

Luntian: The Indestructible Truth about Environmental Destruction

Brandon Parreñas

Department of Education, Philippines

Published by Lampara Publishing House Incorporated in 2018 and translated into the Filipino language by Eugene Evasco, Becky Bravo's children's book entitled *Luntian* is a compelling account that tells its young readers one indestructible truth about our world—there is no one to blame for the destruction of environment but mankind.

The story is about *Pook Luntian*, a “once a quiet little town” surrounded by “thickly wooded forest from almost every side” (p. 4). *Pook Luntian* had a breathtaking view of a magnificent green mountain. This mountain was always “wreathed in the mist” and “smelled of dew” (p. 6), making the atmosphere in the town cool and clean. For the old townsfolk, *Pook Luntian* was a paradise that provided them with peace, abundant food, shelter, and good health.

But one summer day, a man from the city arrived in *Pook Luntian* and brought with him the very last thing the people and the place needed—change. He acquired a piece of land and built on it a big, cemented house. He took down the trees on his property and in their place formed a trimmed lawn, a massive fountain, a cemented driveway, and a communal water tower. He invited his friends and the friends of his friends to visit his well-decorated property and to personally see the majestic green mountain.

The visitation triggered a ripple of destructive consequences. One of the visitors decided to also acquire a property in *Pook Luntian*. The other visitors followed suit. As a result, the once “thickly wooded” town became a space for “homes of stone and concrete” (p. 22). This rapid development in *Pook Luntian* led to water shortage, pollution, and overcrowding. The town which once “smelled of dew” had “smelled like a dusty brown” (p. 25). The air that was once cool and clean became hotter. The once majestic green mountain turned to become a “sad-looking brown cone” enveloped by “even sadder stumps of trees and withering plants where the forest used to be” (p. 26).

The story's narrative unfolds within the confines of *Pook Luntian*, a town that undergoes a dramatic transformation from a vibrant, green haven to a place wounded by urbanization. The author maximizes the use of descriptions and complex sentences to propel the story. Young readers must expect less or a lack of dialogue when reading the book. The lack of dialogue and the use of long intricate sentences to fully appreciate the narrative may be an exhausting task for the untrained young eyes of the readers. However, this facet can also be a good training for young and inexperienced readers. Navigating text can prepare them for the comprehension of technical readings they may encounter as they grow and develop.

Elizabeth Parrocha's enchanting abstract illustrations effectively compensate for the absence of dialogue in the book. The depictions of mountains, trees, animals, concrete houses, and fountains, and the townsfolk possess a whimsical, almost doodle-like quality. These images are composed of intersecting patterns, curvy angles, and a series of parallel lines creating a captivating visual tapestry.

The watercolor effect applied to these illustrations conveys a surreal quality to the book's overall appearance. Dominated by shades of green and brown, the pages tell a visual story of *Pook Luntian*'s transformation over time. The lush green pages remind of its forested past, while the brown pages reflect its current urbanized state.

These illustrations not only enhance aesthetic appeal but also serve as invaluable visual aids, helping young readers navigate the complex descriptions and statements provided by the author. Together, they propel the narrative, creating a visual and immersive reading experience.

The book presents a captivating narrative approach by departing from the classical structure often found in children's literature. In traditional tales, stories typically commence with a statement that introduces the main character e.g. "Once upon a time, in a faraway kingdom, there was a beautiful princess named Aurora." This approach directs the young readers to focus on the main character and, consequently, makes the setting a secondary element.

Bravo's story takes a different path. It begins with an introductory statement: "There was once a quiet little town called Pook Luntian, so named because it was surrounded by a thickly wooded forest from almost every side" (p. 4). Through this narrative technique, the author discloses to its young readers that the main character of the story is not a human entity, but the setting itself. *Pook Luntian*, thus, becomes a dynamic element with a unique, sometimes human-like identity, shaped by significant changes it undergoes over time.

Another seemingly intriguing facet of the book is the enigmatic female figure gracing the cover page. If the main character in the story is in a place, one would ask who the female figure on the cover page of the book is. Most definitely, it is not the man from the city or any random people whom he invited to *Pook Luntian*. Instead, it seems that the author aims to personify the town itself through this female figure, providing a humanized representation of *Pook Luntian*.

In this context, the female figure echoes the longstanding archetype of nature as a female entity. This concept is well-articulated, as underscored by Merchant (2015) in her essay, *Nature as Female*. This perspective emphasizes that since the environment is often personified as female, it is seen as mankind's greatest provider, yet endures significant abuse.

The most intriguing facet of the book lies in its powerful, profound message. The story exposes an indestructible truth—mankind is the destroyer of the environment due to its capitalistic and materialistic ideology. The story does not only entertain but also serves as a reminder of this enduring truth. While the first man from the city is not the main character, he assumes a pivotal role as the embodiment of capitalistic and materialistic values.

This ideology, as explained by Bate (2015) in his article *The Economy of Nature*, has led humanity to neglect its responsibility for environmental preservation. Material possessions take precedence, and the environment is relentlessly exploited to meet insatiable desires. The consequence is thoughtless environmental abuse, vividly portrayed by Bravo. ☸

References

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