Grace V. S. Chin (Ed.), *Translational Politics in Southeast Asian Literatures: Contesting Race, Gender, and Sexuality*. Routledge: Abingdon and New York, 2021. 212 pp. ISBN: 9780367470234.

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In this edited collection, the editor and a significant contributor to the book, Grace Chin, brings in-depth analyses into the discussion of the role of translational politics with regards to imaginary and ideological borders in Southeast Asia. In the introduction, she dives into socio-political accounts in Southeast Asia, a region which she describes as having "remained relatively obscure (despite its wealth of literary offerings) as an area of study in the fields of postcolonial literature, comparative literature, and world literature" (2). Chin outlines the significance of language and translation in the postcolonial politics of identity and representation, emphasising that they can be deployed as a new approach to the reading of Southeast Asian literatures.

An interesting aspect of Chin's edited collection is that the chapters are divided into two important themes: "Translating Across Time" and "Translating Across Culture." The former is discussed in the first half of the book (Chapters 2 to 5) and the latter in the second half (Chapters 6 to 9). Chin meticulously selects these two themes because they represent symbolic sites where identity is being negotiated. As such, they delineate key preoccupations in postcolonial Southeast Asian literatures. Another strength of this book is the range of chapters that is richly diverse in terms of regional coverage, with subsequent discussions expanding the central theme of translational research with case studies from Brunei, Cambodia, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, and the Philippines.

Angelia Poon explores in Chapter 2 the re-imagination of queer desire in the historical past of Malaysia and Singapore, respectively, as depicted in Lydia Kwa's *This Place Called Absence* (2000) and Tan Twan Eng's *The Gift of Rain* (2008). Poon pinpoints that both novels translate the past by representing a same-sex attraction in the first half of the twentieth century, using two Southeast Asian nations that are still reticent about LGBT issues to the present day as the backdrop. Poon argues that, by (re)writing history, the novels position themselves on the global stage as transnational literary texts that attempt to accommodate the modern-day Malaysia, Singapore, and Anglo-American worlds. The selected novels are a fine example of texts that embody national and transnational consciousness.

In Chapter 3, Grace Chin discusses two plays on the Malaysian historical figure Hang Li Po. Both plays attempt to translate "the idea of Malaysia as a nation, and what it means to be Malaysian" (43). Rahmah Bujang's *Putri Li Po* (performed in 1982, published in 1992) and Ann Lee's *Hang Li Poh – Melakan Princess* (performed in 1998, published in 2011) both revise the legend of Hang Li Po, a Chinese princess sent to be wed to Sultan Mansur Shah in the precolonial period. Reading the plays side-by-side, Chin argues that *Putri Li Po* translates the legend to present Malaysia's hegemonic monoculturalism and monolingualism, whereas *Hang Li Poh*, on the other hand, presents Malaysia as a multi-ethnic, multilingual, and multicultural nation. Read alongside each other, the plays are crucial in the analysis of the development of Malaysian identity politics.

Nazry Bahrawi also discusses precolonial literary heritage in Chapter 4, highlighting the depictions of were-tigers in oral folklore as opposed to contemporary novels. The selected folk stories are *Dato' Paroi* and *Dato' Gunung Ledang* from Malaysia as well as *macan gadungan* from East Java; as for the novels, he selects Puteh Ramlee's *Sitora Harimau Jadian* (*Sitora, The Were-Tiger*, 1965, 2012) from Malaysia and Eka Kurniawan's *Lelaki Harimau* (*Man Tiger*, 2014) from Indonesia. Bahrawi suggests that both novels experiment with "cultural translation," in which *Sitora Harimau Jadian* juggles superstition and science, whereas *Lelaki Harimau* juxtaposes feminism and patriarchy, thus showing the evolution of were-tiger narratives in the Malay world across time.

In Chapter 5, Daria Okhvat compares two classic Khmer novels from the colonial period, Nou Hach's *The Faded Flower* (1949, filmed in 1960) and Rim Kin's *Sophat* (1942, filmed in 2014), with two postcolonial films, Norodom Sihanouk's *Apsara* (1966) and Chhay Bora's *Lost Loves* (2010). She focuses on the evolution of Khmer female images and how modern Khmer literature translates the image of women according to Khmer cultural history, arguing that changes in the images of the ideal Khmer woman are slow in coming, since female characters are still based on centuries-old gender archetypes. As a result, female characters are still depicted as preferring a happy marriage over other achievements.

Moving to the theme of "Translation Across Culture", in Chapter 6 Tom Hoogervorst explores a trend among ethnic Chinese and Eurasian translators in the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia), in which they expropriated Western literatures and transformed them to meet the demands of the target reader in the colony – the *Peranakan* Chinese – by providing less racially-charged translations. The Malay translations of Wilhelm Ritter's *De Dubbele Moord* (1855), Sax Rohmer's *The Mystery of Dr. Fu-Manchu* (1915), and Katherine Porter's *My Chinese Marriage* (1922) are therefore different from the originals. In the translated version, "the Asian was

appreciated rather than underestimated and respected rather than ridiculed" (124). This chapter is important in that it highlights the early practice of cultural diplomacy in translation.

The literary depiction of religions is also included in the category of translating across culture. Kathrina Mohd Daud analyses in Chapter 7 how Islam is represented in Norsiah Gapar's *Pengabdian* (1987) and in Aisha Malik's *Jewel* (2017), with the Syariah Penal Code Order in Brunei as the backdrop. Daud classifies both novels, which highlight cross-cultural conversion, under the category of "global Muslim romance", which has helped shape Brunei's national identity after its independence.

While most chapters in this edited volume focus on the successful cases of translating across time and culture, Chapters 8 and 9, on the contrary, highlight the pitfalls of cross-cultural translation. In Chapter 8, Kelly Yin Nga Tse discusses Jon M. Chu's film adaptation of Kevin Kwan's Singaporean novel *Crazy Rich Asians*, which she describes as an attempt to translate "Asia" into America, but with the consequence of an erasure of Southeast Asia as simply "Asia". More precisely, the film only focuses on a China-dominant conception of Asia devoid of Malays, Indians, and Eurasians. Tse argues that "the film's translational practice is detrimental to the global image of Southeast Asia" (166). In Chapter 9, J. Neil C. Garcia reads two of the earliest "gay" texts in English by Philippine writers: Severino Montano's novel *The Lion and the Faun* (1965) and Rolando Tinio's poem "A Parable" (1964). In a similar vein, his analysis criticises the adoption of Western theories of sexuality in LGBT studies in the Philippines, which fail to capture indigenous notions of "gay" identity.

In a postcolonial setting, with its distinctive identity politics of race, gender, and sexuality, the translation of literary texts, either literally or culturally, is important in the context of cross-cultural encounters. This edited collection is therefore a valuable contribution to the study of Southeast Asian literatures and should be worthwhile for any reader wishing to comprehend the translational politics in the wider socio-political framework of Southeast Asia.