1. Nominee: Wu Ming-Yi 吳明益 Juror: Darryl Sterk 石岱崙

I nominate the Taiwanese novelist Wu Ming-Yi for the 2027 Newman Prize for Chinese Literature. From his professional perch in the Department of Sinophone Literatures at National Dong Hwa University in Hualien County, Wu has transformed the geological formations of Formosa's east coast into literary landmarks.

Over the past three decades Wu has built one of the most distinctive oeuvres in contemporary Sinophone letters, grounding his works in the natural history, colonial memory, and multilingual society of Taiwan while also speaking to alienated readers far beyond the island nation's borders in the Anthropocene. In all four of his novels, he has painted boldly on a global canvas, thematizing the dialectic of technology and human-nature environmental relations in rigorously researched and richly imaginative works.

Wu grounds his often fantastic or fabulous plots in documentary research into the world's micro- and macrostructures, from the pattern on the hind wing of a Koxinga or small brown crow butterfly (*Euploea tulliolus koxinga*) to the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, from the gearing of a boneshaker of a bicycle to the folding of the gneiss and marble seams in the Central Mountain Range, each rendered with a naturalist's precision and a poet's "fearless tenderness," as Ursula K. Le Guin put it in her endorsement of *The Man with the Compound Eyes*. A high-water mark of such tenderness, for many readers, comes in *The Stolen Bicycle*, when a zookeeper tells the daughter of a colleague – who died when a bombing raid collapsed the tunnel where they were sheltering the elephant Miss Amber – that he wishes it could have been him. The plots themselves tend to multiply: (hi)stories are told and retold from the vantage points of different characters, species, and even objects, so that the human story is always set within a wider web of the natural and the artificial, the living and the dead.

Wu made his name through nature writing: *The Book of Lost Butterflies* (or *A Book about Losing Oneself in Butterflies*) (迷蝶誌) (2000) and *The Butterfly Way* (蝶道) (2003), followed by a walking travelogue *So Much Water So Close to Home* (家離水邊那麼近) (2007) and a philosophy of photography *Above Flame* (浮光) (2014). In 2007, he was known as a non-fiction nature writer with eclectic interests, but he had published two short-story collections, *Closed for the Holiday* (本日公休) (1997) and *Tiger Lord* (虎爺) (2003), and has gone on to publish two more, *The Illusionist on the Skywalk* (天橋上的魔術師) (2011) and *The Land of Little Rain* (苦雨之地) (2019).

His novels have been butterfly effects. He developed a document of his father's experience as a bonded factory worker in wartime Japan into his first novel, *Dreamlines* (睡眠的航線) (2007), and an experience as a guide in the Butterfly Room at Taipei Zoo into his second: *The Man with the Compound Eyes* (複眼人) (2011). His third novel, *The Stolen Bicycle* (單車失竊記) (2015), resulted from a curiosity about the bicycle his father remembered losing as a young man, and his fourth, *The Sea Breeze Club* (海風酒店) (2023), from a conversation with an artist who had worked in such a club in the heyday of the local cement industry.

Wu is not just a literary artist but also a multimodal one, who has designed and illustrated his own volumes, notably *The Man with the Compound Eyes*, with its krill-eye cover, and *The Stolen Bicycle*, with its detailed illustrations of antique bicycle parts. These two novels have carried Wu's voice into the

English-speaking world. The former, a metafictional ecological fable in which a Pacific trash vortex makes landfall on the Seven Stars Beach just north of H(ualien) City, was the first novel from Taiwan to be published by a major English-language trade publisher (Harvill Secker, an imprint of Penguin Random House) and has since appeared in a dozen languages. *The Stolen Bicycle*, a novel that cycles through the mechanical and familial memory, was picked up by an independent Australian publisher (Text, since acquired by Penguin Random House) and longlisted for the Man Booker International Prize in 2018 – the first time a Taiwanese writer was so recognized.

In every new work, Wu has tried to break new ground. Accordingly, the work submitted for this nomination is his most recent novel, *The Sea Breeze Club* (海風酒店) (2023). Set in a fictionalized Truku Indigenous village called Knibu in Hsiulin Township, Hualien, the novel features a cast of ancestral spirits, Indigenous elders, Han settlers, factory workers from around East Asia, and engineers from across the world. A Truku boy chasing a white dog and a runaway Han Taiwanese girl each enter opposite ends of a cave, in effect two orifices of a living body, an alpine ecosystem; both their fates, and the fate of the range, will be tied up in the struggles over a cement plant constructed under Taiwan’s “industry moves east” policy. In the novel, the mountain is hollowed out to feed the plant, gutting the giant Dnamay, whose role here is comparable to that of the eponymous man with the compound eyes: both are figures for nature’s perspectives, the man highly verbal and Dnamay poignantly wordless. But *The Sea Breeze Club* is also the most fully realized of Wu’s attempts to represent the multilingual reality of his home country, moving freely among Mandarin, Taiwanese, and Truku. Wu worked with Truku elders and linguists to include an authentic Truku voice in the novel, an achievement that has inspired a project to translate Wu’s mainly Chinese-language novel into Truku.

Wu’s body of work is a foundation for a formidable reputation in literary circles in Taiwan and abroad. He has won the China Times Open Book Award six times; his fiction has taken the Taipei International Book Exhibition Grand Prize, the Taiwan Literature Award’s Golden Award for long fiction, and the United Daily News Literary Award, among others. *The Man with the Compound Eyes* won France’s Prix du Livre Insulaire, was selected for Books at Berlinale, and was a nominee for Japan’s Seiun Award; *The Stolen Bicycle* was named among the best Chinese-language novels of the century by Time Out Beijing. His works have been translated into some two dozen languages. He is widely regarded as one of the leading Taiwanese writers of his generation. There are many gifted novelists writing in Chinese, and it is not easy to choose one. Wu Ming-Yi stands out for the propulsiveness of his plots and the seriousness of his ecological and historical conscience. His is a body of work resoundingly worthy of the Newman Prize for Chinese Literature.

Recommended reading:

The Sea Breeze Club《海風酒店》(trans. Darryl Sterk; forthcoming from Arcade Publishing).

The Stolen Bicycle《單車失竊記》(trans. Darryl Sterk; Text, 2017).

The Man with the Compound Eyes《複眼人》(trans. Darryl Sterk; Harvill Secker, 2013).

NEWMAN PRIZE FOR CHINESE LITERATURE

紐 曼 華 語 文 學 獎

章程

纽曼华语文学奖由美国俄克拉荷马大学美 中关系研究所设立，每两年颁发一次，旨 在表彰对华语写作做出杰出贡献的文学作 品（含小说、散文、诗歌和戏剧）及其作者。纽曼奖以文学价值为唯一的衡量标准， 不论是成就卓越的名家或是后起之秀，任 何在世的坚持用华语写作的作者都有被推 荐的资格。

由知名专家组成的国际评委会通过透明的投票程序提名候选人并遴选出获奖者。获奖者将被授予 10,000 美元和奖匾一幅，并应邀到俄克拉荷马大学参与发奖仪式和学术活动。纽曼奖得益于纽曼夫妇的慷慨赞助，特此鸣谢。

Charter

The Newman Prize for Chinese Literature is awarded biennially in recognition of outstanding achievement in prose or poetry that best captures the human condition, and is conferred solely on the basis of literary merit. Any living author writing in Chinese is eligible, and the Prize may serve to crown a lifetime’s achievement or to direct attention to a developing body of work.

An international jury of distinguished experts will both nominate the candidates and select the winner, based on a transparent voting process. The winner will receive USD10,000 and a commemorative plaque, and will be invited to the University of Oklahoma to attend the award ceremony. The Prize honors Harold J. and Ruth Newman, whose generous endowment for a chair at the University of Oklahoma enabled the creation of the OU Institute for US-China Issues.