CARLOS ROJAS

Introduction
Worlds Built of Sand

ABSTRACT   Opening with a discussion of Singaporean artist Charles Lim Yi Yong's multiyear art project SEASTATE (2005–), this introduction uses Singapore's recent land reclamation efforts to reflect on more general processes of world building in Sinophone Southeast Asia. More specifically, the essay considers how multiple waves of migration from China to Southeast Asia have resulted in a wide array of Chinese communities throughout the region, and how modern literature may be used as a prism through which to examine some of the sociocultural formations that have been generated by these waves of migration from China throughout Southeast Asia. The essay considers how literature reflects the region's diverse array of Sinitic communities, or "worlds," and how literary production may be viewed as a process of world making in its own right. Although this special issue covers considerable territory (both literally and metaphorically), our objective is not to offer a comprehensive survey of all modern literary production from the entire region. Instead, we seek to showcase a set of novel approaches that may be used to examine the region's eclectic body of literary production, including approaches grounded in concepts of mesology, postloyalism, inter-imperiality, oceanic epistemologies, off-center articulations, and the condition of being "semi-wild."

KEYWORDS   Charles Lim Yi Yong, world building, land reclamation, Southeast Asia, Chinese literature

This special issue on the worlds of Southeast Asian Chinese literature examines processes of world making found in Chinese literature from throughout Southeast Asia or the "South Seas" (Nanyang 南洋) region. This introduction begins, however, by looking at how Singapore, Southeast Asia's smallest and most ethnically Chinese nation-state, has been actively pursuing a miniature process of world making as it transforms its own territory in a way that has wide-ranging implications, not only for the city-state itself but also for many of its neighbors.

With a total area of under 750 square kilometers, Singapore is one of the world's smallest sovereign states.[1] At the same time, however, with a population of nearly six million and a per capita GDP (adjusted for purchasing power parity) of nearly US$100,000, it also has the second-highest population density and the third-highest per capita GDP of any sovereign state[2]—meaning that it has both the means and the motivation to pursue expensive land-reclamation projects to expand its existing territory. In fact, since gaining independence from the United

Kingdom in 1963, Singapore has used land reclamation to expand its territory by approximately 25 percent. Given that sand is a crucial resource for land reclamation processes, it is not surprising that a 2014 United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) report found that "having imported a reported 517 million tonnes of sand over the last 20 years, Singapore is by far the largest importer of sand worldwide."[3]

In fact, for 2014, the year the UNEP issued the report cited above, the Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC) calculated that Singapore was responsible for 10.5 percent of the world's $2.1 billion in total sand imports, making the tiny nation the largest single sand importer that year.[4] The official import figures cited by the OEC, moreover, are just the tip of the iceberg, given that Singapore's official sand imports are dwarfed by the nation's reliance on a vast black market in sand trade. This is because, responding to concerns about the environmental impact of sand mining, all four of Singapore's primary sources of sand have passed regulations limiting or banning sand exports in recent years. For instance, in 1997 Malaysia officially banned sand exports to Singapore (though this appears to have had minimal impact on actual exports), and although it officially lifted the ban in 2017, it promptly imposed a more specific ban on sea sand exports to Singapore the following year. Similarly, in 2003, Indonesia prohibited all sea sand exports, and in 2007 it expanded the ban to include all sand exports. Cambodia similarly barred all sand exports in 2017, the same year Vietnam blocked the export of white silica sand (though it lifted this ban three years later). Despite these official bans, however, sand exports to Singapore have continued mostly unabated, with a significant portion of the nation's sand imports being conducted over the black market.[5]

Singapore's territorial expansion over the past half century is particularly notable given that the nation is also at risk of losing territory due to rising sea levels. With an average elevation of only fifteen meters, Singapore is one of the lowest-lying countries in the world,[6] meaning that significant portions of its territory are vulnerable to flooding and inundation as a result of global warming.[7] Moreover, the nation's delicate dance between territorial loss and expansion is mirrored by the contrast between its growing coastline, on one hand, and the environmental devastation that sand excavation has been wreaking on the riverways and coastlines of its neighbors, on the other. A particularly dramatic illustration of this contrast between Singapore's territorial expansion and the environmental devastation it is causing can be seen in a set of 2010 reports stating that Singapore's voracious appetite for sand for land reclamation projects had contributed to the disappearance of at least twenty-four Indonesian islands off the coast of Aceh, North Sumatra, Papua, and Riau since 2005.[8]

Coincidentally, it was also in 2005—which is to say, the beginning of the five-year period cited in the reports on the disappearing Indonesia islands—that Singaporean artist Charles Lim Yi Yong 林育荣 launched an ambitious multiyear art

project titled SEASTATE.[9] Already a champion sailor before he began working as a professional artist (he won silver and bronze medals in the men's 470 event at the 1994 and 1998 Asian Games, and he represented Singapore at the 1996 Olympics), Lim describes SEASTATE as an attempt to use the sea as a prism through which to reexamine the nation of Singapore itself:

> [SEASTATE] initiates a dialogue on Singapore's relationship with the sea. It also meditates upon land reclamation as a constant and ongoing activity in Singapore. Singapore continues to grow through this process. It could be said, SEASTATE opens up newer ways of engaging with water and its other—land; from mutating landscapes and islands that have been consumed and generated in this constant need making more space to the imaginary boundaries of a future landmass. SEASTATE negotiates the concerns of Singapore through situating the debates surrounding land reclamation, resource use, and territorial sovereignty in global, transnational terms.[10]

As an archipelago consisting of one major island and over sixty islets, Singapore spans both land and sea. Although the nation is generally viewed as a landmass surrounded by water, Lim's SEASTATE project instead takes as its starting point the sea itself. As art critic Pauline Yao observes, SEASTATE is a "multichaptered, manifold constellation of videos, photographs, found objects, audio recordings, nautical maps, and digital prints [that] casts the sea as the lead character in the unfolding drama of Singapore's maritime existence."[11] At the same time, however, as cultural studies scholar Elizabeth Wijaya observes, a crucial theme that runs through the project is its focus on "the slow violence wrought by the state on the land/sea/people triad due to its justification for expansion beyond the limits of the earth's surface."[12]

Each work in SEASTATE has the same main title, followed by a single numeral and one or more subtitles. The numerals refer not to the order in which the works were produced but rather to the World Meteorological Organization's code for the surface conditions of a large body of water, which ranges from a low of 0, designating "calm (glassy)" conditions, to a high of 9, designating "phenomenal" conditions. In some cases, the numeral in the title roughly matches the conditions of the sea as visible in the work itself, such as in the project's inaugural work, *SEASTATE 1: inside/outside* (2005), which features a collection of paired photographs of marker buoys floating in calm ocean waters near Singapore's nautical port limits (fig. 1). Each buoy was photographed both inside and outside the invisible maritime boundary, thereby revealing, as Pauline Yao notes, not only "the arbitrary nature of nautical boundaries but their sheer porosity," as well as "the ways in which such borders are always representations—appearing as lines on maps, as fences in the ground, and now, as buoys floating in the water."[13] The

FIGURE 1. Charles Lim Yi Yong, *SEASTATE 1: inside/outside*, 2005. Image courtesy of Charles Lim Yi Yong.

sea's apparent calmness in these images, accordingly, belies the dynamic interaction between artificial maritime borders and the sea's fluid surface.

Other works in Lim's project span a variety of different media and formats, and their relationship to the sea conditions alluded to in their titles is often considerably more abstract. For instance, *SEASTATE 0: All the Lines Flow Out* (2011) is a short film exploring Singapore's drainage system, *SEASTATE 4: Line in the Chart* (2008) features a photograph of a sea wall that Lim found on Singapore's northeast border, and *SEASTATE 8: The Grid* (2014) consists of a 2014 nautical chart that has been divided into one portion featuring the original landmass and another featuring reclaimed land and the surrounding sea. *SEASTATE 6: Capsize* (2016) is a short film on Singapore's Jurong Rock Caverns, a vast underground cavern for oil and fuel storage located beneath Banyan Basin on Jurong Island; *SEASTATE 9: Proclamation (drag), (drop), (pour)* (2018) is a three-part work featuring drone video footage of three different methods used for land reclamation; and the similarly titled *SEASTATE 9: Proclamation Garden* (2019) is a "living

FIGURE 2. Charles Lim Yi Yong, *SEASTATE 9: Proclamation Garden,* 2019. Image courtesy of National Gallery Singapore.

art exhibition" installed in the roof garden of Singapore's National Gallery, featuring thirty lesser-known plant species found on Singapore's reclaimed land (fig. 2). In each work, the focus is less on the sea itself than on the unstable interface between (rising) sea and (reclaimed) land.

The term *proclamation* in the titles of the preceding two works derives from Singapore's Foreshores Act (originally passed in 1972 and revised in the 1980s), which decreed that "the President may, by proclamation published in the Gazette, declare any lands formed by the reclamation of any part of the foreshore of Singapore, or any areas of land reclaimed from the sea to be State land." This proclamation process is one of the central concerns of *SEASTATE 9: the sandpapers* (2020), which consists of a box set of thirteen books with sandpaper covers. The books contain a set of public government documents and presidential proclamations of land reclamation dating from 1965 to 2017. Similarly, this proclamation process also occupies an absent presence in two more recent works in the project: *SEASTATE 7: sand print (400,000 sqm, 2015, Tuas)* and *SEASTATE 7: negative print,* both of which debuted in 2021 (figs. 3 and 4). The former features a sand print molded in the form of an area of reclaimed land located at Tuas, an industrial site in southwestern Singapore, while the latter features the plastic mold that was used to create the sand print. The work's tacit commentary on the contingent and artificial nature of Singapore's land reclamation process is reinforced by the fact that, as art critic Vivyan Yeo observes, "this area of Tuas has not undergone proclamation by the Singapore president, [meaning that] the land is still officially part of the sea; it hence exists in a comical and absurd in-between state."[14] Just as Lim's sand print alludes to the material role that sand plays in the land

FIGURE 3. Charles Lim Yi Yong, *SEASTATE 7: sand print (400,000 sqm, 2015, Tuas)*, 2021. Sand on STPI casted paper, 88×65×11.7 cm. © Charles Lim Yi Yong/STPI. Image courtesy of Charles Lim Yi Yong and STPI.

FIGURE 4. Charles Lim Yi Yong, *SEASTATE 7: negative print*, 2021. 3D-printed PLA plastic, 93.6×66×13 cm. © Charles Lim Yi Yong/STPI. Image courtesy of Charles Lim Yi Yong and STPI.

reclamation process, the corresponding "negative print" points to the legal and political abstractions on which this process necessarily relies.

Like the dozens of islands and islets that make up Singapore itself, the works that compose SEASTATE appear in constantly shifting configurations, alternatively presented either as independent works or as parts of larger assemblages. For instance, the film *SEASTATE 0: All the Lines Flow Out* premiered in May 2011 as a stand-alone work at the 2011 Singapore Biennale and was rescreened in August at the 68th Venice Film Festival, where it received a Special Mention, making Lim the first Singaporean director to be recognized at the festival. The film was screened again in 2016 along with several of Lim's other works for a solo exhibition at the NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore, which was the center's first major exhibit by a Singaporean artist. Several components of SEASTATE were also exhibited as part of the Singapore Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2015,[15] and although Lim remarked at the time that this marked "a sort of culmination" of the decade-long project,[16] he nevertheless has continued adding to it. Most recently, new iterations of the project debuted at a 2021–2022 exhibition titled *Staggered Observations of a Coast* at the STPI Gallery in Singapore, which featured works from the SEASTATE project alongside others from two of Lim's newer series, titled Staggered Observations and Zone of Convergence (the latter is discussed in Cheow Thia Chan's conclusion to this special issue).

Among the works that debuted at *Staggered Observations of a Coast* was a six-part series titled *SEASTATE 9: Pulau* (fig. 5). Borrowing the Malay word for "island," this series consists of representations of six artificial islands made from laser-cut handmade paper. The surface of each imaginary landmass is etched with an identical grid pattern, beneath which one finds multiple layers of irregularly shaped paper fragments, suggesting that beneath their relatively homogeneous surfaces, each artificial island contains the sedimented remains of countless individual islets that "disappeared" after being subsumed by the new landmasses.

For instance, what is now Jurong Island to the south of Singapore's mainland is an amalgamation of islets originally named Pulau Pesek Kechil, Pulau Ayer Chawan, Pulau Sakra, Pulau Ayer Merbau, Pulau Meskol, Pulau Merlimau, Pulau Seraya, Pulau Pesek, Pulau Mesemut Laut, and Pulau Mesemut Darat. Although many of these latter names still appear on contemporary maps, they no longer designate discrete islets but rather refer to geographically continuous areas within the larger Jurong Island landmass. In *SEASTATE 9: Pulau*, meanwhile, these vestigial islets are represented not only by the multiple layers of paper out of which the new imaginary landmasses are composed, but also by the concatenated names of those earlier islets that appear in the works' amusingly baroque subtitles, such as Satuasviewdamartekongmarinajurongcovebranibaratchangilautekongsajahatsenanghantupunggolsebaraokeastsamalunbukomsento,

FIGURE 5. Charles Lim Yi Yong, *SEASTATE 9: Pulau Punggolsebaraokeastsamalunbukomsentosatuasviewdamartekongmarinajurongcovebranibaratchangilautekongsajahatsenanghantu*, 2021. Laser-cut STPI handmade paper, 65.3×86.3×1.02 cm, edition of two. © Charles Lim Yi Yong/STPI. Image courtesy of Charles Lim Yi Yong and STPI.

Punggolsebaraokeastsamalunbukomsentosatuasviewdamartekongmarinajurongcovebranibaratchangilautekongsajahatsenanghantu, and Damartekongmarinajurongcovebranibaratchangilautekongsajahatsenanghantupunggolsebaraokeastsamalunbukomsentosatuasview. The exhibition catalog notes that "these satirically named landmasses call attention to the many islands—and thus, the cultures and histories of their people—that were taken over or altogether lost due to being repurposed for the state's use,"[17] underscoring the fact that Singapore's dialectics of land reclamation and destruction has not only geographic implications but also complex sociocultural and ecological ramifications.

Although the subtitles of the works in the *SEASTATE 9: Pulau* series directly reference Singaporean islets that have disappeared because of the nation's land reclamation efforts, the fact that *pulau* means "island" not only in Malay but also in Indonesian suggests that these works may also be seen as an allusion to the nearby Indonesian islands that have been destroyed as a result of illegal sand mining. Similarly, while SEASTATE engages with specific aspects of Singapore's geography and history, the title is polysemic and overdetermined. As Pauline Yao observes, "'SEASTATE' refers to the state of the sea, the sea as (nation-) state, and, more obliquely, the state of SEA (as Southeast Asia is sometimes abbreviated)," suggesting that the project may be viewed as a commentary on issues pertaining not only to Singapore but also to the region as a whole.[18] Accordingly, the local

processes of land reclamation that inform the SEASTATE 9: Pulau series and the entire SEASTATE project may also be viewed as an implicit commentary on more general processes of world making that are continually shaping the entire Southeast Asian region, including not only material transformations resulting from land reclamation, construction, and ecological degradation, but also corresponding sociopolitical, demographic, and cultural transformations.

While the focus on sand that runs throughout the SEASTATE project alludes most directly to the role that the resource plays in Singapore's land reclamation efforts, it also resonates with a powerful metaphor in twentieth-century Chinese political thought. In 1905, exactly a century before Lim inaugurated his SEASTATE project, Sun Yat-sen 孫逸仙 (aka Sun Zhongshan 孫中山) first proposed his "Three People's Principles"—nationalism, democracy, and livelihood—in a short statement for the founding of *Minbao* 民報, the journal for Sun's newly established China Alliance Society (*Tongmeng hui* 同盟會).[19] Two decades later, Sun elaborated on this notion in *Three People's Principles* 三民主義, when he famously compared the Chinese to "a sheet of loose sand" 一片散沙. Noting that Western revolutions are often regarded as quests for more freedom, Sun contends that the Chinese revolution should instead be viewed as a quest for more cohesion—as an attempt to enable the Chinese to "become pressed together into an unyielding body like the firm rock which is formed by the addition of cement to sand" 結成很堅固的團體，像把士敏士參加到散沙裡頭，結成一塊堅固石頭一樣.[20]

Building on these connotations of dispersal and agglutination, we may similarly use sand as a metaphor for the multiple waves of migration that have dispersed millions of people from China throughout Southeast Asia. Contrary to Sun's "loose sand" metaphor, however, these migrants have not remained isolated and independent; instead they have aggregated into a variety of different community formations, with some remaining relatively attached to the notion of a Chinese motherland and others becoming more integrated with local communities.

This special issue uses modern literature as a prism through which to examine some of the sociocultural formations that have been generated by these waves of migration from China throughout Southeast Asia. We consider how literature reflects the region's diverse array of Sinitic communities, or "worlds," and how literary production may be viewed as a process of world making in its own right. Although this issue covers considerable territory (both literally and metaphorically), our objective is not to offer a comprehensive survey of all modern literary production from the entire region. Instead, we seek to showcase a set of novel approaches that may be used to examine the region's eclectic body of literary production, including approaches grounded in concepts of mesology, postloyalism, interimperiality, oceanic epistemologies, off-center articulations, and the condition of being "semiwild."

Our project builds on (and shares some contributors with) the 2021 *Prism* special issue on "Chinese Literature across the Borderlands," which editor David Der-wei Wang described as an attempt "to explore the shifting definitions of the borderland as a geopolitical space, a territorial gateway, a contact zone, a liminal terrain, a 'state of exception,' and an imaginary portal."[21] However, whereas that earlier project examined literary formations from a wide array of Chinese borderlands, stretching "from the Northeast to the Southwest, from Inner Mongolia to Tibet, and from Nanyang 南洋 (Southeast Asia) to Nanmei 南美 (Latin America),"[22] ours instead focuses more specifically on Southeast Asia in order to better attend to the network of themes and concerns that run through this region's literary production. Similarly, our special issue also engages with—but is distinct from—a Sinophone approach. We share with the latter an interest in literary production originating from the margins or outside mainland Chinese sovereignty, though our approach is simultaneously narrower and broader than a conventional Sinophone one. On one hand, we focus only on literary production from Southeast Asia (while the Sinophone approach encompasses the entire global Chinese diaspora), but on the other hand, we cover works written in multiple different languages (while the Sinophone approach is generally restricted to Chinese-language texts). In this way, we attempt to probe some of the distinctive qualities of Sinophone literature from Southeast Asia, while at the same time complicating common assumptions about the structural limits of the category of the Sinophone itself.

The thirteen articles in this special issue examine a diverse array of literary formations, ranging from Chinese-language Singaporean flash fiction to English-language Philippine speculative fiction, and from 1920s poems composed in a Batavian-Hokkien creole to midcentury Chinese-language elegies memorializing the deaths of dozens of teachers and students in Penang, in what is now Malaysia. Several articles focus on works from Singapore, where ethnic Chinese make up nearly 80 percent of the population, and from neighboring Malaysia, where nearly seven million Chinese make up over a fifth of the population.[23] Two other articles examine literature from what is now Indonesia, where the total number of individuals of Chinese descent is estimated be even larger than in Malaysia,[24] while one article considers literature by Filipino writers of Chinese descent—a demographic that accounts for less than 2 percent of the nation's total population. At the same time, it is important to remember that each of these modern nations—like the artificial landmasses in *Lim's SEASTATE 9: Pulau* series—is the product of a complex process of historical sedimentation, whereby concatenated processes of migration, trade, imperialism, and local resistance have left their mark not only on each region's distinctive demographics, but also on their ideology, politics, and cultural production.

This special issue opens with four articles that don't map neatly onto Southeast Asia's current national configurations, including one article that speaks to issues relevant to the entire region, and three others that straddle two or more contemporary nations. First, David Der-wei Wang's "Of Wind, Soil, and Water: On the Mesology of Sinophone/Xenophone Southeast Asian Literature" proposes that Southeast Asian Sinophone literature may be approached via a paradigm of mesology, or "the study of the mutual relationships between living creatures and their biological, social, and environmental surroundings." More specifically, Wang contends that this mesological approach can be used to probe the various "sociopolitical, cultural, and environmental entanglements" of the region's assorted Chinese-speaking communities.

Three other articles that similarly straddle contemporary national boundaries are Shuang Shen's "Popular Literature in the Inter-imperial Space of Hong Kong and Singapore/Malaya," Nicholas Y. H. Wong's "Inter-imperial, Ecological Interpretations of the 'Five Coolies' Myth in Penang and Medan," and Nicolai Volland's "Fluid Horizons: Oceanic Epistemologies and Sinophone Literature." First, Shen uses Laura Doyle's "inter-imperial" paradigm to examine midcentury popular literary production from Hong Kong and parts of what was then still British Malaya. In particular, Shen proposes to use "popular literature as a wedge to pry open some foundational critical discourses that inform existing locality-focused literary histories in order to make way for a regional conceptualization of Sinophone cultural production." Similarly taking inspiration from Doyle's inter-imperial paradigm, Wong examines how two early to mid-twentieth century authors who straddle the categories of Malayan Chinese and Indonesian Chinese both wrote about a "myth" relating to an 1871 incident in which five Chinese coolies on a plantation in East Sumatra were executed on charges of having murdered their Dutch foreman. Wong underscores the degree to which these two works play out against the backdrop of a cross-straits coolie trade between "the two imperial jurisdictions of Penang (Straits Settlements) and Medan (East Sumatra), now part of Malaysia and Indonesia respectively."

Finally, Volland uses the concept of what he calls oceanic epistemologies to examine contemporary works by the Indigenous author Syaman Rapongan and the Malaysian Chinese author Ng Kim Chew. As Volland notes, although Syaman Rapongan, who is a member of Taiwan's Tao ethnic group, is often classified as an Indigenous Taiwanese author, his writings are nevertheless centered around his home island of Lanyu (aka Orchid Island), which is located some forty miles southeast of the main island of Taiwan and whose population is more closely related to Indigenous populations in the Philippines than to Taiwan's other Indigenous peoples. Similarly, although Ng Kim Chew is now a naturalized Taiwanese citizen, he is originally from Malaysia, and most of his fiction is set in or around that region. Volland suggests that by examining the ways in which Rapongan and

Ng thematize oceans and archipelagoes in their writings, we may better understand "how thinking with and through the ocean shapes patterns of place-making and identity formation," and in this way he attempts to rethink Sinophone literatures "from a maritime perspective."

The next two articles focus on literature from Singapore. First, Cheow Thia Chan's article "Off-Center Articulations: Social Class, Postcolonial Singapore, and Reorienting Southeast Asian Chinese Literary Studies" uses an attention to the sociodemographic category of Chinese-educated Singaporeans to develop a novel approach to modern Chinese-language literature from Singapore. In particular, Chan analyzes Singaporean Chinese author Chia Joo Ming's 2015 novel *Exile or Pursuit* with attention to how this work portrays the differences between early Chinese who migrated to Singapore from China, on the one hand, and contemporary Chinese-educated Singaporeans on the other. In this way he seeks to develop an "off-center" perspective that approaches Singaporean literature through the lens of the local concept of "Chinese-educated" Singaporeans. Second, Brian Bernards's "Iridescent Corners: Sinophone Flash Fiction in Singapore" examines the genre of Sinophone flash fiction that has become increasingly influential in Singapore since the 1970s. Bernards argues that flash fiction is a platform that invites "amateur, informal, collaborative participation" and that it is frequently used to "scope out or test the bounds of the state's OB [out-of-bounds] markers, even while acknowledging such counternarratives are likely to be met with indifference by a larger public."

The following four articles turn to literature from the region that is now Malaysia, and particularly what is commonly referred to as Mahua literature, or literature by Malayan/Malaysian Chinese authors. First, in "Chinese-Language Memories under the Conflagration of War: On the Martyrdom of Chung Ling High School's Teachers and Students," Ko Chia-Cian examines an array of textual records relating to the deaths of several dozen teachers and students from the Chung Ling High School in Penang, Malaya, resulting from a Japanese attack during World War II. In the following article, "Why Does a Failed Revolution Also Need Fiction? On the Mahua Genre of Failed Revolutionary Historical Fiction," Ng Kim Chew uses Chinese communist fiction to reexamine the genre of Malayan communist fiction. Ng notes that unlike Chinese communist fiction, which tends to be defined by its triumphal tone, Malayan communist fiction is instead characterized by its focus on failure, specifically the Malayan Communist Party's ultimate failure to carry out a revolution.

In "Counter-discourse: Strategies of Representing Ethnic Minorities in Sinophone Malaysian Literature," Boon Eng Khor uses a Foucauldian notion of counter-discourse to examine the interplay of valorizing and pejorative connotations that run through many literary descriptions of Malaysia's ethnic minorities

in literary works written by Mahua authors. One prominent Mahua author whose works devote considerable attention to Malaysia's Indigenous peoples but who is not covered in detail in Khor's article is Zhang Guixing, and in "Becoming Semi-wild: Colonial Legacies and Interspecies Intimacies in Zhang Guixing's Rainforest Novels" I examine the interplay between a set of interethnic and interspecies relations in two of Zhang's "rainforest" novels set in the multicultural and multi-ethnic environment of the Malaysian state of Sarawak, in the northern portion of the island of Borneo.

The next two articles focus on literature from the region that is now Indonesia. In "Urban Life in Two 1920s Sino-Malay Poems," Tom G. Hoogervorst examines two early twentieth-century Sino-Malay poems from Batavia, the capital of the former Netherlands Indies (now the Indonesian city of Jakarta). Written by Indies-Chinese authors, these works are composed in a creole derived from the Batavian dialect of Malay and the Hokkien dialect of Chinese. Part of this article's interest involves not only the way that it uses an analysis of these poems to probe some of the sociocultural conditions of Batavia's ethnic Chinese communities, but also the way in which Hoogervorst deciphers the meaning of the poems' rather obscure romanized and creolized Hokkien dialect. Next, in "Ethnic Loyalty versus Spring Fancy: Gender and Southeast Asia in Hei Ying's Fiction," Josh Stenberg examines several 1930s fictional works by the Sumatra-born author Hei Ying. Although Hei Ying is currently best known as a Shanghai-based author associated with the modernist New Perceptionist Movement, he also produced a body of work set in the Dutch East Indies, where he was born and grew up. Stenberg focuses on Hei Ying's treatment of gender and ethnicity in his works, and particularly on how the author's attention to the sensuality of Southeast Asian women yields a "distinctly pseudocolonial aesthetic."

This special issue's final article is Shirley O. Lua's "Recreating the World in Twenty-First Century Philippine-Chinese Speculative Fiction," which examines a collection of speculative fiction by several Filipino-Chinese authors, emphasizing the ways in which the stories use a variety of conceits familiar from speculative fiction (such as zombies) to comment allegorically on contemporary issues in the Philippines (including ethnic tensions). While this special issue's other articles all focus on works written either in some version of Chinese or a Chinese creole, Lua instead examines works written in English; and while most of the other articles examine works that turn to the past, Lua instead considers future-oriented works that project "an array of imagined worlds and alternate universes, pushing the boundaries of the real and transgressing the limits of the possible." In this way, her article captures the way in which this special issue showcases approaches that can be used to examine not only the Southeast Asia's
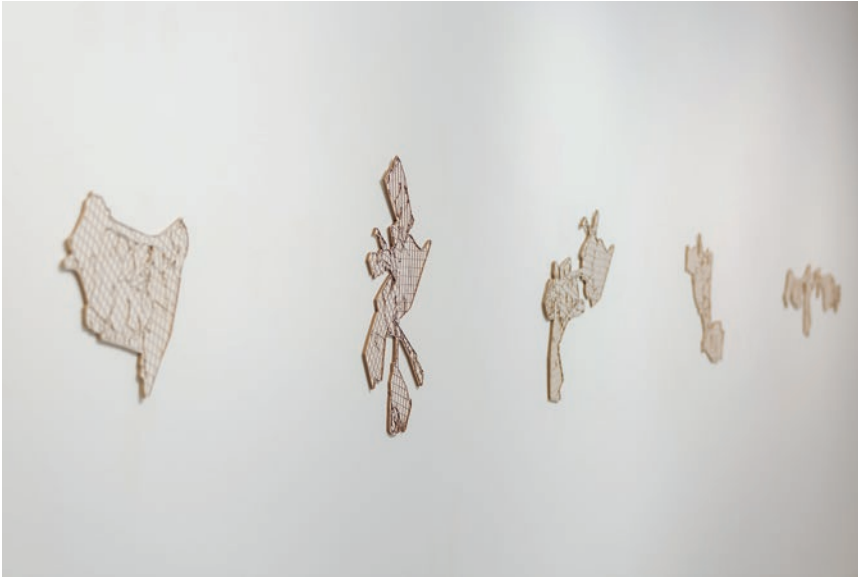
FIGURE 6. Charles Lim Yi Yong, *SEASTATE 9: Pulau* (exhibition photograph, 2021). Image courtesy of Charles Lim Yi Yong and STPI.

histories, but also its contemporary present and its possible futures. Similar reflections on the field's possible future trajectories are then examined through the lens of Charles Lim's recent artwork in Cheow Thia Chan's conclusion to this special issue.

This issue's thirteen contributors include several scholars based in North America (Bernards, Rojas, Shen, Volland, and Wang), Europe (Hoogervorst), and Australia (Stenberg). Three of our contributors (Ng, Ko, and Wong) are based in East Asia (Taiwan or Hong Kong), though each of them is originally from Southeast Asia (Malaysia and/or Singapore). In addition, three others are both originally from and currently based in the Southeast Asian nations of Singapore (Chan), Malaysia (Khor), and the Philippines (Lua). Finally, one of our contributors, Ng Kim Chew, is well recognized not only as a leading scholar of Mahua literature but also as an influential Mahua author in his own right.

The cover image of this special issue is a photograph of Charles Lim's *SEASTATE 9: Pulau* series as displayed at the 2021–2022 *Staggered Observations of a Coast* exhibit (fig. 6). Supplied by the artist's studio, the original photograph was taken with a camera positioned to the left of the horizontal row of wall-mounted works, with a shallow depth of field such that the foreground appears in sharp focus and the midground is increasingly blurry. We have reoriented the image vertically, to appear as though the viewer were gazing at a string

FIGURE 7. Charles Lim Yi Yong, *SEASTATE 8: The Grid, Whatever Whenever Wherever*, 2021. Image courtesy of STPI—Creative Gallery and Workshop, Singapore.

of islands stretching out toward the horizon. The five artificial islands visible in the cover image mirror this special issue's five "artificial" clusters of articles (focusing on Singapore, Malaya/Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and transregional concerns). Meanwhile, the sixth island positioned just outside the cover's field of vision could be viewed as a symbol of all the regions, genres, methodologies, and perspectives that have been left out of this necessarily finite project.

Similarly positioned just outside the cover photograph's field of vision is another work that was also enjoying its debut at the 2021–2022 *Staggered Observations of a Coast* exhibit. Titled *SEASTATE 8: The Grid, Whatever Whenever Wherever* (2021), the latter work consists of a large magnetic rubber sheet that was printed with the image of a large nautical map and then cut into small pieces that could be affixed to the metallic surface of the gallery's walls and columns, where visitors were invited to move them around and arrange them into different configurations (figs. 7 and 8). One of Lim's most fluid and interactive creations, *SEASTATE 8: The Grid* is not an autonomous, self-contained work, but rather a basic template that visitors can transform as they wish, in much the same way that we, as editors, hope that readers may take some of the novel methodologies proposed here and use them to develop new analyses, approaches, and methodologies.
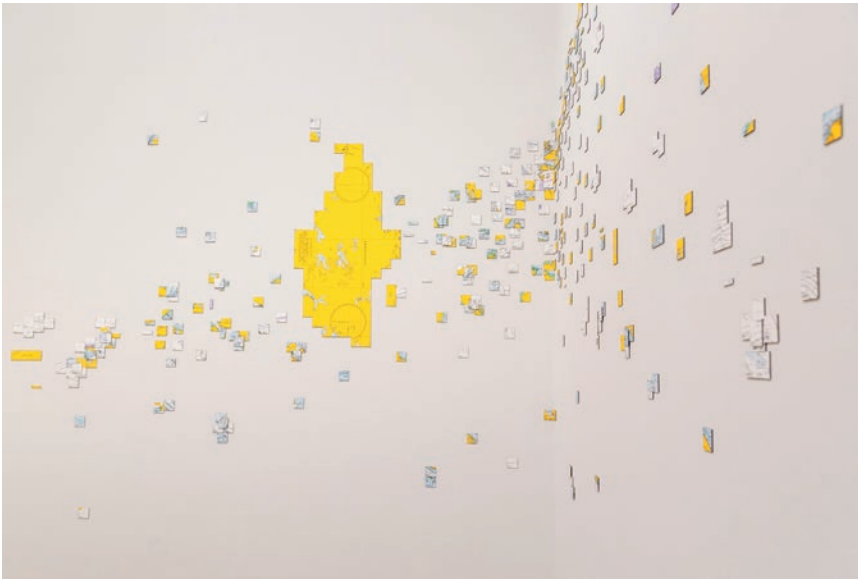
FIGURE 8. Charles Lim Yi Yong, *SEASTATE 8: The Grid, Whatever Whenever Wherever*, 2021. Screenprint on paper, magnetic rubber sheets, dimensions variable. Exhibition installation image at Singapore Art Museum's *Wikicliki: Collecting Habits on an Earth Filled with Smartphones* (2021), first presented as *SEA STATE 8: the grid*. Artwork © Charles Lim Yi Yong/STPI. Image courtesy of Charles Lim Yi Yong and STPI.

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Notes

1   Singapore ranks twentieth on Statista's list of the smallest sovereign states. See Jaganmohan, "Smallest Countries."
2   See "Countries by Population Density." Per capita GDP figures are as of 2017. See "GDP per Capita."
3   Here and in the following discussion, "sand" often includes both sand and gravel. See Peduzzi, "Sand, Rarer Than One Thinks."
4   "Sand."
5   Banergee, "South Asia's Vanishing Sand Bans."
6   "Singapore."
7   Chua et al., "Saving Singapore's Shores."
8   The statistic about Indonesia's two dozen lost islands was first reported in late 2007, just before a UN climate change conference was scheduled to convene on the Indonesian resort island of Bali. See "Minister Says 24 Indonesian Islands." The statistic resurfaced in 2010, when it was widely reported by international papers like *The Guardian* and the *New York Times*. Although the loss of the islands was attributed to factors that included global warming and a tsunami in the final days of 2004, the reports also cited sand

exports to China, Hong Kong, and Thailand as an important contributing factor. See Parry, "Black Marketeers."

9   The project is sometimes referred to as two words: *SEA STATE*. An overview of the project can be found on the artist's website: https://www.seastate.sg/seastate.

10   Lau, "Exclusive Interview."

11   Yao, "Close Up."

12   Wijaya, "Learning to See," 30.

13   Yao, "Close Up."

14   Yeo, "'Staggered Observations of a Coast.'"

15   The works featured at the Venice Biennale included *SEASTATE 3: inversion* (2015), *SEASTATE 7: sand man* (2015), *SEASTATE 2: as evil disappears (Sajahat Buoy)* (2014), *SEASTATE 7: sandwich* (2015), *SEASTATE 6: capsize* (2015), *SEASTATE 2: as evil disappears (quadrant 0124)* (2012), *SEASTATE 9: Proclamation* (2015), and *SEASTATE 6: phase 1* (2015). See Tan, "SEASTATE."

16   Lau, "Exclusive Interview."

17   "Charles Lim Yi Yong."

18   Yao, "Close Up."

19   Sun Zhongshan, 1905.

20   Sun, "Sanmin zhuyi," 721. English translation taken from Sun, *San Min Chu* I, 210.

21   Wang, "Introduction," 315.

22   Ibid.

23   Textor, "Selected Countries."

24   "Chinese in Indonesia."

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