

## Unit 3: Exploring Asia through Poetry

**Objective:** To develop and pilot a poetry package introducing students to Asian poetic forms and to understand issues in Asia through poetry



# Objectives

1. To introduce to students a variety of poetry and poets from Asia in English or texts translated into English.
2. To introduce poetic forms emerging from Asia and explore how Asian poets engage with poetic forms to express ideas.
3. To help students recognize that perspectives of texts embedded socio-historical contexts and lived experiences.
4. To provide opportunities for students to experiment with dialogic form to express contradictions in the world.

# Unit Overview

Parts	Focus	Activities
1	Disrupting stereotypes: Introduction to Asia	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Activity on Asian Stereotypes and quiz on Asia.</li><li>2. Poems to complicate understanding of Asia.</li></ol>
2	Intro to Asian poetic forms - Landay and Ghazal	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Introduction to the landay – form and history</li><li>2. Introduction to the Ghazal – form and history</li><li>3. Close reading and analysis of various examples</li></ol>
3	Poetry as resistance in Asia – applying critical Translations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Discuss the nature of identity</li><li>2. Examine and take up ethical invitations in the text</li><li>3. Discuss poetry as resistance</li><li>4. Apply critical translation to texts</li></ol>
4	Dialogic form: Twin Cinema	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Compare two twin cinema forms and derive characteristics of this dialogic form.</li><li>2. Creative writing: Conduct research into the various perspectives involved in a global issue and collaborate with peers to create a dialogic poem</li></ol>

# Highlights of Part 1: What we emphasized at the end

## 48 Countries

Across Western, Southern, Southeastern, Eastern, Central Asia

## ~2200 languages

When we consider dialects as languages in their own right

## ~4.5 billion

Population of Asia

# Highlights of Part 2: Features of the Landay

Who is behind the burqa?

What is she thinking, feeling?

Why does it matter?



Image Source:

<http://www.defenceimagery.mod.uk/fotoweb/fwbin/download.dll/45153802.jpg>

# What is a landay?

- a 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

# Sample classroom activity

- Pick a photo from @everydayasia (Instagram): See-Think-Wonder
- Consider the given context in the caption
- Write a landay that expresses your opinion, feelings, experiences related to this photo or subject, and context
- Review and imitate the characteristics and form of a landay
- Share your landay anonymously



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# Highlights of Part 3 & 4: Dialogue and Resistance

A poem can be considered dialogic when it features:

## Formal Properties:

1. Dual, multiple personas or voices in conflict;
2. Single persona addressing an unseen or unheard interlocutor or counterpart
3. Formal/structural qualities showcasing dichotomy and/or fragmentation

## Thematic Properties:

1. May address existing tensions of inequality, power and privilege
2. May address issues of resistance to ideology, bias and stereotypes
3. May address empowering and uplifting perspectives of difference



## The poetry of the duet

“Some poets choose to traverse the gap between with harmony, crafting poems that read clearly as two independent pieces but also as one poem broken across two sides of the page.”

– Tammy Ho Lai-Ming and Joshua Ip, Introduction, “Twin Cities”

## The poetry of the duel

“Others maintain a distinct counterpoint, where the two columns can only be read individually and not across, focusing on the juxtaposition of parallel images to conjure up conflict and resolution.”

– Tammy Ho Lai-Ming and Joshua Ip, Introduction, “Twin Cities”

# Dialogic possibilities from critical translation pedagogy



The instability of meanings across translations can sensitise students to the following:

1. Focus on word choice and different connotations
2. Consider possible ideological values of translators and how these may affect representation
3. Disrupts Anglocentric approaches to reading Literature

# Guidelines for Text Selection

1. Highlighting voices of different peoples in Asia; including less represented ones
2. Framework of “Encounters of the Familiar VS the Foreign” (consider what is familiar/foreign to your students’ context)
3. Depart from Anglocentric EL syllabus: consider texts in translation / translated texts from Asian languages

## Some texts we used:

- Selection from “I am the beggar of the world”, translated and edited by Eliza Griswold
- **Selection of Ghazals**, e.g. “A Ghazal for England” by Faith Christine Lai; “Ghazal” by Agha Shahid Ali (Kashmir/India/USA)
- **Dialogic poems**: “ID Card” by Mahmoud Darwish (translated); “sungei road thieves market” by Jerome Lim
- **Resistance poems**: “Monk” by Rosman Tuazon (translated); “Sambal” by Afi Noor; “Dragon Girls” by Joyce Chng

## Some sources:

- Anak Sastra
- Asymptote Journal
- Asia Literary Review
- CHA: An Asian Literary Journal
- Cordite Literary Review
- Kitaab
- Mascara Literary Review
- Mekong Review
- Rambutan Literary
- Quarterly Literary Review of Singapore
- SARE: Southeast Asian Review of English
- The Bombay Literary Magazine
- The Electronic Intifada
- The Kindling Journal
- The Shanghai Literary Review
- Words Without Borders