Mapping Native Americans in Taiwan: The Way to Rainy Mountain as an Example
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Despite the prevalence of Native American literature since the 1960s, Asian students are still unfamiliar with the Native American culture and may be bewildered to learn the subject. This paper intends to analyze Taiwan fresh persons' conception on the so-called American Indians in terms of a reading of N. Scott Momaday, Native American (Kiowa) writer's short essay. In a course titled Advanced Reading, students took four hours' reading and studying Momaday's The Way to Rainy Mountain in The Norton Reader. After class, they were divided into several groups to bring a drawing based on a paragraph of The Way to Rainy Mountain. Ten drawings were selected for further analysis.

To be brief, in light of the reading, the paper aims at a brief introduction of the indigenous culture to clarify some misunderstandings (such as some misinterpretation of "Indian images," ghosts and their residence), and to reassure such cross or inter-cultural reading by sharing several of these students' drawings from a national university in Taiwan.
This paper is divided into three sections. The first section discusses the stereotypes students noted down before they started the reading. The second section raises some reading troubles students had pointed out in class and then a deep analysis of students' drawings based on one selected paragraph. This very paragraph was picked up because of its manifestation of Native Americans' residence, their notions of ghosts, and that of the natural milieu which are helpful for learners' understanding of the Native American culture. Discussion and suggestions are provided in the last section.

Stereotypes

Before the reading, students were asked to write down what they knew about Native Americans. Students in the beginning were confused about the questions and had no idea where to start. The research thus inspired students by indicating they might put down their opinions of Native Americans' appearance, some customs and/or ideas of nature, society, and/or ghosts. If possible, they were also encouraged to note down the source. The instructor reorganized their ideas as follow:

About appearance:

1. They wear skirts (no matter whether they are males or females).
   (from *Shanghai Noon*¹)

2. They wear long hair.

¹ *Shanghai Noon* is about an imperial guard's journey to the United States to rescue the abducted princess. Jackie Chen is very imperial guard. Among his adventures, he has also rescued a Native American boy and thus has the chance to enter the tribe, experiencing the culture and the most important, married an Indian girl.
3. They wear tattoos

4. The princesses are gorgeous and brave; however, the males may look old with wrinkles on their faces (and they are very serious, too). (from *Shanghai Noon*)

5. They are sun-tanned beautifully.

6. The girls are silent. (From *Shanghai Noon* and *Night at the Museum*)

7. They have beautiful facial lines, high cheekbones, well-rounded lips, and big dark eyes—resembling black women. (Tiffany in *America's Next Top Model*)

**About some customs, behaviors or conceptions:**

1. They like to scalp people's heads.

2. They all live on reservations.

3. They make a living by selling artifacts just as aboriginals in Taiwan do.

4. They used to live in the mountains. (From *The Last of the Mohicans*)

5. The love story between Pocahontas and John Smith is romantic.

6. They are nature-oriented.

7. They are noble savages (living on the prairies but peace-loving in fact)

8. The ladies always fall in love with white men. (From

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2 The movie portrays how animals and objects are revived at the night in the museum. Among the objects, a Native American girl, Sacajawea, is mentioned.

3 Tiffany is a contestant of a TV show *America's Next Top Model*.

4 Another film adapted from Fenimore Cooper's novel *The Last of the Mohicans*. 
Pocahontas\textsuperscript{5} and Shanghai Noon\textsuperscript{6}

9. They are tall and ready to kill. (From Adventures of Tom Sawyer)

10. I heard that when they looked for some plants, they might also talk to the Earth Mother first.

11. They have been killed by the white men and some tribes are even "genocidized."

12. They love to tell many strange stories.

13. They are alcoholics.

Their notions can be roughly divided into two different types of Native Americans:\textsuperscript{6} some of the students romanticized images of Native Americans into the princesses as Pocahontas in the animation film and Sacajawea in Night at the Museum while the others might take Native Americans as the killing machines.

To the romanticized group, I presented several book covers of Sacajawea (a Shoshone; see Figure 1-3). Students were, of course, surprised to know different representations and in particular, the odd looks of the princess. However, I reminded them of the following points:

1) that these pictures depict different images of Native Americans, but not that Native Americans are all ugly or beautiful;

2) that not all Native American females are princesses; it is just that Pocahontas and Sacajawea happen to be princesses

\textsuperscript{5} A famous film by Disney telling a romantic story between a white American, John Smith and a Native girl, Pocahontas.

\textsuperscript{6} In fact, the first myth to solve is about the term, "Native Americans." In spite of the fact that I always used the term in class, in students' writing, they still kept on referring to these people as "Indians," which in fact could be a result of Columbus' misunderstanding of his discovery as the India that he knew.
which, however, is still questionable;

3) that not all native girls will fall in love with the white men; in fact, Pocahontas just helped John Smith but did not marry him.

To those who considered Native American ignoble and cruel, I tried to tell them, as a matter of fact, only very few tribes had such kinds of custom. I also took this opportunity to make the comparison between the rumor and the story of Wu Feng in Taiwan. Wu Feng was romanticized into a hero who sacrificed himself and it is said, accordingly, the aboriginals were touched and stopped the bad custom of beheading. However, such romanticization was just a political strategy. Only after further research and protests from the aboriginals do people in Taiwan understand it never happened at all. Even to
everyone’s surprise, Wu was a greedy businessman and was not killed for no reason. The rumor that Wu was saintly, however, was spread to highlight the generosity of the plain people, to degrade the aboriginal culture, and even to frighten the plain people by exaggerating or even contorting the aboriginais into savages. As Balter has pointed out, "groups that are marginalized and rarely seen" may be "conceptualized as unfavorable and negative" (149). Likewise, that Native Americans are scalp-loving may result from white men's terror. In fact, there is indeed evidence to support this view. Rubenstein indicates that the negative, cruel image is said to be generated from the "extreme racism" to suppress the large Indian populations for gratifying economic reasons (110). During the Puritan Period, particularly, the prolific captivity narratives in which Indians were mostly portrayed as daemons, in some way, showed the horror of the white people to the indigenous peoples. These unfair images, according to Thomas Weaver, still are continuing and even "encouraged through television and the movies" (5).

**The Reading and the Drawings**

After a brief explanation introduction, the students started their reading of *The Way to Rainy Mountain*. Students were asked to firstly, raise questions about the text and then have a drawing based on one of the paragraphs.
Students' questions of sentences mainly include,

1. War was their sacred business (79).

2. The Kiowas reckoned their stature by the distance they could see, and they were bent and blind n the wilderness (80).

3. The sun is at home on the plains (81).

Question 3 is associated with the Native Americans' philosophy of nature which is not really difficult to understand. Question 2 is a little Zen-like. Yet, it also shows the Native Americans recognize the petty existence of human beings. Again, it is not different from Chinese beliefs. I spent most of my time explaining Question 1. The word business seemed to be imbued with a negative perspective. However, when "business" was replaced with "item" or even "behavior," students understood war was scared to the indigenous because the war should be ritual-like and respected. This can be compared with the Westerners who initiated wars because of their greed.

Students' drawing (based on only one paragraph):

Since it was a one-semester class for reading for the English Department, I just divided the class into several groups. Each group submitted only one picture. Consequently, 18 pictures were collected on the basis of 18 groups from two different classes.

The paragraph for drawing is listed

\begin{quote}
Houses are like sentinels in the plain, old keepers of the weather watch. There, in a very little while, wood takes on the
\end{quote}
appearance of great age. All colors wear soon away in the wind and rain, and then the wood is burned gray and the grain appears and the nails turn red with rust. The windowpanes are black and opaque; you imagine there is nothing within, and indeed there are many ghosts, bones give up to the land. They stand here and there against the sky and you approach them for a longer time than you expect. They belong in the distance; it is their domain. (83)

Paragraphs from The Norton Reader described what the narrator observed when he went back home to attend his grandmother's funeral. The above paragraph follows the narrator's depiction of the memory of his grandma—what she looked like, how she prayed daily. After the above mentioned paragraph, the narrator concluded that "I think I knew then that I should not see her again" (83).

Since students were asked to put words into images, most of the time, they could only focus on objects which mean the nouns. A list of the nouns of this paragraph include: houses, sentinels, plain, old keepers, weather watch, wood, colors, away in the wind and rain, gray and the grain wood, nails, black and opaque windowpanes, ghosts against the sky.

Interestingly, most students focused on the portrait of the house, wood, and ghosts. Among the eighteen pictures submitted, I selected ten of them which could be identified (since some of them were rendered in pencil) and which had enlisted as many nouns as
mentioned in the noun list (see Figure 4 to 13).

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Among these ten pictures, Figures 10 and 13 presented two different types of living places. Figure 13 drew a hut-like dwelling place
while figure 13 was the only one that featured a teepee as the residential place. As to the other figures, houses are alike—in particular, most of them were built with chimneys. It is difficult to tell which is correct and which is incorrect in the house style since Native Americans are, for sure, facing the modernization and therefore, their living place should be modernized at the same time. However, I would like to point out one aspect: in addition to Figure 7, most students drew more than one house to present Native American's sense of community. Jace Weaver (a Cherokee scholar) points out that "Natives define their identity in terms of community and relate to ultimate reality through that community" (32). Clifford E. Trafzer (a Wyandot scholar) notes that "Native Americans act as a community [to survive] even when individual members of the community refuse to cooperate in the maintenance of the people" (20). Community indeed plays an essential part in Native Americans' life.

I took this opportunity, too, to introduce them some different conceptions of community of Native Americans in comparison with those of the Westerners. First of all, I focused on the non-hierarchal community. Leslie Marmon Silko (a Laguna writer) reflects that "there was no social ladder" (Yellow Woman 65) in the traditional Pueblo society. Beauty to the Pueblo means being healthy. "No job was a man's job or a woman's job" (66). Pueblo people "did not worry about aging or about looking old because there were no social boundaries drawn by the passage of years" (66). Before the arrival of Christianity, "a man
could dress as a woman...and even marry a man without any fanfare" and vice versa for a woman. "[P]regnancy before marriage was celebrated as a good sign" (68). Moreover, children could call any of their mother's sisters "mother" as well. I also introduced a term, "berdache" which refers to "Indian men who chose to do women's work, and who accordingly adopted the symbols, especially the style of dress, of the female gender" (Shoemaker 5-6). The above statements indeed manifest a different society from that in Taiwan.

I gave examples from plays and novels to tell them the importance of community. Krupat remarks that "To be a story-teller in traditional society is to be one who participates in a traditionally sanctioned manner in sustaining the community" (162-63), to be a hero/heroine is also to be the one "who participates in a traditionally sanctioned manner in sustaining the community." Sacajawea in Diane Glancy's Stone Heart, Rosemarie in Marie Clements's "Urban Tattoo" and molly in Margaret Bruchac's "molly has her say", are all heroines who are presented to characterize and manifest their tribal culture, which means, without the tribal culture, identification of these heroines would only fail.

Back to the drawings of the houses. Figures 9, 12 and 13 manifested a triangle-like arrangement which is similar to a "sanheyuan" (courtyard house) design of the traditional Chinese

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7 Stone Heart is the story of Sacajawea's journey with the Corps of Discovery assembled by the government of the United States; "Urban Tattoo" delineates a Metis girl, Rosemarie's dream and disillusion in the urban city; in "molly has her say," two different kinds of mentors (one is visible while the other, in visible) come to help molly for her awareness of herself and the tribal culture. All of the heroines and their stories are emphasized with their own tribal stories and cultures.
building (see Figure 14). Apparently, students were influenced by their own Chinese culture. In linguistics, an interlingual error refers to the error made by a non-English learner because of the interference of his/her mother tongue (Richards). Axiomatically, culture may boost or interfere learners' readings (Anderson and Barnitz; Brooks; Carrell; Pritchard). To this extent, culture had interfered in the learners' reading since "sanheyuan" is not a Native American building style.

Students' opinions of ghosts in the Native American reading were, again, multifaceted and interesting. The paragraph cited indicates ghosts are everywhere and yet, they belong in the distance (83).
Therefore, students portrayed some ghosts instead of only one ghost. Strangely, some students kept ghosts outside while some had ghosts inside of the house. To those who kept ghosts outside, they considered a distance between Native Americans and ghosts. To those who "invited" ghosts inside of the house, they rendered a co-existence between human beings and the specters. All of them, though, depicted a Casper-like ghost—up in the sky without feet. Figure 10 even presented an evil-faced ghost. The painter proclaimed the ghost as trickster-like but not satanic. No matter what the ghosts look like, none were drawn with a human being's appearance. One the one hand, it is true that Native Americans regard ghosts as part of the world and they can co-exist with living persons. Therefore, Wendy K. Kolmar indicates, "all states of being are comparable" (241). Gloria Hull suggests, "for everyone we meet takes up essential space, and there is no meaningful difference between various states of corporeality/being/presence" (219).

Thus, among the Native American plays I read, the word ghost is not often associated with something terrible or despicable. In Anetta Arkeketa's "Ghost Dance," the ancestor-ghosts appeared as witnesses to help the leading heroine. When discussing a Native American's novel, Erdrich's Track, Kolmar comments, "the presence of ghosts and other non-rational elements is simply part of the experience" (240) and "they are the material of connection rather than separation" (242).
Discussion and Suggestions

Despite it being a four hour class, I learned a lot as well.

1. Students are indeed greatly influenced by mass media. As Balter observes, "The media truly have become our society's cultural voice" (148). From the first impression they noted down, they learned what a Native American is like either from TV (as America's Next Top Model) or from movies (as Pokahontas and Shanghai Noon). Nonetheless, Gross (1991) indicates that the role that the mass media play is "rarely a positive one" (27). Consequently, most students are convinced that Native Americans scalp very often and consider them "weird."

2. As the mass media imposes great influence on students' culture recognition, so do students' "mother" cultures. It is quite easy to have a discussion with students' about the twisted images of Native Americans by the white Americans after the example of Wu Feng is given. Nevertheless, when they learned the dynamic social ladder and conception of ghosts of the Native Americans, a lot of Taiwanese students showed distrust and some even gave "chaos" as a comment. To the Chinese, the world is a world when everyone is put in his/her division. Thus, the living and the ghosts should be separated and should stay in their own places. Co-existence with ghosts is still an obstacle to them.
To sum up, Figures 8 and 10 are two of the most impressive pictures to me. Figure 8 is surprising in that a medieval castle was presented—which is far from the correct image of a Native American's dwelling. It is, however, explainable. Obviously, the student romanticized his image of the Native American culture and thus he confused it with the medieval romance. The angry ghost in Figure 10 stunned me. After an email discussion, the illustrator confessed himself a fan of Ghostbusters—another case to show the influence of the mass media.

3. Due to the limitation of time, there are still agendas left for further discussion. For example, the problem of the mixed-bloods and that of recognition of an indigene can be interesting issues. In America, an indigene is recognized by his blood which is somehow similar in Taiwan. However, in Taiwan, a language test is quite popular right now. Recognition of one's ability of a certain tribal language can help a teacher obtain more teaching hours. The original intention is especially worthy of praise since everyone can take this kind of test. None the less, I heard from a tribal student that for the aboriginal, it is quite easy to pass the exam because even if one is wrong, the examiner may not dare to correct one. The policy may be perfect; but blemishes are not avoidable in putting it into practice.

4. The problem that puzzles me most in fact is my own ability of information-gathering. Being neither a Taiwanese aboriginal nor a Native American, I was very assiduous in my preparation. Most of the
time, when questioned if the information is correct, I was able to respond because I always noted down the resource. Still there is one question just too elusive. Students frequently asked if all the customs could be applicable in all the tribes. From Krupat, Weaver, and Silko, it seems that customs are not too different. In particular, Paula Gunn Allen, a famous Native American scholar, asserts that "although our [Native Americans'] traditions are as diverse as the tribes who practice and live within them, they are all earth-based and wilderness centered" (78). Kim Anderson also supports the statement, "As traditionally land-based peoples, we can uncover many common values about how we relate to the earth and all of creation, including how we define our human relationships" (35).

All in all, at least it is a good try. Most students enjoyed the four-hour lesson. But still few of them questioned the need to learn about Native Americans since they consider it a minor culture that can be ignored. Because it is only a four-hour lesson, students also reflect it is not enough to learn a culture, which is definitely an acceptable comment. Nevertheless, I offered a reading class in which we could not spend too much time on only one culture. Finally, asking students to draw indeed helps their acquisition either of their misunderstanding or of their conception of the Native American culture. It may be time-consuming—that's why only a teamwork but not an individual work is required. In terms of the drawing, I find that their ideas of Native Americans can be concretely presented and properly discussed. Two
more hours after were spent on picture discussing; nevertheless, the joy was also doubly extended.
Works Cited


Bruchac, Margaret. "molly has her say." Darby and Fitzgerald. 317-374.


*Pokahontas.* Dir. by Mike Gabriel and Eric Goldberg. Disney. 1995.


