Re-Positioning Taiwan:
Spatial Politics and Cultural Landscape in Dancing Crane's Heterogeneous Writing

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Spatial reading of landscapes has been an important aspect of Taiwanese literary studies for years. It is worth noting that Taiwanese literary production and criticism are constantly shaped and reshaped in response to varied political turns and theoretical waves. A number of writers tend to instill into literary words their individual memories of historical markers and geographical sites. Through writers' re-packaging and re-imagining, landscape writing in modern Taiwan displays profound cultural perspectives of history, ethnicity, and sexuality. What are cultural landscapes? As "cultures and human actions impacted the physical environment," "cultural landscapes" are thus created and can be defined as "sedimented layers of social and cultural accretion."[1] This article aims to analyze the unique cultural landscapes represented in the works of Dancing Crane [Wu He]. Dancing Crane has long been known for his experimental language, erotic accounts, and displaying pathos for minorities by ethnicity and sexuality. As a prolific and influential contemporary writer, Dancing

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[1] Karen E. Till, "Political Landscapes," *A Companion to Cultural Geography*, ed. James S. Duncan, Nuala C. Johnson, and Richard H. Schein (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 347.

Crane has consistently outlined a fragmented picture of the other within multiple heterogeneous spaces under the overpowering ideological system, thus providing a drastic shift in the cultural landscape writing of Taiwan. The first part of the article examines the trajectory of folk custom and spatial writing as well as the issue of how Dancing Crane forces readers to question the dominant writing trend in Taiwan. The second part brings into focus Dancing Crane's dynamic spatial writing about the cultural spectacles in the postmodern era. This section deals with the sea town Danshui, the memorial sites within indigenous communities, and discusses spectralized queer space in Dancing Crane's works in order to shed a new light on the heterogeneous cultural landscapes of Taiwan.

The course of Taiwanese literature has been altered time and again due to its colonial history, postcolonial transition, and political instability. In this light, the focus of the natural/social writing and spatial imagination in Taiwan has passed through multiple stages of challenges and conflicts. During Japan's rule over Taiwan, Taiwanese writers' attempt to resist the colonial power can be found in such works as Lai He's "The Steelyard" [Yi gan cheng zai] (1926) and Wu Zhuoliu's *Orphan of Asia* [Yaxiya de guer] (1945). These fictional works demonstrate the fundamental search for cultural identity and local consciousness with respect to the geographical locales and social struggle in colonial Taiwan. Following the 1949 retreat, the Nationalist Party, aka Kumingtung (KMT), established the government in Taiwan. This also marked the beginning of an oppressive regime under the martial law. While the Chinese immigrant writers gradually rode the political tide and occupied the center of the literary arena on the island, other Taiwanese writers

were troubled by "collective aphasia"[2] as a "psychological and pathological symptom" in the 1950s.[3] As the local landscapes of Taiwan were gradually replaced by the imaginary China in literary writing, the "collective aphasia" here lays bare the cultural and political imbalance between Chinese and Taiwanese narratives.

Alongside the evolving literary trends, natural and cultural landscape writing hinges on the positioning of "folk literature" in Taiwan. Folk, or xiangtu in Mandarin, not only implies "homeland," but suggests "a recognition of historical memories of the Taiwanese soil."[4] Furthermore, folk refers to the geographical and cultural connection with the native soil, and thereby provides descriptive accounts of local landscapes. Landscape conveys the "the *look* or the *style* of the land" and further delves into the "outcome and the medium of social relations" and "ideology."[5] In this sense, landscape in writing covers both geographical and cultural grounds and can be representational in social and political contexts. The term "folk literature" in Taiwan has existed for decades and has drawn in productive discussions about local history and native space. In the 1970s, the literary debate between modernism and nativism (folk

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[2] In this article, all the Chinese translations are mine.

[3] Tsui Yang, "Cultural China, Geographic Taiwan: Folk Context of Hsiao Li-Hung's Works in 1970s," *Journal of Taiwan Literature* 7 (2005): 3.

[4] Liang-ya Liou, "Women, Hsiang-Tu, and Nationalism: Lai Hsiang-Ying's 'Island' and 'Fort Zeelandia' and Li Ang's Visible Ghosts," *Journal of Taiwan Literary Studies* 9 (2009): 8.

[5] Don Mitchell, "Landscape," *Cultural Geography: A Critical Dictionary of Key Concepts*, ed. David Atkinson, Peter Jackson, David Sibley, and Neil Washbourne (London: I.B.TAURIS, 2005), 49.

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custom) opened up the political and cultural tug-of-war between Chinese immigrant writers and local Taiwanese writers. This divide is embodied via the production and reproduction of "cultural China" and "native Taiwan" in Taiwanese literature.[6] In terms of modernist writing, Pai Hsien-yung [Bai Xianyong] can be viewed as the most prominent writer in representing the post-civil war nostalgia towards mainland China. In Pai's narrative, China serves as an imaginary homeland in collective memories of Chinese immigrants. As for nativism, writers take an alternative route to realist accounts of specific regions in Taiwan. Wang Zenhe's Hualien and Huang Chunming's Yilan are good cases in point. These diverse writing attempts provide intriguing manifestations of cultural imaginings of Greater China as well as social criticism of Taiwan.

In the 1980s, the tension between Chinese diaspora and Taiwanese consciousness was still characterized as an unresolved issue in Taiwanese society. Hsiao Li-hung's [Xiao Lihong] *A Thousand Moons on A Thousand Rivers* [Qian jiang you shui qian jiang yue] (1980) blends regional depictions of feminine Taiwan with sensitive perceptions of cultural China, and in this way creates a new folk style from a female angle. Local senses of places and regions continue to thrive in literary writing of Taiwan and are merged into various economic and social aspects. Since the 1990s, postmodern cultural imagining has enriched local folk writing of Taiwan by embracing such themes as "cult worship," "magic," "meta-fiction," and "deconstruction," thus being considered "new generation folk

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[6] Yang, "Cultural China, Geographic Taiwan: Folk Context of Hsiao Li-Hung's Works in 1970s," 1.

custom," "new folk custom," or "post-folk custom" by Taiwanese critics.[7] Zhu Tianwen's "Fin-de-Siecle Splendor" (1990) and *Notes of a Desolate Man* [Huangren shouji] (1994) and Zhu Tianxin's *Ancient Capital* [Gu du] (1997) have been canonized in the discussion of the unique cultural phenomena caught between new and old generations in postmodern Taiwan.

After the sensational moves made by the Zhu sisters (i.e. Zhu Tianwen and Zhu Tianxin), writers like Hsu Jung-che [Xu Rongze], Gan Yaoming, and Chen Xue have developed their own ways of writing and played with spatial and sexual politics in the literary mapping of Taiwan. At this stage of literary history, spatial writing functions as a strategy to formulate "identification," to highlight "regional characteristics," and to reconstruct "regional cultures."[8] With the rise of local consciousness, it is surprising to note that topics on the cultural geography of Taiwan remain important in the literary production industry. It seems that Taiwan always needs to face cultural and political challenges while trying to cut the tie with its Chinese roots. As David Der-wei Wang presented his "post-loyalist" [hou yimin] discourse in 2004, Taiwanese literature was once again brought back to the grand Chinese narrative. This narrative relates Taiwanese writers from various ethnic backgrounds but only to the limited, one-dimensional Chinese influence. In 2009, Paul-Francois Tremlett also points out that today's studies on Taiwanese literature

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[7] Wei-Lin Chen, "The Implication of Spatial Symbolism: The Regional Writing Esthetics in Taiwan's 'New Folk' Novels," *Journal of Taiwan Literary Studies* 9 (2009): 133.

[8] Ming-ju Fan, *Literary Geography: Spatial Reading of Taiwanese Fiction* (Taipei: Rye Field, 2008).

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must account for "the construction or imagination of Taiwan as a place" in relation to "culture" and "identity" and as "a sign or a simulacrum of an imagined, traditional Chinese culture."[9] Such statements carry a clear political agenda and bring into focus Taiwan's temporal and spatial association with its cultural Other.

Can Taiwanese literature as a whole be situated under David Wang's post-loyalist discourse without any problem? Can Taiwanese literature properly take the place of "an imagined, traditional Chinese culture"? If we take into account Taiwan's multicultural and multiethnic backgrounds, the grand Chinese discourse is tenuous at its best. Taiwanese scholar Liu Chih-chun has provided his counter-discourse against Wang's argument by including the Dancing Crane's novel *Remains of Life* [Yusheng] (2000) and indigenous writings in his discussion. In Liu's words, Wang's intentional ignorance of the indigenous history outside the post-loyalist narrative actually "eliminates/consumes the natural landscapes bound with indigenous cultures"[10] As the indigenous writing of Taiwan reminisces and re-imagines a naturally ordered world of the premodern period, Wang's "post-loyalist" discourse excludes the possibility of understanding Taiwaneseness outside the Chinese framework. Therefore, Wang's discourse can never be as influential as the long-existing folk custom in the process of re-positioning Taiwan as a geographical and cultural locale. Actually, post-folk or nativist writing can be deemed as a new form of landscape narrative with a

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[9] "Introduction," 6–7.

[10] "When David Der-Wei Wang Meets the Aborigines: On David Der-Wei Wang's Post-Loyalist Discourse," *Journal of Taiwan Literary Studies* 6 (2008): 181.

postmodern twist and through a localized lens. That said, political localization has served to replace the grand Chinese myth with geographical and cultural writing of the native island.

Beyond China, literary mapping of Taiwan has become a notable outcome of "topographical writing," as proposed by Wu Chien-cheng, and the "[political] movement of localization."[11] Critic Chen Wei-lin also uses phrases like "descriptive folk custom" and "virtual world" to express the imaginary folk world of the individual in the changing society.[12] In this case, Dancing Crane can be the most special and significant writer in relation to the cultural landscape narrative of Taiwan. While traditional rural writing in Taiwan can be static and lack the possibility of social mobility, urban writing demonstrates multiple layers of memories and experiences in the postmodern and postcolonial context. Dancing Crane has been ambitious enough to grapple with varied topics throughout his literary career and to transcend the geographical and cultural boundaries of Taiwan. Although Dancing Crane has clearly delivered his "negative view" of traditional "folk / realism,"[13] no one can deny his unique presence in the post-folk production of Taiwan. Also, Dancing Crane wants to go beyond "national and political ideology" and resorts to "local identification."[14] In doing so, Dancing Crane

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[11] Liou, "Women, Hsiang-Tu, and Nationalism," 11.

[12] Chen, "The Implication of Spatial Symbolism," 129.

[13] Liu, "When David Der-Wei Wang Meets the Aborigines: On David Der-Wei Wang's Post-Loyalist Discourse," 168.

[14] Chih-kuang Kuo, "Patchwork Diaries of Blue Stockings Vs. Countryside Traveler's Chronicle: A Comparative Study of Tien-Wen Chu's The Words of A Witch and

discloses strange senses of locality along with a heterogeneous writing style. Due to the fragmentation of storyline and language, it is relatively challenging to understand Dancing Crane's literary works. If read closely, the linguistic gaps in Dancing Crane's writing can be a catalyst to generate numerous meanings in transition, meditation, and communication.

The focus of Dancing Crane's writing is on the process of defamiliarization from mainstream viewpoints. Against the popular logic of usefulness, Dancing Crane's notion of uselessness is best exemplified in his prominent image of "stranger." Hou Tzuoh-jen has employed Julia Kristeva's concept and defined "stranger" as "the other," "the alienated," and "the banished."[15] What Dancing Crane creates through the "stranger" image is the heterogeneous geographical locality and textual scapes of Taiwan. Michel Foucault has reminded us of the existence of "heterotopia," or the heterogeneous space outside "utopia" and "real place" in his article "Texts/Contexts: Of Other Spaces" (1986). Dancing Crane's strange, ghostly, and even demonic narratives can thus be represented within "heterotopias of deviation," in Foucault's phrase.[16] In other words, Dancing Crane's heterogeneous spatial and textual construct reflects the real world and/or the cultural fantasy in a twisted way. It has been

Dancing Crane's Remains of Life," *Journal of Taiwan Literary Studies* 12 (2011): 244.

[15] Tzuoh-Jen Hou, "On Inheriting and Transforming the Fate of 'Stranger' in the Novels by Song Ze Lai and Dancing Crane," *Journal of Taiwan Literary Studies* 9 (2009): 167.

[16] "Texts/Contexts: Of Other Spaces," trans. Jay Miskowiec *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986): 25.

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widely mentioned that readers can never enjoy the smooth pleasure derived from a coherent story plot in Dancing Crane's works. Going beyond political and ethnic affiliations, Dancing Crane uses heterogeneous landscape narrative to mount performances of inner conflicts, social turmoil, and even sexual politics.

In terms of the literary geography of Taiwan, Dancing Crane has set foot on various urban and rural places, including aboriginal communities in southern and central Taiwan and Danshui in northern Taiwan. Even the queer space is included in his heterogeneous writing. In *Remains of Life* and *Ruminating on Ah Bang-Kalusi* [Si suo Abang Kalusi] (2002), Dancing Crane revisits indigenous people's memorial sites of the traumatic past and oppressive present. It is important to remember that the author conducts a "fictional field work" so as to perform an "ethnographical" writing.[17] As a stranger trying to identify with local aborigines, Dancing Crane carefully touches upon the sensitive topic on indigenous cultures and makes visible a series of landscape pastiches. It has been argued that landscapes can be "made, used, and circulated," and in this regard "reinforce and create meanings about the political realm and about social identities."[18] To Dancing Crane, cultural landscapes also function as a means of representation and self-recognition for indigenous subjects.

In *Remains of Life*, Dancing Crane stays away from the official

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[17] Kuo, "Patchwork Diaries of Blue Stockings Vs. Countryside Traveler's Chronicle: A Comparative Study of Tien-Wen Chu's The Words of A Witch and Dancing Crane's Remains of Life," 262.

[18] Till, "Political Landscapes," 348.

memorial stone about the Musha [Wushe] Incident and lays stress on the wood tablet set up by aborigines themselves in memory of the incident in Kawanakajima, or Chuan Zhong Dao in Mandarin. In the 1930 Musha Incident, about 300 Seediq[19] warriors led by Mona Rudao killed over one hundred Japanese settlers, including women and children. In retaliation, the Japanese colonizers killed hundreds of Seediq people and moved the remaining Seediq tribesmen to a different location by force. The Japanese even provoked the second Musha Incident and caused more deaths of Seediq in the following year. Actually, Dancing Crane's novel is not the first attempt to re-narrate the Musha Incident. Back in 1931, famous writer Lai He published his poem "Southern Territory Lament" [Nanguo Aige] as the first literary narrative about the incident. Lai He's poem directly acclaims and rationalizes the Seediq warriors' act of head-hunting from the standpoint of anti-colonialism. Apart from the politically correct view, Dancing Crane's fictions revolve around the specific memorial site and attempt to re-examine the oral and official history of the incident.

Nowadays, most aged Seediq people view the incident as a traditional "head-hunting" [chucao] event, whereas the young generation of Seediq considers it a "political uprising" against the Japanese colonization.[20] Mixing the two points of view, Dancing Crane transforms the violent act and idealization of decapitation into

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[19] Seediq, or Sediq [Saideke], refers to a Taiwanese aboriginal group related to Atayal.

[20] Dancing Crane, *Remains of Life*, ed. David D. W. Wang (Taipei: Rye Field, 2000), 176.

a "political head-hunting."[21] On account of the representation of head-hunting and its political/cultural implications, Dancing Crane's *Remains of Life* can be a good work to study body politics. The relationship between decapitation and its relation to soul and/or nation is not a new topic within academic domain, but the interpretation of body politics may differ. In the novel, the author skillfully links the severed body with the cultural and historical rupture in response to the collective memories of Seediq. In other words, the primitive impulse of decapitation has a strong effect on the cultural landscape and imaginary space of indigenousness. The head-hunting event can thus be regarded as a simply free play or a political action for claiming hunting and living spaces.

Moreover, Dancing Crane wants to remind us that the indigenous cultures are still declining under the control of the Han-dominated regime in the modern period. To better represent the marginalized space of indigenous people, the author deliberately stages strange aboriginal characters such as Nun, Strange Man [Qi ren], Wandering Man [Piao ren], the homecoming prostitute Girl [Gu niang], and the gigolo Black V, who still resides in the city. All of these strange figures are situated outside the ideological center of Taiwan. Their bodies are driven and disciplined politically, and their living spaces are changing rapidly under the watch of the national machine. As head-hunting is an honorable act of overpowering the other in indigenous belief, there should also be a parallel between the loss of body autonomy and the loss of culture even in contemporary times. It is indeed a positive case that Girl returns to the village and

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[21] Ibid.

participates in the journey for cultural root-seeking with the author-narrator. Nevertheless, there are more indigenous people still struggling and lost in the process of adaptation into the dominant community of people in the plains. There seems to be no easy solution to the cultural issue about Seediq people's remains of life. All in all, the author only leads us to think about the heterogeneous existence of ethnography and indigenousness in Taiwan.

Besides *Remains of Life*, Dancing Crane also elaborates the indigenous issues in *Ruminating on Ah Bang-Kalusi*. In this novel, the I-narrator befriends the amateur photographer Ah Bang and Rukai[22] [Lukai] writer Kalusi (Auvini Kadresengan), whose Chinese name is Qiu Jinshi. Together with Ah Bang and Kalusi, the author observes the Rukai tribe in Hao Cha Village, Pingtung [Pingdong], Taiwan in different aspects. Through sociopolitical snapshots, oral narrative of history, and literary writing, Dancing Crane pieces together a lively picture of indigenous landscapes. The trickiest part here is how to identify oneself in engaging with aboriginal cultures in an outsider's account. After all, Dancing Crane himself merely serves as a social observer and cultural commentator. The author is smart enough to render Ah Bang's case in "positioning oneself" as a "communicator" or mediator without denying indigenous people's rights for self-identification.[23] Accordingly, Dancing Crane helps readers ponder over the living space and cultural predicament of Rukai. It is significant to remember that the author comments on the 92-year-old lady Bi Ah Niu [Bi A Niu]'s isolated life and relates her hazy,

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[22] Rukai is one of the major aboriginal peoples in Taiwan.

[23] Dancing Crane, *Ruminating on Ah Bang-Kalusi*, (Taipei: Rye Field, 2002), 42.

out-of-focus gaze to "a faraway, uncertain locale" in juxtaposition to the lingering memorial site of Rukai.[24] As the politically controlled reconstruction projects gradually change the local customs and natural landscapes of Rukai communities, Kalusi proposes that young Rukaiese not just return to but relive the Rukai traditions. This ideal goal requires experimental departure from urbanization as a crucial transport to the prolonged process of re-naturalization or re-adaptation into nature. Is this goal really attainable? We readers may put a big question mark on it.

Knowingly, Dancing Crane defers the possible solution to the above question and moves on to the pensive reflections of cultural heritage and social reality within Rukai tribes. "Civilization is more gruesome than [indigenous] wizardry," Kalusi argues, "[and it seems that indigenous people] are castrated by civilization. Such civilization is too civilized to request the consent from 'people'."[25] Kalusi's statement evokes a critical spectacle regarding the disappearing cultural landscapes of indigenous people. To fight such a losing battle, Kalusi reclaims the long lost freedom of a transformed hunter on the ancient hunting ground. As the author remarks,

> You can consider [Kalusi] "a great hunter," "the last hunter," and "the eternal hunter." He wanders around in the hunting area during the daytime. He is simply wandering, instead of chasing after animals. While animals walk by him, he is able to recognize them. It can be a wild chicken, a goat, or ancestral spirits' friend

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[24] Ibid., 76.

[25] Ibid., 150–151.

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> Clouded Leopard. He is used to aiming the gun or the
> arrow at animals, but he won't shoot. […] He lies down
> and watches the sun, the moon, and stars peacefully […].
> It is indeed a feeling of going home, rather than
> hunting.[26]

While hunting is not real hunting any more, Kalusi's insistence profoundly resonates with a nostalgic attachment to the past, the land, and the history of Rukai vis-à-vis a wild calling for primitive nature. Dancing Crane concludes the novel with a new subject—that is, Ah Bang-Kalusi. This new subject is adapted into a remarkable vehicle for a unique form of looking at/through and feeling. By that means, Dancing Crane embarks on the re-imagining of indigenous experience and space, thus displaying a brand new cultural landscape of Rukaiese.

In addition to his humanist concern about indigenous cultural locales, Dancing Crane develops a particular panorama of Danshui, a changing sea town adjacent to the political and cultural capital Taipei. Whereas Zhu Tianxin's urban classic *Ancient Capital* wisely mixes the forgotten past and the multicultural present within the fluid transitional cityscape of Taipei, Dancing Crane re-presents Danshui, a historic site in New Taipei City, formerly Taipei County, with a profound touch of sophistication and eroticism in *Dancing Crane Danshui* [Wu He Danshui] (2002). In this novel, Dancing Crane ventures into the shifting urban façade, local practices of Daoism, and erotic accounts of sexual awareness. To start with, Dancing Crane takes issue with the Fulu Sects or Talismans and Registers

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[26] Ibid., 224.

Sects by addressing the local Fulu residence as a haunted house. Traditionally in nativist writing, religious sites can produce feelings of holiness and emerge as social realms in mediating the spiritual and the secular. But when they are spectralized and deconstructed by the author, such cultural and social functions of religious sites not only appear less divine but also seem odd and strange. It is true that "religious ideas and practices in Taiwan" are loaded with "a cultural debt" to China and "a unique history of its [Taiwan's] own."[27] At this point, the haunted/haunting religious practices with a Chinese origin unpack the secrets of Dancing Crane's political concern in response to the cultural locality of Taiwan.

Then Dancing Crane delineates the renovated and re-imagined Danshui by means of representative pictures of Japanese-style bungalows and urban constructions. His dark humor also repeatedly signals his alienation from official policies and projects. The best example appears in the case of road widening in this ancient town. Dancing Crane severely criticizes the short-sighted government and outlines the irreparable harm caused by its road widening project. What worries Dancing Crane most here is the disappearance of "ancient scenic spots" and the diminishing of "interpersonal space."[28] From this perspective, Dancing Crane tries to stress the historical senses of a specific urban space within the framework of Walter Benjamin. To quote Mike Savage,

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[27] Fang-long Shih, "Re-writing Religion: Questions of Translation, Context, and Location in the Writing of Religion in Taiwan," *Re-Writing Culture in Taiwan*, ed. Fang-long Shih, Stuart Thompson, and Paul-Francois Tremlett (London: Routledge, 2009), 16.

[28] *Dancing Crane Danshui*, (Taipei: Rye Field, 2002), 135.

> Benjamin's strategy was therefore to displace, by questioning the boundaries between past and present, the notion of linear historical time which was sustained by narrative form. In his urban writing Benjamin could use a common spatial reference to bring things together in time. Thus the city could be used to disrupt ideas of new and old […]. [29]

Through geographical and historical markers, Dancing Crane successfully calls into question the fading antiquity in juxtaposition to the urban experience in Danshui. Accordingly, the interplay between antiquity and modernity can be an essential characteristic in the transformation process of Danshui. Obsessed with a critical vision against political regime, the author articulates a dissimilated identity of locality and explores the repressed absence of regional cultures.

Dancing Crane also delivers an uncanny sense of sexualized landscape. Though resident in Danshui for ten years, the narrator of the novel, the alter-ego of Dancing Crane himself, still operates as a stranger strolling around in the ancient town and enjoying the dazzling scenic views of the old and new. The author's opposition to the process of urbanization is centered around the re-built environment in contrast to the old, dark, and mysterious place of the past. In anticipation of bringing about sensual effects upon readers, Dancing Crane envisions an erotic world of body and space. On the one hand, the author sees in Danshui's old looks lasting cultural values. On the other, he captures the origin of human life through a

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[29] "Walter Benjamin's Urban Thought: A Critical Analysis," *Thinking Space*, ed. Mike Crang and Thrift Nigel (London: Routledge, 2000), 40.

sexualized vision in response to the changing glamor of Danshui. Scenes of old streets and old houses are indeed important to the formation of local history and identity, but bodily arenas can be as important as geographical sites from Dancing Crane's angle. What is intriguing to note is that Dancing Crane produces such sexual landscapes as the "armpit scape" and "vagina landscape" in his writing.[30] Dancing Crane's sexualized landscape narrative comes close to being perverse when he connects the audio recording of one's losing virginity with "the embodiment of the important and mysterious cultural relic" of Danshui.[31] It is true that this type of sexual fantasy is part of Dancing Crane's self-indulgence and rhetorical technique. For better or worse, sexualized landscape writing has become a notable token of Dancing Crane. Focusing on the bodily sites and sexual fantasies, Dancing Crane accounts for the primitive energy of human life in relation to the regeneration process of Danshui.

Interestingly, Dancing Crane turns from his cynical and erotic tones to a relatively calm and contemplative mood at the conclusion of the novel. As the author comments on the reborn Danshui with the Taipei Mass Rapid Transit system in operation,

> Each contemporary period has her own beauty. Those who were born in the 1980s grew up with the dazzle and luxury of the 1990s and were alien to the plainness and quietness of 1970s. […] They can't understand why the plainness of the past blames and harms the splendor of

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[30] *Dancing Crane Danshui*, 94–95.

[31] Ibid., 225.

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the present. Without plainness, their lives also accommodate a sense of serenity. […] If they are persistent with the beauty of the past, they won't be able to perceive Danshui with their reborn eyes.[32]

Dancing Crane eventually provides a solution to the sensitive issue regarding the old and new. As he suggests earlier in the novel, what he really wants to criticize is the long-standing iconic worship and the ideological surveillance of the political machine. Both the natural landscapes of old Danshui and the fin-de-siecle cityscape of new Danshui are precious and irreplaceable in the natural cycle and human civilization. Dancing Crane's heterogeneous Danshui contains historical, geographical, and sexual landscapes which are vital for the private realm of the author in retrospection and meditation on the spatial and temporal change of the reborn town.

In addition to the geographical sites and cultural arenas of Taiwan, Dancing Crane explores the less-trodden domains of ghost haunting: the gender figuration of spectral identities in relation to sexual minority and queer space. By discussing the broader perspective of the spectral otherness in Taiwan, this part deals with the function of the ghostly through a close examination of sexuality represented in Dancing Crane's *Ghosts and Fairies* [Guier yu ayao] (2000). In this novel, ghost haunting and sexuality are combined with expressive techniques of playfulness beyond the one-dimensional phase of homophobia. Herein Dancing Crane places the (gay) ghosts beyond the political framework of both heterosexuality and queerness, and in this sense presents the fluid desire in en-gendering

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[32] Ibid., 256.

the ghostly faces/phases of sexuality. The feature of spectral otherness can be observed in the "homosexual" [tongzhi] fiction of Taiwan. While the homosexual subjects are actually human beings, their abject-identity makes them alien and invisible to the overarching heterosexual ideology.

What is interesting to note here is that the ghosting process of homosexuality in Taiwanese literature appeared decades ago in Pai Hsien-yung's [Bai Xianyong] "Lonely 17-Year-Old" [Jimuo de shiqisui] (1961), the homosexual character Yang Yunfeng is already described as an alienated ghost from his family. In Pai's *Crystal Boys* (1977), the first gay fiction in Asia, the homosexual characters appear as shadows looming in a dismal park, or the kingdom of darkness, where their homosexual desire is liberated. As for the lesbian fiction of Taiwan, Liang-ya Liou also makes interesting connections between ghost haunting and homosexuality. Analyzing Chiu Miao-jin's [Qiu Miaojin] *Crocodile Note* [E Yu Shouji] (1994) and Chang I-hsuan's [Zhang Yixuan] "The Haunted House of Happiness" [Xingfu Guiwu] (2001), Liou relates the ghostly manifestation of homosexuality to the "lesbian trauma" of being "invisible, unknown, and abject."[33] Liou's analysis of the ghostly homosexuality is well elaborated; still, there is room for further discussion on this issue.

Unlike other homosexual writers in Taiwan, Dancing Crane's ghost writing of homosexuality and bisexuality in *Ghosts and Fairies* can be regarded as another form of heterogeneity. His homosexual writing first appears in his short fiction "A Homosexual's Secret

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[33] *Postmodernism and Postcolonialism: Taiwanese Fiction Since 1987,* ed. F. M. Chen. (Taipei: Rye Field, 2006), 298.

Notes" [Yiwei Tongxinglian zhe de mimi shouji] (1996). This story contains seventy-three brief notes, in which the I-narrator delineates a bizarre arena of homosexual desire. The key tone of this story is cynical, destructive, anti-Confucian, and anti-Christian, basically deconstructing all the ethical rules against homosexuality. Whereas "A Homosexual's Secret Notes" represents rampant, fearless homosexual resistance, *Ghosts and Fairies* further highlights the ecstasy of the (homo-)sexual ghost body. First of all, we need to take into consideration the significance of the title. Instead of describing homosexuals as ghostly, Dancing Crane directly names gay men Ghosts, and lesbians Fairies. The bottom line is—"Ghosts are not Queers," in the words of Dancing Crane.[34] In Taiwan, the word 'queer' is translated as Kuer, which literally means the cool being. The localization of the English term 'queer' is thus imbued with a political reinterpretation of homosexual identity by making homosexuality 'cool'. However, this political term is not favored by the I-narrator of the novel, the alternative ego of Dancing Crane. Actually, the ghostly subject Guier, which sounds like Kuer, refers to a departure from Queers. While Fairies and Queers may be politically subversive, Ghosts are aloof to the outward resistance against heterosexuality. What Ghosts always bear in mind is the complete corporeal life vis-à-vis the extreme carnival-like sexual acts.

At the beginning of *Ghosts and Fairies*, the I-narrator serves as a social observer who visits a homosexual bar called Devil in Heart [Xin Mo] on Wednesday and Friday nights. Later, the narrator shifts his identity from an observer to a participant and becomes the leader

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[34] *Ghosts and Fairies* (Taipei: Rye Field, 2000), 5.

of Lair of Ghosts [Guier Wo], which is a secret residence for Ghosts and Fairies in the urban jungle. It is obvious that places like "Devil in Heart" and "Lair of Ghosts" demonstrate the inhuman traces of homosexual subjects, thereby reinforcing the dark impacts in homosexual fiction. For example, common people usually identify Ghosts as "a fin-de-siècle virus," and Lair of Ghosts as "a plague zone."[35] These homosexual/queer spaces can be labeled as the "vision of heterotopia."[36] Despite its abject-identity, the ghostly homosexual subject carries the possibility of gender-crossing in heterogeneous spaces. Beyond the demarcation between male and female, Ghosts carry the dynamic agency in breaking through sexual boundaries.

In defiance of the patriarchal and heterosexual hegemony, Dancing Crane makes use of spectral figuration to make possible a subversive homosexual practice. Therewith it brings about a vague, shadowy space where the socially subordinate homosexual figures perform their repressed desire. However, the Ghosts discussed above do not achieve real liberation unless they reach the stage of complete corporeal life, which will be further elaborated later. Unlike Queers, who resort to political movements against the heterosexual dominance, Ghosts' existence should be accredited outside the general construct of gender politics. At this point, Dancing Crane wants to emphasize that gender is merely a masquerade, and generic terms like queer and ghost are nothing but signifiers constructed in

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[35] Ibid., 149.

[36] Chao-chen Hsieh, *Sexual Politics in Dancing Crane's Fiction [Qun Yu Luan Wu: Dancing Crane Xiaoshuo Zhong De Xing Zhengzhi]* (Taipei: Rye Field, 2003), 159.

the symbolic order. Furthermore, Dancing Crane's Ghosts channel sexual otherness and straddle between heterosexual beings and queer subjects. In Hsieh Chao-chen's account,

> The reproduction of rituals, ethics, and conventional thinking […] continue to encode everybody and process a re-figuration and a dominance of the social mechanism of heterosexuality without leaving any space for deviation. Dancing Crane's literary text serves to escape from the trajectory of encoding and to make an ambivalent argument between giving up and not giving up.[37]

Hsieh's argument points to Dancing Crane's remakes of homosexual identity. Through a diverse cognitive process of signification, Dancing Crane assigns new meanings to a Ghost, who is neither spiritual nor evil, neither heterosexual nor queer. Moreover, his emphasis on the ecstasy of the Ghost body transforms the spiritual into the corporeal, thus cleverly substantializing the spectral entity of homosexuality.

Placing carnal desire in the center, Dancing Crane indeed reverses the spiritual-and-corporeal paradigm. It can be regarded as a generic mutation of homosexuality. The gradual regression to a primitive demand turns out to be a grand statement above love, ethics, and religious faith. In this regard, ghosting the homosexual body points to the author's unique way to localize the western concept of being 'queer'. Dancing Crane has reminded readers that the western notion of 'queer' has its historical backgrounds and political agendas.

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[37] Ibid., 144.

That is why he insists on using the word Ghost, which is a transformed and localized queer subject. It is also notable that Dancing Crane appropriates both western conceptions and local Taiwanese cult cultures in ghosting his homosexual characters. Despite the difference between Ghosts and Queers in political consciousness, the performative queerness is indeed embodied in the sexual acts of Ghosts and Fairies, thus making apparent a diverse gender pattern. It is worth considering that Dancing Crane's ghost writing here serves as a phantasmatic mutation of homosexuality. It not only provides a parodic repetition of gender patterns, but deconstructs it from the margin with a focus on physical sensation and sexual pleasure.

Additionally, this mutation of homosexuality brings about an ambiguous penis-centric or phallocentric myth represented in the I-narrator's observation of and encounter with the Ghosts and Fairies. Both the extreme sexual pleasure and the complete life of freedom require the contribution of the male organ to the ritual of corporeality. Dancing Crane's Ghost story reaches the climax when the I-narrator finally agrees to participate in the "fin-de-siècle heterogeneous virgin sacrifice" [Shijimuo yizhi chunuji], organized by Fairies and supported by Queers. During this public ritual, the I-narrator is instructed to insert a nuclear-radiant tube, which is presumably safe, into the vagina of a voluntary virgin girl. This heterogeneous ritual performed in the Memorial Hall aims at changing the public perception of the virgin complex. To be sure, this highly explosive event captures close attention from the government and news media. Under the surveillance of the national machine and public press, the agency of the virgin sacrifice is

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brought to the extreme. If we take the tube as a symbolic agent of the national machine, the performance of penetrating the virgin's vagina does not just mock national control over the human body, but involves an ideological collision with patriarchal dominance. As the above sexual ritual is organized by Fairies and performed by a Ghost (the I-narrator), it conveys political messages regarding homoerotic desire and corporeal autonomy. That said, Dancing Crane stages such a weird and provocative show as to represent the bewildering entanglements of gender consciousness and national supervision in postmodern Taiwan.

To sum up, Dancing Crane's ghost narrative is another form of queer writing against the patriarchal and heterosexual systems, and he really brings the subversive Ghosts and Fairies into full play. The homosexual subjects are marginalized if they recognize and accept the negative symbolic titles given to them by the Other. To avoid the dominance of heterosexuality, the author chooses not to identify with the gender stereotypes. When he transforms his homosexual characters into (in-)visible Ghosts, he does not deny the subversive power of the ghostly mutation. The Ghosts in the novel may be apolitical, but the author's queer writing surely carries lots of political messages in challenging the stiff binary oppositions of sexuality. From Dancing Crane's perspective, socially and culturally subordinate homosexuals must take an alternative route in the face of heterosexual hegemony. Ghosting homosexuality here is fashioned as a political strategy to celebrate the fluidity of gender identity and to embrace the freedom of the human body. To Ghosts and Fairies, the complete life of corporeality transcends political ideology and linguistic structure. Following Dancing Crane's logic, it is sexual

enjoyment that counts. It does not matter if the sexual act is performed with penises, fingers, or toes. It does not matter whether or not it is a pure homosexual encounter. Therefore, Dancing Crane deconstructs Taiwanese homosexual fiction by queering the queerness in localized, spectralized, and heterogeneous spaces.

In 2007, Dancing Crane published his disorienting and formidable work *Mess and Lost* [Luan Mi] and received lukewarm, if not harsh, feedback from readers and critics. The oft-stated reason is that this piece is extremely difficult to understand and digest due to the lack of order, structure, and punctuation. *Mess and Lost* reads like a collection of the author's chaotic and fragmented thoughts as reflections on his previous books. Besides, this esoteric work re-engages with such topics as family/aboriginal/national history and erotic imagination, and thus contains numerous entries into sexual desire, political criticism, social concerns, and environmental consciousness in Taiwan. There are two major issues worthy of note in this work. First, Dancing Crane presents his special longing for nature in response to cultural identification with the local soil. Second, the author unleashes his excessive sexual fantasy and brings his erotic accounts to the extreme.

In terms of geographical and spatial visions in *Mess and Lost*, there are a number of descriptions of natural scenes in words along with four real photos of natural landscapes taken by the author himself. As if indulging himself in the process of natural catharsis, the author recounts his experience of river trekking as an emotional and spiritual escape from human civilization. And Dancing Crane continues to lament,

Landscapes are around us[,] but it is a pity that nature is

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not merged into our inner state[.] Our island is so small[.] With mountains and rivers, our life still goes on without nature[.] [Nature] is not part of our [modern] life[.] […] Are civilization and nature separated[?] Civilization is nature's creation[,] but nature has been forgotten by the civilization on this transitional island[.][38]

At this point, Dancing Crane's call for natural landscapes is made apparent with his personal concerns about spatial and cultural problems in modern Taiwan. It is interesting that the author even attempts to play with the spatial politics of landscape narrative. Combined with natural landscapes, Dancing Crane' sexual scapes further externalize primitive desire and create the space of lasciviousness in *Mess and Lost*. Instead of aestheticizing sex, the author infuses his work with obscene images and pieces together a massively overwhelming realm of lust and lewdness. As Ng Kim Chew mentions, "[T]he narrator" in the novel "suffers from delusion and is obsessed with women's vaginas and human bodily waste."[39] Further, Dancing Crane seems to enjoy sexualizing and eroticizing his cultural imagination. From natural to sexual landscapes, Dancing Crane touches upon multiple dimensions of the political machinery and cultural phenomena of Taiwan. *Mess and Lost* thus should be taken as a significant milestone featuring possibilities of re-interpretation and re-narration in terms of the literary geography of Taiwan.

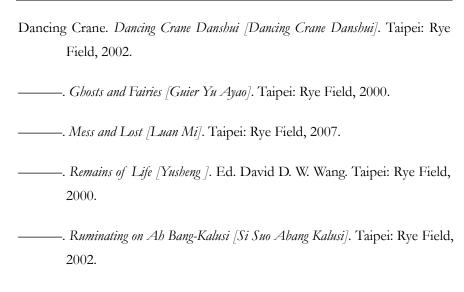To conclude, Dancing Crane explores the spatial politics and

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[38] *Mess and Lost* (Taipei: Rye Field, 2007), 320–321.

[39] Kim-chew Ng, "Sorceress's Discourse and Messy Language: Comments and Notes on Two Novels," *Journal of Taiwan Literary Studies* 7 (2008): 246.

cultural landscapes of Taiwan in relation to multiethnic identity, environmental consciousness, and queer performance. Following Dancing Crane's steps and words, readers would be able to go on a literary journey and look at/through various geographical locations, historical sites, and cultural spectacles. Here a singular sense of contemporariness centers around Dancing Crane's heterogeneous fiction writing. While Dancing Crane leads readers to revisit Danshui, memorial sites of indigenous people, and ghostly gay spaces, he is actually introducing, if not passing on, an individual perspective of strangeness as cultural resistance in the contemporary period. For Dancing Crane, the return to nature and return to the primitive stage/desire of life can provide emotional and physical outlets. However, he also underscores the significance of being and living in the present. Although his philosophy of uselessness seems to be pessimistic, it is simply a form of uniqueness in opposition to the domineering modes of thinking governed by the political regime. Imbued with multiple faces/phases, Dancing Crane's works can travel across time and space, capturing the forgotten past and the evolving present. Therefore, Dancing Crane's heterogeneous writing definitely functions as a new venture for challenging the way how people view Taiwan as a geographical location and a cultural entity in the postmodern era.

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