

ending with the death of the losing contender for the empire, an event well known from Sima Qian's immortal version in *Shiji*. This outline must have produced powerful performances when amplified by a seasoned professional such as Dai Buzhang.

Quite apart from its tremendous value to scholarship, this imprint is itself designed for maximum usefulness as a scholarly source. First, it includes a photographic facsimile of every page of the original five slim volumes, a total of 330 images. Alongside it provides an easy-to-read typescript of everything on those pages: the crossed-out passages, Dai Buzhang's marginal and interlineal comments, and even what is written on the scraps of paper Dai had pasted in to accommodate his more extensive substitutions and additions. The typescript includes *fantizi* 繁體字, *jiantizi* 简体字, *cuozi* 錯字, and *suzi* 俗字 as they appear in both original text and Dai's annotations. Both of these original texts include a certain number of substandard homophonic loan characters (*tongyinzi* 同音字), which Børdahl and Ge have endeavored to sort out and replace in the transcript. Because the original script is not easy to read, in both transcription and translation the additions by Dai Buzhang are printed in blue ink, to distinguish these passages from the original manuscript which is printed in black. Finally, the volume includes a complete, annotated translation of both script and annotations. The editors' and translators' scheme to separate these textual elements is successful; their efforts to preserve this rare manuscript were heroic, and they succeeded in producing an everlasting tribute to the artist Dai Buzhang, to his school of storytelling, and to his family, for their trust in the friendship of these foreign scholars to preserve and protect their treasured heirloom.

In order to accommodate the photographic facsimiles of the original pages, the publisher has utilized especially heavy paper throughout. The area needed for text, transcription, and translation has dictated printing the book in a large format: its pages measure 275 x 188 mm (10.8 x 7.4 in.). At over 750 pages, the entire volume weighs a bit more than five pounds. Indeed, this is a weighty tome in all senses of that term, truly a signal contribution to studies of China's oral narrative tradition.

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Classical Chinese Poetry in Singapore: Witnesses to Social and Cultural Transformations in the Chinese Community. By BING WANG. Lanham, Md.: LEXINGTON BOOKS, 2018. Pp. xii + 189. \$90 (cloth); \$85.50 (e-book).

This study aims to uncover “a neglected treasure trove in Nanyang [i.e., Southeast Asian] culture” and “render a special cultural heritage accessible [to the people in Singapore and Southeast Asia at large]” (p. 7). The treasure trove the author is referring to are the classical Chinese poems produced by the poets of Singapore from the late nineteenth century to contemporary time, the history of which he outlines in three main chapters (in addition to an introduction and a conclusion). The first main chapter, “Identity: Whose Nanyang Is it?,” focuses on delineating the poets' identification with Singapore (as opposed to China, especially among the Chinese immigrant poets who lived through the late 1800s to the pre-WWII period, whom the author calls “the first-generation” poets), touching on issues such as “acculturation” and “localization.” The next main chapter, “Community: How to Shape Cultural Space?,” traces the formation of groups, clubs, societies, and organizations of classical Chinese poetry, highlighting the close-knit relationship among poets in Singapore as well as between them and the “visiting literati” from China. The last main chapter, “Medium: What Are the Influences on Classical Poetry?,” contends that three types of media—newspaper, anthology, and the internet—have each played the role of creating a “classical Chinese poetry scene” in Singapore at different historical times. Conceptually, the author attempts to situate his study within “diasporic literature and Sinophone literature,” announcing that he will “set aside the Sino-centric title ‘Overseas Chinese/Chinese-Language Literature’ (*haiwai Huaren/wen wenxue*) and the all-encompassing view of ‘World Literature in Chinese/by Chinese’ (*shijie Huawen/ren wenxue*)” (p. 135). Although this is not the first focused study of classical Chinese poetry in Singapore, it is, as far as I am aware, the first book-length study of

the subject in English, lending the work a substantial significance. Its intended scope and approach, as introduced above, promise a comprehensive and multifaceted analysis of Singapore's cultural and literary history. But what unfolds is a limited narrative flawed by over-generalization/simplification, imprecision, and even mischaracterization and inaccuracy. These problems, I surmise, fundamentally arise from a China-centric point of view, in spite of the fact that the author has claimed otherwise.

Cultural designations such as "Chinese," "Chineseness," and "Chinese culture" are used throughout the book without explanation or contextualization. Consciously or unconsciously, the author assumes that "Chinese culture" is the culture in/of China or of the people in/of China. Based on this assumption, he takes for granted that among first-generation Singaporean poets of classical Chinese poetry, "Chineseness" and "localization" were mutually exclusive or necessarily in conflict (pp. 32, 142, 143). And, in characterizing later generations, he writes, for example, that "the second-generation immigrants who were educated before 1987—the Chinese-educated group—are considered to experience a Chinese cultural gap" and that "the subsequent generations can be said to have only a superficial understanding," opining further that "those who were educated after 1987 have a limited knowledge of Chinese culture, and most of what they do know comes from Chinese textbooks or people around them" (p. 27). As these statements reflect, the author seems to imply that whatever "Chinese culture" later generations of Singaporean Chinese poets inhabit, it is somehow artificial or inauthentic. Through a China-centric lens, he ventures to conclude, "China is an obscure imagined cultural element in the minds of the younger generation of Singapore Chinese," different from their first-generation forebears, and "their love of classical Chinese poetry stems from their ethnic Chinese identity and later Chinese education" (p. 28).

Given its premise of viewing Singapore through China, it is unsurprising that this book puts heavy emphasis on the first-generation poets who migrated to Singapore from Qing China. But even for this group of poets, the author highlights only a handful of individuals, such as the two men who, by his account, single-handedly founded "culture" in Singapore: "under the efforts of the two consuls [sent by the Qing court]—Zuo Binglong and Huang Zunxian—a sizable group of over a thousand intellectuals had emerged in Singapore, and it was no longer a cultural desert" (p. 49). Who were these "over a thousand intellectuals"? What did they do? What were their achievements? Only four of them (Yeh Chi Yun, Shi Ruiyu, Khoo Seok Wan, and Lee Choon Seng), all born in China and designated by the author as "sojourner poets," are given some attention. Even so, their literary achievements are deemed "incomparable" to those of Huang Zunxian, the Qing consul (p. 63). The unspoken criteria for judging literary achievements would seem to be these men's proximity to China and/or the strength of their "traditional Chinese/Confucian education" (p. 42). How their work and perspectives were *enabled* and *shaped* by their being in Singapore and Southeast Asia is dealt with only superficially. As a result, the "locals" in the first-generation context are relegated to catch-all terms, such as "the local Chinese community," the "public," "the business community," or "the Buddhist community" (p. 69), and the "localization" reflected in the poems of this generation is presented merely by pointing out the "local" landscape, language, or subject matters in them (e.g., pp. 28–31). His claims that anthologies of classical Chinese poetry peaked in the 1950s–1980s (p. 125) and that the internet "caused a seismic shift in the transmission of CCPS [i.e., classical Chinese poetry of Singapore]" (p. 130) notwithstanding, the author treats the later generations in perfunctory terms. He largely generalizes and simplifies their literary activities and points of view by listing names and groups or by describing a few landmark events and publications (pp. 29–33, 75–85, 123–29). The limited attention he gives to more recent history reflects his assessment that "the Chinese-language abilities of those educated from the 1980s onward were nowhere near those of their seniors" (p. 79) and his pessimism about "whether the younger generation of Singaporeans will or can compose literary works in Chinese" (p. 146). But even the post-1980 "shrinkage" or "fading" of classical Chinese poetry in Singapore deserves to be proven true and carefully examined. What does "classical Chinese poetry" mean to contemporary Singaporean readers and poets? How does the new wave of migration from mainland China in the last two decades, in addition to migration from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and other Southeast Asian countries, influence the Chinese language environment and literary scene in Singapore? As for the pre-independence periods, one might also ask: how did Singapore's history as a British colony and as a part of the Federation of Malaya and

as part of Malaysia constitute a uniquely multi-lingual, multi-racial, and multi-cultural environment for the evolution of classical Chinese poetry? What role did Peranakan (i.e., Malay-Chinese mixed-race) writers of classical Chinese poetry (mentioned only in passing on p. 49) play in shaping the genre? What about women poets? Considered carefully, these questions could help render the “local,” whether as “scene,” “actor,” or “agent,” visible to the reader. To bring the history of classical Chinese poetry in Singapore into focus, we also need to ask: what is the significance of classical Chinese poetry in the history of Singaporean literature, the history of classical Chinese poetry, and the history of Chinese literature?

As important as it is to understand the tie between Singapore and China, this vantage point itself, let alone a “Chinese equals China” approach, is clearly insufficient for, if not detrimental to, comprehending the complexity and nuances of Singaporean Chinese culture and literature. At the same time, urging Singaporeans to “seize the opportunity provided by the Chinese classical poetry rejuvenation in China to increase poetry exchanges, improve the local creative environment, and thus promote higher poetic standard in their own country” (p. 141) is unlikely to advance this book’s stated purpose of making “a special cultural heritage” (p. 7) accessible to the readers and writers there. Lastly, it must be noted that this book mischaracterizes parts of the history and context of Singapore, two examples of which are given here: (1) the assertion that “the Chinese have been the majority population since Singapore’s founding” is directly contradicted by the statistics provided in the book itself (p. 13), which show the incremental growth of the Chinese population from 1824 to 1871 that began at 31%; (2) the claim that “by 1987, all schools had replaced the Chinese teaching medium with English, signaling the end of Chinese education” (p. 79) is untrue, as I know from my own experience as a humanities major of Chinese history and literature in Singapore from 1988 to 1994 and from the experience of my nieces and nephews in Singapore now, whose primary and secondary school education is still characterized by bilingualism (English and a mother-tongue, i.e., Mandarin Chinese, Malay, or Tamil).

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