Academy
of Singapore Teachers

**Teacher-Led
Workshops
2020
(Secondary/JC)**

Teaching Asian Poetry in the Literature Classroom

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NIE, HCI, NYGH, BBSS

BE OUR BEST
BUKIT BATOK
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An Institute of
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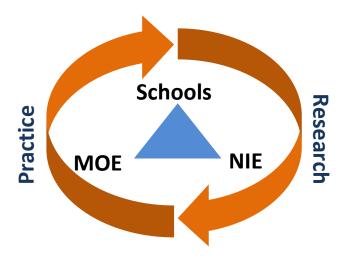TECHNOLOGICAL
UNIVERSITY
SINGAPORE

Context of the Research

This unit was developed from an NIE research project involving NIE researchers, MOE collaborator and teachers from 10 schools.

A Tripartite Partnership to Advance Education Research and Practice

Team

1) NIE researchers

A/P Suzanne Choo, Dr Dennis Yeo , Dr Chua Bee Leng

2) Research Assistants
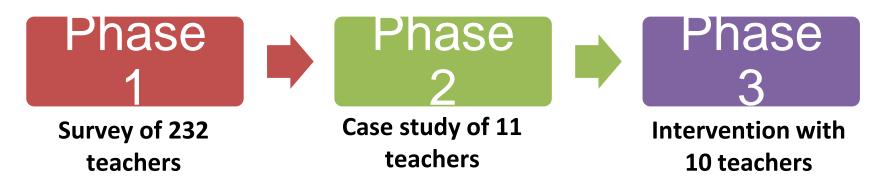
Ms Ismath Beevi & Mr Dominic Nah

3) External collaborator

Ms Meenakshi Palaniappan (Assistant Director, CPDD, MOE)

4) Schools (phases 2 and 3)

11 teachers

Phases of the Project

Phase 1 → **Phase 2** → **Phase 3**

Survey of 232 teachers

Case study of 11 teachers

Intervention with 10 teachers

Phase 3 involved the formation of a **21CC Literature Research Interest Group.** The objectives of this group are:

1. To develop a close network of teachers and researchers who can **collaborate** on research projects to inform innovative approaches to teaching.

2. To explore pedagogical strategies that can facilitate core **21st century competencies** through Literature.

Focus of Phase 3

Phase 3 involved the formation of 3 groups:

1. **Asian poetry** – Development of poetry package to introduce students to Asian poetic forms and to understand issues in Asia through poetry

2. **Drama pedagogy** – Development of strategies to encourage the co-construction of meaning through drama in studying a Singapore play

3. **Identity and Race in Singapore poetry** – Development of a poetry unit to explore issues about identity and race in Singapore

This workshop will focus on the poetry unit developed in group 1

Workshop Objectives and Programme

The workshop will encourage teachers to explore issues arising from Asian poetry, with a focus on Asian poetic forms.

Part	Focus	Activities
1	Disrupting stereotypes of Asia	1. Quiz on knowledge about Asia 2. Initial discussion on Asian poetry in the classroom
2	Asian poetic form 1: The landay	1. Landay and its links to everyday culture 2. Features of the landay 3. *Creative writing activity
3	Asian poetic form 2: Dialogic poetry	1. Analyzing dialogic poems 2. Features of dialogic poems
4	Dialogic poetry collaborative writing	1. Process of student collaboration 2. Highlights of their writing and performance

Part 1. Disrupting stereotypes of Asia

Objective: To sensitize students to diverse communities
and cultures in Asia

48 Countries
Across Western, Southern, Southeastern, Eastern, Central Asia

~2200 languages
When we consider dialects as languages in their own right

24.1 Million
Population of Shanghai (2018): World's most populous city

4,644,565,843

Asia's Population, as of Monday, 3 August 2020
Based on United Nations' Estimates

31,033,131 km²

Land Mass of Asia
(Yes with a lot of that Russian land)
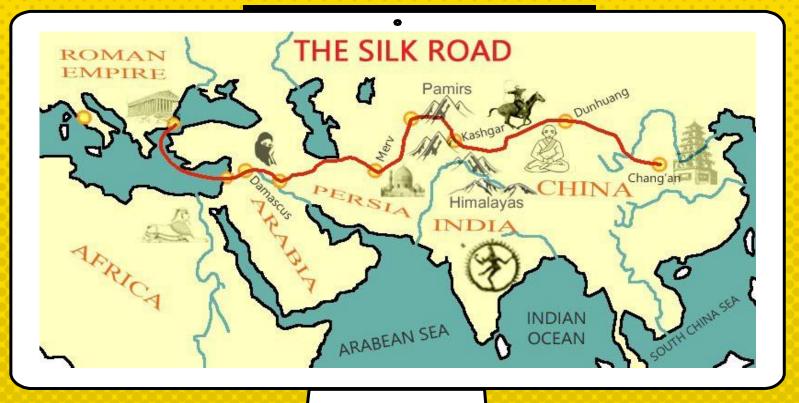> 43,000 Singapores!

2,197

Approximate number of languages in Asia!
(Note: we consider dialects as languages)

Religion

ANCIENT SILK ROAD

21st Century: Belt and Road Initiative

NAMING ASIA

A common theory is that the Greek name ultimately derived from the Phoenician word _asu_, which means **"east"**, and the Akkadian word _asu_ which means **"to go out, to rise."**
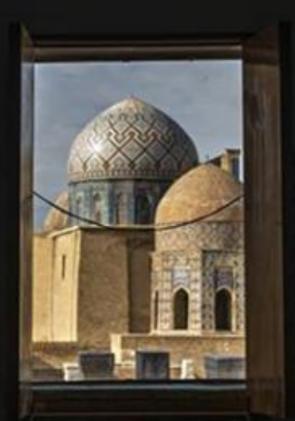
In reference to the sun, Asia would then mean **"the land of the sunrise."**

SOME FORMS OF ASIAN POETRY

Long-standing

Haiku & Tanka (Japanese)
Landay (Afghanistan)
Ghazal (Persian)
Pantun; Syair (Malay)
Empat Perkataan (Malay)
Tanaga (Filipino)
Kural; Udaiyaathathu (Tamil)
Lục bát (Vietnamese)
Yadu (Myanmar)
Sijo (Korean)

Emerging

Twin Cinema; Anima Methodi (Singaporean)
Nucleus Poem (Bangladeshi/Singaporean)

Discussion:

What questions or thoughts do you have about Asian poetry in the Literature classroom?

Part 2. Asian poetic form 1: The landay

Objective: To introduce the origins and features of the landay and provide opportunities for students to explore the form through creative writing

Examine this photograph. Make a list of 3 to 5 things using the routine See-Think-Wonder.

What do landays reveal about the speakers?

1 When sisters sit together, they always praise their brothers.
When brothers sit together, they sell their sisters to others.

2 You'll understand why I wear bangles
When you choose the wrong bed in the dark and mine jangle.

3 Send my greeting to my lover.
If he's a farmer, I'll fart louder.

4 May God destroy your tank and your drone.
You, who've destroyed my village and home.

5 You won't allow me to go to school. I won't become a doctor.
Remember this: One day you will be sick."

6 What have you done to me, God?
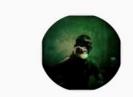Others have blossomed. I stay tight as a bud.

What is a landay?

- a **couplet**, two-line poem (9 and 13 syllables)
- usually on a subject that is **dangerous** or **uncomfortable** for people to talk about — political or personal
- **authored** by Pashtun women in Afghanistan and Pakistan
- circulated **anonymously** through **oral** tradition
- literally means **'a short, poisonous snake'**: (1) poems as weapons to fight against oppression; or, (2) lethal for women discovered reciting them

[**ACTIVITY: 10-15min**]

https://www.instagram.com/everydayasia/

- **Pick** a photo from Instagram, @everydayasia: apply See-Think-Wonder
- **Write** a landay that **expresses** your opinion, feelings, experiences related to this photo or subject, considering the given **context**
- Review and **imitate** the characteristics and form of a landay
- **Share** your landay anonymously on padlet
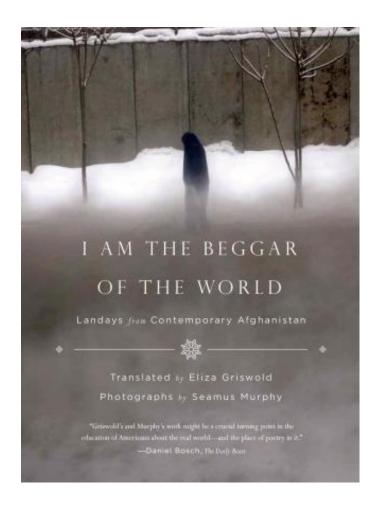
"A poem is a sword," Sheeran Sharif, Mirman Baheer's founder said. (Mirman Baheer is a literary society consisting of women from all over Afghanistan.) Sharif is not a poet but a member of Parliament from the province of Khost.

Literature, she says, **is a more effective battle for women's rights than shouting at political rallies.**

"This is a different kind of struggle."

Key resource:

"I am the beggar of the world": Landays *from* Contemporary Afghanistan

Translated by Eliza Griswold
Photographs by Seamus Murphy

Part 3. Asian poetic form 2: Dialogic poetry

Objective: To introduce dialogic poetry originating from Asia and explore how writers have used the form to express multiple perspectives to issues

Why are Asian works less featured?

- Translated works
- Accuracy of language
- Authenticity of (cultural) experience

Precisely because of tensions…

[ACTIVITY] How do the differences alter the meaning of the text? In particular, how does the form and style shape meaning in the translated versions of this poem?

"ID Card" translated by Salman Hilmy	"ID Card" translated by Denys Johnson-Davies	"ID Card" translated by Salman Masalha and Vivian Eden

Therefore,
Write at the top of page one:
I do not hate people,
I do not assault anyone,
But…if I get hungry,
I eat the flesh of my usurper.
Beware…beware…of my hunger,
And of my anger.
	So!
	    Put it on record at the top of page one:
	    I don't hate people,
	    I trespass on no one's property.
	
	And yet, if I were to become hungry
	    I shall eat the flesh of my usurper.
	    Beware, beware of my hunger
	    And of my anger!
		Therefore,
		Write down on the top of the first page:
		I do not hate people
		And I do not steal from anyone
		But if I starve
		I will eat my oppressor's flesh
		Beware, beware of my starving
		And my rage.

Interpretation

Israeli Minister of Culture Miri Regev

- Darwish as a "Palestinian poet who hoped . . . for the death of the Jewish state, who wanted to **eat the flesh of the 'occupier.'**
- Regev erroneously frames Darwish's opposition to the Israeli occupation as **hatred** of the Jewish state

Julia Schwartz

- Regev omitted from her speech lines in Darwish's distinction between anger and hatred. **"I do not hate people,"** the narrator asserts
- By reading it as hate, Israeli politicians can discredit the voice it gives to **Palestinian anger**, and to deflect attention from the reasons for that anger

Gone Viral

we scramble for masks
to ward off
infections and other
hazards
that we need protection from
if we have come into contact with
anyone coughing or sneezing,
be on your guard.
wash your hands
regularly
and avoid touching
your face. Because
this virus, considering its severity, is
simply
nothing like what we have seen before.

like talismans—
nightmares of
phantoms—masks reveal our fears:
which arise when we believe
our own delusions.
rumours of
fatality cases would naturally alarm us.
but be slow to judge others. instead,
clean of prejudice, you can dwell
upon the importance of hygiene.
on the matter of sensitive topics: save
your time spent worrying, which is worse than
the actual threat. all this paranoia is
as lethal as any other pandemic.
this is not the last we shall see of it.

some warn: "how can we avoid
foreign
disease-ridden
walking pathogens,
with their nauseating habits,
we can hardly quarantine them all."
this disease
has truly gone viral

media sources that paint
visitors and immigrants as
virus-spreaders? xenophobes are
plagues of terror.
they mask their true intentions.
so the danger remains—
of our own ignorance—until we know what
is fear itself.

This poem is a 'twin cinema': the text can be read vertically (down each column), horizontally (across both columns), or hysterically.

https://go.gov.sg/goneviral

The Twin Cinema:

"Poetry of the Duel; Poetry of the Duet"

GO.gov.sg

https://go.gov.sg/goneviral

Characteristics of "Twin Cinema" form

1. Combines **constraint** with **possibility**.
2. Its twin columns can be read **vertically** down as discrete poems,
3. The reader can also derive meaning by crossing the gap **horizontally** for each line.
4. Can be used to **contrast two opposed points of view**, OR
   find a **common bridge** stretching across a seemingly insurmountable gap

Some Qualities of a Dialogic Poem

- **Dual/multiple** personas/voices in conflict/conversation
- Formal qualities of showing **dichotomy/fragmentation**
- **Single** persona addressing an **unseen/unheard interlocutor/counterpart**
- May address empowering and uplifting perspectives

Part 4. Dialogic poetry collaborative writing task

Objective: To provide opportunities for students to engage in research on contemporary issues in Asia and express their research creatively through writing a dialogic poem collaboratively across schools

72 Students, 18 Groups of 4, Flock Online Collaboration

- Students grouped according to preliminary survey on their preferred issues and concerns to explore
- Students used school emails to participate on Flock platform
- Tight deadline of 2-3 weeks
- Teachers set initial synchronised meeting to kickstart collaboration

3 Key Deliverables

1. **Dialogic Poem** (or series of short poems with dialogic characteristics)

2. **Documentation of Research Process**
● **Initial Brainstorming**
● **Observation and Research**
● **Process of Writing and Editing**

3. **Critical Commentary on Dialogic Poem**
● **Overall vision for the poem**
● **Use of any poetic form/s and incorporated characteristics of the dialogic**
● **Use of language and literary devices**

Guidelines for Online Dialogue

To facilitate effective and sensitive discussion, a 1-page PDF handout was created

- Adapted from Out Of Eden Learning Dialogue Toolkit

https://s3.amazonaws.com/outofeden/OOEL+Dialogue+toolkit_printable_Fall+2018.pdf

● **Generative Approaches to Online Dialogue.**

(e.g. "Notice", "Appreciate", "Extend", "Synthetise" etc.)

● **Creative Questions & Sentence Starts.**

(e.g. "Help me understand…", "What I found interesting/intriguing was…" etc.)

● **Practice Hospitality in Discussions.**

(e.g. What is my group mate thinking about or focusing on? Etc.)

● **Have Conversations about the Co-Authoring and Decision-Making Process.**

(e.g. Pick your Creative Battles etc.)

Benefits of Collaborative Writing Activity

Helps students to appreciate the dialogic art of collaborative writing. There are two key benefits:

1.	To provide opportunities for students to research on an issue involving some form of injustice or discrimination and to explore this from multiple and conflicting perspectives;

2.	To provide opportunities for students to collaborate with other students (especially from other schools) and to learn how to negotiate, debate and dialogue to make meaning.

For more information about this project, please visit:
https://nieliterature.wixsite.com/projects

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Credits

- × https://population.un.org/wpp/
- × https://www.worldometers.info/
- × https://www.britannica.com/place/Asia/

Images

- × https://www.chinadailyasia.com/asiaweekly/2014-12/12/content_15202446.html
- × http://www.sloveniatimes.com/belt-and-road-for-international-cooperation
- × https://medium.com/startup-grind/silk-road-was-the-fastest-growing-online-marketplace-ever-be5759ab3332
- × https://saltori.com/articles/what-is-saltori-structured-thinking/is-saltori-religious-or-biased-in-some-way/
- × https://www.lonelyplanet.com/asia
- × https://asiatravel.company/featured/asiana-travel.html