

AN ONLINE CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME ON LITERATURE PEDAGOGY FOR THE TEACHING OF MAHUA LITERATURE IN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

Chinese Language is a subject offered in both Malaysian Primary and Secondary schools. Given that literary appreciation forms a part of the curriculum content, the Chinese textbooks used in schools have incorporated a good selection of localised literature, known as Malaysian Chinese (Mahua) literature. However, feedback from language teachers revealed that there was a lack of reference resources on Mahua literature, causing them to request for more support in this regard (Malaysia Sin Chew Daily, 6 June 2020). Their lack of familiarity with Mahua literature warrants a continuous professional development (CPD) programme. In response, the Chinese Studies Department of University of Malaya and the Writers' Association of the Chinese Medium of Malaysia jointly developed and implemented a 10-week online intervention course for Chinese Language teachers. The observations of the researchers yielded a pedagogical framework of Mahua literature encompassing four aspects, namely, (a) linguistic features; (b) imagery or object representation; (c) "pathos" or the affective aspect; and (d) "logos" or the motive of the text. In brief, this pedagogical framework can be termed as the "Language-Representation-Affect-Motive" (LRAM) framework. It is significant that Chinese Language teachers would view Mahua literature as being more challenging than Chinese literature from the Mainland to teach and prepare lessons for. Nevertheless, the research findings have, to a certain extent, affirmed that the LRAM framework was effective in addressing the felt needs of these teachers. The research also revealed that the LRAM was well-accepted as a feasible pedagogy of literature in assisting both novice and experienced Chinese Language teachers to dive deeper into Mahua literature. The feedback and reflections from the interviewees discussed reflect the participants' opinions concerning the weightage of localised content in Chinese textbooks, as well as the literary value of Mahua literature. All in all, this study applies a socio-ecological approach in examining the LRAM literature pedagogy implemented in an online CPD programme on Mahua literature.

Keywords: Malaysian Chinese literature, Mahua literature, literature pedagogy, online programme, CPD, Chinese subject, Chinese textbooks, Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

The inclusive education policy of the Malaysian government towards Chinese education supports the use of the Chinese language as an instructional language in Chinese vernacular schools at the primary level as well as an optional subject in secondary schools. As with other languages, the aim of the Chinese Language subject includes the four (4) basic language skills, namely, listening, speaking, reading, and writing, as well as language arts skills and other

higher order literacy skills. The content of language textbooks is carefully selected to facilitate students' reading skills, appreciation of literary works, and their understanding of Malaysian culture and society. In this respect, the Chinese textbooks used in schools have incorporated a good selection of localised literature known as Malaysian Chinese (Mahua) literature.

The inclusion of Mahua literature is in line with both the current localisation policy of the Ministry of Education of Malaysia as well as the growing acceptance of Mahua literature across the world. This study examines a 10-week online intervention programme on Mahua literature in response to feedback from Chinese teachers voicing the challenges they face in teaching Mahua literature due to the lack of related reference materials (Sin Chew Daily, 6 June 2020). The design and implementation of this programme was the initiative of the Chinese Studies Department of University of Malaya and the Writers' Association of the Chinese Medium of Malaysia. The number of participants reached 500 pax in Week 4, and the organising committee had to close the programme for further registration. The findings will serve as an important reference for the stakeholders as well as scholars interested in the teaching and learning of Chinese language and culture outside China. In addition, it will also shed insight on the efficacy of the socio-ecological approach in examining the observable literature pedagogy coined as the LRAM framework by the researchers of this study as a result of the online Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programme on Mahua literature organized in the midst of home-bound constraints due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Malaysian Chinese (Mahua) literature has evolved since the 1920s with the emergence of literary publications as spin-offs to the major Chinese newspapers during that era. According to Chou Wenlong (2013, pp. 33-37), these literature spin-off publications included "Nanfeng (South Wind)" (15 July 1925-15 May 1933) by *Sin Kuo Min Daily* (1 October 1919-15 May 1933); "Xingguang (Star Light)" (9 October 1925-31 Mar 1921) by *Lat Pau* (19 Aug 1887-31 Mar 1932); "Xianqu (Frontier)" (December 1925-current) by *Kwong Wah Yit Poh* (20 Dec 1910- current); and so forth.

Yang Songnian (1986, p.2) reported over 300 Chinese literary magazines and printouts in Singapore-Malaya before the Second World War with distinctly "Nanyang" characteristics. "Nanyang" refers to Southeast Asia, in relation to the southern coastal regions of China. Even though pre-World War II Mahua literature was associated with China in many ways, its own subjectivity gradually took shape. A representative work of the era was Zhang Jinyan (14 January 1927, p.15)'s "Nanyang Literature and Art (Nanyang yu Wenyi)":

"Even though I inherited the skin color of my ancestors, my stomach and intestines are now seasoned with turmeric and curry. That's why the 'Nanyang' undertones in me are stronger than the Five Classics of our ancestors. I have consumed way too much coconut juice than the waters subdued by Emperor Yu the Great." (See Note 1)

In 1950, the British government imposed a censorship on the leftist books from mainland China in Malaya (Boycott 2012). Mahua writers had to resort to reading contemporary literature from Hong Kong, Taiwan and the West. However, this shift exposed them to the ideas and writing styles of contemporary writers beyond the mainland. In 1954, Fang Beifang published *Nyonya and Baba (Niangre he Baba)*, which is commonly considered

one of the first authentic Mahua novels due to its vivid portrayal of the protagonists' pre-independence nationalism towards Malaya. During the 1950s, Mahua literature was permeated with patriotic expression for Malaya and the process of its post-war nation-building. Works produced during this time contained a high degree of realism, with emphasis on various themes such as patriotism, leftism, socialism and anti-pornography.

With Malaysia and China establishing official international relations in 1974, the positioning of the Chinese in Malaysia became very clear – ethnic Chinese in Malaysia were now regarded as Malaysians. In the 1980s, local dialect clans, Chinese newspapers and writers' associations started to allocate funds to attract local talent in an effort to stimulate the production of quality Chinese literature within the Malaysian context. In 1982, the Writers' Association of the Chinese Medium of Malaysia and *Tungbao* Newspaper jointly organized the first literary award for short stories, with cash prizes as high as RM5,000. In 1983, the Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall held a public exhibition on the history of Mahua literature. In 1989, a few Chinese societies jointly organized the first ever Mahua Literature Festival. Such efforts from the grassroots level generated momentum for the development of Mahua literature, effectively increasing the quantity and quality of literary output since then. In most cases, a hybrid writing style was adopted. Productive writers during this era and their notable themes include: (a) Ya-Po: Social conscience; (b) Xiao-Hei: Patriotism / Love for Malay(sia); (c) Pan Yutong: The history of Malaysian Chinese; (d) Liang Fang: Poetic imagery of the people and daily life in Malay(sia); (e) Song Zi-heng: The dignity of man; (f) Shang Wanying: Modern women; (g) Ding Yun: The struggles of life; (h) Ju-fan: The disintegration of cultures. Even Fang Beifang, the patriarch of Mahua, worked laboriously to produce a three-part novel known as the "Malayan Trilogy," namely *Deeply Rooted (Shuda Genshen)*, *Blossoming (Zhirong Yemao)* also entitled *Under the Roof of the 'Tauke' (Toujia Menxia)*, and *Falling Petals, Fallen Fruits (Huapiao Guozhui)*. (Lim 2015, pp.187-212)

In the 1990s, scholars Ng Kim Chew and Lim Kien Ket proposed the "Weaning Theory" for the theoretical repositioning of Mahua literature as one that had been weaned from its original sources. In "Zhongguoxing yu Biaoyanxing: Lun Mahua Wenxue yu Wenhua de Xiandu (Chineseness and Performing Arts: Limitations of Mahua Literature and Culture)", Ng (1997) pointed out emphatically that the essence of Mahua literature cannot consist of cultural symbolism alone. Following that, Lim (1998), in his treatise entitled "Wei Shenme Mahua Wenxue? (Why 'Mahua Literature'?)", exhorted his readers to put aside discussions on 'what is Mahua literature', but instead to rethink the reasons for the existence of Mahua literature apart from its assumed Chineseness. All in all, the Weaning Theory sought to present Mahua literature as having evolved its own Malaysian imprint and trademark. Subsequently, in order to delineate the complexity of the nature and positioning of Mahua literature, Tee Kim Tong proposed the "Polysystem Concept" (Tee in Choong & Chan eds. 2019, p.59). While Lim and Ng promoted the subjectivity and uniqueness of Mahua literature, Tee held a more encompassing and contemporary view of the Chinese in Malaysia, suggesting that Mahua literature thrived across multiple geopolitical and linguistic systems.

In the present, the identification of Malaysia as one's home or homeland has become so ingrained in Chinese Malaysians that its depiction is now natural and common. When young writers write on the theme of "home", they more often than not relate it to Malaysia. In the 2011 Huazong (Floral Trail) Chinese Literature Competition, widely recognized as the "Oscars" of Chinese literature in Malaysia, the two short stories that won the first prize and the special mention prize both expounded on this "home" theme. For example, "Shift House (Ban Jia),"

winner of the first prize, emphasized the protagonist's emotional pain in being forced to relocate from his current residence due to unprecedented modern development. In 2016, renowned Chinese Malaysian poet Fang Lu won the first prize in Huazong's poetry category with his "Oviparous Nostalgia (Luansheng Xiangchou)." The poem depicts the difficult marine life of an elderly Chinese Malaysian fisherman who survives a lifetime of ordeals at sea with his belief in the bestowed protection of his ancestors, as well as his frequent use of a medicated wine to ease his rheumatic pains. The notion of an elderly man whose life is tied to this land and its seas makes it very clear where "home" is. Once again, the subjectivity and distinctiveness of Mahua literature is undeniable.

Internationally, Mahua literature has gradually gained recognition. Some Mahua writers have managed to get their works translated for international readers. Today, Mahua literature can be found in at least seven (7) languages across the world. Li Yong-Peng's works have been translated into English, Japanese and Malay. Tan Cheng Sin's short stories have been translated into Japanese and Malay. Zhang Gui-xing's novels have been translated into English and Japanese. Ng Kim Chew's anthologies of short stories have been translated into English, French and Polish. Ho Sok Fong's short stories have been translated into English, Japanese, Portuguese and Korean. Li Zi-shu's works have been translated into English and Japanese. King Banhui's short story has been translated to Japanese.

Ironically, while Mahua literature has found international readership, it has yet to take root among Malaysian readers. The article in *Sin Chew Malaysia* (6 June 2020) and the write-up on the website of the Chinese Studies Department, University of Malaya (22 May 2020) reflects the collective voice of Chinese Language teachers that reference materials for Mahua literature are scarce, which makes it difficult for them to prepare lessons on such texts.

In fact, three (3) out of the six (6) selected interviewees for this study separately and voluntarily confirmed the problem to be as stated above. During the interview, an East Malaysian teacher with 15 years of teaching experience in Chinese schools repeatedly expressed that reference sources for Mahua literature "was truly difficult to get, really difficult to get" (RS-E002). She expressed that she was not even aware of the body of good literature written by Malaysian Chinese available. Another teacher with two (2) years of experience teaching Chinese in the southern region of the Peninsula also expressed affirmatively that, "I could tell this (training on Mahua literature pedagogy) is really very good lah. This is exactly what we teachers needed" (RS-H004).

Yet another Chinese Language teacher with seven (7) years of teaching experience – also in the southern region of the Peninsula – recalled his struggles when he attended courses on Mahua literature during his first semester at a teachers' training college, saying, "That was a very difficult semester for me yeah, because we could hardly find related resources from the internet" (RS-E003). He further elaborated that he was far more familiar with the Chinese literature from Taiwan, Hong Kong and Mainland China compared to Mahua literature, as there were ample resources for literary criticism on those texts. From his experience, he fell short of paying attention to the contextual background of Mahua literature such as the "Nanyang" element and the history of the ethnic Chinese in Malaysia as detailed during the CPD programme (BG-E004).

The lack of reference resources on Mahua literature was the very reason that the Writers' Association of the Chinese Medium of Malaysia, the Chinese Studies Department of University of Malaya, and the Malaysia Secondary School Chinese Language Teachers Association

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offered the 10-week online programme for both primary and secondary teachers of the Chinese Language subject.

INTERVENTION

As authorised by the programme committee, the researchers of this study were given access IDs to the 10-week online programme, held on Friday evenings, 8.30pm-10.30pm. The number of registrants for the programme reached 500 pax, a majority of which fell within the target group of primary and secondary Chinese Language teachers. The breakdown of the participants is shown in Table 1 as follows:

Table 1: Teachers and Non-teaching Participants of the 10-Week CPD Programme on Mahua Literature (5 June 2020-7 August 2020)

Categories	Number
Teachers (Primary, Secondary and Tuition centres)	438
Trainee Teachers (Students of teachers' training colleges)	12
University Students (including postgraduates and a China student from the National University Singapore)	16
Members of the Public (including publishers and the general public from Singapore)	34
TOTAL	500

Source: Database, Organising Committee (12 March 2021)

The strong demand for the programme as a continuous professional training course for Chinese teachers is evident in the overwhelming registration numbers and attendance rate of over 80% throughout the entire course – except for the second last session, which fell on a public holiday and long weekend, causing the attendance rate to drop by half. Nevertheless, the online mode of this CPD programme allowed for the participation of Chinese Language teachers beyond the central region of the Peninsula. Statistics from the organisers show that the participants came from all over Malaysia, including the East Coast, northern Peninsula as well as East Malaysia, as shown in Table 2 as follows:

Table 2: Geographical Distribution of Participants of the 10-Week CPD on Mahua Literature (5 June 2020- 7 August 2020)

No.	Region	Number of Participants
A.	Northern Region (Peninsula): Perlis, Kedah, Penang, Perak	154
B.	Central Region (Peninsula): Selangor, Federal Territories of Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya	138
C.	Southern Region (Peninsula):	120

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	Negeri Sembilan, Melaka, Johor	
D.	East Coast (Peninsula): Kelantan, Terengganu, Pahang	36
E.	East Malaysia: Sabah, Federal Territory of Labuan, Sarawak	49
F.	Singapore	1
G.	China (student @ the National University of Singapore)	1
H.	Unknown	1
TOTAL		500

Source: Database, Organising Committee (12 March 2021)

A total of 17 instructors were involved in conducting this CPD programme on Mahua literature. They included tertiary lecturers, postgraduate students, professional readers and writers. Besides the instructors, 13 original authors of the respective texts accepted the invitation by the organising committee to elaborate on the authorial intent behind their writings via video footage. The details are as shown in Table 3 in the following:

Table 3: Structure of Lesson Delivery and Profile of Instructors during the 10-Week CPD Programme on Mahua Literature (5 June 2020-7 August 2020)

10-Week CPD Programme on Mahua Literature						
	Time	Text	Genre	Chinese Textbook	Lecture	Sharing by Original Author
Week 1	1 st hour	<i>Shuiyi</i> (Pyjamas)	Poetry	Primary 1	L1 (Lecturer) L2 (Editor)	Yes
	2 nd hour	<i>Zhangwen</i> (Palm Print)	Poetry	Secondary 1	L3 (Lecturer) L1 (Editor)	-
Week 2	1 st hour	<i>Xinnian</i> (Chinese New Year)	Poetry	Primary 1	L4 (Writer) L5 (Writer)	-
	2 nd hour	<i>Cong Dalihua dao Lanhua</i> (From Dahlia to Orchid)	Prose	Secondary 2	L3 (Lecturer) L6 (Lecturer)	Yes
Week 3	1 st hour	<i>Nayiye</i> (That Night)	Poetry	Primary 2	L7 (Lecturer) L8 (Lecturer)	-
	2 nd hour	<i>Yushu</i> (Rain Tree)	Prose	Secondary 2	L3 (Lecturer) L9 (Lecturer)	Yes
Week 4	1 st hour	<i>Dulun</i> (The Ferry)	Poetry	Primary 2	L4 (Writer) L5 (Writer)	Yes
	2 nd hour	<i>Pixiang de Gushi</i> (The Story of the Suitcase)	Poetry	Secondary 3	L10 (Lecturer) L3 (Editor)	Yes
Week 5	1 st hour	<i>Cao de Gaobai</i> (The Confession of the Little Grass)	Poetry	Primary 3	L1 (Lecturer) L2 (Editor)	Yes

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	2 nd hour	<i>Huijia de Yuanying -Qiyi</i> (The Reason for Homecoming - 1)	Poetry	Secondary 3	L5 (Writer) L2 (Editor)	Yes
Week 6	1 st hour	<i>Tanxian</i> (An Expedition)	Poetry	Primary 3	L10 (Writer) L1 (Lecturer)	-
	2 nd hour	<i>Jing</i> (The Well)	Prose	Secondary 4	L5 (Writer) L6 (Lecturer)	Yes
Week 7	1 st hour	<i>Deng shang Heifengdong</i> (Climbing Batu Caves)	Poetry	Primary 3	L8 (Lecturer) L11 (Master Student)	-
	2 nd hour	<i>Liang ke Xiangzi</i> (Two Rubber Seeds)	Prose	Secondary 4	L12 (Writer) L1 (Lecturer)	Yes
Week 8	1 st hour	<i>Yu Hemin Tongle</i> (Rejoicing with the River Tribe)	Prose	Primary 5	L13 (Master Student) L14 (PhD Student)	Yes
	2 nd hour	<i>Xianglin de Yesheng</i> (Night Song on a Rubber Estate)	Prose	Secondary 4	L8 (Lecturer) L15 (PhD Student)	-
Week 9	1 st hour	<i>Lalang Jiangban, Yulin Shenchu</i> (Along Rajang River, In the Depths of the Rainforest)	Prose	Primary 5	L10 (Writer) L16 (PhD Student)	Yes
	2 nd hour	<i>Jian Shiguang</i> (Tailoring Time)	Prose	Secondary 4	L17 (Master Student) L9 (Lecturer)	Yes
Week 10	1 st hour	<i>Si zheng Shangyan</i> (The Show is On)	Prose	Primary 6	L6 (Lecturer) L1 (Lecturer)	Yes
	2 nd hour	<i>Zanmei</i> (In Awe)	Poetry	Secondary 5	L11 (Master Student) L2 (Editor)	-

METHODOLOGY

One of the research objectives of this study is to expound on the model of literature pedagogy employed during the CPD programme. The researchers employed both quantitative and qualitative methods to explore this subject. The findings in this paper are based on observation throughout the 10-week period, document analysis of lecture PowerPoints, as well as interviews with selected CPD participants. The interviewees were selected from among the teachers who provided their contact details in an optional column of the feedback questionnaire, based on maximum variation in terms of geographical distribution, years of service in education and gender.

As presented in Table 3, there was a total of 40 lectures across the 10 weeks, namely, four (4) lectures per week, two (2) lectures per text. As confirmed by the organising committee,

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the instructors were only given a general guideline – the first lecture was to provide an overview of the text, while the second lecture was to consist of literary analysis as per their own interpretation of the text. No further interpretive model or literature pedagogy was imposed. The researchers were therefore able to examine by observation whether there were any interpretative applications or literary aspects common among the different instructors. Table 4 shows the researchers’ observation checklist for the literature pedagogy employed during the 10-week CPD on Mahua literature based on the 40 Powerpoints presented by the instructors as well as their actual delivery during the programme:

Table 4: Checklist for the Literature Pedagogy employed during the 10-Week CPD on Mahua Literature (5 June 2020- 7 August 2020)

	Lesson	Genre	“L”	“R”	“A”	“M”
Week 1	<i>Shuiyi</i> (Pyjamas)	Poetry	√	√	√	√
	<i>Zhangwen</i> (Palm Print)	Poetry	√	√	√	√
Week 2	<i>Xinnian</i> (Chinese New Year)	Poetry	√	√	√	√
	<i>Cong Dalihua dao Lanhua</i> (From Dahlia to Orchid)	Prose	√	√	√	√
Week 3	<i>Nayiyi</i> (That Night)	Poetry	√	√	√	√
	<i>Yushu</i> (Rain Tree)	Prose	√	√	√	√
Week 4	<i>Dulun</i> (The Ferry)	Poetry	√	√	√	√
	<i>Pixiang de Gushi</i> (The Story of the Suitcase)	Poetry	√	√	√	√
Week 5	<i>Cao de Gaobai</i> (The Confession of the Little Grass)	Poetry	√	√	√	√
	<i>Huijia de Yuanying -Qiyi</i> (The Reason for Homecoming - 1)	Poetry	√	√	√	√
Week 6	<i>Tanxian</i> (An Expedition)	Poetry	√	√	√	√
	<i>Jing</i> (The Well)	Prose	√	√	√	√
Week 7	<i>Deng shang Heifengdong</i> (Climbing Batu Caves)	Poetry	√	√	√	√
	<i>Liang ke Xiangzi</i> (Two Rubber Seeds)	Prose	√	√	√	√

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Week 8	<i>Yu Hemin Tongle</i> (Rejoicing with the River Tribe)	Prose	√	√	√	√
	<i>Xianglin de Yesheng</i> (Night Song on a Rubber Estate)	Prose	√	√	√	√
Week 9	<i>Lalang Jiangban, Yulin Shenchu</i> (Along Rajang River, in the Depths of the Rainforest)	Prose	√	√	√	√
	<i>Jian Shiguang</i> (Tailoring Time)	Prose	√	√	√	√
Week 10	<i>Si zheng Shangyan</i> (The Show is On)	Prose	√	√	√	√
	<i>Zanmei</i> (In Awe)	Poetry	√	√	√	√

FINDINGS

As shown in Table 4, a document analysis of the 40 power-point (PPT) slides provided by the instructors as their teaching aids, as well as the researchers' own observations throughout the 10-week synchronous online sessions lead to the conclusion that all of the following four (4) aspects were addressed for each text, namely, (a) the linguistic features; (b) the imagery or object representation; (c) the "pathos" or affective aspect; and, (d) the "logos" or motive of the text. In brief, the pedagogical framework can be abbreviated as the "Language-Representation-Affect-Motive" (LRAM) framework.

- L – Linguistic Features
- R – Representation / Imagery
- A – Affect / "pathos"
- M – Motive / "logos"

In addition, the researchers conducted separate interview sessions with the participants to further explore whether the participants also picked up on a literary framework akin to LRAM. E001, a Chinese Language teacher from the central region of the Peninsula with 15 years of teaching experience, was convinced that if she were to follow the pedagogical scheme of the CPD programme, she would be able to teach students to "feel" a literary text. The researchers identified this as akin to the "Affect (A)" aspect in the LRAM framework. She also expressed that she is quite capable of teaching students to appreciate the linguistic features of a literary text. The researchers identified this as akin to the "Language (L)" aspect in the LRAM. However, this highly experienced teacher admitted that she only learned about the relevance of the other two literary aspects, namely, the "Representation (R)" and the "Motive (M)" in the LRAM framework after attending the CPD programme. (PU-E001).

H006, a Chinese teacher residing in the East Coast of the Peninsula and with 28 years of teaching experience affirmed that these four aspects, namely, language, imagery, feelings and motive, altogether captures the "soul" of a literary text, as it gives the readers a concrete

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idea of their understanding of the text. This in turn helps them to appreciate the beauty and unique characteristics of each literary text (LA-H006).

E003, who was quoted earlier under section (II), is a teacher from the southern region of the Peninsula with seven (7) years of teaching experience. He expressed his excitement upon discovering the “Representation (R)” or imageries expounded during the CPD programme on the literary text entitled “Pixiang de Gushi (The Story of the Suitcase)” (LP-E003). Nevertheless, there were also participants who were not able to perceive any particular method employed within this CPD programme on Mahua literature. H005, a Chinese teacher residing in East Malaysia and entering the third year of her teaching career, said she was still “trying to understand” the literature pedagogy taught during the CPD programme (LP-H005).

Based on the LRAM framework, the researchers discovered that “Motive (M)” themes discussed by the CPD instructors can be consolidated as shown in Table 5 as follows:

Table 5: Evolving Themes in the Mahua Literary Texts Discussed during the 10-Week CPD Programme (5 June 2020- 7 August 2020)

Lesson	Genre	“Motive (M)”				
		Familial Love	Joy	Grit	Transcendence	
Week 1 <i>Shuiyi</i> (Pyjamas)	Poetry	-	√ (Childlike joy)	-	-	
	<i>Zhangwen</i> (Palm Print)	Poetry	-	-	√ (Anti-fatalism)	-
Week 2 <i>Xinnian</i> (Chinese New Year)	Poetry	√ (Grandma as the centre of familial ties)	√ (Joy of families coming together)	-	-	
	<i>Cong Dalihua dao Lanhua</i> (From Dahlia to Orchid)	Prose	√ (Filial piety)	-	-	
Week 3 <i>Naiye</i> (That Night)	Poetry	-	-	√ (Enduring difficulties)	-	
	<i>Yushu</i> (Rain Tree)	Prose	-	--	√ (Relocation & hardship)	-
Week 4 <i>Dulun</i> (The Ferry)	Poetry	-	√ (Joy of new discoveries)	-	-	
	<i>Pixiang de Gushi</i> (The Story of the Suitcase)	Poetry	-	-	√ (From being an immigrant generation to taking root in a new homeland)	-
	<i>Cao de Gaobai</i>	Poetry	-	-	√	-

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Week 5	(The Confession of the Little Grass) <i>Huijia de Yuanying -Qiyi</i> (The Reason for Homecoming-1)	Poetry	-	-	-	(Never giving up) √ (To be or not to be; to stay or to leave?)
Week 6	<i>Tanxian</i> (An Expedition)	Poetry	-	√ (Joy of new discoveries)	-	-
	<i>Jing</i> (The Well)	Prose	-	-	-	√ (Reminiscence / reflection on time)
Week 7	<i>Deng shang Heifengdong</i> (Climbing Batu Caves)	Poetry	-	-	√ (Holding on in order to obtain success)	√ (Great serenity before a scenic view)
	<i>Liang ke Xiangzi</i> (Two Rubber Seeds)	Prose	-	-	√ (Thriving through life's adversities)	-
Week 8	<i>Yu Hemin Tongle</i> (Rejoicing with the River Tribe)	Prose	-	-	-	√ (Village utopia)
	<i>Xianglin de Yesheng</i> (Night Song on a Rubber Estate)	Prose	-	-	-	√ (From purification of sight to hearing)
Week 9	<i>Lalang Jiangban, Yulin Shenchu</i> (Along Rajang River, in the Depths of the Rainforest)	Prose	-	-	√ (Preservation of cultural heritage)	-
	<i>Jian Shiguang</i> (Time Tailoring)	Prose	-	-	-	√ (Reflections on life)
Week 10	<i>Si zheng Shangyan</i> (The Show is On)	Prose	-	-	√ (Preservation of traditional art forms)	-
	<i>Zanmei</i> (In Awe)	Poetry	-	-	-	√ (Unification with nature)

During the interview sessions with the Chinese Language teachers, the researchers realised that all of them were passionate about teaching the Mahua literature in their textbooks after attending the 10-week CPD programme. Additionally, many of the interviewees

expressed their hope for the inclusion of more Mahua literature or localised content in the Chinese textbooks used in schools.

E003 said he had the impression that Mahua writers did not get much publicity. He expressed his concern that, “If there were no long-term followers for an author, or if they did not even know the existence of such author, good Mahua literature could hardly be promoted” (MH-E003). He stated that it is a matter of importance to have more Mahua literature included in the textbooks used in schools, as an understanding of local history would generate more love for Malaysia as their homeland (LC-E003).

E002 stated that she was exposed to far more Mainland Chinese literature than Mahua literature. However, she did not favour teaching Mainland literature, as she did not find it suitable for Malaysian children (LC-E002), and it would probably need further adaptation if selected for Malaysian textbooks. The reason for her reservation about such texts was simply, “Perhaps, it was due to their different education context” (LC-E002).

H006 welcomed more localised content in school textbooks because local literature reflected the society that students were familiar with (LC-H006). She also suggested that the selection criteria for future textbooks should include literary works by younger Mahua writers. She reasoned that youths would relate better to the literary content produced by a younger generation of writers (LC-H006).

Answering on the type of local content to be included in Chinese textbooks, E001 commented that the current content in the textbooks seem to be restricted to themes related to familial relationships (LT-E001). She suggested that the themes could be widened to include environmental issues and other Malaysian themes (LT-E001). However, she did not think local textbooks should only include Mahua literature. She felt that students should be exposed to both local literature as well as literature from abroad. In addition, there should also be room to read and learn a wide range of literary genres such as poetry, prose, short stories and novels (LC-E001).

IMPLICATIONS

Naming and framing a Chinese literature pedagogy can be difficult. This is especially true for the teaching of Chinese poetry and prose, as some would reject the idea that any method is even necessary. The emphasis on “wenxue ganwu,” or the natural appreciation of literature, has often polarized the discussion on literature studies. A good example would be Yan & Wang (2013), who demised theory or framework as a reference point for reading poetry.

In the case of the 10-Week CPD programme on Mahua literature, the organisers did not impose any literature pedagogy on the instructors apart from requesting an overview of the literary text and some detailed appreciation of the text according to the instructors’ individual preferences. This is equivalent to social readers’ response, as described by Stanley Fish (1980): “the reader's activities are at the center of attention, where they are regarded not as leading to meaning but as *having* meaning.”

Whether they realise it or not, ascribing to no framework is also a conceptual framework in itself. Regardless of whether each of the instructors engaged with the literature through “ganwu” as propounded by Yan & Wang (2013) or critical readers’ response as suggested by Fish (1980), they inevitably made observations on the language and linguistic features of the text, while drawing connections with the imageries embedded therein, and in turn discussing the “pathos” (feelings) and “logos” (motive) of the literary work. Therefore, the researchers

can justifiably conclude that some sort of literary pedagogy that could be framed as “Language-Representation-Affect-Motive” (LRAM) was present throughout the 10-week CPD programme on Mahua literature. In fact, Duan (2013, p.3) claims that LRAM is a generic framework for reading and appreciating almost all types of literature, as it looks at the common or universal characteristics of any literary work.

The interpretation of literature that exists within the context of a broader community of interpretation can also be seen through a socio-ecological lens. The socio-ecological approach examines the wider factors that shape individual and interpersonal characteristics within a community (Sallie et al. 2006). In Bronfenbrenner’s model, these factors consist of human behaviour, environment, structural-developmental settings as well as the processes that take place within the community. All these factors inevitably interact with and influence each other. Through the 10 weeks of interaction within this CPD programme, the teachers undergoing training, individual instructors as well as the body of instructors all came together to form a literary community of readers of Mahua literature.

As the instructors took turns to interpret and teach the Mahua literary texts week after week, their subjective reader’s response towards the texts – in terms of thematic analysis – may have influenced each other, as shown in Table 5. Besides the instructor-instructor mutual influence on each other, they also interacted with the CPD participants both collectively and individually. The instructors prepared the sessions based on their own literary interpretation; however, as they delivered the online sessions, they also responded to the questions posed by participants in the Zoom chat box. Therefore, the interaction between the instructors and participants inevitably influenced the literary interpretation of each individual involved. After the sessions, this interaction continued on in the Facebook group, where instructors and participants had further discussions about specific texts. In this way, this CPD programme on Mahua literature repeatedly promoted the dynamism between readers, the literary texts and Malaysian society. The future development of Mahua literature will likewise be leveraged on the active interactions among the multifaceted factors within the system.

On a broader level, the local and unique characteristics of Mahua literature, as discussed by American scholar Alison M. Groppe (2013) in her *Sinophone Malaysian Literature: Not made in China*, have always been the cultural modality for its innovation and development as a genre. In fact, a socio-ecological reading of Mahua literature can also be found in American Sinologist Shu-mei Shih (2013)’s Sinophone theory. This theory examines the localization or creolisation of the literature of a Chinese community after residing for generations in new homelands such as Malaysia. “Chineseness” is identified as a different construct from “China” and “Chinese.” (Shih, 2007, p.4). All things considered, emerging local themes as well as a new linguistic style and vocabulary have altogether set Mahua literature apart from that which is produced in Mainland China.

In the same vein, Singaporean scholar cum poet Woon Yoon Wah emphasized the reproduction of Mahua literary devices such as language replacement, or language assimilation, as well as textual replacement (Woon, 2011). Influenced by British scholar Kirpal Singh’s treatise on “Inter-Ethnic Responses to Nationhood: Identity in Singapore Poetry” in Rutherford, Anna and K. Peterson eds. *Nationhood and Identity*, Woon praised Mahua writers such as Shang Wanying and Li Yong Peng for their tactful usage of “configuration” and “transfiguration” in creating a new literature that is both ‘local’ and ‘contemporary’ (Ibid).

Malaysian scholar Chong Fah Hing reasoned that the primordial Chinese sentiment in Mahua literature was mostly cultural, not political (Chong, 2016, p.87). Chong’s conclusion is

notable as he speaks from his extensive study on Mahua literature and long-term involvement in translating Mahua novels into Malay throughout his tenure as an associate professor in Universiti Putra Malaysia. In *Perjalanan Malam* (Night Departure), a recent anthology of Mahua-Malay short stories that Chong co-edited with Tee Kim Tong, associate professor of National Sun Yat-sen University, he emphasized the diversity of Malaysian society as well as the complexity of Mahua literature. Along with Chong, Tee stressed the importance of the translation of Mahua literature if it were to continue playing its crucial role in the polysystem of literature in Malaysia (Chong and Tee eds, 2017). Their call for Mahua literature to thrive within the polysystem of Malaysian literature corresponds with the observations on multiculturalism by anglophone writer and scholar Raihanah Mohd Mydin, who published vigorously on the subject. The latter noted the literary phenomenon in which the “authorial-defined” social reality constructed by local writers came to represent the challenges of multiculturalism in the nation (Raihanah, 2009).

CONCLUSION

The research findings in this study have, to a certain extent, affirmed that the LRAM framework was effective in addressing the needs of Chinese Language teachers with regards to the lack of reference materials for Mahua literature. It is therefore a feasible literature pedagogy for both novice and experienced Chinese Language teachers to delve deeper into the literary works of Mahua writers. In fact, this framework was naturally adopted by the body of instructors without prior awareness of what it was. Feedback from the interviewees confirmed that the 10-week CPD programme successfully rekindled interest among the teachers towards Mahua literature, especially in relation to the Malaysian context that is deeply ingrained within it. All in all, this study applies a socio-ecological approach in examining the usefulness of the LRAM framework as a practical literature pedagogy for Mahua literature as showcased through the CPD programme for Chinese Language teachers.

NOTES:

Emperor Yu the Great (2123-2025 BC) was a legendary king in ancient China, known for his ability to control great floods.

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