

Taiwan in Critical Plant Studies

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Critical Plant Studies in Taiwan sets a high benchmark for critical plant studies (CPS) publications about Taiwan. The collection of essays is the first of its kind to focus on Taiwanese literature, history, culture, politics, and society by foregrounding the emergent field of CPS. Under the guidance of the collection's magnanimous and erudite editor Iping Liang, the contributors explore Taiwan's phytological subjects against the backdrop of CPS. The anthology walks in the steps, and somersaults ahead, of two fellow CPS tumbleweeds: Michael Marder's *Plant-Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life* (2013) and *The Philosopher's Plant: An Intellectual Herbarium* (2014). Marder's two foundational CPS studies lay out the philosophical groundwork for the discipline and how to practice CPS against the formidable escarpments of Western philosophy, or against the profound disparagement of plants under Western philosophy's most venerated thinkers. Marder's critique of how plants have been maligned and miscast under the most touted traditional metaphysical thinking in the West helps to explain why Liang's anthology is an important publication. The anthology vitally adds to and expands the work of liberating phyto-knowledge from the prison houses of Western metaphysics. Focusing on colonial and postcolonial, economic,

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environmental, and military histories of plants in Taiwan, on the literary representation of plants, and on how plants might be understood from CPS perspectives, *Critical Plant Studies in Taiwan* counters normative views of plants including those that matured in the lucrative barrows of Western philosophy. As Marder notes, these views were heavily backed “in the age of positivist science” and have held sway until now (*Plant-Thinking* 18).

Critical Plant Studies in Taiwan appreciably contrasts with Marder’s work in focusing less on the purely philosophical positions that shaped plant life and more on the political, social, cultural, and literary histories of plants. A second point of departure from Marder is the contributors’ great reliance on critical terms that owe to ecocriticism and decolonization studies, a dependence that distinguishes the collection as an intersectional study. The first six chapters are about the histories of four of the world’s most intensely commodified plants: sugar, tea, camphor, and the casuarina tree. Chapter 7 is about the history of mangroves, one of the most underrecognized and underrated plants in the long history of underestimating wetlands. Chapter 8, an exploration of the figures of rooftop gardens in Taiwanese literature, is provocative for how it implicitly brings ecofeminism studies into conversation with CPS. Chapter 9 explores the poetry of poet Chen Kehua by bringing CPS into conversation with the discourse of the eco-gothic. Chapter 10 is inspired by ecocritic Timothy Morton’s concepts of “ambient poetics” and “dark ecology” (Chang 163, 169). Chapter 11, similarly to Chapter 5, draws on Atayal (also known as Tayal) Indigenous culture, and it addresses a plant that has been as underrated and unappreciated as mangroves by colonial settler people: millet. The last chapter enlists the rhetoric of poststructuralism to draw attention to the presence of plants in spaces where this presence is interpreted as absence, and so it turns upside down and back to front common understandings of what comprises phyto-environments. In sum, *Critical Plant Studies in Taiwan* calls for a greater understanding of the roles that plant life plays in human life, the myriad ways in which “the enmeshed relationship between the human and the vegetal world” effectively questions practices of treating plants mainly as fodder for the human (Hsu 144), and the ways in which the fates of plants both remarkably differ from and remarkably resonate with the pathways of the human.

Theodoor A. M. Richard’s “Greedflation and Sugarcane Landscaping in Taiwan: A Transcultural Reading of Joyce Bergvelt’s *Lord of Formosa*” and Li-Ru Lu’s “Empire’s Nature: Economics, Ecology, and Formosan Tea in Nineteenth-Century Western Travelers’ Natural Histories,” the first two chapters of *Critical Plant Studies in Taiwan*, respectively relate the Taiwanese histories of two of the world’s most heavily conscripted plants in the period of Western colonialism:

sugar and tea. Richard enlists global strategist Albert Edwards' term "greedflation" to write about the commodification of sugar in the seventeenth century in Taiwan. Like multinational corporations today that "use the rise of raw material costs during a crisis to raise prices and expand profit margins exorbitantly," in the seventeenth century the VOC (Dutch East India Company) engaged in similar tactics to control sugarcane cultivation in Taiwan (Richard 8). In addition to the VOC, a European conglomerate that is "generally considered the world's first multinational corporation," powerful interests allied with "the Ming Dynasty and the Manchus" including the figure of mythical proportions of Koxinga played a role in the struggle to control the trade in sugar (Richard 11-13). "[O]ne of the hottest commodities all over Europe since its intense process of vulgarization from the mid-sixteenth to the seventeenth century," sugar was sundered from its "wild plant variety" form in this time (Richard 18). The older, sustainable form "existed in Taiwan before the VOC turned towards cash-cropping it" (Richard 18). The newer, colonial form was hardly sustainable. As a large-scale commodity crop VOC sugarcane had a lasting and devastating impact on Taiwan's biodiverse ecologies.

Tea has suffered a similar fate to that of sugar; it is a plant both exploited and used to exploit others. In "Empire's Nature: Economics, Ecology, and Formosan Tea in Nineteenth-Century Western Travelers' Natural Histories," Li-Ru Lu writes about the links between colonialism and neo-colonialism and the reduction of vegetal life, bringing CPS into conversation with ecocriticism and one of its most pertinent paths: postcolonial ecocriticism. Ecocriticism in Taiwan (and other countries in East Asia) has been mapped out in several recent important studies: *Embodied Memories, Embedded Memories: New Ecological Perspectives from East Asia*, edited by Xinmin Liu and Peter I-min Huang (2021); *Ecocriticism in Taiwan: Identity, Environment, and the Arts*, edited by Chia-ju Chang and Scott Slovic (2016); *Linda Hogan and Contemporary Taiwanese Writers: An Ecocritical Study of Indigeneities and Environment*, a monograph by Peter I-min Huang (2016); and *East Asian Ecocriticisms: A Critical Reader*, edited by Simon C. Estok and Won-Chung Kim (2013). Lu's chapter distinctively adds to these studies by way of a postcolonial ecocritical as well as CPS-based critique of nineteenth-century British travel writing about Taiwan and natural history accounts of the oolong tea that was cultivated in Taiwan (in Tamsui, in the north) and exported to "Amoy" (Xiamen) and "Foochow" (Fuzhou) in China (Lu 40). As Lu explains, even as this literature reflects and promotes colonial and neo-colonial phyto-agendas of "harnessing the plenitude" and "exploit[ing] the commercial possibilities" of tea (37, 41), some of its authors were nascently open to what North American ecocritic Michael P. Branch

describes as a “proto-ecological sensibility” (qtd. in Lu 43) and to what Marder calls “the exuberance of vegetal life” (*The Philosopher’s Plant* 23). Commenting in depth also on the massive environmental and human losses that accompanied Scottish tea merchant John Dodd’s spectacular success in introducing Taiwan’s “Formosan Oolong” tea to the West, Lu’s chapter productively brings CPS into conversation with postcolonial ecocriticism (38).

The third and fourth chapters of *Critical Plant Studies in Taiwan*, Iping Liang’s “Oriental Beauty: The Tea Plantations and Global Tea Trade in Nineteenth-Century Taiwan” and Stephen Roddy’s “From Resonance to Solastalgia: Tea Poems of Taiwan, ca. 1820-1920,” seamlessly follow Lu’s “Empire’s Nature.” In “Oriental Beauty,” Liang summarizes the “phenomenal success” of the colonial trade in “Formosa Oolong Tea” in the nineteenth century and engages with references to that tea (also branded as “Oriental Beauty”) as they appear in critically acclaimed author Jade Yu-Huei Chen’s novel *The Merry Leaf* (2014) (55). Similarly to Lu, Liang relates these CPS subjects to postcolonial ecocriticism, and she highlights one of its terms, “Plantationocene” (55). It traces to a roundtable event in Denmark and the subsequent essay, “Anthropologists are Talking about the Anthropocene,” by Donna Haraway, Noburu Ishikawa, Scott F. Gilbert, Kenneth Olwig, Anna L. Tsing, and Nils Bubandt. As Liang explains, the term helps to elucidate “the global tea trade,” the widespread practices of “colonial bioprospecting” and “plant mercantilism,” and “the colonial plantation” system in which Taiwan was ensnared over a period of several hundred years (56-57). According to Donna Haraway et al., under the logic of the Plantationocene, there was “a large-scale ‘simplification of landscapes’” in Taiwan as well as elsewhere in the world (qtd. in Liang 58-59). As Donna Haraway and Anna Tsing discuss in a conversation, the “uniformity” enforced on “the landscape,” the “radical simplification” of plant life, and the “[disciplining] of plants” including “coerced labor, displacement, and dispossession” fostered, further, the alienation of human life from plant life (qtd. in Liang 59). Liang comments on these aspects of tea cultivation in Taiwan in her discussion of Chen’s *The Merry Leaf*, a historical romance set in Taiwan in the 1860s and inspired in part by two factual figures, the Chinese and Scottish tea merchants, Chun-sheng Li and John Dodd (1838-1907). Critically relating the mercantile strategies of Dodd to those of an erstwhile predecessor, Robert Fortune—a Scottish explorer, botanist, and tea industrialist (1812-1880), who played a major role in the global tea trade in China and India in the mid-nineteenth century—Liang opens the thematic petals, bracts, and corollas of the novel to readings inspired by both CPS and postcolonial ecocritical perspectives.

In “From Resonance to Solastalgia: Tea Poems of Taiwan, ca. 1820-1920,”

Stephen Roddy traces tea's importance in China and examines poems on both sides of the Taiwan Strait dating to the time between the late eighth century (Tang dynasty) and the middle of the twentieth century. Focusing on short lyrical poems identifying with the genre of "*zhuzhici*" (bamboo branch lyrics) (ca. 800-1900 CE), Roddy includes a discussion of "tea-picking" *zhuzhici* poems (*caichashi*) from the "late-Yuan and early-Ming" periods in China and tea poems from the Japanese colonial period in Taiwan (70). When tea production in Taiwan declined in the early twentieth century due to "a combination of wartime disruptions, restrictions by the (Japanese) colonial authorities, and competition among tea producers in South and East Asia," poets writing about Taiwan's tea production expressed sadness about the decline (Roddy 78). Roddy relates this sadness to "solastalgia," a term coined by the Australian philosopher Glen Albrecht in his research of communities negatively impacted by massive coalmining projects in Queensland, Australia, in the 1980s and 1990s. Solastalgia carries meanings of

loss of a secure environment . . . a form of homesickness one experiences when one is still at "home" . . . a feeling of dislocation; of being undermined by forces that destroy the potential for solace to be derived from the immediate and given. (Albrecht qtd. in Roddy 79)

Roddy's discussion of tea cultivation in Taiwan in the contexts of the literary representation of it and Albrecht's concept of solastalgia, and Liang's and Lu's discussions of tea in postcolonial ecocritical contexts are filling in the gaps of knowledge about tea in Taiwan. Adding to these discussions are those found in the fifth and sixth chapters of the anthology. Here, the contributors turn to three other plants that have played a prominent role in Taiwan's political, social, economic, and cultural landscapes: camphor, mangroves, and casuarinas.

"Brothers Locked in Strife: A Molecular Reading of *Blood Camphor*," by Ya-feng Wu, opens with a sentence that reflects the significant role that camphor played in human affairs in Taiwan in recent centuries. Camphor,

together with tea and sugar [were] the three major export commodities of Taiwan . . . from the final decades of the Qing dynasty . . . [to] the Japanese colonial regime to the early decades of Nationalist government rule on the island. (Y. Wu 83)

Ya-feng Wu goes on to say that the "peak" of human uses of camphor at this time coincided with "deforestation of the mid-level mountains and dislocation of the Indigenous tribes, mainly the Atayal" (83). Before the advent of CPS (and postcolonial ecocriticism and decolonization studies), these facts would not seem worthy of serious scrutiny in literary studies contexts, let alone the critical can opener of that examination. Ya-feng's opening remarks are the lid lifted on a

can that would seem out of place on the shelves of Taiwan's literary storehouses less than twenty years ago; and they are the basis of her reading of Ying-min Chang's *Blood Camphor*, a novel about the history of "bloody confrontations" between Han Chinese settler people and the Atayal and about the decimation of the Atayal people and the equally calamitous felling of one of their home's most majestic beings, camphor trees (first named *Cinnamomum camphora* and later *Camphora officinarum* under the Western nomenclature system) (Y. Wu 86). Their home in Taiwan, along with their homes in China in "Chekiang" and "Fukien," comprised the "geo-botanical center of diversity" of camphor (Y. Wu 86). Camphor also flourished in China in "Kiangsu," "Kwangtang," "Hai-nan," "Szechwan," and "Yunnan" (Y. Wu 86).

What is particularly remarkable about Ying-min Chang's novel is the "major literary theme" of camphor (Y. Wu 83), a theme that is pollen to the bees of CPS scholars. The events of the novel take place between approximately 1855 and 1875 against the backdrop of the 1868 Camphor War, when "the British secured privileges from the Qing court to procure camphor products from Taiwan" (Y. Wu 85). Colonialist and capitalist logging interests bestowed on Taiwan the epithet "land of Green Gold" in this period (the nineteenth century). In critically reading Chang's novel by focusing on camphor, Ya-feng Wu also critically comments on this plant in the time of the Ming dynasty (from approximately 1368-1644), when Taiwan was described as "the ball of mud"; on camphor in the eighteenth century, when Taiwan was dubiously cast and "idealized" as a "living museum of Chinese antiquity"; and on camphor in the early twentieth century, when Taiwan was valued for being a "major" global supplier of camphor (85-86).

In stark contrast with camphor, which was exported from Taiwan up through the first half of the twentieth century, casuarinas were frenziedly imported at the end of the Second World War. They are the phyto-subjects of the sixth chapter, "Beyond Cold War Afforestation: Trans-scalar Imaginary of Casuarinas" by Wei-bon Wu. After the 1949 Battle of Gunningtou, "[m]illions of saplings" were planted on the island of Jinmen (also known as Kinmen and Quemoy) (W. Wu 99). In the ensuing years of the Cold War era, during the period of martial law in Taiwan under the Chinese Nationalist (KMT) one-party government (1949-1987), the government used its casuarina "vegetal fortress" and "green sentinel" secondarily to slow "soil erosion" and "sand drift" and primarily to serve as a military "shield" and "camouflage" for "military facilities" (W. Wu 100). Such uses of the tree invite CPS interrogations of the utilitarian principle relied upon in assessing plant life and critically tie to postcolonial ecocriticism and decolonization studies questions about the

conscripted of plants. For example, in the case of the casuarinas that were transplanted in Taiwan, most were taken from Australia in the decades when First Nations rights and environmental rights in Australia were barely being entertained by federal, state, and local governments and were not mentioned in their offshore agreements.

Wei-bon Wu directly and indirectly broaches the previously mentioned concerns in mapping out the phyto-military casuarina project on Jinmen after World War II and in discussing an illustrated work of children's literature, *Three Tree Friends*, and two collections of prose, *Jinmen* and *Maps of Heat* by Jun-Yao Wu. In his discussion of these works, Wei-bon Wu uses the terms "trans-scalar imaginary" and "non-scalability" as they appear in the work of one of the founders of ecocriticism, Scott Slovic, and in the work of anthropologist Anna Tsing (qtd. in W. Wu 100). As Wu notes, Tsing opposes "non-scalability" to the highly topical and touted term "scalability" in her argument that much scaling up of designs has been done "without rethinking [the] basic elements" of the components used in that design (qtd. in W. Wu 100). The apparent "triumph" of "precision design," "not just in computers" but also "in business, development, the 'conquest' of nature, and more generally, world making" is riddled with problems (Tsing qtd. in W. Wu 100). Casuarinas are among the plant species that were scaled up in the process of world making based on knowledge about their basic properties that was threadbare. Certainly, it was understood that casuarinas had impressive abilities for adaptation and survival. These made casuarinas in Jinmen initially desirable, but after the lifting of martial law in 1987, when the plants were no longer needed or esteemed, they became unwanted. Wu writes about their remarkable flourishing over the years, the human populations on Jinmen (initially military personnel) employed to care for the trees, the human populations (including the soldiers who planted them) who formed an affective and non-utilitarian attachment to them, and the human populations that would treat the trees as pests and impediments to their plans to develop the island. Conscripted like the trees of Birnam Wood in *Macbeth* for the purpose of military camouflage and then treated as an invasive species and "hindrance to land development projects," the casuarinas of Jinmen survive in areas that the government cannot or does not have the financial means to develop (W. Wu 111). The trees "[occupy] the liminal spaces" of the commercial development of Jinmen (W. Wu 111). They "[thrive] in [its] military ruins" (W. Wu 111). "Beyond Cold War Afforestation: Trans-scalar Imaginary of Casuarinas" represents, in the figures of the past standing army and present "feral" communities of casuarinas, how the lives of plants are bound up in the lives of humans, how their forced and unforced migrations mirror those of the human, and the ways

they defy and subvert humans' military, colonial, and commercial impositions (W. Wu 109).

Chapter 7, Rose Hsiu-li Juan's "Mangrove Taiwan: A Birdman's View of an Island Environmental Identity" is a deeply moving tribute to mangroves, the most maligned and overlooked of plants. Around the globe, mangrove ecosystems have borne the full brunt of industrial development. As natural sea barriers, they are extremely effective typhoon stoppers, flood managers, waste filterers, and carbon storers, and yet they often are mostly understood and dismissed as "swampy wastelands" (Juan 116). In the south of Taiwan, the "largest expanse of mangrove forests in Taiwan" (in the inner sea of what is now Kaohsiung Harbor) was eradicated to make way for the expansion of the Kaohsiung Harbor (Juan 117). In the north, the mangroves that once lined the banks of the Tamsui River between Tamsui and Taipei also were removed to make way for industrial development. Juan writes about this attrition, and she writes about the efforts of environmentalists under a thinking that Marder calls "plant-thinking" to conserve Taiwan's last mangroves standing. The environmentalists include Yi-Kung Ma, a major force in the establishment of the Tamsui River Mangrove Wetland, among other ecosystems; and Ka-shiang Liu (whose name also is spelled Kexiang Liu), a tireless advocate for Taiwan's oldest environments including the Guandu Wetland. Situated at the confluence of the Tamsui and Keelung Rivers, this wetland is "the largest waterfowl and water bird relay station in northern Taiwan" (Juan 121). It has suffered from decades of illegal and legal dumping of waste, farming of ducks and pigs, and clearing for other human activities (Juan 121). Commenting on Ma and Liu's environmental work, Juan foregrounds how it critically ties to CPS and the efforts of its scholars to speak for the world's oldest and most vulnerable phyto-populations.

Like the mycorrhizal fungi that attach to the roots of trees and form vast underground networks of communication, CPS intersects with other areas of critical inquiry in mutually beneficial, and often unseen ways. Pei-Wen Clio Kao's "Politics of Femininity, Politics of Plants: The Roof Garden in Zhu Tianwen's 'Fin de Siècle Splendor,'" the eighth chapter of *Critical Plant Studies in Taiwan*, exemplifies those symbiotic relationships. Kao implicitly relates CPS concerns to those of ecofeminist scholars as well as to the work of two major poststructuralist thinkers, Jacques Derrida and feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray. Li-hsin Hsu's "'My Head Like a Mushroom Below': Chen Kehua's Vegetal Gothic and the Anthropocene," the ninth chapter, also exemplifies the productive exchange between CPS and ecocriticism studies in its focus on the discourse of the eco-gothic. Hsu explores the eco-gothic in the work of Taiwanese poet Chen Kehua as well as how Chen's poetry generates CPS questions about the entangled

relationships between humans and plants. The first half of the chapter is an ecocritical interrogation of the “Euro-American” ghosts of colonialism that appear in poems written at the time of Chen’s participation in the Iowa Writers’ Workshop in the United States in 2016 (Hsu 145). In the second half of the chapter, Hsu contrasts Chen’s “The Plant Empire” with a poem by Kexiang Liu, “Song of the Chinese Juniper Forest” (152). The comparison foregrounds two main directions that plant-thinking takes in poems about the vegetal world. The first of these is based on respecting differences; the second of these is based on recognizing the remarkable similarities between human and plant agencies and extending questions of rights to embrace the other-than-human worlds of plants.

Kathryn Yalan Chang’s “Reclaiming the Commons: An Ambient Poetics in Jessica J. Lee’s *Two Trees Make a Forest*,” the tenth chapter, enlists an ecocritical term, “ambient poetics,” in an argument that, similarly to many chapters in the collection, foregrounds the overlapping aims and concerns of CPS and ecocriticism. The term refers to the ecocritical work of Timothy Morton, a poststructuralist thinker as well as a philosopher (and a thinker who, on this basis, closely compares with Michael Marder). The term is from Morton’s *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (first published in 2007) and is part of “ecomimesis” (Morton, *Ecology without Nature* qtd. in Chang 164). In the context of environmental texts, ecomimesis refers to texts that reflect their authors’ recognition that they are aestheticizing the environment and their authors’ attempt to add to or change that, or to “go beyond the aesthetic dimension altogether” by using language (literary devices and so forth) in ways that situate the reader in whatever environment it is those authors are describing through, paradoxically, “the antinatural bliss of sheer textuality” (Morton, *Ecology without Nature* 32-33). An ambient poetics exemplifies ecomimesis, or what Morton means by “situatedness”; it draws attention to what is outside the texts—namely, the *outside* that is being represented *inside* the texts and is being altered by being discursively rendered (Morton, *Ecology without Nature* 33).

Kathryn Yalan Chang explains Morton’s term ambient poetics by homing in on Morton’s description of it as a language that makes “strange the idea of environment” by drawing attention to how the environment escapes or subverts common aesthetic representations of it (Morton, *Ecology without Nature* qtd. in Chang 164). Chang deftly and ingeniously uses this meaning of ambient poetics to read Jessica J. Lee’s experiences of being both an outsider and an insider of Taiwan. Her experiences include her retreats into nature—namely, Taiwan’s high mountains. Her “prior ‘romanticized’ views of Taiwan”—both her environmen-

tal and cultural assumptions—are challenged when she returns to Taiwan for the first time after many years of absence (Chang 168). *Two Trees Make a Forest*, partly memoir and partly a work that fits, uneasily so, into the genre of nature writing, challenges, analogously to ecomimesis, “the notion of a complete dissolution between the internal and external realms” (Chang 169). Lee does not finally resolve the dislocation that she experiences when she returns to Taiwan. “I want to know this place, to feel some sense of familiarity,” she writes, “but that is not simple, not an easy thing” (qtd. in Chang 169).

Chang relates Lee’s *Two Trees Make a Forest* to, further, a second ecocritical term coined by Morton, “dark ecology” (Chang 169). Representing both a reaction against and an homage to the movement of Deep Ecology, dark ecology functions to draw attention to the anthropocentrism that inevitably shapes understandings of the environment and to the belief that the environment can never be fully understood by humans, or by any species alone. As Chang summarizes, instead “of emphasizing ‘ecological sentiment,’ which often involves ‘. . . reinforcing subject-object dualism,’” and instead of looking for a sort of pure unity or accord between the human and the environment, Morton celebrates the “leakiness of the world,” its “pollution, miasma, [and] slime,” and its “dark side,” or alterity (Morton, *Ecology without Nature* qtd. in Chang 169-70). Lee’s *Two Trees Make a Forest* evokes dark ecology in its descriptions of the author’s feelings of disconnection with and alienation from Taiwanese society, culture, and environments, notwithstanding her deep ties to them. Those descriptions are bound up in the author’s sojourns in the mountains of Taiwan. Their histories of deforestation by humans, of colonial and neo-colonial impositions, of betrayal by a species (the human)—many of whose members were as hostile or indifferent to the mountains’ forests as they were hostile or indifferent to members of their own species (namely, Taiwan’s Indigenous people)—are foregrounded in Chang’s “Reclaiming the Commons: An Ambient Poetics in Jessica J. Lee’s *Two Trees Make a Forest*.”¹

Notable among the chapters in *Critical Plant Studies in Taiwan* that foreground the critical junctions between CPS and postcolonial ecocriticism are the second and third chapters, Li-Ru Lu’s “Empire’s Nature” and Iping Liang’s “Oriental Beauty.” Chapter 11, “The Cultural Narrative of Tayal’s Millet Ark” by Yih-Ren Lin, Pagung Tomi, Hsinya Huang, Chia-Hua Lin, and Ysanne Chen, is a third chapter that stands out for this intersectional work. The penultimate chapter in the anthology, Chapter 11 represents paths of CPS and

¹ For more on “dark ecology” in Critical Animal Studies (CAS) as well as postcolonial ecocritical contexts, see Huang, pp. 99-102.

postcolonial ecocriticism that especially speak to recent work in decolonization studies. This is an area of critical inquiry that is synonymous with postcolonial studies, or present from the beginning of the discipline. Decolonization studies also speak for a recent emergent path of postcolonial studies. In addition to documenting and theorizing past colonial and neo-colonial agencies and institutions (which distinguishes early or classic postcolonial studies work), decolonization studies scholars engage in the work of actively de-colonizing the present. The Millet Ark Initiative, named after the project of recovering millet cultivation in Taiwan by the Tayal people (also known as the Atayal) exemplifies decolonization and is the main subject of Chapter 11. The chapter begins with a brief and illuminating history of the Millet Ark Initiative from its beginnings approximately ten years ago to today. The authors explain traditional food production among the Tayal including practices of “shifting” cultivation, “fire-fallow cultivation,” and “intercropping” (Lin et al. 190). They also devote considerable attention to the significance that millet has for biocultural diversity. The last section of the chapter draws attention to the role of women in traditional millet cultivation, a subject that speaks volumes for ecofeminism, an area of critical inquiry that ties as closely as postcolonial studies does to CPS.

Critical Plant Studies in Taiwan concludes with a chapter, “The Call of the Hyperobjects: Plants as Zones of Aesthetic Causality in Tao Lin’s *Taipei*” by Chingshun J. Sheu. Similarly to Kathryn Yalan Chang, Sheu enlists the work of the poststructuralist ecocriticism scholar, Timothy Morton. Sheu focuses on Morton’s explanation of Object Oriented Ontology in a study by Morton entitled *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*. Hyperobjects, in the simplest and most reductive terms, are objects that are “massively distributed in time and space relative to humans” (Morton, *Hyperobjects* qtd. in Sheu 203). These objects describe the two main so-called subjects of Lin’s novel *Taipei*: the “digital” hyperobject of the “internet culture” in which the protagonist Paul is cocooned and the “mycorrhizal” hyperobjects of the “fungi” on which Paul “trip[s]” (hallucinates) (because of their “psilocybin-producing” properties) (Sheu 199). Each of these hyperobjects, digital and biological, “haunts the novel” but is not “spectral”; rather, each speaks for or testifies to an “alternative organization” or for “a radical reorganization” (Sheu 207-08). Sheu relates the fungi that Paul consumes, fungi commonly known as magic mushrooms, and internet culture, to the vast underground mycorrhizal fungi that are found in forests. Collectively, they are colloquially known as the “wood wide web” (Sheu 201). In addition, Sheu relates the fungi that Paul consumes and the internet culture to the hyperobject of global warming. The latter asks or challenges us to shift our planetary perspectives from a position that augments the human to

a position that locates the human in a vast network of objects possessing their own remarkable and consequential agencies.

In the opening pages of *Plant-Thinking*, Marder writes,

At the present historical conjuncture, when the wholesale transformation of all forms of vegetation into sources of food and fuel (at any rate, into something to be burned as calories or as combustibles) proceeds at an accelerated pace, it is urgent to . . . interpret the meanings of vegetal life—its precariousness, violability, and, at the same time . . . astonishing tenacity, its capacity for survival. (19)

Half a dozen or so pages later, Marder describes how plants are treated as beings “verging on inanimate existence” (27). Marder also points to common understandings of plants that reflect the belief that plants are mere “raw materials for animal and human consumption” and “a ‘standing reserve’ on which we unreflectively draw . . . to satisfy our needs” (22). Plant life is far more capacious than this, yet its “exuberance . . . has gone largely unrecognized” (23). A key culprit for the conceptual oversight and material reduction of vegetal life, as Marder argues, is “Western philosophy” (23). From Aristotle through Plotinus, Hegel, Nietzsche, Freud, and Heidegger, plants have the status of something that is “essentially superficial” and commodifiable (31). The philosophical devaluation of plants has resounding effects, trickling, and pouring into economic, political, and other material areas of human life. These effects are taken up by the authors of *Critical Plant Studies in Taiwan*. It, like Marder’s publications, unsettles and challenges the discounting of vegetal life and the belief that plants exist merely to cater to humans’ needs.

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