Theory, Asia and the Sinophone

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The three terms in the title of this essay—theory, Asia, and the Sinophone—appear to be disparate or unrelated. They are, I would like to propose, far from completely discrete entities, and may be more entangled and interconnected than we might assume. If the purpose of genealogical work, following Foucault, especially in light of his interpretation of Nietzsche, is to reveal the multiple and contradictory pasts—the details, accidents, reversals, faults, fissures, discontinuities, errors, petty malice, disguises, etc.—that are wilfully misinterpreted or obliterated so that our current knowledge formation can be so thoroughly structured by power, then I would like to posit that genealogical work is inherently a comparative endeavour on multiple scales and levels involving non-traditional agents, and that its goal is to bring into view those relationalities repressed and obscured by both material and symbolic interests of the power/knowledge dyad. What is disparate—the notion of ‘disparity’ in Foucault—may be events in the world of chance, but they are nonetheless the events that make up what Foucault has called, after Nietzsche, ‘real history’ (wirkliche Historie), which differs from the ‘antiquarian history’ that traces back to an origin, constructs a linear narrative of certainties and absolutes, is teleological and, therefore, ultimately metaphysical. This article is a modest attempt at a non-metaphysical history of disparity through a juxtaposition of these three terms in their apparent discontinuities.

Following Foucault, my task in this article is that of an ‘effective historian’ with a historical sense that is parodic and dissociative, and which seeks to shed the ‘cloak of universals’ and to attend to details and accidents that help ‘the face of the other’ to emerge.1 The perennial other to the construct that is called the West—namely the Rest, the entity to which Asia has been consigned—is logically, then, a subject of important consideration in this article. The explication of the relationship between the first two terms of this article, theory and Asia, must consider this distancing of Asia from the domain of theory as a wilful forgetting of historical crossings that necessarily constituted the formation of what we call theory today, and more specifically, what is known as poststructuralist theory. We need to recall the aftermath of the global 1960s in terms of the interrelatedness of May ’68 in France, Maoism and the Cultural Revolution in China, Marxist humanism in Eastern Europe, global decolonial movements led by Third World peoples, and the Civil Rights Movement led by racial minorities in the United States.2

But this opposition or dichotomy between Western theory and Asia is, I argue, a majoritarian opposition between two major formations, even
though the two are positioned in an uneven and hierarchical relationship. In our critique of and exclusive attention to this majoritarian opposition, we end up systematically displacing the voices of minor and minoritized peoples who are not authentic subjects either in the West or in Asia, but who also theorize and who are also constitutive subjects. Western critical and cultural theory seldom takes into account the standpoints of the internal others in its midst, ignoring, for example, the complex conjunctures of the global 1960s in which racial minorities played a crucial role. And in much the same way, the Asian critical tradition turns a largely deaf ear on the voices of its racialized or ethnicized minorities and other peripheral subjects—self-obsessed, as it were, with its own wounding by the West. This wounding by Western colonialism—political as well as epistemological—and Asia’s response to it through something that can be generally called nationalism has persistently allowed Asia to exercise domination over the various others within its own midst. A key example of this dynamic is Japanese imperialism in the first half of the twentieth century, which presented itself as the saviour of Asia from Western aggression, but was actually a force of violent domination across large swathes of the continent. Japanese civilizing projects vied with Western civilizing projects in the colonies in a relationship of competition and mimicry, while Japan’s internal minorities (the Okinawans, the Zainichi, the Ainus, etc.) and its colonized subjects (in Korea, Taiwan, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific) endured colonial violence and control.

Twentieth-century Chinese nationalism is another example of the obsession with such wounding—which has been euphemistically celebrated as the ‘obsession with China’—and its simultaneous oppression of ethnic minorities and other peripheral subjects. The transition from the officially multilingual empire of the Qing to the officially monolingual nation of modern China (whether Republic of China or People’s Republic of China) has been explained in nationalistic terms of victory over Western and Japanese incursions; but the history of conquest of lands and peoples on the peripheries of empire cannot be explained away by this nationalist narrative, and neither can the suppression of the religions, cultures, and languages of China’s minorities. As Mayfair Yang writes in a forthcoming essay, Chinese anti-colonial nationalism was itself colonial vis-à-vis its religious population through its insistence on secularism. She calls this, appropriately, the ‘disenchantments of sovereignty’. I would further add that this secularism was especially targeted at ethnic minorities and their religions—as the cases of Islam and Tibetan Buddhism make abundantly clear.

Similarly, so-called theory in the West can be readily faulted for its strategic indifference to the dynamics of internal colonialism. The rise of poststructuralist theory in American academia is historically contemporaneous with what Omi and Winant have called the neoconservative ‘racial reaction’ against the gains of the Civil Rights Movement led by the racialized populations of African Americans and other minorities. Backlash politics, charges of ‘reverse discrimination’, the rise of the new right, and the elimination of affirmative action through the 1970s and 1980s set the stage for neoliberalism in the ensuing decades. All the while, however, many American academics in
the humanities were struggling with the aporia of meaning in words and texts, the death of the subject, the substitution of reality by simulacra, and other cerebral quandaries. Shortly afterwards, many such academics, this time including some social scientists, became sympathetic with the fate of the colonized in far-flung British and French ex-colonies rather than with the plight of the internally colonized—the racialized—in their own midst. There is, therefore, a more than compelling rationale for examining the ethical implications of this displacement of minorities within the United States academy in area studies and postcolonial studies, not to mention the traditional social science disciplines where theory is becoming increasingly dominant.

This article is an attempt to scatter the majoritarian dichotomy of the West (theory) and the Rest (Asia) in order to account for the multiplicity of power/knowledge formations on variegated scales that are further articulated along the intersecting axes of language, culture, ethnicity and geography. In this unorthodox history of disparity, I present the Sinophone as a loose network of minoritized voices—as one of the most crucial absent others routinely elided by the West and Asia, both of whom conveniently and simplistically categorize it as the ‘Chinese diaspora’ and thus explain it away. To put it differently, the Sinophone speaks to that which is disavowed by the fantastic, powerful, and collusive opposition between the two major material as well as symbolic entities that we call ‘the West’ and ‘Asia’, and it scandalizes that opposition with irreverence from within. I analyse the potential of this scandal in the second section of the article after first explicating what interests the more specific formulation of the dichotomy, ‘Western theory versus Asian reality’, may serve.

**Theory and Asia**

The pairing of the two terms, theory and Asia, may be considered oxymoronic. Theory as we know it is Euro-American, if not French, by definition, and Asia has not been considered the location or producer of theory. In Asian studies, it has become customary, whether acknowledged or otherwise, for scholars to apply Western theory to Asian reality or Asian texts. In the United States, literary scholars in Asian studies have generally been informed by trends in literary theory from New Criticism to Deconstruction, and from feminism to postcolonialism; while social scientists have either explicitly or implicitly applied theories ranging from modernization theory (even those who claim to be merely empiricists) and Marxism, to rational choice theory and poststructuralism, just to name a few. This current state of widespread and naturalized usage of Western theory has not been achieved without debate, and it has much to do with the victory of the so-called disciplines over area studies, or rather, the still-yet-to-be-evaluated upgrading of area studies from the Cold War model of information retrieval (in the social sciences) and the old Orientalist model of culturalism (in the humanities). While social science disciplines have declared that they no longer need or want to hire area experts, humanities disciplines continue to struggle
with the Orientalist legacy, especially in studies of pre-modern Asia. Hence it is far from surprising that it was modern studies which first took the plunge into theory, much to the consternation and disapproval of the gatekeepers of culturalism.

The assault by theory understandably occurred first in Chinese studies, the oldest and largest Asian area studies field in the United States, and it took the form of a contest in the early 1990s between scholars of pre-modern and modern China, which later developed into a further dispute between the theorists, the culturalists (pre-modern humanities), and the empiricists (social sciences). Multiple provocations took place, including Jonathan Chaves’ criticism of Stephen Owen’s use of deconstructionism as throwing open the ‘portals of Chinese poetry studies to the gremlin progeny of Derrida’s febrile brain’, and Zhang Longxi’s claim that Rey Chow was theorizing about China without a deep enough engagement with ‘Chinese reality’. Even though Zhang Longxi himself advocated the use of theory as the first step in an effort to ‘get out of the cultural ghetto’, in his critique of Rey Chow he appeared to be advocating authentic knowledge about ‘Chinese reality’. His article was tellingly entitled ‘Western Theory and Chinese Reality’, and all subsequent conflicts—whether revealed in public or not—between the modernists and the pre-modernists, between younger scholars and older scholars, between theorists and culturalists, or between theorists and empiricists, are variations on this theme, which can also be described as ‘Western Theory versus Chinese Texts’. A similar debate also occurred in the field of Chinese history, and was framed as nothing less than ‘the paradigmatic crisis in Chinese studies’ by the chief editor of the journal Modern China, Philip Huang, in an article by that same name. Huang then organized a symposium at UCLA which was by all measures a showdown between the theorists and the self-styled empiricists, with some of the articles later published in a special issue of Modern China in 1993. By the time Rey Chow’s edited volume Modern Chinese Literature and Cultural Studies in the Age of Theory: Reimagining a Field was published in 2000, it was difficult to say whether the battle had been won or the conflict simply buried.

In giving this cursory account of the earlier debates, and without going into the complexity of the arguments, I hope to underscore the continuing perception of the disjunction between Western theory (as method) and Asian reality (as object of study), even though that perception is largely suppressed from public scrutiny. Theory is universal because it can be applied to different objects in different geographical locations. Asia is particular because it is a geographical location, and not a set of concepts and ideas. It follows that concepts and ideas can travel, but the location, bound geographically as it is, can only await them passively, even if it then might become the space in which those ideas and concepts are modified or retooled. Hence, even in Asia, Western theory is a coveted genre of knowledge; and the universities, in their frenzy to globalize, are increasingly requiring their faculty to publish in English-language scholarly journals based in the United States or Britain, a process which, needless to say, requires fluency in the theoretical lingo of specific disciplines and in the specific orientations of the various journals. In a
recent analysis of the ways in which Western theory has been appropriated by Chinese practitioners of Comparative Literature in the past few decades, Serena Fusco has noted that it is almost as if the appropriation of Western theory were serving ‘a new moment of Chinese cultural/national self-strengthening’, referring ironically to the importation of Western learning (especially military knowledge) for national strengthening in nineteenth-century Qing China.  

The current formation of the relationship between Western theory and Asian reality has been in place since at least the mid-nineteenth century, and it coincides neatly with the rise of modern Western empires, or to borrow Eric Hobsbawm’s phrase, the ‘Age of Empire’. It is not an exaggeration to say that the configuration of Asian critical thinking over the last 150 years has found its inspiration or provocation in Western knowledge in a range of fundamental ways. The so-called crisis of Chinese consciousness during the mid-nineteenth century was the immediate consequence of defeat in the Opium Wars, which exposed the Qing empire’s weakness vis-à-vis the British. The intellectual formations ensuing from that point up until the present day have been, in one way or another, attempts to manage and overcome this crisis via anxious appropriations of Western knowledge or Western theory. From late-Qing reformist thinking to the May Fourth enlightenment, from Chinese Marxism to the so-called second enlightenment of the 1980s, and right up to recent developments in (neo)liberal and postsocialist thought, we can identify specific Western theories as having been crucial legitimizing discourses or persuasive spectral interlocutors for these formations. In Japan, too, the Meiji Reform of the mid-nineteenth century was in large part a Westernization campaign, and intellectual formations since then can also be viewed as variegated responses to Western knowledge or Western theory. Many have noted and lamented this uneven itinerary of theory, and the massive absorption of Western epistemologies across Asia which it has entailed, while admitting that not much traffic is going in the other direction. China historian Joseph Levenson vividly metaphorized this asymmetry half a century ago, arguing that China has helped to enlarge the West’s vocabulary without significantly changing the character of Western culture or its worldview, while the West has brought such fundamental changes to the grammar or language of Chinese culture that its worldview has been fundamentally transformed. Here, the crucial point is that the two directions of travel vary not only in quantity and intensity but also, and more significantly, in their quality or nature, leading to dramatically different consequences: the West transforms China’s worldview; China adds details and the occasional vocabulary item to the West. Here we can see that the binary between ‘Western epistemology’ and ‘Chinese content’ is no longer merely a conceptual formulation or a technique of Westernization, but a material consequence of historical practice.

In trying to dispute this binary, we may consider the argument that is often made in discussions of the uneven, unequal, and asymmetrical traffic between Western theory and Asia; namely, that Western theory contains within it ample traces of Asia. For instance, it may not be a gross exaggeration to say
that there is an important link between Marx’s theorization of the Asiatic mode of production and the Marxist legitimation of Western imperialism, between Weber’s celebration of the Protestant ethic and his critique of its apparent lack in Oriental religions, between Hegel’s conception of the dynamism of Western-led world history and his views on Asian stagnation, and between the arguments about European racial superiority and the corresponding inferiority of Asians and blacks that we find in Kant’s early work on anthropology. Using more recent examples, it is also possible, if somewhat far-fetched, to suggest that there would have been no Derridean grammatology without the Sinitic written script celebrated most famously by Fenollosa and Pound, no Foucaultian archaeology of knowledge without the Chinese encyclopaedia, and perhaps even no linguistic turn in later twentieth-century French thought without the disillusionment with Maoism. Perhaps Roland Barthes’ work would not have transitioned from structuralism to poststructuralism without a trip to and a book about Japan, and Heidegger might never have learned about Daoism—which some claim is the basis of his notion of Dasein—without his conversations with the Japanese philosopher Kuki Shūzō, one of the founders of the Kyoto School of Philosophy. In all of these examples, however, traces of Asia do not change the character of Western theory so much as function as illustrations or details which support it; and those details are often conjured up in the Western imagination with their residues of Orientalism more or less intact.

A better example for this argument of ‘Asia within the West’ is probably postcolonial theory, which has focused predominantly on theorizing the effects of British colonialism in South Asia and was pioneered by immigrant scholars from South Asia working in US institutions. This Asia, however, is the one most thoroughly and explicitly touched by the West, and the colonial mediation (almost always seen as Western, despite the fact that Asia has known other colonizers) has been the legitimizing mechanism for the relevance and success of postcolonial theory as a school of thought in the American academy. This Asia became ‘theorizable’, so to speak, precisely because it had been intimately touched by the West. And if South Asia had not been postcolonial theory’s predominant focus, Gayatri Spivak would not have had to promote the pluralization of Asia in her recent book, Other Asias. What is more, postcolonial theory as it has developed thus far has a distinctly American history and, we may argue, a correspondingly American character. It has received institutional support in American academia when such support continues to elude postcolonial scholars in Britain. Its genesis is partially attributable to Spivak’s translation of Derrida’s Of Grammatology, which helped usher in the age of theory in the US academy—more properly called the age of translated theory, or even the Americanization of French thought. Yet even in Other Asias, Spivak subtitles two of the chapters ‘testing theory’ in various locations in Asia, a move which tacitly acknowledges the American-ness or Western-ness of postcolonial theory. The formula ‘Western theory, Asian reality’ still operates here, albeit only implicitly. For all practical purposes, postcolonial theory is travelling the same itineraries to Asia as did any other Western theory; it is written in English; it travels on the might of
global English sanctioned by the American empire; and it is highly coveted within Asia.

Can Asia be the location of theory? Takeuchi Yoshimi, the Japanese Sinologist and cultural critic, tried to offer some answers to this question half a century ago. He begins his discussion in the influential 1948 essay, ‘What is Modernity?’, by positing an implicit binary between the West and Asia in dialectical fashion. For Takeuchi, Asia can achieve modernity and enter history only via European invasion. This invasion is inevitable due to capitalism’s inexorable expansionist drive, and it is through resistance to European encroachment that Asia acquires self-consciousness. This self-consciousness allows Asia to reject its recalcitrant tradition and to incorporate Western modernity as thoroughly as possible, while simultaneously resisting the West. Based on this conception of Asian modernity, Takeuchi offers a model for negotiating the relationship between Western theory and Asian reality:

When in Europe a concept becomes discordant (i.e. contradictory) with reality (it always becomes contradictory), a movement occurs in which accord is sought by the overcoming of that contradiction, that is to say, by the development of place. Here it is the concept itself that develops. However, when in Japan a concept becomes discordant with reality (this is not movement, so not a contradiction), one abandons former principles and begins searching for others. Concepts are deserted and principles are abandoned. Writers abandon words and search for others. The more faithful these writers are to scholarship and literature, the more fervently they abandon the old and incorporate the new.

Thus one borrows concepts from Europe, tests them against local reality, and then solves the contradictions that arise so that the concepts can develop properly. Here, the origin of conceptual thinking is still Europe, but it is the mode and attitude of reception that become Takeuchi’s point of focus: namely, critical negotiation in correspondence with local reality as the basis for development.

Takeuchi laments that his compatriots in Japan have failed at this; many tend instead to import and then discard, while others simply imitate the West slavishly without mounting even a token resistance. In the works of Lu Xun, however, Takeuchi finds a perfect combination of grafting from the West while maintaining an attitude of resistance. The sign of resistance which he identifies in Lu Xun is the despair that comes from the slave’s full comprehension of his own predicament and from his recognition that salvation is impossible. Unlike the Japanese who are slaves to the West without knowing it, Lu Xun acknowledges the condition of the self as slave, and hence shows a critical spirit that promises—quite paradoxically—a future beyond subjection. In this way, despair becomes a form of resistance.

If Takeuchi ended up articulating a poetics and politics of despair in his essays from the 1940s and found himself stymied by the ‘Western theory, Asian reality’ binary, he returned to the problem with renewed vigour in an influential essay from 1961 entitled ‘Asia as Method’. The title of the essay clearly implies that Asia can be the base from which methods are derived, in
opposition to the notion that the West must always serve as the origin of concepts and methods. What is intriguing in his seemingly resistant formulation, however, is the fact that Takeuchi considered this to be a possibility only after Asia had engaged fully with the West. To be more precise, Asia must ‘re-embrace the West’—especially after Japan’s defeat in World War II—and help transform it in order to allow for the creation of a truly universal humanity:

[... ] the Orient must re-embrace the West, it must change the West itself in order to realize the latter’s outstanding cultural values on a greater scale. Such a rollback of culture or values would create universality. The Orient must change the West in order to further elevate those universal values that the West itself produced [... ] When this rollback takes place, we must have our own cultural values. And yet perhaps these values do not already exist, in substantive form. Rather I suspect that they are possible as method, that is to say, as the process of the subject’s self-formation. This I have called ‘Asia as method,’ and yet it is impossible to definitely state what this might mean. 14

Asian cultural values are ‘possible as method’, and they are not so much material or substantive as they are processes of ‘the subject’s self-formation’. As vague as this statement sounds, the core point relates to agency and Asia’s ability to subjectivize itself. In other words, it is the agency and subjectivity of Asia that are at stake if Asia is to become the site of method. Ultimately, then, Takeuchi is dealing in notions of political economy: in the binary between Asia and the West, Asia must learn from the West and critique it; and it is through this very process of criticality that Asia becomes a subject and an agent, who can then theorize. ‘Asia as method’ is projected into the future as a potentiality that can be realized only when Asia has achieved this kind of critical subjectivity.

Seeing through the political economy of theory is one of Takeuchi’s key contributions in this piece. Unlike those Asiacentrics who claim that Asians should take comfortable recourse to Asian values and theories, he considers the question from perspectives that emerge after the inevitable Western incursion into Asia has taken place. In a sense, then, one might say that Takeuchi is an early precursor of postcolonial theory: indeed, although he was initially supportive of the cause of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere during the war, he later became a strong critic of Japanese imperialism precisely because it mimicked Western imperialism, and was thus an expression of the slave mentality on the one hand, and a means of strategically displacing internal contradictions on the other. His theory of mimicry is particularly powerful because it does not concern itself with the colonized who mimics and then resists the colonizer, but instead critiques the self-colonized who mimics the West in order to colonize and dominate others. It is a layered and multi-angulated theory of mimicry that encompasses many agents.

In critiquing Japanese imperialism, then, Takeuchi fractures the singularity of Asia into a plurality with its own internal and variegated dynamics of colonialism and resistance, a perspective quite lacking in contemporary
American postcolonial theory—which largely ignores both modern and historical East Asian empires. In analysing Lu Xun’s particular form of resistance, he further fractures the symbolic construct that is the West by referencing the margins or others to this putative entity. He notes, moreover, that Lu Xun chose to translate not mainstream Western literature, as the Japanese tended to do, but rather works from ‘smaller, oppressed nations, such as Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and the Balkans, in addition to Slavic resistance poetry’.15 Lu Xun’s sympathies lay with ‘minor works’ of literature, and these sympathies show his resistant spirit, because they are not dictated by a slavish importation of what is considered ‘the best’ of Western literature. This idea of ‘the best’ guides the Japanese impulse for modernization, always hopeful, optimistic, and blithely unaware of its own slave mentality. Japan ‘rushes off after the latest things in order to overcome [its] own backwardness’.16

Asia as method, for Takeuchi, entailed the kind of confident choices that Lu Xun made of minor literatures (even if his overall tone was one of despair), the overcoming of mimicry and the slave mentality, a non-essentialist understanding of European and Asian concepts and values, and the forging of a true universalism. In these ways, we can say that Takeuchi overcame the ‘Western theory, Asian reality’ binary. But this binary is a historical product that will continue to exist as long as certain interests are still served by it. These are the selfsame interests that served Japanese imperialism, which deployed the binary of Asia versus the West as a tactic to legitimize its hegemony and displace the claims to identity by internal and colonized subjects. In short, it mobilized the discourse of wounding by the West as a self-righteous justification for wounding others. Chinese nationalism, as it resisted Japanese and Western imperialism, enacted a similar strategy of hegemony through the discourse of wounding. And when riots erupted across Tibet and Xinjiang during the first decade of the twenty-first century, the Chinese government and several prominent intellectuals pointed fingers at the West for instilling ‘wrong’ ideas among the Tibetans and the Uighurs, chastising this supposed rhetoric as the updated expression of the West’s age-old colonial ambitions towards these regions, and as a further example of a Western Orientalism that continues to demonize China. China emerges from this framing as the victim, not as the hegemonic agent against whom the Tibetans and the Uighurs were rioting. Edward Said could not have foreseen how the critique of Orientalism, articulated in the language of wounding, can end up flipping so easily into its opposite: a discourse of power.

In order that the ideological work of suppressing internal heterogeneities and maintaining hegemony can operate smoothly, the binary of Asia/China versus the West needs to be continuously produced and reproduced. But a rather more mundane act that occurs all the time is the unselfconscious reproduction of this binary by scholars for the simple purpose of making specific arguments. The binary is its own product, so to speak, and we need to be aware of the implied consequences of this production. It is with this kind of self-reflexivity that I examine, from an oblique angle, the suppression of
Sinophone heterogeneities in the hegemonic understanding of what is known as ‘Modern Chinese Literature’. At once a body of literature and a historical event, ‘Modern Chinese Literature’ is now a thoroughly institutionalized field of study in China, and increasingly in the United States and elsewhere. Following Foucault again, the short genealogical exercise below will read this event, using selective instances, in terms of a ‘reversal of forces’ and an ‘appropriation of a vocabulary turned against those who had once used it’.

Sinophone interruptions

First and foremost, the scandal of the Sinophone is related to how it fractures the coherence of the constructs called ‘China’, the ‘Chinese’, or ‘Chineseness’, all of which have functioned not only symbolically but also materially. The fracturing of these constructs by minoritized voices from within China—Tibetan, Uighur, Mongolian or other—needs extensive research and analysis, particularly in relation to literature, and some scholars have recently embarked on this important task. In the fields of anthropology and ethnography we can come up with a solid list of researchers who have done significant work on minority populations in China, as well as a group of new Qing historians who have carried out important analyses of the question of ethnicity in the Qing empire. The relationship between narrative and empire from literary perspectives within the Qing, and the modern and contemporary consequences and iterations of that relationship, however, have largely been ignored. The one exception is Modern Tibetan Literature and Social Change, edited by Lauran Hartley and Patricia Schiaffini-Vedani, which examines Sinophone and Tibetan-medium literature from Tibet since the 1980s. Edward Said offers an example of how to correlate the relationship between the novel and empire in his important study, Culture and Imperialism, where he argues in relation to the British, French, and American empires that the novel was ‘manifestly and unconcealedly a part’ of the imperial process and crucial to the ‘formation of imperial attitudes, references, and experiences’.

In this section, I will explore what I call the imperial unconscious of the event called ‘Modern Chinese Literature’ (Zhongguo xiandai wenxue, or literally ‘China Modern Literature’), which has been apotheosized as one of the foundational events in the history of the Chinese revolution. As part of this process, Lu Xun was eulogized as ‘the most correct, the most courageous, the most determined, the most loyal, and the most enthusiastic national hero, without any precedents’, by none other than Mao Zedong, thus guaranteeing all the hagiographies to come. Major intellectuals since Lu Xun have tended to be scholars of modern Chinese literature, and oftentimes scholars of Lu Xun as well, since the two are symbolically synonymous. The event of ‘Modern Chinese Literature’ is closely associated with the anti-Western and anti-Japanese, thus anti-imperialist, May Fourth demonstrations of 1919 and the movement that ensued, which was a wide-spread cultural enlightenment project waged by young intellectuals on both the Left and the Right.
'Modern Chinese Literature' was therefore heavily Westernized: it adopted Western and Japanese ideas, forms, and techniques as a way to resist the West and Japan. It enacted the procedure that Takeuchi would write about so eloquently in the 1940s.

Clearly, the event was a fusion of cosmopolitanism and nationalism, and it ranged, in literary practice, from modernism to realism, and from urban fiction to proletarian fiction. Literary historiography about this event written from 1949 to 1976—the period of high socialism—celebrated nationalism and disparaged cosmopolitanism, as Chinese Marxism, despite its internationalist outlook, was predominantly concerned with matters of sovereignty. China’s long history of humiliation since the first Opium War was finally vindicated by the communist revolution, which achieved sovereign status for the nation. If, in political history, it was the nationalist revolution of 1911 led by Sun Yat-sen that initiated this transition from empire to nation—from an empire at the brink of collapse to a semicolonial nation and then to a sovereign socialist state—then ‘Modern Chinese Literature’ was the cultural event that helped set the stage for this triumph. While the nature of socialism might have changed since 1949, the sovereignty of the Chinese nation-state is more solid than ever. This, needless to say, is the mainstream version of history, in slightly revised form.

A history of disparity here involves the uncovering of the effects of the transition from empire to nation in the event of ‘Modern Chinese Literature’, and the exposure of lingering ‘imperial attitudes, references and experiences’. Edward Said notes the long lineage of the imperial mentality in the British novelistic tradition, from *Robinson Crusoe* and the works of William Thackeray, Charles Dickens, Jane Austen, Joseph Conrad and others during the height of empire, in which a ‘structure of attitude and reference’ regarding the colonies emerges. This structure needs to be given ‘density’ since, eventually, it will become known that:

Without empire [...] there is no European novel as we know it, and indeed if we study the impulses giving rise to it, we shall see the far from accidental convergence between the patterns of narrative authority constitutive of the novel on the one hand, and on the other, a complex ideological configuration underlying the tendency to imperialism.20

China during the period when modern Chinese literature was produced (generally understood as the era between 1917 and 1949) was by no means an empire, of course. Because of the history of humiliation since the Opium War, and the conditions of semicolonialism during the early twentieth century which prevented China from feeling secure either as a past empire or as a present nation-state, modern Chinese literature was studded with narratives of wounding and failure. Yu Dafu’s celebrated story ‘Sinking’, for example, is about the emasculation of a Chinese man in Japan who lives under the shadow of China’s weakness and Japan’s rising power, a predicament which is epitomized by the inability of the Chinese man to attract Japanese women. The protagonist in the story, on the brink of suicide, famously blames
his personal failure on China: ‘My country, my country, my death is caused by you!’

Lu Xun’s even more celebrated story ‘The Story of Ah Q’, meanwhile, is about the failure of the uneducated masses to rise above their fundamental stupidity and ignorance. In a recent study, Jing Tsu has rightly argued that modern Chinese identity is built upon a profound sense of failure, which in turn gives rise to discourses of ‘overcoming and regeneration’, and leads to the desire for cultural modernity and salvationary nationalism. In Yu Dafu’s story, the overcoming of personal failure requires nothing less than the strengthening of the ethno-nation itself; it is national allegory gone extreme. In Lu Xun’s narrative, by contrast, the overcoming is projected or at least hoped for through a scalpel-sharp analysis of the failure in question. In either case, we may enquire as to who is supposed to bear responsibility for failure within the narrative structure. Whose responsibility is it that Yu’s Chinese protagonist cannot become the coveted object of Japanese female desire? Whose responsibility is it that Ah Q, and the Chinese masses he represents, are so ignorant and stupid? Yu’s protagonist excoriates the Chinese ethno-nation, while Lu Xun’s narrator seems to point the finger at Chinese culture. Neither of them implicates the narrating or writing self within the structure of the text.

The argument here is simply that under the seemingly paradoxical relationship between failure and nationalism lie the submerged imperial tendencies that actually make this relationship possible. Yu’s protagonist would not have had to endure such a devastating experience of failure without the long history of perceived Chinese superiority towards the ‘dwarf bandits’ of Japan. Because the presumed superiority was so uncontested, the fall from it was commensurately devastating. From the vantage point of the contemporary moment, at a time when this supposed failure has been transcended (by the contemporary rise of China in the world) and when this longed-for nationalism has been achieved (through maintaining the sovereignty and ‘territorial integrity’ of China), modern Chinese literature deserves a retroactive, alternative assessment in terms of the role it played in that transcendence and achievement. Reading it not in terms of cosmopolitanism versus nationalism—both of which involve the measuring of Western (read cosmopolitan) and Chinese (read nationalist) elements that enact the binary further—but in terms of its ‘structure of references’ vis-à-vis its many others will help us glimpse its imperial unconscious. This imperial unconscious has been successfully disavowed by discourses of failure, wounding and victimization, which help to hoist up the hegemony-enhancing binary of China versus the West; and the result is that two important historical legacies inherited by modern China, and thus also inherited by modern Chinese literature, have not been brought to critical attention within modern Chinese literary studies. These two legacies are modern China’s inheritance of the territories conquered by the Qing empire, and the latterday consequences of the maritime excursions since Zheng He via sea routes to Southeast Asia.

With regard to the first historical legacy, a great amount of work has yet to be done in analysing the imperial unconscious of modern Chinese literature
vis-à-vis ethnic minorities and their literatures in China. The limited scope of this article will not allow me to probe this in any depth, but I would like to make a few observations here, to be developed in more detail later and perhaps as a spur to other scholars too. I consider the task to be at least three-pronged: how modern Chinese literature by Han and non-Han writers negotiated questions of ethnicity and cultural difference; how the process of canon-formation either excluded or stipulated particular forms of entry for ethnic minority writers; and what a counter-history of literature might look like if the excluded writers were re-considered. For example, literary historiography in China has largely segregated literatures of ethnic peoples from Han literature, usually by writing separate literary histories, and thereby demarcating what is authentic ‘Chinese literature’ and what is not. Modern Chinese literary histories produced in the United States have also never included literatures written by ethnic minorities if they are written in minority languages or are not deemed significant according to Han-centric standards. The recognition of modern Chinese literature as a multiethnic and multi-lingual literature is long overdue, and the consequences of the Qing conquest of these territories and peoples in the writing of literature by ethnic minorities have yet to be extensively examined.

We also need to remember that one of the main accomplishments of modern Chinese literature was its vernacularization, through a baihua movement that tried to displace the classical, literary language and to capture a unity between speech and writing—yet the vernacular being valorized was that of the Han. As mentioned earlier, modern Chinese literature was quite unlike that of the Qing, when multiple official languages were spoken and a great deal of bilingual literature was produced. The overcoming of the classical language and the institution of the vernacular was a movement among and between Han-language writers, who were also most often of Han ethnicity. Historically, too, the vernacularization movement in literature coincided with the state’s ‘national language’ campaign which propagated the government-defined standard language and prohibited educational institutions from giving instruction in local languages (topolects and dialects). In this context, literature written in non-standard languages, let alone in minority languages, constituted a major inconsistency that had to be excised. This is precisely why the ethnicity of works by non-Han writers, such as Shen Congwen and Lao She, is either elided or receives only brief passing mention. Scholars have developed elaborate theories about Shen’s aesthetics and his unique worldview without connecting them in any integral fashion to his Miao background, even when his stories are set in Miao towns, and populated with Miao characters. The reasons why Lao She put aside his only ostensibly Manchu novel Under the Plain Red Banner (Zhenghongqi xia) in 1962—even though he lived for a further four years before committing suicide in 1966—would also be worthy of exposition.

Southeast Asia, or ‘Nanyang’ in the Chinese imaginary, has historically been the place where Han Chinese went to acquire a livelihood or, better still, a fortune. Philip Kuhn’s study, Chinese Among Others, demonstrates the
extensive and continuous emigration of Chinese peoples from the southern coastal areas of China to the region—which began after Zheng He’s successful expeditions there in the early fifteenth century—and it argues that Nanyang constituted an important actor in the global maritime trade connecting Asia to the Americas and Europe. The Kangxi Emperor’s edict of 1684 explains why it was important to lift the maritime ban, intermittently imposed and abolished through the centuries, and promote seafaring trade and associated migration not only for the sake of ‘popular livelihood’ and the ‘economic prosperity of Fujian and Guangdong provinces’, but also ‘to enhance state revenue from merchant profits’. With or without the imperial court’s sanctions, Chinese emigrants left for Southeast Asia to become port managers, customs collectors, city builders, tax farmers, and trading middlemen, becoming, after the arrival of European colonialism, the ‘essential coadjutors’ of the imperialists. They were so successful that their financial power sometimes surpassed that of the European colonizers and the native elites.

Before the inevitable suppression by European colonialism, some Chinese emigrants even set up self-governing, territorial regimes with armed militia forces in Malaya and West Borneo. ‘Lan Fang Republic’, established by Hakka from Canton in today’s Western Kalimantan, was supposedly in existence for over 100 years before the Dutch destroyed it. The collective actions of these emigrant merchants, labourers, and even outlaws, were akin to settler colonialism until the arrival of the Europeans—and perhaps even during the European colonial period, too, since it was during this latter epoch that migration from China reached its peak. The practice was so widespread and the situation was so well-known that it led none other than the prominent late Qing reformer and doyen of modern Chinese thought, Liang Qichao, to declare in 1906: ‘In the hundred or more kingdoms of the Nanyang, the majority of the population is descended from the Yellow Emperor. Whether from the standpoint of geography or history, they are natural colonies of our people.’ After all, Nanyang consisted of ‘barbarian islands’ inhabited by ‘barbarians’ and whoever travelled there should be able to take ‘natural colonies’. The occasion for Liang’s claim was his hagiography of eight Chinese colonizers in Southeast Asia, entitled ‘Biographies of Eight Great Men in Chinese Colonialism’, in which he celebrated the lives of eight Chinese sultans and monarchs across Southeast Asia. The experience of Chinese emigration to Southeast Asia is, in sum, decidedly different from that to the Western world, even though there were contract labourers and coolies involved in both situations. Kuhn concludes that we can view this history of emigration as ‘China’s own form of overseas expansion’. And bearing in mind the middleman identity of many Chinese emigrants under European colonialism, we might also consider this a kind of ‘middlemen settler colonialism’ that exerted power over local populations but were under the putative control of European imperialists.

Almost the entire period of the highest rate of emigration from China to Southeast Asia (from the 1850s to the 1920s) had already occurred when modern Chinese literature came into being. Yet the notion that modern
Chinese literature inevitably has something to do with this history has been entirely overlooked. In the work of Xu Dishan, one of the original founders of the Literary Research Society, whose members practically defined major directions and trends in modern Chinese literature, we see frequent references to people who cross the seas to Nanyang for business opportunities, not unlike those characters who go to India in the British novels that Said has analysed. Just as the minor characters in Thackeray and Austen leave for India because of infractions committed or lack of avenues for success in the colonial metropole, so do the minor characters in Xu Dishan’s stories depart for Nanyang on very similar provocations. A husband who stabs his wife out of jealousy escapes to Penang Palau in one story; and in another, entitled ‘The Merchant’s Wife’, a husband who gambles away his business and cannot borrow any capital to restart it leaves for Nanyang, a journey described as ‘travelling to the barbarian land’ (guofan), borrowing the customary usage. He becomes a successful merchant and marries a new Malay wife. When his Chinese wife comes to visit, she encounters the Malay wife and finds her ‘extremely ugly’ on account of her ‘black face’ over-adorned with diamonds, the pearls she wears in her hair, and the gold and silver which decorate her body. In this famous story, the narrative object of sympathy is the Chinese wife (who is later sold by her husband to an Indian man); and thus one can assume that her racism towards the Malay woman was not perceived as offensive by Xu’s Chinese readers.

The oddity of the unexamined racism in this story lies in the fact that Xu Dishan was actually one of the most cosmopolitan writers of his time: born in Taiwan, and educated in China, the US and England, he also spent extensive time in India and Burma, and later died in colonial Hong Kong. His stories are populated by Indians, Europeans, biracials, Burmese, Malays and other Southeast Asians, whose unique practices of life and religion are represented largely without bias. Additionally, his stories often have a feminist content that is not the facile male parading of women’s perspectives practised by so many of his contemporaries, but a serious reflection on and critique of the fate of women in a thoroughly patriarchal universe. On account of Xu’s cosmopolitanism and feminism, one can argue that the frequent references to sojourns in Nanyang work to narrativize the southward exploration and expansion of the Chinese in ways that create precisely that unconscious structure of reference that Said identified in British novels. Nanyang is the deus ex machina that Xu’s characters and narratives need for expedient explanation or narrative closure. In perhaps his most famous story, ‘Yuguan’, written after he arrived in Hong Kong, this pattern appears at its most explicit and actually recurs three times. A criminal who abducts a child plans to go to Nanyang to escape arrest after he fails to sell his young prisoner. Another man who has to flee the law due to his violent tendencies initially holes up in a small rural village and eventually makes the trip (guofan) to Nanyang. And at the end of the story, the protagonist Yuguan leaves for Nanyang to look for this second man as atonement for her sins. Part of her atonement is expressed by the fact that she chooses the third-class cabin for her sea voyage when she can well afford to travel first-class.
If Nanyang is the location to which all problems can be dispatched, it is also a location that sends back not just riches, but troubles of its own. The Sinophone world in Nanyang is, so to speak, not just a destination, but also a location that sends people back to their ‘origin’—most particularly the descendants of the emigrants, who are presumably very different from ordinary Chinese now that they are *huaqiao* (the Chinese who live abroad). The ideology and function of *huaqiao* as a category deserve fuller analysis and critique than have been offered in scholarship so far and than I can offer here; but in what follows I would like to examine how this category operates in two of the most canonical works of modern Chinese literature. Without Chinese Southeast Asians, or without a fantastic representation of Sinophone voices from Nanyang, I would argue, there could not have been the other major revolution catapulted into being by modern Chinese literature: namely, the revolution in love.

There is no questioning the status of Ding Ling’s ‘Miss Sophie’s Diary’ (1928) as a foundational text which called for emotional and sexual liberation as the basis for the emancipation of the self. The story consists of a series of diary entries by a beautiful, TB-stricken, sentimental young woman who lives an emotionally tumultuous life, courted by a faithful but boring Chinese man and a dazzlingly handsome but somehow suspect suitor from Singapore. The diary revolutionized Chinese literature by performing, probably for the first time in China’s modern literary history, a female erotic gaze upon the male body. The object of Sophie’s erotic desire is the exotic-sounding Ling Jishi, whom she calls ‘that man from Nanyang’ or ‘the Nanyang *huaqiao*’. He incites such intense sexual desire in Sophie that she feels her body might melt, and she yearns to plant kisses on every inch of his body. He embodies the European qualities of a chivalric knight together with a certain Eastern tenderness, since he is both Singaporean (under British colonialism) and Chinese (based on ethnicity and language). Referred to obliquely as ‘that thing that men and women do when alone with each other’ or ‘that boldness between the sexes’, sexual love is the taboo that she wants to break, but she is afraid to do so. She expresses this fear by maintaining a dichotomy between eroticism (the Singaporean) and emotion (the Chinese man); and via this dichotomy she is able to restrain her desire. At the moment when she realizes that she has fallen in love with the Singaporean, she must, therefore, resolutely end the relationship and leave. She cannot accept the resolution between love and sex, because it is built upon a corresponding dichotomy between morality and immorality. Within these dichotomies, the Singaporean has to be immoral and must therefore be forsaken, even though and precisely because it is he who has made her realize her sexual being. Once that understanding has taken place, she must reject the man from Nanyang.37 The prudish morality of the protagonist, and of the narrative itself, is maintained at his expense.

The revolution in love continues through the rejection of another Chinese Singaporean in Zhang Ailing’s story ‘Red Rose, White Rose’ (1944). The protagonist of this story is ‘the most ideal modern Chinese man’: he possesses an advanced degree from Europe, is hard-working, honest, moral, and always
ready to help others. He lives his life according to his system of proper values until he meets a friend’s wife, a Chinese Singaporean seductress, who happens to be his landlady. Her husband is conveniently away on business in Singapore much of the time—another guofanke (a guest who travels to the barbarian lands)—so the stage is set for steamy scenes of seduction and the ‘pleasures of the flesh’. When the protagonist later discovers that he has fallen in love with his mistress, the dichotomy between sex and love that he, like Sophie, sought so hard to uphold is seriously challenged. And just like Sophie before him, he leaves the Singaporean who would have forced him to integrate love and sex. He later marries a tall, small-breasted, constipated woman who is totally uninterested in the ‘best indoor athletic activity’. By this point, he is convinced that he has successfully rejected the sexy Red Rose by marrying the noble and pure White Rose, and is living fully by his system of values—until he discovers his wife’s illicit affair with her tailor. He begins to frequent prostitutes in a fit of anger until one day he wakes up and decides to be an upright man again, whereupon the story reaches its end.

To be ‘the most ideal modern Chinese man’ requires nothing less than the suppression of his erotic and emotional attraction to the woman from Nanyang, and the setting up of an opposition between ‘them huaqiao’ (tamen huaqiao) and ‘us Chinese’. After all, in the protagonist’s cultural and racial typology, huaqiao women are more ‘lively’ than Chinese women, and biracial women are even more ‘outgoing’ or ‘forthcoming’ than huaqiao, depending on how one translates the sexually tinged term dafang. Without the Singaporean Jiaorui (her name means ‘tender pistils’) or the Red Rose, we would not have the trials our protagonist requires in his quest to preserve his identity as the ‘most ideal modern Chinese man’. Similarly, without the Singaporean Ling Jishi, we would be denied the central interior conflict at the core of ‘Miss Sophie’s Diary’, a story that revolutionized representations of female desire and love in modern Chinese literature. These characters from Nanyang serve as figurative foils for what it means to be at once modern and Chinese: the protagonists incorporate and reject the modernity of the not-so-Chinese Singaporeans, who are more desirable because they are more modern and ‘forthcoming’, but who are deemed less moral and less ‘Chinese’ for precisely the same reason.

The representation of guofan as an expedient and widely-used solution to economic and criminal problems, and the rejection of the culture of the Nanyang as embodied by the huaqiao together reveal modern Chinese literature’s structure of reference vis-à-vis Nanyang. It is the place where fortunes are sought, excess elements released, and second chances had; but it also sends back not-so-moral and not-so-Chinese subjects who cannot be trusted or married, even as—and specifically because—they incite desire and love in all the most seductive ways. If this structure of reference displays elements that are commonly found in the colonizing mentality, no scholar has so far pointed it out.

What is more, Sinophone writers in Southeast Asia started to produce modern literature in a concerted way around the same time as modern Chinese literature began to emerge; and they were condescendingly told, just
as the Red Rose was, that their ability to use the Sinitic language was limited or childish. In the Chinese imagination, the Red Roses could barely speak the standard language properly or write their names in the standard script without the strokes falling into disarray—they just could not be ‘Chinese’ enough. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that some works of Sinophone Southeast Asian literature present the ideology of the correct language and script as a kind of fetishism with pathological implications. As Kim-chew Ng has incisively pointed out, the standard Sinitic language (as national language, guoyu) and its script (as national script, guozi) were sites heavily saturated with the desire for a Han ethno-nation in the late Qing, since they are the language and script of the Han race. Ethno-language and ethno-script were the necessary correlatives of the ethno-nation, and the language and the script became essential units of Chineseness or Chinese national character (guoxing). Modern Chinese literature, despite its supposed radical stance against the past, was therefore a continuation rather than a departure from this ethnocentrism. Ng calls this the ‘structuration of the collective memory of the past’, in which the moderns structurally incorporated their late-Qing antecedents’ nostalgia for the Han ethno-universe as it existed before the Manchu invasion in 1644, so that no further extensive justification was needed.

The de-fetishization of the Sinitic script, enacted most notably in the works of Kim-chew Ng himself, has profound theoretical implications for the supposedly seamless chain of equivalence that links ethnicity, language, identity and nationality, not just in China, but also in Southeast Asia. In the case of China, modern Chinese literature now has to face, as do British and French literatures, ‘an impressive roster of newly empowered voices asking for their narratives to be heard’. Some of these most powerful voices come from the geographical region of Southeast Asia: the Nanyang in the Chinese imagination. The Chinese empire strikes back, even if the strike comes from the descendants of those who occupied middlemen positions within the European empires. In the case of Malaysia, a multilingual and multiethnic state which has decreed that only Malay-language literature can qualify as ‘national literature’, the de-fetishization of the Sinitic script by Malaysian Sinophone writers expresses an intent to disassociate that language from both ethnicity and nationality. They are Malaysians who are Sinophone; they use the Sinitic language and its script with a difference.

The example of modern Chinese literature’s unexamined and highly problematic representation of Nanyang, and the interrelated suppression of Sinophone heterogeneities, reveal for us the risks involved in operating under the binary of ‘China and the West’. The theoretical insights offered by such thinkers as Takeuchi and Ng further fracture the binary of ‘Western theory and Asian reality’, prompting us to ask whose interests these binaries serve, what kind of work is hampered or held up in the service of these interests, and what, therefore, remains to be done. In the effort to expedite this necessary scholarship, the Sinophone can perhaps be posited as a method that unsettles binaries and offers in their place the far richer potential of multidirectional critiques. It is in this way that the Sinophone interrupts.
Notes

1 Michel Foucault, ‘Nietzsche, Genealogy, History’, in Paul Rabinow (ed), The Foucault Reader, New York: Pantheon Books, 1984, pp 76–100. The quoted phrases are from pages 91 and 80 respectively.

2 I elaborate on this conjuncture in two articles: see Shu-mei Shih, ‘Is the Post in Postsocialism the Post in Posthumanism?’, Social Text, Summer and Fall 2011, forthcoming; and Shu-mei Shih and Françoise Lionnet, ‘The Creolization of Theory’, in Lionnet and Shih (eds), The Creolization of Theory, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, forthcoming.


10 Naoki Sakai offers a reading of Takeuchi’s binary as a kind of circular logic where the West’s need to constitute itself via others (be it Asia, Africa or Latin America) becomes a mode of keeping alive the cultural imaginary of the West. See Naoki Sakai, ‘“You Asians”: On the Historical Role of the West and Asia Binary’, South Atlantic Quarterly 99(4), 2000, pp 789–817.


17 Foucault, ‘Nietzsche, Genealogy, History’, p 88.


19 See Mao Zedong, ‘On New Democracy’ (Xin minzhuzhuyi lun; 1940), in Selected Works of Mao Zedong (Mao Zedong xuanji), Beijing: Beijing renmin chubanshe, 1968, p 658. It is probably not an exaggeration to state that the field of ‘Modern Chinese Literature’ is the most highly regarded field in humanistic studies in China, with its leading scholars often seen as major intellectual figures and as the spokespersons for national cultural affairs. Wang Hui, for instance, was originally a scholar of modern Chinese literature who wrote an early book on Lu Xun before he started to write about intellectual history and philosophy, and before his work became more concerned with contemporary cultural and social issues.

20 Said, Culture and Imperialism, pp 69–70.


23 Han ethnicity, like all ethnicities, transformed over time through different amalgamations, but it has always functioned simultaneously as a cultural and social category, with both symbolic and material consequences. Its fetishization was embedded in the Republican Revolution itself, the aim of which was to overthrow the Manchus who ruled the Qing. Lu Xun cut off his queue while studying in Japan as a way of shedding his identity as a Qing person (Qingren), as did Sun Yat-sen. The Republican state enforced the cutting off of queues, often by force, since queues were a Manchu mandate enforced on pain of death, and they represented enslavement to the Manchus and a weak stance towards the West. Some jestingly argued that Republican China officially began with the compulsory cutting off of queues.


Kuhn, *Chinese Among Others*, p 12.

Kuhn notes, for instance, that by the late eighteenth century, Chinese wealth in the Dutch East Indies overshadowed that of the Dutch and the Indonesians and eventually led to a Dutch crackdown (*Chinese Among Others*, p 154).

Kuhn, *Chinese Among Others*, p 56.

Quoted in Kuhn, *Chinese Among Others*, p 246.

From a 1724 document written by Lan Dingyuan to the Qing court, quoted in Kuhn, *Chinese Among Others*, p 88.


Kuhn, *Chinese Among Others*, p 12.

The lone exception is a dissertation being written by Brian Bernards.


Xu Dishan, ‘Shangren fu’ (1921), in *Xu Dishan xiaoshuo xuan*, pp 59–74.


A more recent incident that shows the continuing prejudice of Han Chinese writers towards Nanyang writers as inferior users of the Sinitic language can be seen in Wang Anyi’s condescending statement that ‘the South has lost language’. Ng Kim-chew, a major Sinophone Malaysian writer who lives in Taiwan, makes an impassioned rebuttal to Wang in his provocative essay, ‘Huawen/zhongwen: shiyu de nanfang yu yuyan zaizao’, in *Mahua wenxue yu Zhongguoxing*, Taibei: Yuanzun, 1988, pp 53–92.

Ng, *Wen yu hun yu ti*, pp 15–36.

See the stories collected in *Youdao zhi dao* (in Malay: *Dari Pulau Ke Pulau*), Taibei: Maitian, 2001, especially the story ‘Back Tattoo’ (kebei).