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‘Some Genuine Chinese Authors’:
literary appreciation, comparatism,
and universalism in the
Straits Chinese Magazine

Porscha Fermanis

In 1897 Tan Teck Soon, the future manager of the Chinese-language newspaper *Thien Nan Shin Pao* (‘The New Daily of the South’), complained that the Chinese residents of the Straits Settlements – from the ‘half naked jinricksha puller’ to the ‘sleek merchant lolling in his well-equipped carriage’ – were rarely associated with ‘literature or literary achievements of any kind’.¹ Responding to British disparagements of contemporary Malay and Chinese literary cultures, Tan’s three articles on ‘Some Genuine Chinese Authors’ in the *Straits Chinese Magazine* (1897–1907) are determined to prove otherwise, identifying Straits Chinese reading audiences, Chinese-language circulating libraries, translations of Chinese fiction into Romanised Malay, and professional Chinese storytellers and operatic troupes. If his own remit is to translate ‘the best products of the Chinese mind’ into ‘English dress’, Tan’s argument for the variety and depth of contemporary Chinese culture counters the then prevailing view that literature was irrelevant to ‘illiterate’ Chinese communities in nineteenth-century Singapore, Malacca, and Penang, while simultaneously valorising popular forms of visual, oral, and aural entertainment alongside the revival of classical Chinese literature.²

Mark Ravinder Frost and Jan van der Putten have recently gone some way towards vindicating Tan Teck Soon’s claims by demonstrating the existence of a small but significant Chinese and Malay middle class in the Straits Settlements from at least the mid-nineteenth century onwards, noting the extent to which commercial trading centres such as Singapore encouraged literacy, and arguing that the earliest Malay and Chinese publishers and literati were usually merchants, businessmen, and shopkeepers.³ Extending his study to the imperial cities of the Indian Ocean rim, Frost has further sketched out a distinct public sphere that developed in Bombay, Rangoon, and Singapore after 1870, ‘rooted in pan-religious movements’ and reformist agendas, and ‘sustained by the intelligentsias of intersecting diasporas’, who were often

western-educated professionals, bi- or trilingual, and multi-ethnic in composition.⁴ In South and Southeast Asia – wrongly imagined by ‘Orientalists as immobile and even timeless’ – European colonial powers therefore encountered a highly connected and mobile society that moved between and within Nanyang South Sea and Indian Ocean spaces, creating southern networks that retained distinctive regional identities that long predated European hegemony and western imperialism.⁵ Although the size of the reading publics associated with these various networks was relatively small, the last decade of the nineteenth century saw the emergence of a distinctive multilingual periodical culture with new progressive modes of pan-Asian addressivity.⁶

This chapter considers the relationship between language, literacy, and literary appreciation in one of these culturally hybrid publications: the *Straits Chinese Magazine*, a self-professed journal of ‘Oriental and Occidental’ culture modelled on the miscellany format of British monthly magazines. Edited by Song Ong Siang, Lim Boon Keng, and later Wu Lien Teh, the magazine’s contributors were Chinese, Malay, and British, but its articles and original fiction were primarily written in English with interlineal English-language translations of Chinese and Malay source texts.⁷ Registering an awareness that the ‘present chaotic state of public opinion’ in the Straits Settlements was partly the result of anxieties over the increasingly racialised regulation of imperial citizenship, the editors used English-language literacy to ‘negotiate a place’ for Southeast Asians in the Anglophone ‘colonial public sphere’, both promoting Malay and Chinese cultural revivalism, and adopting ‘foreign’ languages and cultural practices in order to do so.⁸

The aim of this chapter is not to provide an overview of the magazine’s revivalist project or its reformist politics, but rather to consider how its contributors navigate questions relating to cultural forms of knowledge, such as linguistic standardisation, vernacular education, literary appreciation, and canonicity.⁹ English literature as a practice and discipline has always been heavily implicated in the comparative cultural politics of nineteenth-century philology whereby the ‘quality of a society’s language was the most telling index of the quality of its personal and social life’.¹⁰ My interest here is with the ways in which Straits Chinese authors co-opt and/or negotiate the dual epistemological commitment to comparatism and universalism that, as Uday Singh Mehta argues, underpinned liberal justifications of empire and its deferral of self-determination for colonised subjects.¹¹ I consider, in particular, how liberalism’s unevenness informs the ‘political stakes of relational thinking’, a question that has permeated understandings of anticolonial and post-colonial nationalism ever since the recognition of comparison’s origins in racialised developmental categories.¹²

Three main schools of thought have emerged from debates surrounding comparatism: the first involves an attempt to historicise comparative practises

by seeing them as a function of specific locations; the second aims to ‘displace the problem of universality’ by seeing colonialism as the meeting of incommensurable ‘forms of particularity’; and the third reclaims universalism by understanding colonialism as ‘a contestation of different universalisms’.¹³ Drawing on Andrew Sartori and Manu Goswami’s interventions in these debates, I read the strategic desire in the *Straits Chinese Magazine* to establish commensurability across cultural worlds – rather than ‘to claim radical alterity’ – as part of what Goswami has called a ‘distinctively anticolonial project’.¹⁴ While the *Straits Chinese Magazine* operated as a cultural broker for its elite Asian readership ‘standing half-way between east and west’, its confrontation with European (and especially British) culture also involved an intense engagement with the asymmetries of liberal thought.¹⁵ My focus in this chapter is therefore on how the *Straits Chinese Magazine* was able to convene regional audiences and sensibilities in new and surprising ways, containing within it a ‘subversive radicalising potential’ that is often unacknowledged in studies of decolonisation in Southeast Asia.¹⁶

Arnoldian high culture and the politics of comparison

Conscious of the rise of racialised migration and labour policies across the Anglosphere, the editors of the *Straits Chinese Magazine* focused heavily on the accumulation of cultural capital for Chinese and (to a lesser extent) Malay populations in the Straits Settlements, giving literary culture a central role in its construction of a modern Asian identity.¹⁷ As Philip Holden has noted, the magazine takes an Arnoldian view of high culture as the best way to chart both the external progress of a civilisation and the inner perfection of a ‘best self’, maintaining the view that culture is a ‘privileged domain of expression’ and noting ‘[t]he wonderful results of the arts and sciences for the characteristic features of modern European civilization’.¹⁸ The view of literature upheld by the magazine, and promoted by influential nineteenth-century taste-makers such as Goethe, Arnold, and Ruskin, was the result of a gradual shift after 1700 from a rhetorical culture where reading was primarily seen as an instrument of social power to a new kind of cultural arrangement centred on literary appreciation, in particular on a close reading of literary ‘classics’ (western and non-western).¹⁹ In this formulation, literature became the ‘domain of a universalized, cosmopolitan discourse of the value of culture’, which simultaneously sought to theorise culture as, in Arnold’s words, ‘the best that has been thought or said’ and to see it trans-historically as ‘the fruit of comparative analysis across time and societies’.²⁰

Arnoldian echoes find expression in the *Straits Chinese Magazine* not only in the constant quotations from an emerging canon of ‘classics’ forged

by common British education policies across colonial South Asia (especially from Shakespeare, Dryden, Milton, Keats, Shelley, Macaulay, Dickens, and Tennyson), but also in the related privileging of classical Chinese texts as the best representations of the 'spirit of the age' in which they were written, as both 'a powerful expression of natural feeling' and 'an insight into the political history of the period'.²¹ If the 'literary language of China' is 'to all intents and purposes a *dead* language', it is nonetheless characterised by Lim Boon Keng as historically the most 'wonderful medium of written communication among the myriad inhabitants of the Far East from Korea [sic] and Japan in the Arctic North to the great Chinese settlements in the Malayan archipelago' – a language that has lived through and reflects 'generations, surviving all social cataclysms, and so many dynastic changes'.²²

In adapting and applying Arnoldian views of high culture to a classical Chinese culture that both connects and acts metonymically for the achievements of various other eastern cultures, Lim is able to register classical Chinese and its written texts as serious rivals to the Latin and Greek classics, and to argue for the existence and longevity of an alternative eastern counter-culture to the western Judeo-Christian and Greco-Latin one. Even as he accepts the need for widespread political and educational reform in China, Lim's arguments are suggestive of the extent to which China considered itself to be an 'actively competing civilizational model' that could not easily be assimilated into 'progressivist, Eurocentric models of world history'.²³ While he adopts the comparative perspective of European philological discourses, noting that the position and status of classical Chinese can be 'fitly compared with that of Latin in the Middle Ages of Europe', his aim is to invert the comparatist paradigm by favourably comparing classical Chinese culture with the best that British culture has to offer.²⁴

As the numerous book reviews of philological works in the *Straits Chinese Magazine* suggest, Lim, Tan, and their colleagues were well versed in the work of a community of European philologists such as William Jones and Friedrich Max Müller, who developed older rhetorical tropes of comparison and analogy derived from Christian and moral philosophy into a new scientific approach to the study of texts as 'historical specimens'.²⁵ To some extent, Lim and Tan see comparatism as a means of empowering Chinese civilisation within an increasingly racialised imperial world-system, crediting French, British, and Anglo-Chinese philologists with changing opinions regarding the 'utility of Chinese literature' and hence 'the capabilities of the Chinese race'.²⁶ Sinologists such as Herbert Giles, Paul Carter, and Ku Li Cheng are singled out for particular praise by Tan because their work indicates 'the true sympathetic spirit with which all such studies should be carried out'.²⁷ Yet while comparatism is seen as a potentially sympathetic mode of understanding difference, Lim and Tan are well aware that even sympathetic

comparisons exist within a Eurocentric hierarchy of race relations that incorporates Asian difference into the model of the 'universal subject'.²⁸

Concluding his review of Carter's *Buddhism and Its Christian Critics* (1897) with a call for a 'higher and scientific unity' which will 'transcend all racial distinctions', Tan sees Charles Darwin's evolutionary theories as critical for the development of more secular and racially aware forms of comparative understanding free from essentialist biologism and unwelcome Christian proselytising.²⁹ In his lengthy serialised article 'Chinese Problems', Tan embraces natural history models of variability and slow growth as a counterpoint both to '[h]asty views' of China by 'outsiders' that see it as immobile and despotic, and to the static and flattening tendencies of racial theory. Instead of analysing cultures and/or the relations between cultures 'entirely from *above-downwards*', Tan instead proposes a tree-shaped methodological model that argues for the functional interdependence of different parts of the cultural organism: '[Chinese civilization] is a *natural growth* and has its roots and branches in racial characteristics and national institutions, while the government is merely its leaves'.³⁰

Capitalising on the evolutionary thrust of the 'tree of life' metaphor in *On the Origin of Species* (1859), Tan critiques those European comparatists who anachronistically extract Chinese manners and customs from their longer social, cultural, and historical contexts.³¹ Indeed, the hastiness of foreign judgement towards China is a central theme of the magazine more generally.³² In one of the many articles on the status of Chinese women, Lim Boon Keng (writing under the pseudonym Lim Ming Cheng) claims that '[f]oreigners recognise the secondary place Chinese women occupy without thinking of the complementary nature of their functions in the social economy. They ... generalise from exceptions and abnormalities'. Lim's critique involves not just a reversal of the European comparative gaze by a hypothetical 'Chinese observer' in London and Paris (itself reminiscent of the infamous Chinese 'hypothetical mandarin'), but also an exposition of the defective use of Enlightenment methodologies by European comparatists: 'What a terrible picture of European life would be painted by a Chinese observer who made his observations among the inhabitants of the slums of London and Paris.'³³

If Lim's defence of Chinese culture and society operates at the expense of a Chinese and Malay *lumpen proletariat* of "'cooks, coolies, carters'", it nonetheless usefully illuminates the ongoing tensions between indentured, free, and 'native' populations in the Straits. The elite 'orientalising' of 'social inferiors' as 'backward' was particularly prevalent in cosmopolitan port towns like Singapore where large diasporas and multi-imperial states produced various modernising projects based on the desire to figuratively and literally separate the 'modern' from the 'pre-modern' subject.³⁴ Actively encouraged by the Chinese Protectorate (est. 1877) to territorialise their

own populations into ethno-environmental categories, the magazine's pan-Asiatic solidarities repeatedly break down in the face of 'backward-looking' Malay peasants and foreign-born 'sojourning' Chinese diasporas, who are portrayed in the magazine by G. T. Hare, the deputy Protector of Chinese, as unsettled, unhygienic, self-regulating entities without any permanent loyalty to the British regime.³⁵

At the same time, a favourite tactic employed by the *Straits Chinese Magazine* is to point out how British interlocutors fall short of their own claims to neutrality and superior empirical knowledge systems: comparatists employ uneven and faulty grounds of comparison by comparing non-equivalent classes of people, while tourists and travelling correspondents 'express opinions not directly founded upon personal observation'.³⁶ Many of the critiques of British sinologists in the *Straits Chinese Magazine* similarly rest on their lack of methodological empiricism, Eurocentric comparative bias, and/or flawed generalisations.³⁷ Indeed, as Lim and Tan were only too aware, comparatism, in effect, made possible these kinds of generalities by subjugating the importance of direct lived experience to the creation of knowledge based on an 'abstract scale' of civilisational progress.³⁸

A second key tactic used by the *Straits Chinese Magazine* is to attack attempts to essentialise or fetishise Chinese difference. A pseudonymous review by T. B. G. of Arthur Smith's *Chinese Characteristics* (1894) complains that the author (a missionary in China for over twenty years) has wilfully misunderstood Chinese society and culture, deliberately making 'things appear strange and peculiar'.³⁹ Employing a comparative perspective to critique western comparatist culture, T. B. G. co-opts a series of western proverbs to argue that 'the faults which form [the author's] long series of complaints are universal, and that "human nature is the same all the world over"'.⁴⁰ Other articles in the *Straits Chinese Magazine* similarly attempt to de-essentialise Chinese difference – in particular, claims of Chinese cruelty – by noting that supposedly 'Chinese' customs such as infanticide are not unknown in Europe and America, as well as comparing foot-binding to tight-lacing and piercings among Europeans.⁴¹ An article by Wen Ching (another pseudonym of Lim Boon Keng) entitled 'Deformity as an Element of Beauty', for example, merges species and aesthetic discourses by explaining Chinese customs through the distinction between the beautiful and the sublime – itself a heavily racialised distinction in the Kantian tradition. If Lim follows 'Darwinian principles' in concluding that '[n]ature will win by exterminating ... rebellious races', his point is to show that all races use artificial disfigurements of the human body to 'realise certain vague conceptions of ideal beauty'.⁴²

That comparison should end in this kind of universalism is not entirely surprising since comparison ultimately depends on the abandonment of

radical difference. In this case, however, the use of comparative methodologies to assert the universality of human nature by Straits Chinese authors seems actively to draw on a western imperial epistemology which sought to ‘align or educate the regnant forms of the unfamiliar with its own expectations’.⁴³ This strategy is perhaps most pronounced in the magazine’s renditions of Malay and Chinese literary history, where a sense of Asian culture as Europe’s degenerate shadow is most apparent, and where Malay and Chinese writers appear haunted by the prospect of civilisational stagnation or decline.⁴⁴ Increasingly focusing their attention on Chinese-language education and classical Chinese literature, Lim and Tan set out to rethink the place of Chinese culture in a multilingual imperial state, partly to prevent their ‘national existence’ from being ‘swallowed up’ by the Malay language and ‘a local *patois* of English’, and partly to prevent the creation of an imperial under-class of English-language literate Chinese clerks, who can quote Shakespeare, Milton, Johnson, and Macaulay but whose ‘life-long drudgery at the counting desk’ bears more than a passing resemblance to that of illiterate ‘coolie’ labourers.⁴⁵

Utilitarian limits: Chinese and Malay literary history

Outlining both the classical and popular literary productions of the Han (206 BC–220 AD) and Tang (618–907 AD) dynasties from romances to encyclopedia, Tan Teck Soon argues in the third and concluding part of ‘Some Genuine Chinese Authors’ that ‘in the poetry of the Tangs, the mental attainments of the Chinese reached their highest limit’. Although the Tang dynasty is generally considered to be one of the golden ages of ancient Chinese culture and history, Tan suggests that the ‘unfitness of the Chinese mind to abstract reasoning’ prevented the Tang Chinese from achieving the sublimity of Indian or Semitic poetry, instead producing a more prosaic, utilitarian version of poetic discourse. Even under the Sung dynasty (960–1279 AD), where there was a somewhat greater ‘passion for speculative philosophy’, Chinese intellectuals ‘refused to be tempted to realms of abstract imagination’ and instead produced predominantly practical treatises and tracts. In contrast to Malay literature, which is characterised by both Chinese and British authors as fanciful and hyperbolic, Tan sees Chinese literature’s lack of ‘enthusiasm’ as its greatest defect, one which ‘impairs’ even its poetry and makes its philosophical works ‘monotonous and uninspiring’.⁴⁶

It quickly becomes clear, however, that the point of Tan’s pan-Asian comparatism is to render Chinese literary culture compatible with developments in western literary culture, envisaging a return to a vernacular tradition of classic Chinese literature as consistent with a ‘modern’ cultural continuity:

Chinese literature 'has its analogue in the concrete tendency to which Western civilization itself is becoming more and more exposed, through its wealth of material details and its intense passion for scientific organization and visible uses'. Ultimately making a virtue of Chinese utilitarianism and concreteness, Tan argues for the proto-realism and proto-empiricism of Chinese literary culture, thereby subverting the orientalist stereotypes of European observers of China, and reducing his initial production of difference – the 'vast and complex civilization which appears to the stranger as belonging to a different planetary sphere' – to commensurability with a western 'passion for scientific organization'. If the belatedness of western empiricism is hinted at – both Tan and Lim believed that Confucianism had anticipated Enlightenment philosophy in its secular rationalism – there is nonetheless a clear attempt to reduce the unfamiliar to the commensurable: the 'different planetary' perspective of the east, which seemingly leaves it outside western universalism by implying, quite literally, the perspective of an entire planet, is shown to be just another version of the same thing, with Chinese culture and religion demonstrating the 'tolerant *spirit* of its civilization and ... its assimilative faculty'.⁴⁷

In emphasising the assimilative faculties of Chinese culture, Tan is responding to the tendency of the west to dismiss the 'native imagination as the place of the fetish', rescuing ancient Chinese culture from accusations of mysticism and superstition.⁴⁸ Part of the goal of the *Straits Chinese Magazine* is to wean the Chinese community from what Sanjay Krishnan has called 'older ways of sense-making and being in the world', leaving behind those superstitions and 'silly tales' associated with 'pre-modern' forms of knowledge.⁴⁹ At the same time, there is also a serious attempt in the magazine to repatriate or recuperate Chinese and Malay folk tales.⁵⁰ Adopting a strategy that is part reversal and part assimilation, western comparative methodologies are therefore used against themselves in order to valorise Chinese culture as prior to European culture while simultaneously avowing and disavowing more traditional types of literary expression by seeing literary modernity as a dialectic between 'modern' and 'pre-modern' forms.⁵¹

The sense that the 'silly tales' of non-European literary traditions must be left behind is more pronounced in representations of Malay literary culture. That the Malays had little respect for their own literary history was a circulating theme among British and Chinese scholars of Malay literature. Whereas the Straits Chinese are said to have long had an 'unbounded confidence in the excellence of Chinese literature', the President of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, Archdeacon George F. Hose, argued in 1879 that Malays must be taught to 'value their own literature'.⁵² Similarly, in a series of eleven articles published under the pseudonym 'Senex' and entitled 'Why Are the Malays Withering Away?' in the first Romanised

Malay newspaper *Bintang Timor* (est. 1894), founded by Song Ong Siang and Tan Boon Chin, it was pointed out, ‘for the good of the Malays’, that Malay economic and educational backwardness was due to their ‘slavish adherence to outmoded custom’.⁵³ *Bintang Timor* received a heated response from the editors of the Malay newspaper *Jawi Peranakan* (est. 1876), but to some extent this paternalistic view of Malay culture as ‘remnant’ is echoed by Malay commentators in the *Straits Chinese Magazine* – for example, by Shaik Othman bin Sallim in his 1898 article on Malay *bangsawan* (opera). While the Malays have ‘made more progress in the histrionic arts than the Chinese’, Sallim concludes that the Malays are ‘little known and still less understood’ by an Anglophone reading audience, largely because they have taken little interest in preserving their own customs and folklore, which are fast disappearing ‘before the path of European civilization’.⁵⁴

Apart from Shaik Othman bin Sallim’s article on Malay opera and two articles by Song Ong Siang on Abdullah bin Abdul al Kadir, who Song represents as the almost single-handed progenitor of Malay literary modernity, the only article-length examination of Malay literature in the magazine is an article entitled ‘The Poetry of the Malays’ (1897) by the British administrator and linguist R. J. Wilkinson, then Acting Inspector of Schools in Singapore.⁵⁵ Wilkinson attempts to undo some of the unfair stereotypes surrounding Malay peoples, including charges of illiteracy, but when sketching out the revival of popular Malay poetry he is mostly struck by the extent to which such poetry is ‘not likely to be appreciated by Europeans’. The pantun, for example, is ‘a most powerful form of poetry’, yet when translated into English it ‘loses the conciseness, mystery and force which endear it to the Malay’. Noting that many Europeans, from Victor Hugo to Hugh Clifford, have attempted but failed to render literal translations of the pantun, and that several Dutch experts, such as Baron von Hoevell and Dr van der Tuuk, have puzzled over the connection between its two halves, Wilkinson concludes that what is lost in translation is significant.⁵⁶

Wilkinson’s initial account of the apparent incommensurability of the pantun – and its resistance to translation into European languages based on deep grammatical and linguistic difference – leads him to a more general appreciation of Malay poetry, albeit one that is profoundly Eurocentric in its outlook and tone. Employing a universalising metric of global equivalence, Wilkinson takes the well-known lines from a popular Thomas Hood poem, ‘The Bridge of Sighs’ (1844), to give the reader ‘some idea of Malay construction’:

One more unfortunate,
Weary of breath,
Rashly importunate,
Gone to her death.

While many consider these lines 'elliptical', Wilkinson argues that, like the pantun, they nonetheless convey 'a definite meaning'. Similarly, he suggests that some lines from Canto II of Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812) allow us to see 'a succession of pictures all the more vividly because of the absence of auxiliary verbs, conjunctions, predicates and other portions of the mechanism of a sentence':

The flying Mede, his shaftless broken bow;
The fiery Greek, his red pursuing spear;
Mountains above; Earth's, Ocean's plain below;
Death in the van, Destruction in the rear

Malay, Wilkinson concludes, is 'impossible of adaptation to argument' but, like the poetry of Hood and Byron, it is 'brief and forcible when expressing a succession of simple ideas'.⁵⁷ The recalcitrant particularity of the pantun – its essential difference – is bridged by the apparent universality of poetic style.

Despite his admiration of some recent Malay publications which 'go far to acquit [the Malay] of the charge of being apathetic, illiterate and dull', Wilkinson's Eurocentric 'appreciation' of Malay poetry eventually collapses under the force of his insistence that the point of studying Malay literature does not lie in its intrinsic interest but rather in the way it enables an understanding of the 'native mind'. If Wilkinson's conclusion is that 'the Malay understands the European far better than the European understands the Malay', he nonetheless represents Malay literature as a naive mirror of Malay culture: 'There is not a veil of suspicion over his literature. It was not written to deceive the European. It is natural utterance and, if properly understood, represents a true picture of Malay life.' Wilkinson's reflections on the ways in which Malay poetry can help the European reader overcome various forms of deception and misrecognition suggest the extent to which his 'Malay' is an abstraction, represented through literary texts rather than through everyday life, conversation, or the experience of encounter: 'Great as is the power of personal relations, it must not be forgotten that the Malay in conversation is on his guard and represents himself not as he is but as he would like us to believe him.' In undermining the integrity of the encounter, Wilkinson confines the Malay-as-type to a symbolic expression of Malayness, to the 'embodiment of an abstract type' that is removed from a life world or way of being and becomes only a way of knowing.⁵⁸

Summoning Shakespeare, Confucius, and Dickens

The same strategy of equivalence used by Wilkinson in his article on Malay poetry is, to some extent, adopted by Straits Chinese writers to accumulate

the kind of cultural capital required for participation in the colonial public sphere. Quoting Shakespeare, Dryden, Byron, Keats, Shelley, Tennyson, and other writers that signified British learning, and modelling their essays and short stories on those by Dickens, Charles Lamb, and Wilkie Collins, this referencing of British culture made visible, as Holden has put it, ‘the split between the pedagogic (the accumulated sense of British national identity) and the performative (the manner in which such identity is reinscribed, and rephrased in the colonies)’.⁵⁹ Yet amid the dazzling displays of knowledge, there are examples of a more critical position. If Shakespeare, Dickens, and others are meant to stand as placeholders for certain cultural values – and for the universalism of British culture more generally – the magazine can equally deflect the self-proclaimed universality of the western canon.

Two short case studies demonstrate the ways in which British universality is undermined by both Straits Chinese and British writers. The first is a colloquy written by the Reverend Archibald Lamont, a Scottish Presbyterian missionary from Glasgow, who founded the Singapore Chinese Educational Institute in 1892 to educate Chinese men for leadership roles.⁶⁰ The second, a short story modelled on Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol* (1843), was published anonymously by Lim Boon Keng.⁶¹ In Lamont’s colloquy, ‘Two Real Ghosts’, the aptly named Mr Yew Go Back and Mr Wo Wo Bee meet to discuss the possibility of a séance as part of their newly formed Spiritualist Society. They are subsequently joined by a friend, Mr Wee Tin Tack, and three Europeans: Mr Flabbyton, who is well liked by the Chinese community; Mr Wingwye, who has attended on the condition that he be allowed to say what he thinks; and Mr Carson, who is ‘fresh from Europe’. During the séance, the ghost of Shakespeare is called upon and he too is ‘fresh from Europe’ or, in other words, unacculturated in the ways of eastern culture. After criticising the ‘Chinaman’s English’ and their ““jip” tones’, Shakespeare characterises his own genius as being able to ‘see human nature and paint it true. My watchword is character.’⁶²

Satirising both popular accounts of the universality of Shakespearean character types and the idea of Renaissance humanism as something that could be used to ‘civilise’ native populations, Lamont’s Shakespeare goes on to argue that the Straits Chinese character is degenerate: ‘Be Chinese civilization what it may – let the fluid West be transparent with the faults of hell – the civilization of the Straits Chinese spells failure.’⁶³ His pronouncements on Asian degeneracy trigger a disagreement among the Europeans along Anglicist and Orientalist lines. Mr Wingwye sees Shakespeare’s comments as a confirmation that ‘it’s no good educating the Chinese on our lines’, whereas the more sympathetic Mr Flabbyton characterises Shakespeare as a symbol for western cultural values that make no sense in an eastern context: ‘I’m glad he’s gone. Had Shakespeare lived twenty years in the East as I’ve done, he’d be more charitable.’⁶⁴

If Shakespeare stands as a symbol for ethnocentrism on a grand scale, as well as for the ways in which western literary classics lose their meaning and value outside of a European context, Confucius fares little better. The Chinese gentlemen summon Confucius as representative of their position, although they are ironically unable to speak to him in Chinese (speaking only a colloquial Straits Malay patois) and are worried about the fact that they have not registered their society under the Societies Ordinance and could therefore occasion his deportation – a position that echoes Lamont's ongoing concern with British attempts to circumscribe the free movement of Chinese immigrants. Reflecting Lamont's Presbyterian background, Confucius denies Confucianism's status as a religion: 'Have I ever claimed to be a religious teacher? Never. I taught ethics and politics to an ungrateful generation.'⁶⁵ Concluding that his teachings have been obfuscated by mysticism and that '[y]ou revere me not for my own sake nor for the sake of my teaching, but simply that you may shirk the obligations of your time' [i.e. reform], the story ends without any sense of agreement between the Straits Chinese and their British friends, pointing to the incommensurability of their religious beliefs and their positions as coloniser and colonised, as well as to the failure of either Shakespeare or Confucius, as representative figures of a western and eastern canon, to adequately speak to or reconcile those positions.

The failure of universalism also figures in the short story 'A Vision of Bong Khiam Siap'. Like Ebenezer Scrooge, Bong Khiam Siap, which means salty or rubbery in Hokkien, is a miserly self-made man.⁶⁶ Having come to Singapore at the age of eighteen to work as a cook's assistant in a Chinese business house, he eventually runs the firm through a combination of hard work and blatant self-interest. Now one of the conservative elite and a staunch opponent of the Straits Chinese reform party, Bong proposes a donation to a Diamond Jubilee Memorial Hall in honour of Queen Victoria, but refuses to support an alternative proposal – a local institution for the education of girls – on the basis that female education 'is like throwing money into a pool of dirty water'.⁶⁷ Following the logic of Dickens' original story, Bong has a visionary dream sequence triggered by the celebrations surrounding Queen Victoria's Jubilee in which he is twenty-five years older. The Straits Chinese population in Singapore has increased but women vastly outnumber the men. This, we are told, is directly related to Bong's own lack of support for local education: the influx of highly trained foreign wage earners has meant that the Straits Chinese men have been forced to emigrate elsewhere.

The story uses Dickens' visionary conceit to travel to a Chinese women's prison where uneducated women are caught in a cycle of gaming, debt, addiction, and ruin; a Chinese club frequented by high-class Chinese

prostitutes; a children's hospital with female Chinese nurses; and a domestic household where a young literate Chinese girl provides for her family by painting candles. These dream visions gather together some intersecting themes that run throughout the various issues of the *Straits Chinese Magazine* including Chinese reform and the nature it should take; the education of Straits Chinese communities and its economic benefit to Britain; the position and education of Straits Chinese women as an index of Chinese civilisation; and Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee celebration and the best way for loyalist Straits Chinese to mark the occasion.⁶⁸ Yet despite his remarkable dream and the lessons it potentially entails, we are told that Bong's view of reform did not change at all and that he has failed to redeem himself in any meaningful way: 'Bong Khiam Siap died as he had lived – a stern and uncompromising opponent of any form of education for Straits Chinese women, and a bitter enemy of the reform party.'⁶⁹

The failure of Dickens' moral-conversion narrative echoes an accompanying article in the same volume on 'Straits Chinese Hedonism' by W. C. Lin (another of Lim Boon Keng's pseudonyms). The article is ostensibly about Straits Chinese dandies but it also depicts the character of the 'Baba miser' who loves the 'Almighty Dollar' and 'chooses to inhabit filthy premises, to eat coarse food, and to dress in rags'.⁷⁰ While the Baba Miser's stinginess hints – like Scrooge's lonely and unhappy childhood – at a traumatic history of hardship, Lim argues that educated reformists must rise up against the self-made man who has not taken the opportunity to educate himself or others: 'We must begin the campaign in our own homes, then try to carry it through in the *kampong* and finally assail the strongest positions held by the hereditary enemies of progress – the wealthy conservatives.'⁷¹ Lacking the capacity for change and personal emancipation, these miserly conservatives are, for Lim, comparable to their consumptive opposites, the dandies: both are selfish capitalists and slaves of a foreign imperial system that simultaneously guarantees their economic prosperity and defers their entitlement to universal rights.

Lim's emphasis on the repudiation of material self-interest makes itself felt throughout the magazine in what Holden has called its disciplinary 'body project'; that is, a project rooted in the idea that self-discipline, self-improvement, and a kind of muscular Confucianism would lead to an autonomous Chinese society free from colonial governance and paternalistic protective measures.⁷² Here the Arnoldian consciousness of a 'best self' is entangled with the political project of using 'disinterested self-cultivation' to construct an extra-economic space 'homologous with the universal collective interest'.⁷³ As this article suggests, Dickens' story is not being used in the magazine in the familiar or straightforward sense of mimicry or cultural transmission but rather in the service of a politically charged campaign against wealthy Chinese conservatives opposed to widespread economic and political reform – one that might

be extended to and carried through proletariat kampongs (villages). It is, of course, possible to read this article in a Gramscian sense as the attempt of an emergent bourgeoisie elite to assert 'moral-intellectual leadership' over a labouring peasantry, but it also demonstrates the ways in which the language of culture is used to position an emerging national or collective life as a force working against the capitalist 'determinations of petty self-interest'.⁷⁴

Ethnic nationalism in Southeast Asia

Representations of literary culture in the *Straits Chinese Magazine* register the claims of two influential sets of ideas: the first is the set of ideas surrounding comparatism and related forms of civilisational and cultural development; the second is the set of ideas surrounding liberal universalism. Elucidating the ways in which these two discourses work together to produce 'modernity's dream of a universal subject' has been one of the key aims of this chapter.⁷⁵ The tactic of universal equivalence is used by Lim Boon Keng, Tan Teck Soon, and other Straits Chinese contributors to minimise the fetishisation of Chinese difference, to taxonomise and transcode Chinese customs and creative expressions within well-established European comparatist frameworks, and to produce an 'equivalence of judgement' from which to assess their own culture.⁷⁶

For all these reasons, the magazine is conventionally read as an apology for both British and Chinese imperialism, occupying an 'awkward place in the historiography of the decolonial order', and inhabiting the uneasy space of bourgeois politics and writing in English in a moment of emerging Malay anticolonial nationalism.⁷⁷ As Neil Khor has pointed out, Straits Chinese reform sat in particular tension with the development of ethnic nationalism in Malaya, where Malays rejected the Straits Chinese claim to a 'homeland', indigeneity, and/or settled status, and shifted to writing in Malaysian rather than English.⁷⁸ Elite Anglophone literary societies and periodicals in the Straits Settlements are therefore often associated with a kind of 'performed Englishness', whereby loyalism and participation in the colonial public sphere is seen as false consciousness, at odds with the more authentic forms of radicalism associated with workers and peasants in the kampongs.⁷⁹ In particular, the aspiration of universality is perceived as a racialised project trapped within a colonial ethnographic logic, while pan-Asian internationalism is seen as the 'failed negation of nationalism'.⁸⁰

Yet such narratives, as Peter Hill has pointed out, are in danger of retroactively 'direct[ing] our attention ... to the *provenance* of ideas and cultural practices' as 'western versus eastern' or 'traditional-inherited' versus 'modern-imported' rather than to their (then) contemporary resonances and meanings.⁸¹ The *Straits Chinese Magazine's* ideological and representational

structures are certainly informed by the ‘universal value form’ inculcated by English-language education, but Straits Chinese writers by no means simply reproduce the discourse of the universal equivalent, instead consciously and unconsciously bringing into play suppressed Sinocentric and Islamocentric perspectives.⁸² There is a strong sense in the magazine, for example, that comparatism retains and naturalises Eurocentric racial distinctions, and that there are good and bad forms of comparison.⁸³ Similarly, the magazine’s explicit flirtations with British literary authors and texts often work to render them unfamiliar rather than familiar, suggesting the ways in which Anglophone styles, forms, and plots were used to point to the false universalism of western norms in a Southeast Asian context. Certainly, the Straits Chinese community never simply self-identified as non-white ‘Britishers’, asserting their own modernity and cultural particularity, as well as an autonomous inner domain or ‘spirit’ separate from the universalising claims of imperial liberalism: ‘the reform must be a real reform within and without, not a mere adoption of a European external covering to hide the old sores of an inner life’.⁸⁴

Mark Frost, Saul Dubow, Daniel Goh, and others have recently argued for the importance of reformist and petit-bourgeois nationalists who used ‘the language of late-nineteenth-century liberalism to call the British Empire to account’, noting that ‘assertions of Britishness or Englishness could run counter to the declared interests of the British state’.⁸⁵ It is therefore possible to understand the *Straits Chinese Magazine* as an attempt to think and agitate pluricentrically for ‘contending political futures’ rather than as crudely nationalist or anti-nationalist or as a minor episode in an inevitable teleology towards future or emergent nationhoods.⁸⁶ The plural forms of cultural nationalism in the *Straits Chinese Magazine* point to the importance of English-language periodical culture in the emergence of Southeast Asian nationalisms and to the extent to which ethnic nationalisms could emerge from apparently loyalist periodicals. If by 1907 the *Straits Chinese Magazine* was abandoned because of a lack of support among its intended reading audience of elite Malay and Chinese communities, its reformist agenda and belief in the importance of culture for Chinese identity was later mobilised by Sun Yat-sen in the service of a more aggressive kind of cultural nationalism and sinification – one that rested on a revitalised Confucianism as a distinctive form of religious modernity, and saw Chinese-language education both as a source of national strength and an effective response to the ongoing threat of western imperialism.⁸⁷

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Notes

- 1 *Straits Chinese Magazine* (SCM), 1:2 (June 1897), 63. See also SCM, 1:3 (September 1897), 95–9, and SCM, 1:4 (December 1897), 136–41.
- 2 SCM, 1:2 (June 1897), 64–5.
- 3 Mark Ravinder Frost, 'Emporium in imperio: Nanyang Networks and the Straits Chinese in Singapore, 1819–1914', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 36 (2005), 29–36; Jan Van de Putten, 'Abdullah Munsyi and the Missionaries', *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land-en Volkenkunde* (BKI), 162:4 (2006), 407–40.
- 4 Mark Frost, "'Wider Opportunities': Religious Revival, Nationalist Awakening and the Global Dimension in Colombo, 1870–1920', *Modern Asian Studies*, 36:4 (2002), 937–67; Isabel Hofmeyr, 'The Black Atlantic Meets the Indian Ocean: Forging New Paradigms of Transnationalism for the Global South – Literary and Cultural Perspectives', *Social Dynamics: A Journal of African Studies*, 33:7 (2007), 7.
- 5 Tony Ballantyne, 'Mobility, Empire, Colonisation', *History Australia*, 11:2 (2014), 25. See also Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A. D. 1250–1350* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); John M. Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilisation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
- 6 Frost, "'Wider Opportunities'", 940.
- 7 See also SCM, 1:2 (June 1897), 64–7, SCM, 2:5 (March 1898), 18, and SCM, 5:19 (September 1901), 96. Song and Lim were educated at the elite Raffles Institution in Singapore and subsequently as Queen's Scholars at Cambridge and Edinburgh Universities, where Song studied law and Lim studied medicine.
- 8 SCM, 1:1 (March 1897), 2, 20; Philip Holden, 'Communities and Conceptual Limits: Exploring Malaysian Literature in English', *Asiatic*, 3:2 (2009), 58.
- 9 For a general overview, see Bonny Tan, *The Straits Chinese Magazine: A Malayan Voice*, *BiblioAsia*, 7:2 (2011), 30–5.
- 10 Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), p. 56.
- 11 Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), pp. 18, 20.
- 12 Rita Felski and Susan Stanford Friedman, 'Introduction', in Rita Felski and Susan Stanford Friedman (eds), *Comparison: Theories, Approaches, Uses* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), p. 2. On the Eurocentrism of comparison, see, e.g., Ann Laura Stoler, 'Tense and Tender Ties: The Politics of Comparison in North American History and (Post) Colonial Studies', *The Journal of American History*, 88:3 (2001), 829–65 (esp. 863–4); and Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object*, foreword Matti Bunzl (1983; New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

- 13 Andrew Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History: Culturalism in the Age of Capital* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), p. 9; Hofmeyr, 'Black Atlantic', 7–8. On European claims to universality, see Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).
- 14 Manu Goswami, 'Imaginary Futures and Colonial Internationalisms', *The American Historical Review*, 117:5 (2012), 1471–2, and 'Autonomy and Comparability: Notes on the Anticolonial and the Postcolonial', *boundary 2*, 32:2 (2005), 204, 205. See also Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History*, esp. pp. 5, 19, 22.
- 15 Chinese authority structures in the Straits were regarded by the British as something like a parallel *imperium in imperio*. See, e.g., *SCM*, 2:5 (March 1898), 1–2.
- 16 Mark Frost, 'Imperial Citizenship or Else: Liberal Ideals and the Indian Unmasking of Empire, 1890–1919', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 46:5 (2018), 866.
- 17 See, e.g., *SCM*, 3:10 (June 1899), 61–7, and *SCM*, 3:11 (September 1899), 106–12; Holden, 'Communities and Conceptual Limits', 58.
- 18 Philip Holden, 'Colonial Fiction, Hybrid Lives: Early Singaporean Fiction in *The Straits Chinese Magazine*', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 33:1 (1998), 87; *SCM*, 2:7 (September 1898), 90.
- 19 Trevor Ross, *The Making of the English Literary Canon: From the Middle Ages to the Late Eighteenth Century* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998), p. 228.
- 20 Michael Allan, 'Reading with One Eye, Speaking with One Tongue: On the Problem of Address in World Literature', *Comparative Literature*, 44:1–2 (2007), 15. For a direct reference to Arnold, see *SCM*, 6:21 (March 1902), 97.
- 21 *SCM*, 1:3 (September 1897), 96. On colonial literary education, see Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Studies and British Rule in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989); and Daniel Goh, 'Elite Schools, Postcolonial Chineseness and Hegemonic Masculinities in Singapore', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 36:1 (2005), 137–55.
- 22 *SCM*, 5:18 (June 1901), 66. See also *SCM*, 6:21 (March 1902), 30.
- 23 Eric Hayot, *The Hypothetical Mandarin: Sympathy, Modernity, and Chinese Pain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 9. See, e.g., *SCM*, 5:19 (September 1901), 108.
- 24 *SCM*, 5:19 (June 1901), 96. See also Ah Sing's argument that '[n]o one nation contains all the best that has been thought and said in the world', in *SCM*, 6:21 (March 1902), 97.
- 25 Devin Griffiths, *The Age of Analogy: Science and Literature between the Darwins* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), p. 14.
- 26 See, e.g., *SCM*, 2:5 (March 1898), 31. On European sinologists, see *SCM*, 1:2 (June 1897), 64. Müller is called a 'champion of the cause of the misunderstood Asiatics' in *SCM*, 5:17 (March 1901), 10.
- 27 *SCM*, 2:5 (March 1898), 31.

- 28 See Sanjay Krishnan's 'History and the Work of Literature in the Periphery', *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 42 (2009), 483–9 (esp. 485), and 'Reading Globalization from the Margin: The Case of Abdullah Munshi', *Representations*, 99 (2007), 40–73 (esp. 51).
- 29 *SCM*, 5:19 (September 1901), 83. See also *SCM*, 1:1 (March 1897), 26.
- 30 *SCM*, 2:8 (December 1898), 132.
- 31 Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species* (London: John Murray, 1859), p. 129. See also Lim's rejection of an immediate reform of Chinese customs in favour of 'first shaping public opinion' and his pen name 'Historicus', *SCM*, 1:3 (September 1897), 110, and *SCM*, 5:18 (June 1901), 51.
- 32 See, e.g., *SCM*, 1:1 (March 1897), 16, and *SCM*, 1:4 (December 1897), 158. On the 'self-conceit and egotism' of Europeans in the east, see *SCM*, 7:3 (September 1903), 101.
- 33 *SCM*, 1:4 (December 1897), 158. See also *SCM*, 5:19 (September 1901), 154.
- 34 *SCM*, 2:7 (September 1898), 117. On the elite 'orientalising' of social inferiors in the Egyptian context, see Hussein Omar, 'Arabic Thought in the Liberal Cage', in Faisal Devji and Zaheer Kazmi (eds), *Islam after Liberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 19.
- 35 *SCM*, 1:1 (March 1897), 3–8.
- 36 *SCM*, 2:8 (December 1898), 154.
- 37 See, e.g., *SCM*, 2:5 (March 1898), 29, and *SCM*, 1:4 (December 1897), 182.
- 38 Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*, pp. 20–1.
- 39 *SCM*, 2:7 (September 1898), 116.
- 40 *SCM*, 2:7 (September 1898), 117.
- 41 *SCM*, 1:2 (March 1897), 55–6. On European cruelty in war, see, *SCM*, 5:19 (September 1901), 127.
- 42 *SCM*, 1:4 (December 1897), 164, 165.
- 43 Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*, p. 18.
- 44 On the loss of the Chinese language, see *SCM*, 3:9 (March 1899), 11–15, and *SCM*, 11:4 (December 1907), 141–2.
- 45 *SCM*, 1:1 (March 1897), 7; *SCM*, 1:2 (June 1897), 54.
- 46 *SCM*, 1:4 (December 1897), 140, 141. See also the pan-Asian comparison in Tan's article on 'Chinese Problems', *SCM*, 2:5 (March 1898) 1–2.
- 47 *SCM*, 1:4 (December 1897), 141; *SCM*, 2:7 (September 1898), 89; *SCM*, 3:10 (June 1899), 70. On Confucianism and Enlightenment, see Christine Doran, 'Singapore', in Benjamin Isakhan and Stephen Stockwell (eds), *The Edinburgh Companion to the History of Democracy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), pp. 258, 261.
- 48 Krishnan, 'Literature in the Periphery', 383. There is a strong sense throughout the magazine of writing back to British authors like Hugh Clifford. See, e.g., *SCM*, 2:5 (March 1898), 38, *SCM*, 5:19 (September 1901), 116, and *SCM*, 9:2 (June 1905), 41.
- 49 Krishnan, 'Literature in the Periphery', 484.
- 50 See, e.g. *SCM*, 1:1 (March 1897), 12–14, and *SCM*, 8:3 (June 1904), 91–3.
- 51 Javed Majeed, 'Literary Modernity in South Asia', in Douglas Peers and Nandini Gooptu (eds), *India and the British Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 265, 263; Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*, pp. 18, 20

- 52 SCM, 1:2 (June 1897), 54; *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* (JMBRAS), 4 (1879), xxi.
- 53 William R. Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 54.
- 54 SCM, 2:8 (December 1898), 129, 131, 128.
- 55 On Abdullah Munshi, see SCM, 8:4 (December 1904), 190–202, and SCM, 9:3 (September 1905), 96.
- 56 SCM, 1:2 (June 1897), 39, 41, 47, 45, 47.
- 57 SCM, 1:2 (June 1897), 47.
- 58 SCM, 1:2 (June 1897), 47; Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*, p. 25.
- 59 Philip Holden, ‘China Men: Writing the British Nation in Malaya’, *SPAN*, 38 (1994), 70–1. See, e.g., SCM, 1:1. March (1897), 16, 23, SCM, 1:2 (June 1897), 52, 53, and SCM, 1:4 (December 1897), 124
- 60 Lamont had close ties with Tan Teck Soon, with whom he purchased the *Daily Advertiser* in 1890, co-ran the Chinese Educational Institute, and collaborated on a novel, *Bright Celestials* (1894).
- 61 Khor, ‘Imperial Cosmopolitan Malaya’, 42.
- 62 SCM, 1:3 (September 1897), 100, 101.
- 63 SCM, 1:3 (September 1897), 100. For fears of degeneracy and/or stagnancy, see SCM, 2:7 (September 1898), 92; and SCM, 3:10 (June 1899), 59.
- 64 SCM, 1:3 (September 1897), 101.
- 65 On Confucianism as religion, see, e.g., SCM, 1:2 (June 1897), 58, and SCM, 3:12 (December 1899), 163–6. For Lim’s fierce debate with William Murray over the superiority of Confucian ‘universal truths’, see SCM, 8:3 (September 1904), 128–30, SCM, 9:2 (June 1905), 73–8, and SCM, 9:3 (September 1905), 106–8.
- 66 Neil Khor, ‘Imperial Cosmopolitan Malaya: A Study of Realist Fiction in the *Straits Chinese Magazine*’, *JMBRAS*, 1 (2008), 37.
- 67 SCM, 4:15 (September 1900), 103, 103–4.
- 68 On ‘native education’, see SCM, 1:1 (March 1897), 27, SCM, 1:2 (June 1897), 71, SCM, 1:4 (December 1897), 174, and SCM, 4:15 (September 1900), 94. On Chinese women, see, e.g., SCM, 1:1 (March 1897), 16–23, and SCM, 5:19 (September 1901), 154–7.
- 69 SCM, 4:15 (September 1900), 108.
- 70 SCM, 4:15 (September 1900), 109.
- 71 SCM, 4:15 (September 1900), 111. See also SCM, 7:4 (December 1903), 130.
- 72 Philip Holden, ‘The Beginnings of “Asian Modernity” in Singapore: A Straits Chinese Body Project’, *Common/Plural*, 7:1 (1999), 59–78.
- 73 Andrew Sartori, ‘The Resonance of “Culture”: Framing a Problem in Global Concept-History’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 47:4 (2005), 682.
- 74 Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History*, p. 12, and ‘The Resonance of “Culture”’, 682, 683; Goswami, ‘Autonomy and Comparability’, 217. On the need for an ‘Asiatic daily’ that would be ‘in touch with the Asiatic proletariat’, see SCM, 9:2 (June 1905), 41.
- 75 Hayot, *The Hypothetical Mandarin*, p. 6.

- 76 See, e.g., *SCM*, 2:7 (September 1898), 92; and Krishnan, 'Reading Globalization', 54.
- 77 Mohd Noordin Sopiee, *From Malayan Union to Singapore Separation: Political Unification in the Malaysia Region, 1945–65* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1974), p. 75; Philip Holden, 'Dissonant Voices: Straits Chinese and the Appropriation of Travel Writing', *Studies in Travel Writing*, 2:1 (1998), 183; Daniel Goh, 'Unofficial Contentions: The Postcoloniality of Straits Chinese Political Discourse in the Straits Chinese Legislative Council', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 41:3 (2010), 484.
- 78 Neil Khor, 'Malacca's Straits Chinese Anglophone Poets and their Experience of Malaysian Nationalism', *Archipel*, 76 (2008), 127–49.
- 79 Philip Holden, 'The Littoral and the Literary: Making Moral Communities in the Straits Settlements and the Gold Coast in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries', in Derek Heng and Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied (eds), *Singapore in Global Context* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011), p. 93.
- 80 Denise Ferreira da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), p. 169; Goswami, 'Imaginary Futures', 1461.
- 81 Peter Hill, *Utopia and Civilisation in the Arab Nahda* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 9–10. See also Omar, 'Arabic Thought in the Liberal Cage', pp. 20, 21.
- 82 Krishnan, 'Reading Globalization', 59.
- 83 Griffiths, *Age of Analogy*, p. 17. On the 'haunting' legacies of bad or difficult comparison, see Benedict Anderson, *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia and the World* (London: Verso, 1998).
- 84 *SCM*, 2:5 (March 1898), 25. See also Lim Boon Keng's *The Chinese Crisis from Within* (1901). On the fear of becoming 'Malayanised or Europeanised', see *SCM*, 3:10 (June 1899), 59.
- 85 Saul Dubow, 'How British Was the British World? The Case of South Africa', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 37:1 (2009), 18.
- 86 Goswami, 'Imaginary Futures', 1462.
- 87 C. M. Turnbull, *A History of Modern Singapore, 1819–2005* (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2009), p. 21.