ethnic distinctiveness, and to present diverse interactions with the land.

In addition to the cultural intrusion, the imperial colonizers also wage an economic assault, which leads to the exploitation of the mountain areas, and the persecution of the residents. The Japanese colonial government restricts the Seediq tribes from practicing their traditional head hunting and facial tattooing, and gradually deprives them of their language, weapon, and land. The film is divided into two parts: *The Sun Flag* and *The Rainbow Bridge*. Part One title clearly presents the dominating image of Japanese colonization, as "*The Sun Flag*" symbolizes the imperial and military power of Japan. As a colony, the land and the people in Taiwan are therefore subdued. Deforestation occurs in the Taiwanese highlands near Chilai Mountain, which reduces nature merely to materials. Therefore, in the film, right after the aboriginals' hunting scene, they are being forced into logging large sections of the forest. Between hunters' scene and log-laborers' are twenty-five years, during which Mouna Rudao has grown older, and developed a permanent, deep gloom in the presence of Japanese transformation of the land. Mouna Rudao thus asks, "Is it good to be ruled by them [the Japanese]? Our men are forced to bend over to carry logs on our backs, and our women have to kneel down to serve and pour wine." His son also talks to one Japanese policeman about their hunting in the forest: "...what can we hunt in those disappearing forests? You've about hacked down all the trees on our hunting grounds. If we don't go hunting now, we'll have nothing left once the trees are all gone." Colonial invasion goes along with the inhabitants' subjection and with environmental destruction. This demonstrates a close association between imperialism and deforestation. Robert Pogue Harrison, in his book *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization*, mentions that when nature stops satisfying a colonizers' wish for potential exchange value, natural exploitation occurs – and deforestation is a form. In the film, the low-waged laborers wish for surplus value to buy the millet wine, which is once again an abuse of nature's intrinsic value. In a word, deforestation leads to the advanced expansion of imperial colonization, and therefore to the contraction of natural resources and of regional identity.

Colonial invasion sees the environment as "the marketability of nature providing an implicit rationalization for the control and management of natural resources by the global

urban-industrial system and its primary political ally, the nation-state” (Huggan & Tiffin 32). In this sense, economic growth is prioritized over sustainable development; all non-commodified relations with nature are denied, which causes alienation in social activities. Alienation comes from the separation and conflict of capitalist and worker interests, and leads to the reduction of human-nature relations. This capitalist mode of production has turned this Taiwanese mountain area from “the space of production” into “the consumption of space” (Lefebvre 188). Mountain areas become a political instrument manipulated by the state (the Japanese colonizers); the labor is thus segregated from product, man from nature, so that the profits of the dominant class are guaranteed. Due to the Japanese intrusion, this mountain area can never be a place with an ecological entity. It becomes a part of the social, economic and political life – “an inhabited landscape” – a term coined by J.B. Jackson to refer to “the product of incessant adaptation and conflict: adaptation to what is often a new and bewildering natural environment, conflict between groups of people with very dissimilar views as to how to make that adaptation” (43). This attempt causes a clash between the respective value systems of the aboriginals and colonizers; so an exploitation of the mountain areas for colonial consumption benefits occurs. The consumption needs reduce the mountain area into “placeless, soulless new spaces, which are functionally more efficient but reduce the quality of experience” (Crang 106). Deforestation exercised in a colonized place thus coincides with Deane Curtin’s notion of “environmental racism,” which portrays the connection between racial oppression and environmental exploitation.

This mountain area degenerates into a landscape, in which material realities are consumed; in addition, rootedness, rituals and sense of place are shaken, even forbidden. In this vein, the war scenes are represented with bombs exploding in the forest, flames engulfing the trees, and trucks falling apart and down. These war scenes obviously associate the suppression of the subordinated with the destruction of nature. Nature is appropriated, and its residents are persecuted, so as to realize the commercial goals of imperial powers. The rebellion is defined by Mouna Rudao as a blood sacrifice to their ancestors, in defense of their hunting ground – an organic place free of colonial invasion and destruction. To justify their uprising, Mouna Rudao gives a stentorian heroic declaration, in which the aboriginals’ close connection with nature is disclosed: “There are more Japanese people than there are tree leaves in the forest, than there are pebbles in Jhuoshuei River. But my determination to fight them is more adamant than Mt. Chilai. If your civilization wants us to cringe, I’ll show you the pride of savages.” A real Seediq Bale will fight to keep his soul intact, his people unbiased, and his land undestroyed. A legendary promise is constantly brought up: “...at the other end of the rainbow in the heavenly home of our ancestors lies a fertile hunting ground.” In the film, the battle scene is launched by a Japanese soldier’s shouting line: “The savages are revolting!” and then the Seediq show off their fighting prowess in slow motion, which is backed by tribal traditional ballads. The rebellion for freedom and dignity lasts for more than forty days, during which the real Seediq Bale prove their daring gallantry, but destruction of those people and place engaged cannot be avoided.

#### IV. Epilogue

By the end of the epic film, the aboriginals’ heroic gallantry is, over time, admired by General Kamada. The bright cherry blossoms remind the General of the bushido. He says: “Three hundred warriors against thousands of soldiers; those who survived the battle all killed themselves eventually. *Why did I see in such a remote mountain area in Taiwan the bushido of samurais that died over a century ago in Japan?*” The connection of Taiwan

cherry blossoms to the Japanese bushido shows the Japanese perception of the mountain area as a landscape, in which anthropocentric and colonial consumption are instilled and destruction is caused. To the Japanese colonizers, Taiwan mountain areas is a landscape, a treachery in which commercial needs are satisfied, and cultural annihilation is practiced.

The Seediq rebellion for tribal survival and freedom ends with heroes fighting to death, and many family members instructed to commit suicide to escape capture and humiliation. The majority of the film delves into the dark realms of war terror, mass suicide, cultural annihilation, and genocide. But these horribly violent acts are followed by a tranquil mountain scene. After the last battle there is the scene of the surviving Seediq walking along the treks in the forest: the Japanese are relocating them to another mountain area. What is portrayed here is the moral ambiguity, the difficult life-or-death choices that the Seediq people have to make when facing colonial threats of violence. Cherry blossoms are still shivering in the trees along the treks to display an organic land wishing to be cherished and conserved. After that, a Seediq clansman is seen running through the forests up to the summit of Mt. Chilai, where he catches a glimpse of the whole mountain area that used to be their hunting ground, their place, and hopefully will be once again. This colonial experience degenerates the mountain area into a consumption site; with imperial colonialism on the wane, however, the land is likely to rejuvenate. After all, as Aldo Leopold insists: "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise" (421). In this sense, the very last scene has the camera pulling up over the mountain area, with a surviving clansman gazing into the remote mountains; this panorama displays the aboriginals' close relation with nature, and promises the likely recovery of the land as a place with histories and memories buried within, and with hopes and lives rejuvenated henceforth.

Director Wei once mentioned that he wanted to show "an encounter between a people who believe in rainbows and a nation which believes in the sun." This encounter leads to cultural clashes, military conflicts and massacres. By the end, however, with the mountain area as the central target for an unknown indigenous character, and for the film audience, the sun and the rainbow implied throughout the film display the necessity of perceiving the environment under cultural and national invasion. The mountain area is expected to *be a place* with its unique culture, language and life constituted in events, memory and attachment, *rather than a landscape* for people to come and go. It was a place for the indigenous tribes to be a part, rather than apart; it is, and shall be, for all, if "the fate of place"<sup>4</sup> is considered within and with-out the film.

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<sup>4</sup> The phrase, "the fate of place," is adapted from the book of the same title by Edward Casey.

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