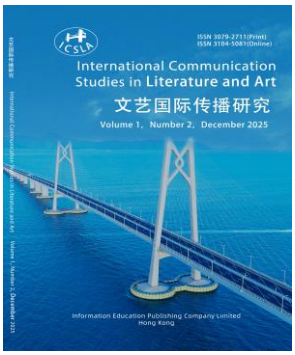

ICSLA

International Communication Studies in Literature and Art

***ICSLA*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 2025, pp.271-283.**

Print ISSN: 3079-2711; Online ISSN: 3104-5081

Journal homepage: https://www.icslajournal.com

DOI: Https://doi.org/10.64058/ICSLA.25.2.10

HIEP
Academic Publishing

Navigation Routes, Mesology, and Lyricism: A Review of Gao Jiaqian's *Maritime Poetry Road: East Asian Routes and Nanyang Mesology*

Huang Jiajun

Abstract: Traditional Chinese literary studies have been anchored in terrestrial perspectives, with maritime dimensions often relegated to the periphery. Gao Jiaqian's *Maritime Poetry Road: East Asian Routes and Nanyang Mesology* employs East Asian shipping lanes and the South China Sea as analytical frameworks, examining transnational poetry and prose by envoys, maritime merchants, and other groups from the Song-Yuan dynasties through the modern era, thereby revealing the dual literary and epistemological attributes of "maritime poetry routes". This work can be understood through three key concepts: first, the "Navigation Routes" perspective transcends land-centered approaches, tracing the evolution of maritime routes across different periods and their corresponding literary transformations. Second, it examines Nanyang's natural characteristics and cultural history through the lens of "Mesology", echoing the New Southern writing movement. Third, "Lyricism" presents the subjective imagination of the Chinese diaspora's transformation from "sojourner melancholy" as temporary migrants to "settled" identity as permanent residents. This work responds to the current flourishing of "New Southern Writing", providing fresh perspectives for understanding its "cosmopolitan" dimensions.

Keywords: *Maritime Poetry Road: East Asian Routes and Nanyang Mesology*; shipping lanes; Nanyang mesology; diaspora lyricism; New Southern Writing

Received: 16 Sep 2025 / Revised: 10 Nov 2025 / Accepted: 16 Nov 2025 / Published online: 30 Nov 2025 / Print published: 30 Dec 2025.

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标题：航道、风土与抒情：评高嘉谦《海国诗路——东亚航道与南洋风土》

摘要：传统中国文学研究以陆地为锚点，海洋常处边缘。高嘉谦《海国诗路》以东亚航道与南海为视域，探讨宋元至近现代使臣、海商等群体的跨境诗文，揭示“海上诗路”的文学与知识双重属性。该著作可以从三个关键词出发去理解：一是以“航道”视角突破陆地中心，梳理各时期航道演变及文学转型；二是以“风土学”观照南洋的自然特质与文化历史，呼应新南方写作；三是凭“抒情”呈现离散华人从“客愁”侨民到“定居”邦民的主体性想象。该著作回应了当下如火如荼的“新南方写作”，为理解其“世界性”提供新视角。

关键词：《海国诗路》；航道；南洋风土；离散抒情；新南方写作

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In the current field of Sinophone literary studies, Gao Jiaqian occupies a distinctive critical position. As a Malaysian Chinese scholar who now resides in Taiwan, his mobile identity and positionality have shaped a uniquely situated critical perspective. From his early research on martial arts fiction, to subsequent studies on early Yue-ou (粤讴) in the Nanyang region, classical Chinese poetry, and contemporary Mahua literature—spanning both ancient and modern periods, inward and outward contexts—Gao's scholarship covers an expansive portion of Sinophone literary territory, while maintaining what can be recognized as a distinctly "Gao Jiaqian" vantage point. His importance to Mahua literary criticism is already widely acknowledged: the independent compilation and publication of his critical writings in *The Complete Works of Mahua Literary Criticism* edited by Zhong Yiwen and Chen Dawei sufficiently illustrates this recognition.

It is also notable that Gao studied under David Wang(王德威) and Huang Jinshu(黄锦树)—the former a leading figure in overseas Chinese literary scholarship, and the latter one of the most significant Malaysian writers and critics since the 1990s. Gao has unquestionably benefited from and been influenced by both. Following his 2016 monograph *Remnants, Frontiers, and Modernity: Southern Chinese Poetry's Diaspora and Lyricism (1895–1945)*, Gao published his most recent work in 2024: *Maritime Poetry Road: East Asian Routes and Nanyang Mesology.*

Maritime Poetry Road takes East Asian navigation routes and the South China Sea as its primary analytical horizon. It examines transnational poetry and prose produced by envoys, maritime merchants, literati, and migrants from the Song-Yuan period through the modern era—especially from the eighteenth century onward—analyzing how these texts encode Sino-foreign encounters, geopolitical tensions, colonial expansion, and wartime memory. The book reveals the dual literary and epistemological nature of maritime poetry routes, while its three major sections — "Island Perspectives" "South Sea Poetry Routes" and "South

of the Flames"—interweave discussions of technological knowledge, the politics of sound, the construction of local sensibilities, and the transmission of Chinese education overseas. It ultimately demonstrates a process in which Chinese literature engages in "worlding"—where China moves toward the world while the world likewise moves toward China.

Compared with previous studies of Nanyang Chinese literature that either prioritize a China-centered viewpoint or focus on Malaysia, Singapore, or Indonesia as fixed frames of reference, this work—traveling along sea routes—foregrounds greater mobility and even fluidity. Drawing on the three principal keywords Navigation Routes, Mesology, and Lyricism, the following discussion asks: How does Gao Jiaqian reinterpret Chinese poetry produced along maritime routes? How does a sea-based perspective re-narrate the literary formation of the Nanyang? In what ways does Nanyang Mesology become a distinctive marker of the literary Nanyang? How does the work respond to the current flourishing of New Southern Writing? And how do diasporic Chinese connect local mesological conditions with historical experiences to construct unique lyric subjectivities?

1. Navigation Routes: A Mobile Perspective for Overseas Chinese Literature

Looking back at the traditional horizon of Chinese literary studies, the "land" has always served as the anchor—the center of perspective. Since *the Book of Songs*(《诗经》), literary narratives have largely unfolded around the Central Plains and inland landscapes, while the ocean has often been relegated to a symbol of the "periphery" or the "foreign," or merely treated as a backdrop for sea-crossing journeys. In Maritime Poetry Road, however, Gao Jiaqian reorients the ocean from the margins to the center by taking East Asian navigation routes and the South China Sea as the fundamental spatial coordinates, thereby re-narrating the early trajectories of Chinese literature's worlding.

In this book, "Navigation Routes" are far more than a geographical notion. They represent routes of literary, cultural, and historical mobility. Indeed, throughout the maritime writings of East Asian Sinitic poetry, the journeys of envoys, merchants, intellectuals, and monks circulating between China, Japan, Ryukyu, and Korea had already made the sea routes a crucial site of literary production. From Wuhu Gate in Fujian to Naha Port in the Ryukyus, from the South China Sea archipelagos to the Strait of Malacca, Gao incisively traces how the evolution of maritime routes is intertwined with shifts in literary practice.

The Song–Yuan period marked a critical turning point in China's maritime knowledge. During this time, the state encouraged private overseas trade, and navigators began to articulate increasingly precise distinctions between "sea" (hai) and "ocean" (yang). In the Song dynasty, maritime regions were classified by direction into the "Southern Ocean" (Nanyang) and "Northern Ocean" (Beiyang); in the Yuan dynasty, within the South China Sea, a further distinction emerged between the "Eastern Ocean" and the "Western Ocean"—"the former referring to continental routes, the latter to island routes" (p. 6). Texts such as *Island Barbarian Gazetteer* (《岛夷志略》) and *A Record of Cambodia* (《真腊风土记》) recorded sea routes and local products, already demonstrating an incipient "maritime vision".

Gao Jiaqian argues that such "navigation-route cognition" directly shaped literary expression. Unlike the largely imaginative representations of the sea in Han–Tang poetry, the works of Song–Yuan maritime merchants and literati began to incorporate concrete seafaring experiences. Even collections such as the Yuan-dynasty *Ode on the Whale's Back* (《鲸背吟》)—thirty-three quatrains composed during a maritime voyage—though not intended as systematic manuals of oceanic knowledge, nonetheless transformed the "ocean" from an abstract poetic image into a sensory and experiential itinerary, documenting the passage of grain-transport ships at sea. Meanwhile, literati of the same period began to record coordinates such as the "Seven-Islands Ocean" and the Strait of Malacca, and to observe climatic phenomena like the southwest monsoon and northeast monsoon, granting the "ocean" in literature, for the first time, tangible, embodied geographical coordinates.

Entering the Ming–Qing period, understandings of Navigation Routes further expanded, and literary representations of maritime pathways diversified into multiple perspectives. A striking example is *the Selden Map* (《塞尔登地图》, 1617–1644), also known as *The Ming-Dynasty Navigation Map of the Eastern and Western Oceans* (《明代东西洋航海图》). Centered on Quanzhou and covering the maritime regions from East Asia to Southeast Asia, the map breaks away from a land-based Sinocentric worldview and instead renders the ocean through sea routes as its central organizing logic. As Gao Jiaqian observes, this map "breaks free from the imperial framework and reveals the freedom of maritime navigation and trade among non-state actors" (p. 18). Such "navigation-route thinking" also shaped contemporary poetic and prose creation.

Members of Zheng He(郑和)'s maritime expeditions, such as Ma Huan(马欢) and Fei Xin(费信), recorded their journeys in works like *Overall Survey of the Ocean's Shores* (《瀛涯胜览》) and *Overall Survey of the Star Raft* (《星槎胜览》), using poetry to document their travels. Therein, five-character ancient-style verses describe sights along the routes—envoys from Melaka, the fengtu of Java—making poetry an early medium for inscribing maritime experience along the Navigation Routes.

During the Qing dynasty, Xu Baoguang(徐葆光) served as a surveying officer on a mission to confer investiture upon the Ryukyu Kingdom. His poems and his Record of *Transmission from Zhongshan* (《中山传信录》, 1721) form an intertextual pair: the former contains verses such as "At noon we encountered the summer solstice and returned; the imperial vessel, divinely protected, departed from the southern station" ("午日初逢夏至回，皇轮神护出南台")and "At Taiping Harbor the investiture ship lay anchored, its reflection floating alongside the star-tower," integrating precise observations of "compass bearings, nautical distances, and islands."("太平港口驻封舟，倒影星塔共浮")The latter records detailed sailing instructions and geographical measurements. Together, they fundamentally transformed traditional Chinese poetic imagination of the ocean: maritime poetry came to embody both lyric expression and rigorous geographic knowledge, replacing purely sentimental oceanic imagery with embodied, empirical navigation.

At the same time, the maritime writings of non-official groups further enriched the oceanic dimension of Ming–Qing literature. Ryukyuan students dispatched by the court to study in China crossed the sea to Fuzhou alongside tribute missions, and their writings were later compiled into Ryukyu Poetic Affinities (《琉球诗

缘》, 1844). Many poems in this collection titled Songs on Watching the Tides at Sea (《海上观潮歌》) present perspectives distinct from those of investiture missions.

Ruan Xuanshao(阮宣韶)'s depictions of turbulent waters—"The east wind roars in fury, adding force to the waves, as though in one night it might roll up the vast deep" ("东风号怒助声势，一夕欲捲沧溟乾") and "Our light boat, but one leaf, follows the rushing torrent" ("轻舟一叶随奔湍")—record the perilous immediacy of sea crossing. Meanwhile, Zheng Xuekai(郑学楷) imagines tribute journeys in lines such as "No longer are there raging waves or charging whales; the sky's radiance and the sea's mirror shine with gentle ripples" ("奔鲸骇浪不复有，天光海镜清涟漪"), combining personal seafaring impressions with the Qing empire's civilizational belief in a pacified, wave-less sea (hai bu yangbo).

Together, these writings supplement imperial perspectives with lived maritime experience, demonstrating that by the Ming–Qing period, navigation routes were no longer merely diplomatic corridors but dynamic cultural spaces in which diverse groups engaged in literary dialogue and transregional exchange.

Although the dream of the "Celestial Empire" would not fully collapse until 1840, in the early Qing period some "coastal-defense geographers already observed the invasion and enslavement of Southeast Asian polities, and some had acutely sensed the impending danger of Western colonial aggression, calling for strengthened maritime defense" (Ma Shuhua 马树华 & Qu Jinliang 曲金良 2012, p.125). Yet such warnings were dismissed as exaggerations about threats beyond the imperial frontier, ultimately contributing to the Qing's turn toward a closed-door policy.

Thus, from the nineteenth century onward, as "sea routes" entered the steamship era and colonial expansion drastically reconfigured geopolitical space, the literary radius of mobility simultaneously widened. From the British India Steam Navigation Company's regular line linking "Britain—Calcutta—Penang—Singapore—Hong Kong" to later transoceanic routes established by France and Japan, these colonial itineraries constituted imperial maritime networks and catalyzed new literary forms.

During his diplomatic mission to Japan, the late-Qing envoy Huang Zunxian (黄遵宪) composed Liuqiu ge (《流求歌》 Songs of Ryukyu), recording the fall of the Ryukyu Kingdom. Lines such as "White-haired old ministers lean against walls in tears, hairpins loosened, garments dyed in sorrowful green (白头老臣倚墙哭，颓髻斜簪衣惨绿)" and "Too distant the northern Pole Star, the heavens will not open; though the Eastern Sea runs dry, the kingdom cannot be restored (北辰太远天不开，东海虽枯国难复)" lament the collapse of maritime defenses and serve as literary testimony to shifting geopolitics.

By contrast, the Meiji-period Sinophone poet Mori Kainan (森槐南), accompanying Itō Hirobumi (伊藤博文) on his 1887 tour of Okinawa (formerly the Ryukyu Kingdom), articulated an imperial vision. In verses such as "Washing feet in the mighty waves of the Eastern Seas, one need not boast as Yuanlong once did (濯足东瀛万里涛，元龙意气未须豪)" and "Ryukyu so near I sing in triumph—this event seems dreamlike in its passing (中山咫尺讴歌壮，此事翻疑梦寐过)," he refigures the Ryukyu maritime sphere as a symbol of Japan's territorial expansion; his phrasing "to destroy and annex this vassal to imperial Japan (破是附庸皇日本)" stands in sharp contrast to Huang's mourning.

In addition, the overseas community leader Zhang Yunan (张煜南) compiled Haiguo gong jilü (《海国公辑录》 Collected Records of Sea-bound Public Affairs), weaving together diplomatic travel poetry and Penang exile poetry to map an oceanic poetic route—further transforming the "sea route" into a connective space for transnational literary communities.

From the formation of maritime knowledge in the Song–Yuan period to the reconstruction of colonial sea routes in the modern era, each expansion of Navigation Routes profoundly reshaped literary narrative and imaginative horizons. Gao Jiaqian's Maritime Poetry Road (《海国诗路》) creatively adopts "Navigation Routes" as both analytical perspective and methodological lens, re-entering the field of Sinophone poetry in the Nanyang since the eighteenth century. In this work, Gao does not treat maritime routes merely as physical channels of transportation; rather, he conceptualizes them as dynamic structures of humanistic and epistemic flow.Within the intersections of maritime experience, geopolitical realities, and cross-regional cultural exchange, poetry, observational writing, lyric expression, and cartographic documentation intertwine, linking imperial visions with local sensibilities. In this way, Navigation Routes become a crucial entry point for understanding how the literary imagination shapes the spaces of East Asia and the South China Sea. The work reveals the triple formation of affective structure, mesological experience, and poetic expression, offering a lens through which to observe the worlding of the Chinese poetic tradition in maritime spaces over time.

2. Mesology: New Southern Writing and Memories of the "South of the South"

"Mesology" constitutes another core concept in Maritime Poetry Road, Gao Jiaqian does not reduce it to mere depictions of local scenery; rather, he draws on David Wang's notion of "Sinophone" (华夷风) and Tetsurō Watsuji (和辻哲郎)'s theoretical framework of Mesology and human existence (风土人间学):

The "wind" that propelled maritime journeys in antiquity functions not only as the physical movement of air in the natural environment, but also as a cultural force encompassing currents, trends, directions, and the broader mesological conditions. This follows David Wang's discussion of "wind" (风), inspiring reflections on the push and pull of maritime travel. The cultural interactions and social developments among maritime states and archipelagos, and the resulting configurations of human–mesology relations, create a mutually entangled and motivating field, which can be understood as a relational network of wind.Within this field, the interweaving of humans with the sea and terrestrial environment generates emotional resonance and inscribes knowledge traces, resonating with Tetsurō Watsuji's humanistic insight that one discovers the self in Mesology. Only humans, he argues, can embody the totality of worldly existence. The maritime "wind", in its concreteness, subtly indicates the entangled cultural, social, and historical networks. It thus carries a topos-oriented dimension, highlighting the dynamic "emotion-realm" that emerges when humans are embedded in mesological spaces (p. 20).

Here, Mesology encompasses not only tangible natural features such as tropical monsoons, climate patterns, and Nanyang local products, but also the historical imprints arising from the encounter between Sino-foreign

cultures and the influence of colonial regimes. These constitute the two analytical dimensions through which Gao Jiaqian approaches the study of Nanyang Mesology.

The first dimension concerns the shaping of literature by the natural environment of the Nanyang. Gao Jiaqian argues that the region's tropical climate and marine ecology directly influenced the imagery and affective tone of poetry and prose. The book provides several examples: Wang Dahai (王大海) records in *Hai Dao Yizhi* (《海岛逸志》) that in Java "summer and autumn storms destroyed both people and ships" ("夏秋飓风，人船俱没"); Singaporean physician Xie Songpeng (谢颂彭), in *Nanyang Shiwenshi* (《南洋湿温病》), notes that "residents of the southern islands favor cold-water baths and have a particular taste for coffee and chili" ("南岛居民好冷水浴，性嗜咖啡辣椒"). Such mesological habits were subsequently inscribed in Yue-ou (粤讴) and bamboo-branch poems (竹枝词), forming cultural and lifestyle traces of the Chinese diaspora.

Huang Zunxian (黄遵宪) in his *Miscellaneous Poems from Singapore* (《新加坡杂诗》) vividly depicts tropical products: "Abandoning shadows, red beans, dangerously leaning bananas" ("舍影红豆，险覆蕉", poem 10) and "Red-ripe peach-flower rice, yellow-sealed coconut wine" ("红熟桃花饭，黄封椰酒浆", poem 9), embedding region-specific plants and foods such as red beans, bananas, durians, and betel nuts into the Sinitic poetic universe. For the first time, the tropical natural mesology of the Nanyang is clearly reflected in Chinese poetry. Likewise, Zuo Binglong (左秉隆), in *Xili* (《息力》), writes that "Wild bamboo remains green in winter; secluded flowers are more fragrant at night" ("野竹冬仍翠，幽花夜更香"), employing the perennial greenery of Singapore to subvert the traditional autumn–winter imagery of withered vegetation, highlighting how the tropical climate influenced poetic selection of natural motifs.

It is noteworthy that Gao links bodily experience with Mesology, arguing that the natural environment also shaped distinctive Nanyang corporeal sensations. Ming–Qing physicians observed that the southern region's damp lowlands tended to cause "sha illness" (sha zheng) and skin eruptions (guang chuang), which later became metaphors for the homesickness of literati arriving from the north. Huang Zunxian's *Illness Poems* (《疴诗》) subtly encode this connection between natural mesology and bodily experience: in one line, "Instruct the monkeys to pick away, thirsty for tea and wine my throat dries" ("分付猿攀摘去，渴茶渴酒正枯喉", poem 4), he depicts local labor practices of driving monkeys to harvest coconuts, reflecting the unique work imposed by tropical ecology, while simultaneously alluding to his own affliction with pulmonary and skin ailments due to the damp, tropical climate.

The second dimension concerns the collision of Sino-foreign cultures and the historical writing of the Chinese diaspora in the Nanyang. In the "contact zones" along the Strait of Malacca, such as Batavia and Penang, interactions between Chinese, Malay, Dutch, and British communities created a culturally hybridized Nanyang. Wang Dahai (王大海) in *Hai Dao Yizhi* (《海岛逸志》) records that "the Chinese in Penang spoke a mixture of Mandarin, Malay, and Dutch" ("吧城唐人汉语夹马来语、荷兰语") and describes "legal disputes arising from intermarriage between Chinese and local populations" ("唐番通婚引发的法律纠纷"). Huang Zunxian (黄遵宪), in his *Fan Ke Pian* (《番客篇》), focuses on weddings of locally born Chinese, depicting scenes such as "White people brought baskets of flowers in hand" ("白人挈姗来，手揣

花盈筐”), “the native shamans came, half-naked leading the sheep” (“蚩蚩巫来由，肉袒牵羊”), and “all instruments played, inviting guests into the hall” (“诸乐作，引客来登堂”), vividly portraying the coexistence and interaction of Europeans, indigenous Malay groups, and Cantonese Chinese. These instances of Sino-foreign cultural fusion disrupted the traditional narrative of “Chinese superiority and foreign inferiority” (Hua zun yi bei), revealing the subtle transformations of Sino-foreign relations in the modern period.

At the same time, Zuo Binglong (左秉隆), founder of the Huixian Society (会贤社), promoted intellectual exchanges between Chinese and local communities through institutionalized forms, such as collecting essays by local literati for monthly thematic sessions (“每月课题，征集当地士人文章”, p.214). Later, Straits Chinese in Singapore and Malaya composed bamboo-branch poems within various associations, using Cantonese vernacular to describe marketplaces and labor in rubber plantations, combining dialectal mesology with the lived experiences of migrants. In this way, mesological writing became a form of historical testimony.

During the Second World War, the writing of mesology acquired the additional dimension of war memory. After the outbreak of the Pacific War in 1941, Japanese southward expansion occupied Penang and Singapore (renamed Syonan), turning the Strait of Malacca into a “corridor of fire”. The representation of mesology was no longer peaceful or quotidian, but bloody and traumatic: following the martyrdom of teachers and students at Penang Ling Zhong School, Chinese-language educator Guan Zhenmin (管震民) recorded in verse “Ashes cover the ground; corpses are hard to find” (“劫灰满地”， “尸骨难寻”). From this point onward, mesological writing became intertwined with the survival of Chinese-language education and cultural resistance.

From the perspective of mesology, Gao Jiaqian’s *Maritime Poetry Road* can be understood as a response to the recently prominent concept of “New Southern Writing”. The term was first proposed by Chen Peihao (陈培浩) in his study of Chen Chongzheng’s (陈崇正) novels, aiming to uncover the literary world south of the Yangtze River as recognized in traditional “Southern writing” (Chen 2020, p.1). Following the introduction of the concept, many scholars and writers participated in the discussion through articles published in journals such as Nanfang Wentan (《南方文坛》) and Guangzhou Literature and Art (《广州文艺》).

In 2021, Professor Yang Qingxiang (杨庆祥) published the influential article “New Southern Writing: Subjectivity, Territory, and the Sovereignty of Chinese-Language Writing” (《新南方写作：主体、版图与汉语书写的主权》), which established the research focus, scope, and academic significance of contemporary New Southern Writing, generating widespread attention in the field. At the outset of the article, Yang also highly praises the Malayan Chinese writer Huang Jinshu (黄锦树), acknowledging his critical role in the “discovery of the South”: Huang, he notes, “approaches Lu Xun infinitely closely, and also approaches the core codes of modern literary culture infinitely” (Yang 2021, p.49). This high evaluation of Huang Jinshu reflects the growing scholarly attention to the South, particularly within the context of Malayan Chinese literature.

Many scholars have since begun to reconceive and reimagine the "South", reassessing its aesthetic and cultural values, among them David Wang of Harvard University. In his 2023 article "Written in the South of the South: Tides, Plates, Corridors, and Mesology" (《写在南方之南：潮汐、板块、走廊、风土》), Wang not only introduces cutting-edge overseas theories of tidal dynamics and archipelagos, but also incorporates the concept of tectonic plate movement, the corridor perspective that breaks traditional regional boundaries, and mesology (风土学) understood as the "structural moment"（结构性时刻） in which humans are situated between heaven and earth. These frameworks guide readers to re-examine the geographic and literary wonders of the southern frontiers.

As a disciple of David Wang, Gao Jiaqian's *Maritime Poetry Road* clearly reflects his mentor's influence. This is evident both in Gao's emphasis on mesology and in his innovative Navigation Routes perspective, which corresponds to Wang's corridor concept. As a concrete response to New Southern Writing, Maritime Poetry Road situates its objects of study in the "South of the South", namely the Nanyang world where Gao was born and raised, thus largely compensating for the current scholarly limitations in exploring the "South of the South—of the South."

Furthermore, Gao's meticulous investigation of Nanyang mesology provides historical depth for New Southern Writing: the diversity, mobility, and marginality emphasized in contemporary Southern writing were already nascent in Nanyang poetry and prose a century ago. The Chinese diaspora figures presented in the book leave a set of poetic images that carry significance for the cultural history of Nanyang customs and the history of Chinese migration, enriching the canon of Central Plains Chinese poetry of the period. Importantly, as Yasuo Tomioka (汤浅泰雄) observes, "If nature constitutes the shared foundation of all human cultures, then these cultures should relate not only diachronically, but also synchronically across space" (Tomioka 1981, p.119).

In Gao Jiaqian's work, Nanyang is not a marginal extension of Chinese literature; rather, it is a dynamic platform for dialogue between Chinese literature and the world. The southern dimension of Chinese literature has never been limited to the terrestrial South; it extends to the maritime South and even to the more distant "South of the South". In other words, these overseas Chinese poems may be seen as the earliest conceptual and formal expressions of Overseas Sinophone Literature, rooted in a transnational migratory context, forming a historical trajectory that cannot be overlooked when writing and understanding Chinese-language literature across regions.

3. Lyricism: The Formation of Chinese Subjectivity in a Diasporic Context

If we follow David Der-wei Wang's theory of the "Sinophone (华夷风)"—the resonance between word(文) and winds(风)—or Watsuji Tetsurō's mesological vision that "Mesology manifests human existence," then the notion of "lyricism" in The Poetic Routes of the Maritime Realm is far from the traditional idea of solitary sentiment "arising from emotion." Rather, it is a mode of subjectivity produced through the interlacing of maritime Mesology and diasporic Chinese experience. In Gao Jia-qian's writing, "lyricism" is always situated within the historical context of the "maritime realm". Excavating each lyrical trace reveals how "Mesology

forms the substance while emotion provides the function," and further illuminates the dialectic between "self" and "other," "homeland" and "foreign land" as experienced by Chinese moving across regions.

In fact, lyricism has long been a central concern of Gao. His earlier work Remnant Subjects, Borderlands, and Modernity: Southern Diaspora and Lyricism in Modern Chinese Poetry (1895–1945) foregrounded this interest. Yet the two works diverge subtly but critically. In *Remnant Subjects, Borderlands, and Modernity, lyricism* emphasizes rupture and resistance: focused on "remnant subjects," it bears the scars of imperial collapse and colonial oppression, its orientation fundamentally conservative—a look back toward the cultural homeland of China. By contrast, the lyricism in *The Poetic Routes of the Maritime Realm* highlights movement and emergence: centered on "sea routes," it stresses cross-regional interaction—such as the emotional resonance between envoys and migrants, or the mutual supplementation of laborers' and literati's experiences. Its core is constructive rather than retrospective—discovering and building a literary Nanyang and diasporic subjectivity through lyric expression.

In the early phase of Chinese arrival in the Nanyang, "guest-sorrow" (客 愁) formed the dominant lyrical mood. It expressed both attachment to the homeland and alienation in foreign lands. Yet, through its encounter with the Nanyang mesology—the lived intertwining of climate, place, and human sensibility—this emotion gradually shifted from a feeling of drifting to a motive force toward rootedness.

This trajectory is best exemplified in the lyricism of Zuo Binglong (左秉隆), the first Qing consul in Singapore. Upon his arrival, his poems overflowed with the solitude of a sojourner— "in this lonely harbor, autumn rains fall again; sitting in the silent yamen, I wound my own spirit." Facing British colonial governance, the customs of Cantonese migrants, and diplomatic difficulties, Zuo assumed the posture of a "guest," lamenting that "there is no public justice in the world, only brute power; tongues wear out and lips dry, all in vain."

Yet this "guest-sorrow" never devolved into passive lamentation. Instead, it generated a sense of responsibility toward the overseas Chinese community. Zuo established charitable schools, organized literary circles, and opened a literary space through *Lat Pau* (《叻报》). His line "Singapore has achievements for a thousand autumns; do not sigh over being a drifting guest" marks a key shift in his diasporic subjectivity. He no longer regarded himself as a temporary envoy, but envisioned Singapore as a site where lasting cultural and civic endeavors might take root. In this sense, lyricism becomes not mournful withdrawal but a form of generative world-making across maritime routes, where the diasporic self emerges in relation to a new mesological ground.

Gao Jiaxian observes that this transformation of guest-sorrow becomes even more nuanced in the works of folk poets. Xiao Yatang (萧雅堂), who lived in British Malaya and Singapore, writes in "With Longing" (有怀): "Even if I return home, I will seem a guest; wherever I go, it is the edge of the world." This line lays bare the diasporic condition—the homeland is no longer the homeland of memory, yet the Nanyang has not fully embraced the self either.

Yet Xiao does not remain imprisoned within this dilemma. Instead, he weaves guest-sorrow into a lyrical engagement with the mesology of the Nanyang. In *Sen cun* (森村), he departs from the traditional Chinese

utopia of the Peach Blossom Spring and faces the frontier reality of the South Seas: "The land is thin—what can people do? The family poor—yet children study." What emerges is a recognition of life forged through hardship— "Though this place is no paradise, a village stands here in its quiet solitude."

The significance of this lyricism lies in the diasporic subject's acceptance of the Nanyang mesological ground. When Xiao Yatang begins to record the labor of rubber plantations and the everyday life of Chinatown, it signals that the self has shifted—from a sojourner nostalgic for the homeland to an embedded inhabitant of the South Seas. In this sense, lyricism becomes not an escape into memory, but a mode of root-making within displacement, where emotion, landscape, and lived environment co-produce a new locus of belonging.

When Japan's Southward Advance (Nanjin) brought the flames of war across the Nanyang, lyricism again became a strategy through which the Chinese diaspora confronted trauma. The lyric practice of Guan Zhenmin (管震民), a Chinese-language teacher at Chung Ling High School in Penang, exemplifies this process. After Penang fell in 1942 and the Japanese army launched mass purges, Guan's son, Guan Liangong (管亮工)—a physical-education instructor at Chung Ling and formerly a trainer of anti-Japanese mechanics—was tortured to death. Guan Zhenmin wrote, "His collar torn by the prison hounds, cruel wires rending flesh without mercy" ("领子偏遭狱犬伤，无情螺线肆摧戕"), each character saturated with paternal grief.

Yet he does not remain confined to personal sorrow; instead, he transforms his pain into collective mourning for the teachers and students of Chung Ling High School who perished. In his *Memorial Prose for the Martyred Teachers and Students of Chung Ling*(《祭锺灵殉难师生文》), he denounces the Japanese troops as reenacting "the pits and flames of old, cruelty surpassing Qin" ("焚坑重演，毒过嬴秦"), and with the lament "White bones lie exposed in the wild; loyal souls circle their homeland" ("白骨露于野，忠魂绕故园"), he summons the diasporic consciousness to defend the cultural lifeline of Sinophone education.

Gao Jiaxian insightfully observes that Guan's lyricism remains embedded in the mesology of wartime Nanyang: his depiction of "main streets and alleys cut off, people staring in terror at those wrapped in tiger-skin coats" ("通衢小巷断人行，蒙马虎皮众目惊") vividly recalls the Japanese purge in Penang, while the fear that "the name Chung Ling itself became a danger to utter" ("钟灵二字怕人知") speaks to a shared trauma across occupied Chinese communities.

Yet this writing of trauma ultimately galvanizes diasporic subjecthood. When the school was rebuilt after the war, Guan Zhenmin declared, "An eight-foot monument stands proudly in the hall, names carved in stone and engraved in gold for eternity" ("丰碑八尺立堂楹，石镂金贞勒姓名"), transforming individual grief into collective memorial. The power of such lyricism lies in its recognition that suffering is not isolated: to protect Sinophone education is to safeguard the cultural roots of the entire Chinese diaspora.

After World War II, the newly independent mesology of Malaya introduced another stage in diasporic lyricism—one of identity reconstruction. Rather than clinging to a binary between "homeland" and "foreign land," Chinese migrants began negotiating a selfhood shaped by multiethnic coexistence, transforming from Tang-people sojourners to citizens of a new polity and completing a diasporic cycle of belonging. Gao Jiaxian's reading of Guan Zhenmin's late poetry vividly illustrates this shift.

Before the Federation of Malaya gained independence in 1957, Guan's verse still carried the uncertainty of "Where lies a Peach Blossom Spring to escape Qin's tyranny?" ("桃源何处避秦人"), expressing a longing for refuge amid instability. Yet after independence, he wrote, "Sojourners now are citizens; Malays and Chinese live as brothers" ("侨民今已列公民，马巫相处如兄弟"), reorienting his identity from Tang sojourner toward Malayan citizen. When the government promoted the national language movement, he responded supportively—"The movement thrives in National Language Week; wise governance leads the new nation" ("运动风行国语周，新邦善政占先筹")—and even appealed for solidarity: "Under one sky we are brothers; Chinese, Malay, British, Indian, let us cherish each other" ("四海一家兄弟似，华巫英印互相亲").

This transformation was not a passive "compromise," but a deliberate embrace of the Nanyang mesology. Having lived in Penang for nearly thirty years, Guan had long regarded its tropical textures—"yards filled with coconut and plantain, areca palms encircling the house" ("椰蕉满院、槟榔绕屋")—as the everyday fabric of life. In "Self-Consolation While Residing at Home" (屋居自遣), he writes, "I love my humble dwelling, another heaven of its own; vine bed and bamboo chair bring delight" ("吾爱吾庐别有天，藤床竹椅亦怡然"), treating a rented house not as a transient inn but as a settled home. Even during renovations he reflected, "Long residence makes one forget being a guest; this Peach Blossom Spring is but a temporary refuge from Qin" ("久住浑忘身是客，桃源暂作避秦人"). Here, the Peach Blossom Spring no longer signifies a nostalgic projection of the homeland, but the new soil of Malaya itself.

As Gao notes, the significance of this lyricism lies in showing that diasporic subjectivity need not remain forever "suspended." Rather, through sustained engagement with the new mesology, it "ultimately settles in a lyrical return, bearing witness to a reorientation of national identification and the self's emplacement" (p. 312). In his later years, Guan Zhenmin's subjecthood completes its metamorphosis—from a homeland-yearning sojourner to a rooted citizen of the Nanyang—and the plural mesology of post-independence Malaya becomes the ultimate ground for this identity.

Conclusion: Worlding Chinese Literature

In the context of "New Southern Writing", *Maritime Poetic Road* opens up a "maritime China" horizon for reading Chinese literature. Here, "maritime poetic routes" are not merely a literary lineage; they operate as a knowledge network, carrying multiple layers of oceanic geography, Sino–foreign encounters, and colonial histories. Through the three analytical threads of routes, mesology, and lyricism, the book reveals the worlding dimension of Chinese literature. The so-called moment when Chinese literature "went global" did not begin with the late-Qing encounter with Western learning. Rather, beginning in the Song-Yuan era, the seasonal monsoons of the South China Sea had already carved maritime passages that enabled Chinese literature to participate in worlding through natural circulation. In other words, Chinese literature has never been a sealed, self-contained formation; it is a tradition that has continuously moved, transformed, and grown through its entanglements with the world. For readers seeking to understand the deep origins of Chinese literature's worlding impulse—and the early literary cultures of the Nanyang—this book is indispensable.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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