

Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies

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Call for Papers

Reorienting Singapore Literature

Guest Editors

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Deadline for Submissions: July 31, 2024

Before its present incarnation as a nation and global city, Singapore has been historically envisaged within larger geographical, cultural and sociopolitical entities and imaginaries such as the Malay World (Alam Melayu) and Nanyang or the South Seas. Specific to different historical moments in its ancient, pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial past, Singapore's strategic location has seen it serve as a contact zone for multiple cultural exchanges and a site for plurilingual and hybridized identities. The term "Nanyang," the South Seas, has been historically associated with the huge bodies of oceanic waters in the south of continental China, flowing freely across the South China Sea, the Java Sea, the Indian Ocean and beyond. Brian Bernards notes in *Writing the South Seas: Imagining the Nanyang in Chinese and Southeast Asian Postcolonial Literature* (2015) that "despite the diverse backgrounds of the Chinese travelers—they imagined this region singularly as the 'South Seas'" (xi). Many of the Chinese expatriates, such as Khoo Seok Wan (1874-1941), Yu Dafu (1896-1945), Lin Yutang (1895-1976) and others, came to Singapore and became writers of "Nanyang Literature." Putting Yu Dafu in dialogue with Suchen Christine Lim, Bernards regards the "evolution of the Nanyang as a postcolonial literary trope of the Chinese travel, migration, settlement and creolization in Southeast Asia" (3). In other words, the very conception of the "Nanyang" signifies a centrifugal force away from the center.

Pre-colonial Singapore was for centuries part of Alam Melayu. One of its monikers, "Pulau Ujong," refers to Singapore's location south of the Malay

Peninsula while another name, Temasek," meaning "a town by the sea," manifests a deep-rooted Malay indigeneity in the area. Intersecting the Malay Peninsula and the Malacca Strait, the island has been a contact zone for Malays, Chinese, Indians and many other groups. The various names of the island signify its complex history and the multifarious ethnicity of its inhabitants. According to the *Malay Annals*, the Palembang Prince Sang Nila Utama, arguably a descendant of Alexander the Great, spotting a lion while on a hunting trip, gave the island the legendary name of "Singapura," the Malay name which was derived from the Sanskrit, meaning "Lion City." It is the potent animal of the lion which inspired the poet Edwin Thumboo to invoke the mythical figure of the "Merlion" – "Half-beast, half-fish / This powerful creature of land and sea," standing by the city.

This special issue invites essays about Singapore literature that take into account the manifold and interwoven trajectories that the island has been part of historically and in the present. We welcome contributions that examine Singapore literature (in all four of its official languages of English, Malay, Chinese and Tamil) through a variety of theoretical lenses and as part of diverse imaginaries including but not limited to the Malay World, the diasporic imaginary of the Nanyang or historic or contemporary flows of peoples and cultures in and out of Singapore. Comparative approaches that examine Singapore literature in relation to other Southeast Asian literatures through shared frameworks centered on migration, travel, labor, religion, ethnic identities, or environmental concerns are also welcome.

Please send complete papers of 6,000-10,000 words, 5–8 keywords, and a brief biography to concentric.lit@deps.ntnu.edu.tw by July 31, 2024. Manuscripts should follow the latest edition of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. Except for footnotes, which should be single-spaced, manuscripts must be double-spaced in 12-point Times New Roman. Please consult our style guide at <http://www.concentric-literature.url.tw>.

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Concentric is devoted to offering innovative perspectives on literary and cultural issues and advancing the transcultural exchange of ideas. While committed to bringing Asian-based scholarship to the world academic community, *Concentric* welcomes original contributions from diverse national and cultural backgrounds. In each issue of *Concentric* we publish groups of essays on a special topic as well as papers on more general issues. <http://www.concentric-literature.url.tw/>.

For submissions or general inquiries, please contact us at:
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