

an air of mystery around his central question about the causes and consequences of land deals in Laos.

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Malaysian Crossings: Place and Language in the Worlding of Modern Chinese Literature. By Cheow Thia Chan. New York: Columbia University Press, 2023. 298 pp.

Studies on Chinese literature could no longer overlook the literature produced outside mainland China, especially after the emergence of Sinophone studies in English-language scholarship over a decade ago. Critics regard Mahua (Malaysian Chinese) literature as a distinctive manifestation of Sinophone literature, notable for its outstanding production of Chinese-language creative writing from Southeast Asia. Nevertheless, Sinophone literature existed before the term Sinophone gained traction in academia, in a way that their “covert globality” (p. 1) was previously unnoticed. In Sinophone regions such as Taiwan, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia, authors and critics have long nurtured local literary traditions and intellectual discourse.

Malaysian Crossings by Cheow Thia Chan is a critical addition to the growing body of scholarship in Sinophone studies focusing on Mahua literature. Chan offers a nuanced critique to challenge the field's prevailing perspectives articulated from academic contexts beyond Mahua/Malaysia, advocating for the acknowledgement of the oft-overlooked "lineage of local self-understandings" (p. 18). Chan draws upon Taiwan-based Mahua author and scholar Ng Kim Chew's metaphor of the "literary Galapagos archipelago" (p. 13) to refer to the marginality and isolation of Mahua literature. The book foregrounds transregional connections in the "Sinophone South" among various peripherized sites in the "world-Chinese literary space" (p. 3), a term Chan uses to include all regions where Sinitic languages are spoken. Significantly, Chan consciously engages with numerous research and literary criticism works published in Chinese by writers based in Malaysia, Singapore and Taiwan, positioning Mahua literature not only as a subject of study but also as a source of theory-making.

The book's theoretical intervention lies in the assertion that Mahua literature operates in a state of "deep marginality" (p. 2). This characterization denotes the minoritized positions of Mahua literature in multiple sites: first, in Malaysia, where non-Malay literature is deemed only as "sectional literature"; second, in the field of Chinese literature overshadowed by works from China; third, within the globally dominant Eurocentric Anglophone literary sphere. Chan underscores the significance of place-making in the four selected case studies spanning the 1930s to the 2000s, illustrating how authors interact and negotiate with what is known as Malaysia in their literary practices. "Malaysia" as the site of literary representation transcends a mere nationalistic interpretation. Chan challenges readers to discard a normative understanding of literary identity and taxonomy based on nation-states. Instead, he explores the unexpected connections and imaginative expressions that reveal the worldly and cosmopolitan character of Mahua literature.

Malaysia plays a pivotal role in mediating local and translocal identities, forging connections for these writers and their envisioned

readership. Chapter 1 showcases the linkage between Shanghai and Malaya's reading public that enabled the China-born author Lin Cantian to publish the first Mahua novel in history. Living as a minority *waijiangren* (non-Fujian and non-Guangdong migrant) in Malaya, Lin experimented with the textualization of topolects in Chinese scripts to formulate a place-appropriate literary language. Chapter 2 delves into the renowned Eurasian author Han Suyin's time in Malaya, highlighting her efforts to dismantle barriers between the Anglophone and Sinophone cultural spheres in Malaya. Chan points out that it is in Malaya where Han "transitioned from an amateur novelist to a professional author" (p. 73). Chapter 3 features contemporary China author Wang Anyi, whose search for her heritage in Singapore and Malaysia is narrated in her literary prose, *Sadness of the Pacific*. Her father, Wang Xiaoping, was a returned overseas Chinese writer (*guiqiao zuojia*) from Singapore, and the daughter's root-seeking journey decentralizes China as the ancestral land to return to and thereby challenges the conventional genealogy of Chinese identity. Chapter 4 tells the story of Li Yong Ping, Sarawak-born and naturalized Taiwanese author, who once resisted being labelled as a Malaysian writer. Chan argues that Li practises "off-center articulation" (p. 156) and strategic distancing in his portrayal of indigenous and migrant identity, problematizing the fixated boundaries of literary nationalities.

All of these examples suggest that Malaysia is not a bounded place in Chinese literary imagination but, as Rachel Leow noted in her praise of the book, "a vibrant center of multiple literary crossings" (blurb). While the book's approach underscores Malaysia as an imaginative literary space, it also raises the question of whether deep knowledge of Malaysia could shed more light on the materiality of these literary crossings. Instances include the historical conditions of the Malayan Emergency that influenced Han Suyin's conceptualization of Malayan writings, and the political instability and racial formation of Borneo in the 1960s that shaped Li Yong Ping's imagination and narration of the native Borneo landscape.

Moreover, while situated in the Southeast Asian region, how have Mahua authors interacted with other local literary realms such as Malay, Tamil and other indigenous literatures and cultures, which also share common marginality in world literature? To what extent do literary crossings not circumvent but confront the common issues surrounding Third World national literature—the intractable non-cosmopolitan predicaments? *Malaysian Crossings* offers a fresh perspective that suggests that multiscalar peripherality and marginality can also be rescaled within and across the margins. Malaysia, with its distinct cultural and linguistic diversity not mirrored in other Sinophone regions, emerges as an ideal site to test the boundaries and meanings of literary crossings.

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Colonizing Animals: Interspecies Empire in Myanmar. By Jonathan Saha. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022. xiv+234 pp.

Colonizing Animals is Jonathan Saha's second monograph that, following his previous work on corruption, again brings a new, thought-provoking perspective to the colonial history of Myanmar/Burma. This time, he focuses on animals, or, to be precise, the interspecies empire. Historiography on colonial Myanmar has been dominated by the single species, *homo sapiens*, if occasionally joined by a few plant species that became the colony's main export commodities, like rice or teak. The book investigates the changing relationships between humans and multiple non-human species through an animal-history lens and raises a critique against colonialism and anthropocentrism.