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SOCIOLITERARY APPROACHES TO LITERARY DEVELOPMENT IN ASIA

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1. Purpose

These notes are intended to provide a basis for discussion of interdisciplinary and intercultural study of the development of literatures in Asia especially in order to understand how literature interrelates with development in general and language development in particular. The paper proposes a "socioliterary" approach similar to the sociolinguistic approach in the study of language use. The paper regards literature as communication and accepts wide variation in esthetic evaluation and purpose of [reading and writing] literature.

An adequate understanding of the development of literary systems can only be said to exist when one is able to explain why texts by some writers, wherever and whenever they wrote, are held in high esteem but are not widely read whereas texts by other writers, wherever and whenever they wrote, are held in low esteem or are not noted in literary histories but are or were widely read.

The feeling of timeliness of a broadly socioliterary approach to literatures is shared with Wang Gungwu who advocates to emphasize the time and place of the literature in modern Asia and to study literary actions and writings "as records and documents" (in Wang Gungwu et al. 1981, 3; cf. also Miles, 8).

The unit of description is problematical. For purposes of beginning comparative research study, the politically formed state provides a convenient set of boundaries. This may also have the advantage of placing the discussion of the literary system closer to the world of policy which is normally focused on the affairs of a particular state.

The unit of description is also problematical in many Asian communities in regard to language because of the continuity in use of exogenous languages and because of the variety of developing and other languages often present (cf. Neustupný 1965 on the concept of "developing languages" in relation to societal change). Within the state, literatures have to be studied, for example, in relation to the continuation in use of an exogenous language at the "national level" in relation to the varying fates of own languages; or in relation to the rise in use of one or a few domestic languages as "national" languages and the varying fates of the others.

2.0.0. A developmental perspective in the study of literature

Wang Gungwu identifies a number of common themes in Asian development of literature. He proceeds from (a) the stimulus of aggression from Europe and America to the subsequent (b) willingness, in varying degrees to adapt Western norms and even to employ borrowed forms, techniques, concepts and vocabulary. Writers were, according to him, challenged to remake language to meet new reality under conditions of societal change (op. cit., 2). This situation characterizes an early period of development (cf. Lumbera 1981, 156).

Influence was mediated by conditions determined by systemically motivated individual and societal circumstances in the receiving society. These conditions include alliances between the given society and neighbouring ones, as well as contact within the given society between different traditions (of kind and in time) and different language communities. Modifying factors derive from the specific historical conditions in the overall contact of both societies and within each society (Král and Novák, 18).

2.1.0. Research questions

The objective historical phenomenon of modernization

which has been unfolding since the 19th century necessarily provides the frame of reference for data collection and analysis of the development of modern literatures in Asian communities. In regard to language use alone, the phasing in of new forms of oral and written expression, the rise of new literary language, the rise of new formats of text and genres (newspapers, periodicals etc.), new themes, new contexts for continued practice of existing oral and written modes of expression, the development of modern translation (between languages within the state, between own and exogenous languages; and eventually to bring literatures from periods of time in the past into the present) and the impact of translation on literatures, languages and social practices, pose intriguing problems.

To be worthwhile, a comparative approach to the study of relationships between, e.g., development of the use of language and literature would have to generate and demonstrate substantive and valid regularities of change and formation of characteristics of the system of literature in relation to the rest of society. Literature is seen to change in interactive response to the general situation of society, taken as the environment to the system of literature. Specific thoughts or practices may be in or out of phase between the literary system and other systems of society, but the systems move together. Some specific characteristics in a modernizing society of the system of literature are (1) the saliency of an ideological function of expression and behavior, (2) the responsibility of the individual, (3) the removal or at least suppression of dualities, such as diglossia, and discontinuity in endogenous literary practice.

2.1.1. The ideological function as a feature of developing literatures.

One may hypothesize that early development of modern Asian literatures is clearly characterized by a predominance of an explicit "ideological" (or organizing) function (Král and Novák, 11). This has been convincingly demonstrated in regard to language management (cf. Fishman). For literature, it may have support from, among others, Tham who claims that an

intellectual milieu where political ideology is the all-dominating influence on literary development characterizes the Malaysian literary scene (Tham, 242).

One may claim that authors and readerships at the stage of early development and into the period of maturation of modernity live in a "climate of the times" which foregrounds collective social questions—be it elaborated from individual perspectives. Literary preoccupation with social issues and themes imply narrative and other literary forms that include the reader in this concern, thus, necessitates language and styles that are accessible to an equivalently engaged readership. Language is one of the collective issues and the authors contribute to a pervasively need for norms and standards. At the same time, this developing literary language use enables communication between author and reader. The contemporary literary system in First World countries today by contrast permits individualistically isolationist and technically abstract literature which exercises the intellect with less motivation in socially collective assumption and concerns. It also permits another literature that pampers to mass audiences in the extreme in the business context of "ratings" and "bestsellers."

An ideologically informed literature definitely has support in Farquhar who describes how "children's literature only emerged as a separate subject during the May Fourth period when intellectuals demanded a special literature, as in the West which would give children a new vision of man and society" (Farquhar, 173). This ideologically based demand was accompanied by a changed conception of childhood in Chinese society, pressure for vernacularization of written language, and translation of foreign children's literature (ib., 174). Whether such development is desirable or not, the overtly ideological function diminishes in importance as modern Asian literatures mature. Such a transition is necessary, and inter-relates with social, political and economic change.

2.1.2. The individual writer as a feature of developing literatures.

Literary works in the modern world are individual in creation and dissemination, although not necessarily in their function. In function, they remain exponents of a general literary system. In that system, however, the individuality of the author assumes saliency with modernity. An individual author takes responsibility for the literary product, and in that work, the "I" and an individual perspective are foregrounded. For example, writing about the Malaysian poet Usman Awang, Muhammad Haji Salleh and commenting on the transformation of poetry from a strictly patterned classical form to vers libre, "the society releases its grip over the individual mind and his literary art, [and] the poet is then set free to speak of his personal experiences which was never allowed before" (Salleh, 4).

Simatupang (in ASANAL 1981) contextualizes individuation of creativity and highlights the vastly different functions of [religious] oral performance (whether of memorized text or newly created expression) in pre-modern times and those of [not religious] modern and written literary texts :

Literature according to the old tradition is meant for every member of the society rather than the elite. Its forms are rigidly bound by rules known to the members of the society. Thematically, it is but an artistic restatement of what is commonly shared by the society as a whole. Its didactic purpose is inseparable from its artistic purpose. It is not a means of expressing the individual, hence it is anonymous. In the light of these characteristics, it would not be difficult to explain why modern Indonesian literature, especially its poetry, has abandoned the traditional framework of reference, linguistically as well as thematically.

On the basis of empirical assessment of Southeast Asian literatures, Wang Gungwu documents transition from an earlier stage into a literary system characterized by this "obvious" feature of modern literature. He observes that "the one great social change in Asia that literature documents magnificently is the emergence of the individual writer" (op. cit., 13). Earlier

practice exercised a pressure on the writer to conform, to write anonymously or collectively.

2.1.3. Dualisms in the system of literature.

Interestingly, at a recent discussion (March 1986) between the author and staff of the literature section of the federally authorized language and literature agency in Malaysia (Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka), three principal and contemporary problems of literature, from their point of view, were identified, namely, (a) traditional vs. modern styles in literature and of criteria of evaluation, (b) ethnic vs. national (language) literatures, (c) elite vs. mass literature. These all overlap and interact.

Just as there are dual sectors in the economy, one a "traditional" one and another a "modern" one, there are dualities in a developing literary system. What must be included in the concept of "literature" according to some is excluded by others, there is discontinuity in endorsement of past practices and uncertainties of criteria of evaluation as a result, and there are pressures that arise on the literary system from the dominant social and political classes in the state.

Past literary practices are inevitably reflected in theoretical and creative works, and could be said to predispose, even determine to a degree, present practices. However, there is a difference over developmental time in the degree to which there is consciousness of the past, the measures according to which past practices are positively evaluated, and the extent of conscious formulation of attitudes toward the past, i.e., the beginnings of a modern literary history, continuity of language, style, expression etc..

It can be hypothesized that at the birth of modern literature earlier practices tend to be devalued, even renounced as a whole by the literary elite, and its (continued, yet, disadvantaged) practice intellectually, socially and esthetically isolated. Later, continuity as an aspect of national character is apt to be stressed, thus "tradition" created and used, together with

recognition of the problem of broader intelligibility. When rehabilitation of the Low continuing practice is possible, this is apt to amplify and enrich variability between modern communities.

In early modern society especially, an opposition between High and Low literatures may be particularly salient, especially so in speech communities in which a "classical" language continues in dominant written use, while speech is articulated mainly in a colloquial form of the language (cf. Nepote and Khing on repeated purist reaction to mass fiction in Cambodia.) Other forms of literary duality are in evidence when there is a favored literature in one or several recognized ("standard") languages or even in exogenous (Ngũgĩ would say neo-colonial) language that continues in use, versus use for literary expression of other (e.g., "ethnic minority") languages; or between varieties of "the same" language in regard to sources for lexical enrichment and grammatical modelling (e.g., Sanskritic versus dialectal/colloquial for many Indian languages, or Sanskritic vs. Arabic/Persian for some others). This phase in development normally also implies a centralizing search for a uniquely "national" and therefore uniform standard of excellence. It is indeed a social fact that when there is mass production of what is regarded as stereotyped "pulp" in the opinion of the literary elite, this same pulp is nevertheless read by the masses. For example, books of popular humour sell very well in Singapore but are not recognized as worthwhile literature by the literary establishment, nor commonly by foreign observers, yet they are among the only locally written literary texts that depend on the use and readers' understanding of the local colloquial variety and message forms of English, the so-called "Singlish," for effective communication of content.

In *Asiaweek*, February 2, 1986 [page 46], Prof. Boen S. Oemarjati is quoted to hold that

[In] a developing country as young as Indonesia, 'popular' literature is generally considered by critics to be inferior to 'serious' literature. It is branded as transient literature and

[dismissed] as such... This attitude, however, is questionable: In a developing society does not transiency mark a stage in growth? (For elaboration, see Oemarjati 1981.)

Growth, however, need not be "unilinear." For example, Soetomo (cf also Quinn) documents the relative collapse of an early blossoming of an emerging (early modern) literature in Javanese in Indonesia as a result of the consolidation of development of Bahasa Indonesia. McCoy and Guerrero similarly document the brief blossomings of the *zarzuela* theatre in Ilongo language during the first three decades of this century in the Philippines and the Tagalog literature, respectively, into disappearance or decline. Tagalog may return in the guise of Pilipino, and there may yet be a future for Javanese—but literature in both these languages labor at a disadvantage today despite their endogenously important and developmentally highly motivated blossomings at that earlier time.

Diglossia is normally removed and access to the high forms of expression vastly expanded when the society continues to modernize. For one thing, the typically modern phenomenon of the novel is hardly successfully emulated unless the exclusivity of opposition between High and Low language is removed (cf. Dissanayake 1985). The diglossia of language extends to a diglossia of the literary system; the standardization of a uniform norm of language extends to esthetic judgement of literature as well. With maturation of modernity, variation is increasingly recognized as a positive phenomenon in the system of literature, as elsewhere in society. Other facets of literary dualisms may remain in literary criticism and distribution of roles of literary specialists. Critics and teachers of literature attend mainly to authors in the High sector and the reading public to authors in the Low sector even in societies that have become modern.

3.0. A socioliterary methodological framework.

The study of literature as it is presently commonly exercised is well equipped to formulate insightful observations about the

style of a text (the literary work) in relation to individual critical perceptions of that which is esthetically pleasing, and to offer details about the text's creation and author. Clearly, topics of study such as national literary traditions and the succession of writings within genres, descriptions and analyses of texts in regard to form, motif, theme, symbols, even readability, and of texts to infer author intent, values and biography are all also central in the received study of literature. One need only cursorily inspect for example *A Glossary of Literary Terms* to vastly expand such lists of words that reflect the received concerns the literary study today. Theories of rhetoric and poetics, esthetics and literary criticism define types of texts characterize relationships between their parts, and seek to explain why one text is seen to be better or more pleasing in the perception of the scholar/critic than another.

The methodological matter at hand, however, is what data is comprehensively sought and how analysis is conducted in the study of development and literature. Case studies on a biographical basis of individual authors' contributions to the overall enterprise or on the basis of the one or the other literary work are of course valuable. However, such a stratified sample of one (author and/or work) provides data to learn about the one but not about society other than by chance and by individually limited inference of intuition on the part of the analyst. In order to understand development and literature, however, major attention would have to be given to the economic, legal, sociological (and popular), and political contexts of literatures as societal institutions in which the individual author merely takes her or his place as one among the many.

Perhaps even more important is the methodological need to pay major attention to literature from the point of view of people in general and the processes of their reading and evaluation of texts of fiction (or of any other text, for that matter) in relation to the above quantitatively and qualitatively thoroughly appreciated societal context.

These notes advocate the study of the constituting of literatures in Asian states as institutions of their rapidly changing societies through processes of individual interactions in relation to the literary work. Literature can be processually related to norms. Norms of course are guiding rules of behavior. Correction acts uphold norms. When correction is absent or changes occur in the content of correction, norms may also change. This further involves viewing the literary process as a continuing social system with its principal problems, structures and functions, social positions of roles and statuses of participants, attitudes, and formal organizations, all in relation to other social systems. Attitudes can be seen as propensities to behave in particular ways given particular situations. Principal problems can be elaborated as structures of adaption to and influence on environments, whether harmoniously resolved or most likely reflected in struggle, conflict and protest (cf. Rosengren 1966).

Neustupny has suggested a framework which suggests description and analysis of literature as process. This becomes possible in part through application of the notion of "management", a major component of which is correction (for a most recent presentation of this notion, cf. Jernudd and Neustupny 1986). There is organized management of, and there is the fundamental individual action and reaction to, the written texts. At the level of organized management, for example, a publishing company's personnel encourage a particular writer to produce a novel of a preferred content, edit it in accordance with certain correction rules that enhance the preferred form and content of the novel-in-writing, and decide on and implement a marketing strategy. (Film scripts are now sometimes subject to market testing as well, through presentation to select audiences whose reactions are solicited and made the basis for corrections to optimize the scripted text's appeal to a mass audience of hearer-viewers!)

An individual writer would generate a novel in his/her chosen language varieties (perhaps mixing "standard" language

of narrative with "colloquial" language of representation in writing of dialogue) by applying certain norms of form and content for the novel to his/her own purposes, probably correcting the manuscript by rewriting it many times, nothing and evaluating as inadequate one set of formulations at one stage of its rewrite, another set at another stage. When the manuscript goes to the publishing company's editor, yet other deviations from some norms may be noted by that person and be either positively or negatively evaluated, in the latter case undoubtedly resulting in the rejection of the manuscript or in specific suggestions for correction to the writer/author. This process occurs in an environment which can conveniently be characterized as a multidimensional space of interaction between "components" of "ways" of reading and writing.

Individual noting, evaluation and correction of deviance in written language may be influenced by goals that are typical of the developmental stage in which a particular literary community or system finds itself. Organized management would be likewise determined. For example, uniformation and standardization in spelling and in language use in general are typical of early modern development. These goals start being eroded already at the height of the modern phase when dialectal variations become at least partially permissible again, and "ethnic" and "minority" groups regain a visibility now not necessarily negatively evaluated. A weakening of a uniform normative ideal takes place which allows a tendency to subjectivity. Authors, editors, critics, and cultural administrators and personalities and other people in the literary system act according to these management rule, thus more or less consciously conspiring to construct a "climate of the times" (cf. Østebø). Research ideally connects the individual acts of language production and management that form a literature with the terms that characterize the developing system of literature and through which comparison between systems becomes possible.

2.1. Research questions in a socioliterary approach.

A set of very basic questions about literature can be generated on the basis of sociological and sociolinguistic descriptive practices, each one of which implies a time dimension. For example, the ethnography of communication as formulated by Hymes elaborates on the primitive notion of "ways of speaking", roughly corresponding here to the system of literature. Authors and readers display competencies in the appropriate situations of production and consumption of literary texts through norm application and correction. "Components" of communicative acts such as, e.g., the form and content of the message, the time and place of its delivery or creation, the writer, the channel etc., are related (bundled) through rules that characterize appropriate communicative behavior in specific communicative situations in a given community. These functions can be more or less poetic, esthetic, instrumental etc. (Hymes, 45-65).

Neustupny (e.g., 1982) has successfully applied a list of components similar to Hymes' components of communicative competency to systems of communication such as, e.g., language teaching and language cultivation. This shorter list could also provide a starting point for formulating research questions to support a socioliterary analysis. He distinguishes rules concerning

- (1) switch-on of communicative behaviour
- (2) settings
- (3) participants
- (4) varieties of language
- (5) content
- (6) message form
- (7) channel
- (8) management.

In the following text are offered examples of research questions that can be generated by application of Neustupny's framework, "other things being equal". to processes that constitute the literary system and its features.

(1) Switch-on of communication in the literary system :

Why do authors, dramatists, editors, critics, scholars, among others, write ?

What makes a translator translate a given text ? What translated texts do authors read ?

(2) Setting, i.e., time and place of literary processes :

When (literally, and in what "contexts") do they write ?

When is a distinction important, if made at all, between translated and endogenously created literary texts ?

How often and where do people read ? When do people read ?

What is the relation of reading to other activities ?

(3) Participants :

Who are authors, dramatists, translators, editors, publishers, critics, teachers, scholars, among others ? What do they do precisely ? What associations do they belong to ? How are they trained ?

Who are the most translated authors ?

How many book sellers are there ? Where ? How many people can they (and other distributors) serve ? Who decides on campaigns to sell literature, or to promote reading of literature ?

Who writes criticism ?

Who are the readers ? Who reads what ? To whom do people read ? From whom do people borrow or buy reading matter ? Who are the people who belong to book clubs ?

Who translates what kind of texts (for whose reading, on whose request etc) ? How much do writers read in translation ?

Who reads what ? Why do people read (that which they read) ? How do reading habits get formed ?

How do authors, dramatists, translators, editors, publishers, critics, teachers, scholars, among others, earn a living from literature ? How much from literary activities ? How ?

What publishing companies are there? How do they publish, at what cost, in what quantities? How do copyright, contracts, subsidies, pricing, and regulations work? What importance does international publishing have in a given system?

Where and when are their outlets such as kiosks, libraries, itinerant merchants, etc for literature? What expenses, incomes and regulations characterize the book trade? What government policies govern distribution of books etc.?

Are there book clubs?

Is there a separate sector of marketing and distribution for translated texts?

(4) Varieties of language, incl. genres, style etc. :

In what languages and varieties of language do authors, dramatists, translators, editors, critics, scholars, among others, write?

Must texts from earlier times be rewritten ("translated") into modern style or language variety?

From and into what languages are translations made?

Publishing companies publish in what languages?

Booksellers and other distributors of literary texts sell literature that's written in what languages?

What languages do readers know, like and use?

In what form[s] do authors, dramatists, translators, critics, scholars, among others, write? What genres/styles are recognized?

Is there a translation style? Has it changed over time?

What characterizes criticism?

Do readers require rewrite of older literary texts (e.g., classics)?

(5) Content :

What do authors, dramatists, translators, editors, publishers,

critics, teachers, scholars, among others, write about and work with, respectively?

What problems do authors tackle and what issues do authors explore?

Are some topics favored in translation? How does translated literature change in interpretation, content?

What do books mean to readers? What value do literary texts have for readers?

What do publishers publish? Which are the most translated titles? Do some publishing companies specialize in translated texts?

What literature do book sellers buy and sell? What do different outlets for literary texts typically sell or distribute? What purchases do public libraries and schools make? What authors and which titles are reproduced in school anthologies?

(6) Message form, incl. journals, series and form of books etc. :

What characterizes the form of a novel?

What makes classics?

How do readers distinguish between translated and endogenously original literature?

How are opinions (critical discussion, reviews) communicated?

Are there regular outlets for reviews? What?

Are translated novels normally first serialized in newspapers?

(7) Channels :

How are books and other literary texts distributed commercially?

What other distribution channels are there? Are there kiosks, supermarkets, itinerant merchants, membership libraries, public libraries that distribute literature?

Where do readers get information about books and other texts?

What information is available about books and other texts?

Where?

What motivation is called on in commercial and public advertising to promote texts and reading?

(8) Management :

Is there censorship? Of what? What commercial and public advertising promote books etc and reading? How?

What criticism is written about what kinds of literature?

Which authors' works are included in handbooks of literary history? in schoolbooks? in anthologies? which authors in encyclopedias? What criteria are used to select authors and works for inclusion in handbooks etc.?

How is censorship administered?

What is written about books? What are the opinions about literary texts?

What do people know about literature?

This list makes it obvious that the frameworks are useful as the design check lists from which research inquiry derives its questions. The questions address the components of the literary systems in accordance with Neustupny's classifiers. They can therefore not reflect the researcher's own descriptive and analytical frameworks in a one to one fashion. The questions must to some extent reflect the idiom of the literary system, rather than the analyst's idiom, in order to communicate with respondents and to coincide with requirements of using various sources of documentary information. The concepts and words thus taken for granted must be validated through separate inquiry.

The exemplificatory list above is very much an open ended list, because it takes the place of an observer in compiling data for description of a state of affairs, and a succession of states of affairs. It is a first and simple attempt to make explicit the kind of information that must be gathered in order to begin analysis of the relationship between the developing literary system and a changing society. Yet, questions can be assembled

for more specific research with a focus on, e. g., contact situations and translation.

The questions are meant to give an equal opportunity to all authors' efforts and all readers' choices to be mapped out (cf. Hansson). In my opinion, a history from the readers' point of view provides the more realistic and broad knowledge about appreciation of literature in a community, rather than the literary critics' and other special interest groups' histories. The "received" history of literature is normally written from specialists' point of view. Among these specialists are degree candidates, professors, teachers, critics, librarians, administrators of cultural programs and awards, and the literary elite. As Hansson rightly characterizes them (ib., 149), these persons from a discourse community [and] share at least to a large degree a cultural heritage, have similar educational and informational backgrounds, and judge the literary works by common esthetic and literary criteria.....

This discourse community makes up the literary establishment. The make up and conduct of this literary elite is of course important and must be understood. But literature must be placed in the context of the general readership. The only constraint in defining the boundaries of study should be to include people and behavior connected with the fact that people once considered a book/text worth reading. This broader history of the system of literature also accounts for debate about literature and for changing points of view including of course every man's opinion. It does not start out with assumptions that translated literature is different from endogenously generated literature or of a different value, or that only High literature, such literature as has become the object of literary history and criticism, is worthwhile.

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