ECHOES FROM SI GANG LIH: BURAO YILU'S 'MOON MOUNTAIN'

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ABSTRACT
Wa poet Burao Yilu's utilization of myth, ritual, and folk customs in representing the Wa ethnic group in the poem 'Moon Mountain' is discussed. Negative stereotypes of the Wa, an indigenous people of southwestern Yunnan Province, China, include the now forbidden practice of headhunting. By referencing the origin myth 'Si gang lih' and evoking images of ancient cliff paintings, rituals, and agricultural practices, Burao offers a nuanced view of Wa culture while affirming deep-rooted aspects of the Wa worldview. As a literary work, 'Moon Mountain' is an example of the Chinese language (Sinophone) poetry being produced by ethnic minority writers in southwest China today.

KEY WORDS
headhunting, Sinophone poetry, Va, Wa, Wazu, Yunnan,
FIGURES

Figure One. Burao Yilu stands on a hill in the area of the mythical Si gang lih, the cave from which the Wa emerged after the great flood. Bamboo water ducts aid in irrigating the upland fields.

Figure Two. Wa poet Burao Yilu poses by a river of mythical importance to the Wa of southwest Yunnan Province.

Figure Three. Wa poet, Burao Yilu, calls this photo, 'Hope of the Wa Mountains'.

Figure Four. Wa drum dance. One marker of the ritual is young women flinging their hair (Burao Yilu).

Figure Five. Traditional Wa upland village, southwest Yunnan (Burao Yilu).

Figure Six. Wa matrons smoking tobacco pipes (Burao Yilu).

Figure Seven. The Monihei festival is held each May in Cangyuan County, southwest Yunnan. A high point is participants merrily smearing each other with mud (Burao Yilu).
'Moon Mountain' (‘Yueliang shan 月亮山’) is a poem by Burao Yīlú 布饶依露, of the Wa¹ ethnic group (Wazu 佤族) of Yunnan Province 云南, China (Burao 2002:58). In the poem, the author combines myth, ritual, and folk customs to engage negative stereotypes of the Wa people, whose traditional practices included headhunting. Written in Chinese, the poem exemplifies how many ethnic minority authors in China utilize the medium of Sinophone poetry to access regional and national literary venues and thus gain profile for themselves and their ethnic groups (Li 2004:11-12). Aside from its value in combating misperceptions and drawing positive attention to Wa culture, a subtext in the poem promotes basic aspects of the Wa worldview.

Often writing under her Han 汉 Chinese name, Wu

¹ Most Wa live in areas of China and Burma between the Mekong and Salween rivers. Groups sharing aspects of their lifestyle are found as far west as northeastern India. In China, many Wa live in Ximeng 西盟 and Cangyuan 沧源 autonomous counties, as well as in Menglian 孟连, Shuangjiang 双江, Gengma 耿马, Lancang 澜沧, and other counties in southwest Yunnan (Wei 2001:1). An ethnic group spread across several borders, the Wa are estimated to number over one million. Around 400,000 Wa (also known as Awa, Va, Kawa, Parauk, and other names) live in China (Yamada 2007:1-3). Many hundreds of thousands of Wa live in Burma, including a special zone on the Chinese border. Over 20,000 Wa live in Thailand. Their dialects belong to the Mon-Khmer branch of the Austro-Asiatic language family (Watkins 2010). See Kramer (2007) for historical and geopolitical perspectives on the areas of Wa inhabitation.

*Special thanks to Burao Yilu, Yifan Pai (Bai Yifan 白奕凡), the editors of *Asian Highlands Perspectives*, and an astute outside reader for contributions to this paper.
Meng 吴萌, Burao Yilu is among the few Wa writers to appear on the Chinese literary stage since the economic reforms of the early 1980s (Wei 1999:86a). As the first accomplished Wa poet and female Wa essayist, her works join the short stories of Dong Xiuying 董秀英 (1949-1996), the first Wa member of the Chinese Writer's Association (Zhongguo zuojia xiehui 中国作家协会), and younger Wa writers such as Wang Xuebing 王学兵 and Zhong Huaqiang 钟华强 (Guo and Shang 1999:360-361, 395-403). A resident of the provincial capital, Kunming 昆明, Burao began writing in 1986, and has worked as a journalist and editor, promoting positive images of the Wa ethnic group in dozens of in-depth articles, essays, and poems published in such well-known journals as Ethnic Unity (Minzu tuanjie 民族团结), Women of China (Zhongguo funü 中国妇女), Ethnic Literature (Minzu wenxue 民族文学), People's Daily (Renmin ribao 人民日报), and People's Government (Renmin zhengfu 人民政府). She was admitted to the Yunnan Writer's Association (Yunnan sheng zuojia xiehui 云南省作家协会) in 1989 and engaged in advanced literary studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (Zhongguo shehui ke xueyuan 中国社会科学院) in Beijing 北京 in 1995. Her works, including a report on Wa women's issues entitled 'Four Generations of Wa Women' (Wa jia de si dai nüren 佤家四代女人), have won several journalism and literary awards (Wei 2001:273-274). She is presently working on a book of essays (sanwen 散文) on Wa culture in the contemporary world.

Growing up in a family with both Wa and Han Chinese roots, Burao is of a mixed cultural background reminiscent of Tibetan novelists Zhashi Dawa 扎西达瓦 and Alai 阿来 (Schiaffino-Vedani 2008:204-208). She was born to a Wa mother and a father of Han descent whose family was 'Wa-icized' by marriage. One maternal grandfather was a well-known Wa headman in the pre-1949 era. Paternally, she
is a tenth generation descendant of Wu Shangxian 吴尚贤, a powerful figure in mining interests in Wa territory on the Yunnan and Burma border during the Qing 清 Dynasty (1644-1911). At an early age her family moved from the Wa Mountains to Kunming, where her father was an inventor in an industrial unit. As a young adult she revived connections with her Wa family roots and re-immersed herself in Wa culture.

Like the majority of ethnic-authored literary works published in recent decades, Burao's poems are written in Chinese (Luo 2001; Dayton 2006). As the Wa had no indigenous tradition of writing prior to the 1950s and nothing similar to modernist poetry, Sinophone poetry is a pragmatic medium of expression. Fluency in Modern Standard Chinese opens doors to personal and group advancement and allows direct communication with a diverse audience. In order to compete for cultural 'market share' in today's China, writing in Chinese is a fact of life for the majority of ethnic

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2 See Fiskesjö (2010a: 250-252) for a discussion of the role of Wu Shangxian 吴尚贤 (d. 1750), a Han 'miner-entrepreneur' involved in brokering relations with Wa 'kings' in exploiting the resources in the Maolong 茂隆 Silver Mines in Wa territory in the eighteenth century. Wu died in prison in 1750 after running afoul of Qing Dynasty authorities.

3 Burao's daughter, Burao Yiling 布饶依灵, is a recognized Wa artist. She was considered a child-prodigy in the 1990s for her paintings of chickens and other small animals. She now devotes her talents to modernist painting that include themes of Wa life.

4 A Romanized Wa script was created in 1912 as a medium for Christian religious tracts. The script was revised in 1957, and although ignored during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) it has seen limited use in transcribing folk literature and writing official documents, but has been little used for literary works (Wei 2001:112-113).
authors in China, even those such as Yi poet Aku Wuwu 阿库乌穆 (Luo Qingchun 罗庆春), who write in both their 'native tongues' and Chinese (Bender 2009:123-124). As is usual with names of minority Sinophone writers (or other non-Chinese names), Burao's name has been Sinicized by the use of Chinese characters. Thus, 'Burao Yilu' is a representation of her Wa name Ilu Buraog'.\(^5\) Though writing in a mainstream linguistic medium Burao consciously utilizes elements of Wa myth, ritual, and folk customs to conjure certain images of the Wa. These representations are produced and distributed within a popular social context that is saturated with images of ethnic minorities (including the Wa) in films, public art, cultural song and dance programs, ethnic minority eco-museums, ethnic minority theme parks, and ethnic tourism venues (Schein 2000:133-134; Rees 2000:147-157; Harrell 2001:11-12; Davis 2005:32-37; Notar 2006:54-59).

Burao has striven to connect with rural Wa culture in the remotest mountain areas of southwest China as part of her advocacy. Though of a different nature, she is involved in cultural brokerage between Wa and Han culture, as was her distant forbear Wu Shangxian. 'Moon Mountain' is replete with ethnographic imagery enabling engagement with perceptions of the Wa as among the most extreme of 'exotic Others'. Yet, it is in this act of engagement that Burao secures a voice for a counter-discourse, conveying the idea that the

\(^5\) Besides authors' names, a large number of terms from ethnic languages have evolved counterparts in Chinese that often appear in Sinophone writings of a given ethnic group. It is difficult to represent sounds in many languages using Chinese characters, and Wa is no exception. To partially remedy this situation, word lists and dictionaries in which conventional equivalents for Chinese characters are given in Romanized scripts or IPA symbols have been compiled for a number of languages spoken in southwest China. See Watkins (2010) for an online Wa dictionary.
Wa are misunderstood and deserving of reconsideration as sensitive inhabitants of their lightly-tread cultural territory that is now implicitly under the impact of the rapid development and cultural change affecting all cultures in southwest China. The following paragraphs briefly examine popular representations of the Wa and Burao's use of Wa myth, ritual, and folk customs that are essential for approaching her poem 'Moon Mountain' from a culturally informed perspective.

REPRESENTATIONS OF THE WA IN CHINA

All of the ethnic groups in China were categorized on a Marxist scale of evolutionary development in the 1950s. The Wa lifestyle was classified as 'primitive society' due to an economic base in swidden agriculture, what were determined to be matriarchal elements in the society, and the existence in certain locales of the practice of headhunting.

6 The version of 'Moon Mountain' received for this article was slightly revised by the author. In the original version published in Ethnic Literature in 2002, the references to headhunting were not as obvious. The line "an awe-inspiring human skull" in the present version was originally "an awe-inspiring buffalo skull" and "the fierce Awa blade used to cut heads" was rendered simply as "the fierce Awa blade." (I have translated man 蛮 as 'fierce'. Historically this character has also been used to represent some of the 'barbarian' tribes in southern China, suggesting a more nuanced meaning of the word in this poem.) Other small changes were also made in the wording. The changes reflect not only the mutability of 'text' in the modern Chinese context, but also suggest the masked references to headhunting as instances in which veiled messages are used by women/ minorities in specific cultural situations (Radner 1993:2-5).
which was outlawed by 1958. As in 'Moon Mountain', Burao often utilizes poetry as a medium for subtly raising consciousness over perceptions of her people, who still suffer from stigma associated with headhunting.\(^7\)

Representations of the Wa in the exhibit depicting Wa folk life and ritual in the Yunnan Provincial Ethnic Museum (Yunnan minzu bowuguan 云南民族博物馆) in Kunming give a straightforward and scientifically framed overview of aspects of traditional Wa culture (including wood drums and water buffalo skulls). Nevertheless, the practice of headhunting is still commonly associated with the Wa in China. \(^8\) A website entitled 'Ethnic China' includes a

\(^7\) In a note to her present version of the poem 'Moon Mountain', Burao asserts that the Wa are among the few groups on earth to have practiced headhunting. She also states that water buffalo skulls have replaced human ones in rituals (Burao 2002:58):

The Wa are among the few headhunting groups on earth. In the past heads were taken for use as ritual offerings in celebrations held to secure bountiful harvests of grain in the coming year, and continue a cultural history that has lasted for thousands of years. In 1958, after the founding of the People's Republic of China, the Wa ended the headhunting tradition, and now use buffalo heads in the grain sacrifices.

\(^8\) Differing from the theory that Wa headhunting was primarily linked to agricultural sacrifices, Fiskesjö (2010a:250) argues that the practice arose only in recent centuries in conflicts with outsiders from China, Burma, and England in the border regions between China and Burma. As such, it may be considered an aspect of warfare. The taking of heads in warfare has occurred in many other cultures around the world, including Europe, the Americas, and early
comprehensive section on Wa culture, including a description of a dragon propitiating rite (jilong 祭龙 in Chinese). As if anticipating the stereotype, wording on the site includes an often repeated line, translated here as:

After the government proscribed headhunting in 1958, the Wa employed another form of sacrificial offering in some contexts—a cow head to represent a human head (Ethnic China 2010).

Moreover, Chinese histories of the Wa often point to possible relations between the Wa of today and an ancient group dating to the Han 漢 Dynasty known as the Pu 濮 (Wei 2001:19-21). The link with the Pu, which legitimizes the Wa as a people rooted in ancient China, is mentioned on the official English language website of the People's Government of Yunnan Province. There is no mention of the former headhunting practice, though the sacrificing of buffalos in connection with the drum rituals is detailed (People's Government 2010).

DRUMS AND GOURDS

As noted, in Chinese sources the practice of headhunting is associated with drum worship and the desire for rich harvests that were expedited by the taking of human heads. Large wood drums carved from logs are a central component in Wa ritual (Zhao 2000:1-3). The major drum ritual is held for the moik krok 'Life Force' residing in the large 'female' wood drum (Wei 2001:172-174). Although meanings of the drums vary among the Wa groups, the drum is often considered a representation of female genitalia or otherwise related to female fertility. In certain rituals, young women dance

For an in-depth study of Wa sacrifices and headhunting see Fiskesjö (2000).
uninhibitedly before the drum as it is beaten, tossing their long hair 'wildly' up and down. In recent years this ritual has been adapted into many new contexts, including choreographed performance events at tourist venues and government-sponsored festivals (see Figure Four).

Wa creation myths tell of the re-peopling of the earth after a devastating flood destroys most living creatures. The primal myth known as *si gang lih* (*sigang li* 司岗里 in Chinese) centers on a cave (*si gang* in Wa; *lih* means 'to emerge') from which the local Wa groups and other peoples (*Yi* 彝, *Dai* 傣, and *Han* 汉 in some versions) emerge after the flood (Bi and Sui 2009:41). The myth places the Wa at the center of the world—and as the first people on the land. Yet, ironically 'Moonlight Mountain' tells us that the Wa live "a life isolated, remote" from the rest of China. The flood myth and cave are referenced by the image of cutting vines, which recalls how in certain versions of the myth, a culture-hero wields a large knife to cut open a giant gourd and release the people and creatures inside. The gourd-cutting is juxtaposed with the image of hunted game being chopped up with the blade 'used to cut heads' to divide meat among the community.¹⁰

Content varies and in one version of the myth the culture-hero known as Ada Regan 阿达惹敢 makes a stone

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⁹ Fiskesjö (2010a:241-243) discusses how the Wa self-concept of being the first people to emerge from the cave at the "center of the world" plays out in inter-state dynamics between China and Burma.

¹⁰ Long, machete-type knives appear in many Wa folksongs and stories and in actual life are an important implement used for a variety of tasks in the forest. The wild game catalogued in the poem includes what is likely the Yunnan hare (*Lepus comus*) and possibly the wild buffalo or gaur (*Bos gaurus*). The 'wild fowl' could be species of jungle fowl (*Phasianinae*) related to domesticated chickens.
boat in anticipation of a great flood. When the floodwaters cover the earth, he floats about accompanied by a cow and a calabash. After some time the cow becomes famished and eats the calabash. When Ada asks where the calabash went, the teary-eyed cow says it is within her. Ada asks her to give birth to it, the cow does so, and Ada plants it. After nine years and nine months the vines, leaves, and flowers soon cover the hillsides and valleys, but the calabash is nowhere in sight. Ada sends the cow, then an elephant, a rat and an eagle to search for it, but all fail. Finally, after a majestic dance, a peacock succeeds in finding the gourd hidden within sacred Caimu 咖目 Mountain. Several creatures try unsuccessfully to gnaw through the shell. Finally Ada takes action and opens the giant calabash with his knife (Wei 2001:256):

...  
Ada sharpened his great knife,  
And cut apart the calabash;  
The calabash split in two;  
Upper and lower halves,  
The upper half was the earth  
The lower half was the waters.  
The upper half was the heavens;  
The lower half was the human realm;  
In the calabash were the myriad beings;  
The myriad beings were of two types:  
In the waters were the fish and shrimp;  
On the land were the beasts;  
The Awa had two places,  
The upper and lower calabash land;  
The Awa had history,  
The upper and lower Si gang lih.

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11 Ada mates with the cow to produce the calabash in some versions.
Moon Mountain symbolizes the traditional world of the Wa, which is now under increased pressure brought about by the economic reforms that began in the late 1970s and have increased with intensity since the late 1990s. The name also resonates with the actual name 'Awa Mountains' that refers to the mountain areas of the Wa. Ancient cliff paintings in Cangyuan 沧源 County, perhaps made by antecedents of the Wa, feature images of humans hunting with crossbows, herding livestock, grinding grain, and dancing. Other images include domestic and wild animals, including buffalo, dogs, horses, deer, monkeys, tigers, and leopards (Wang 1985; Wei 2001:291-292). There are also images of the sun and moon, as well as what may be ritual specialists. In the poem, the phrase "Reaching the pinnacle of perfection" refers to the long and rich culture of the Wa that is inscribed with mineral paints on the cliff walls.

Burao's poems also strongly feature women and women's perspectives, and often draw on Wa myth and lore concerning women. In the second to last stanza the poem mentions Maiden Yena 叶娜 12 an important figure in Wa mythology. She is the granddaughter of the mythic matron, Yenumu 烈奴姆, associated with the custom of hair combing in courting rituals (Wei 2001:142-143; Yunnan shaoshu 2001:70). 13 The poem describes Yena handing a piece of white cloth to her capable and fearless lover, Aicai 岩菜,

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12 Yenumu 烈奴姆 (Wa, yiaex num) is a creator figure in Wa mythology who led the first humans to wash in a river after emerging from the cave. Her granddaughter is named 'Yena' and other variations in Chinese transliteration. In Wa 'Yena' is 'yiex nab', with 'yeix' meaning 'elder sister'.
13 Wa women prize their long hair and there are strong social taboos against touching the head.
onto which he spills his fresh blood as a marriage oath.\textsuperscript{14} Their union begat the first generation of Wa people after emergence from the Si gang cave.\textsuperscript{15} The image relates to marriage customs in some Wa areas and the figure of Yena and Acai can, on some level, represent vital young Wa adults. As in the poem, the origin myths associate women with the tending of grain. The poem also mentions the \textit{moba} 魔吧, ritual specialists who deal with harmful ghosts and the

\textsuperscript{14} The \textit{岩} in 'Aica' (Wa, ai kuad) is pronounced 'yan' in Modern Standard Chinese, 'ai' in the local Yunnan dialect, and 'ai' in Wa. In certain areas, hemp cloth is placed on a fresh grave. The first insect to alight upon it is placed in a bamboo tube and taken to the home, representing the spirit of the deceased (Luo 1995:314).

\textsuperscript{15} Images of Maiden Yena and Yancai resonate ironically with sub-plots in stories by Wa writer Dong Yinghui. The story 'Place of Capturing Souls' ('Shehun zhi di 摄魂之地') features a young women named Yega 叶嘎 who is the granddaughter of a great ritualist, daughter of an accomplished headhunter, and a beautiful young woman. She and her lover, Yan'ga 岩嘎, kowtow to each other in a mountain cave in a secret marriage that violates tribal taboos against unions between members of the same kinship or clan unit (Luo 1995:297-298; Fiskesjö 2009). Another story, set in the late 1940s, also includes scenes of head-hunting. Entitled 'Three Generations of Women in the Masang Tribe' ('Masang buluo de sandai nüren 马桑部落的三代女人'), one subplot involves a young woman named Nahai 娜海, who is rescued from marauding monkeys by a young shepherd named Yankuai 岩块. Though she begs to marry him, he runs off in embarrassment. She is left to starve with her abusive husband until the arrival of People's Liberation Army forces, but not before two army scouts are captured and beheaded (Gao and Shang 1999:368-370).
supernatural and kill chickens in divination rites similar to those practiced in many local cultures in the region.\textsuperscript{16} Hunting is still practiced by some Wa men, who use crossbows and a variety of traps to capture their prey. (The image of crossbow darts being launched at the thatch roofs refers not to a custom, but to a random release of energy on the part of some participants at the feast.) In the latter half of the poem this traditional gender bifurcation is mentioned in the description of the old sun-burned couple. Wa folksongs emphasize gender cooperation and mutual hard work (Wei 2001:263-66).

Other items of material culture and associated customs appearing in the poem include the popular pastime of chewing betel nut (\textit{Areca}), the making of a light beer of fermented grains (locally called \textit{shui jiu} 水酒 'water wine' in Chinese; the Wa term is 'blai' 'beer'), roasting meat, using crossbows, the cultivation of yams, the weaving of hemp cloth, and the use of a non-native herb, tobacco.\textsuperscript{17}

\section*{CONCLUSION}

This discussion has examined Burao Yilu's use of myth, ritual, and folk customs in representing a gentler counter-discourse to negative perceptions of the Wa ethnic group. The final lines of the poem are a plea to reconsider the image of the Wa people in light of their sympathetic, holistic relation to the environment, rather than solely on the grounds of their historic level of economic development and unacceptable behaviors in their recent past. The poem

\textsuperscript{16} 'Moba' is a Sinicization of 'maw pa', a word from the language of the Lahu 拉祜 ethnic group, neighbors of the Wa in China (Walker 2003:170). The Wa term is 'ba ngai'.

\textsuperscript{17} Fiskeşjö has discussed the stigmas surrounding the production and use of this homemade beer in Wa in terms of cultural insiders and outsiders (2010b:111-112).
implicitly suggests, however, that the timeless relation to the life force of nature is mitigated by blood. The recurrent imagery of spilled blood attests to this linkage: the skull that serves as icon of the relation with the life force, disarticulated bodies of prey animals that are consumed by the community; the ritual killing of chickens to carry off evil forces, the implied animal deaths in the old man's traps; and the blood-letting in the primal wedding of Yena—all concern blood as the medium of a force that generates good harvests and individual and community welfare. This subtext argues for the persistence of a Wa sensibility that will continue continguously with efforts to present an edifying face to the outside world and reconcile the place of the Wa among the ethnic minority groups of China.

月亮山

围着月亮的边缘醉舞
一定浑然又自在
阿佤人一辈子一辈子
收获封闭与荒凉 豁达与悠远

登峰造极的老祖先
开创祭祀的信奉物是
一架威严的人头骨
这图腾
为奔走夜路的小伙子
翻山越岭不怕蛇毒 兽猛
……

阿佤人喜爱呆在
月亮山乘凉
用槟椰枝驱赶闷热的雨季
狂欢的风灾

•120•
狩猎者
将战利品野鸡 野兔 野猪 野牛
使用族群中砍人头祭谷的大蛮刀
分割
发散给山寨的父老乡亲
山里人就过上“共产主义”的生活

篝火边烧烤而食的
阿佤人
吃得开心时
一刀刀割断山窝窝里的青藤子
吃得火气来
一弩弩刺痛山坡坡上的草棚子
魔巴杀鸡放血忙碌着看鸡骨卦
把山寨闹得热乎乎

团月亮 扁月亮
老阿妈空着门牙低着头 飘飞着白发
淘制小红米水酒
老阿爹弓着腰干 光着干巴巴的脊梁
摆弄捕猎器吸着草烟斗
那黝黑皮肤的小倆口
管不住那么多写进故乡的
辛酸与欢乐
爬上陡峭的石岩
仰望三千多年历史的崖画
探访土坎上野生成遍的山芋

晴朗的月亮山
只有叶娜姑娘的心
最神秘最惹人眼红
在定亲那天
她备下一块白色的自织麻布

•121•
让岩块咯吱破手指上染几滴血
示意佤族的恋情
永不褪色

铺满银光的月亮山
阿佤人在这块原始而肥沃的土地上
一朝朝生栖
一代代繁衍
这样崇尚大自然的边地民族
谁敢说他不够人性

载自《民族文学》杂志 2002 年第四期

MOON MOUNTAIN

Encircling the edge of moonlight
a drunken dance,
natural and unrestrained

Generation by generation,
wresting what's offered by the bleak mountains,
a life isolated, remote

Reaching the peak of perfection, the elders
incited worship of their object of belief
an awe-inspiring human skull

This totem
erected for youths running the night trails,
crossing the mountains unafraid
of deadly serpents or savage beasts

The Awa people like living as they do
there in the coolness of Moon Mountain
chewing betel nut to fend off the sultry monsoons, 
the frenzied winds

The hunters bear their prizes—
wild fowl, hare, boar, and buffalo
rendering them with the fierce Awa blade
used to cut heads as offerings for grain,
dividing meat among all villagers, all relatives

That's the communal way
of these mountain folk

The Awa, roasting and eating by the bonfires, 
eating with such gusto

Each cut slicing the green vines 
of their nest
within their mountain lair

Then the dancing begins
the unconstrained wooden drum dance

the eating
until the internal heat rises

Crossbow darts prick the thatch roofs 
on the hillsides

a moba kills a chicken, draining its blood, 
reading the divination by its bones, 
as the mountain village breaks wild

a round moon, a flat moon above

An old woman missing a tooth bends her head 
white hair flying
as she washes red grains for beer;
an old man bends his bare back,  
smoking a pipe as he sets a trap

This sun-darkened couple  
has no say over the great joy 
and sadness  
inscribed in the village's past...

They crawl up steep precipices,  
for a look at three thousand year old cliff paintings  
to examine yams within the terraces ...

The cloudless Moon Mountain has  
only Maiden Yena's heart;  
most mysterious, most envied

On the day of their engagement  
she carried a piece of white hemp cloth,  
inviting Brother Yancai to bite his finger,  
to let those drops of blood become the Wa people's love

the color never to fade

Moon Mountain is imbued with a silver sheen  
on this ancient and fertile land  
the Awa people have lived day by day  
generation by generation

Who can say that these people,  
so in tune with nature,  
can lack human feeling?

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