Asian Literature in Transition: A Comparative Analysis of Three Diverse Short Stories

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Abstract Asian Literature, a diverse and dynamic field, has long been at the center of a multifaceted debate that continues to evolve. This debate revolves around questions of definition, representation, and cultural authenticity. At its core, the discourse seeks to (re)define the boundaries of Asian Literature in English while simultaneously(re)visiting the specter of Orientalism. Scholars and writers grapple with determining what qualifies as Asian Literature and how it intersects with the broader spectrum of global literature. A central question emerges: Can literary works authored by individuals of Asian heritage living outside their native countries genuinely encapsulate the diversity of Asian experiences? Simultaneously, this discourse grapples with the intricate legacy of Orientalism, scrutinizing how literature can simultaneously challenge and perpetuate stereotypes about Asia and its diverse cultures. The debate questions whether works authored by individuals of Asian descent living outside their countries of origin can authentically represent Asian experiences. Simultaneously, it engages with the complex legacy of Orientalism, examining how literature can challenge and perpetuate stereotypes about Asia and its diverse cultures. Through a critical analysis of selected works, this study contributes on this ongoing debate, exploring how literature shapes our perceptions of identity, authenticity, and representation within Asian Literature.

Keywords Asian literature; Authenticity; Postcolonial; Orientalism; Self-Orientalism

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Introduction

The definition and boundaries of Asian Literature have been a recurring subject of debate and redefinition in literary studies. This discourse is characterized by a complex interplay between cultural identities, linguistic diversity, and postcolonial perspectives. One school of thought argues that Asian Literature should encompass works produced in Asian languages, focusing on culturally significant issues within the region. Advocates for this view stress the importance of acknowledging linguistic and cultural nuances, emphasizing the significance of original texts and authors from Asia. Asian literature is intended to represent Asian people, values, and experiences associated with Asian society from the past to the present (Dewi, "In Search of Contextual and Humanistic Southeast Asian Literature in English" 138). In contrast, an alternative perspective posits that Asian Literature in English may be written by authors of Asian descent, translated into English, or foreign writers writing about Asia (Guntarik 9-10). This stance highlights the global accessibility and reach of English as a medium for expressing diverse Asian experiences, contributing to the ongoing evolution of Asian Literature and shedding light on the dynamic nature of literary categorization and the intersection of cultural and linguistic identities. In his preface of *A Rainbow Feast: New Asian Short Stories*, an anthology of Southeast Asian short stories, Quayum addresses the possibility of employing English as a means of cross-cultural interaction:

> Literature in English is not confined to the culture-tight compartment and, therefore, can help establish a better understanding between various ethnic groups and nations by articulating each other's values, histories, and cultures. (25)

The introduction of Asian Literature to World Literature has also led to the translation of numerous significant Asian works into English, broadening the scope of Asian Literature and giving rise to Asian Literature in English. As early as the 1910s, the famous Rabindranath Tagore won the Nobel Prize in literature by translating his poems, such as *Gitanjali, Manasi,* and *Sonar Tori* (Indriyanto 23). This latter category expands the definition of Asian Literature to include Western authors who write about Asia and the translation of Asian Literature into English. This transformation signifies a pivotal shift in the understanding of Asian Literature, acknowledging the global resonance and influence of Asian literary traditions and crossing the boundaries of geography and ethnicity. The dynamic interplay between cultures underscores the transformative power of literature, transcending traditional boundaries and fostering a more inclusive perspective on what constitutes Asian Literature in English.

The heterogeneity of Asia, with its diverse cultural backgrounds, poses a complex challenge for translators of Asian literary works into English. Asia is not a demarcated location but a contested idea that invokes multiple geographies and histories of conquest, struggle, and self-determination. This complexity necessitates more than just bilingual proficiency; it demands an intimate understanding of the intricate cultural references interwoven within the texts. Translation, much like democracy, operates on principles of equity and the absence of linguistic bias, making it a particularly intricate task when it comes to rendering Asian literary works into English (Gokhale and Lal 246). Successful translation in this context necessitates more than just bilingual proficiency; it demands an intimate familiarity with the diverse cultural tapestries interwoven within the texts. Translators of Asian Literature must possess extensive linguistic skills and a profound understanding of the specific Asian cultures portrayed in the translated text. For instance, if a translator aims to convey the essence of Pramoedya's short story, a profound grasp of Javanese culture becomes imperative (Dewi, "Women of Will for Nation Building in Pramoedya's Three Early Novels" 8). This situation underscores the intricate challenge translators face as they navigate the complexity of Asian Literature.

The expanded definition of Asian Literature highlights translators' multifaceted challenges and prompts a critical examination of its intricate aspects, such as

representation, authenticity, and cross-cultural dialogue. This inquiry raises questions regarding the portrayal of Asian experiences by non-Asian writers and the influence of translation on preserving the subtleties of original texts. It is imperative to acknowledge that Asian writers occasionally affirm the idea of essentialism in their endeavors to depict Asia. These inquiries stem from a critique of Western Orientalist narratives, historically depicting Asia as the "Other" – uncivilized and inferior due to colonial constructs (Chandran and Vengadasamy). Stephanie Lawson aptly articulates this by highlighting how the "regionalist narrative" simplifies the cultural complexities of Asia into a vague set of values, primarily to create a positive contrast with the West, in which Asia is seen as the Exotic Other (26-27) In this pursuit, the West tends to amalgamate the diverse cultures of Asia into a singular "East," inadvertently giving rise to essentialized and overly simplified representations. Paradoxically, this mirrors the issues of Orientalism, as it perpetuates a false homogenization of Asia, a perspective that both Asian and Western scholars sometimes embrace to support their anti-Western viewpoints (Nandy 147).

The prior section summarized some defining characteristics of how Asian scholarship perceives Asian Literature. In summary, the perspectives within Asian scholarship regarding Asian Literature are intricately shaped by Asia's diversity and the historical backdrop of Western colonialism. These factors contribute to common themes in Asian Literature that are rooted in the processes of nation-building, anti-colonialism, and responses to colonial conditions. These themes manifest in many Asian authors' works, where they address the impact of colonization on their nations and actively counter Western narratives and stereotypes about Asia. Authors such as Arundhati Roy, Salman Rushdie, Kazuo Ishiguro, and Amitav Ghosh use their literature to critically examine the impact of colonization and challenge Western narratives about India, South Asia, and Japan (Thornber; Gokhale and Lal). This critical examination of the intersection between historical context and literary representation forms a fundamental aspect of Asian Literature scholarship, providing valuable insights into its multifaceted nature. Within this context, using English as the medium conjures a distinctive creative space, resisting and reflecting imperial governing powers' reiterations. As Lim et al. articulates,

> Asian literature in English shows the creative and critical potential of the language beyond instrumental uses. Instead, Asian writers use English within their terms to recollect histories, remember journeys, and represent conflicts within and between the communities and nation-states situated throughout the

> Asian region. (790).

The act of appropriating and transforming dominant forms of representation for self-determination is a central theme in postcolonial literature. Language plays a pivotal role in this process, as it becomes a medium for postcolonial societies introduce themselves to a global audience. Using English as a medium for cultural expression underscores the significance of language as cultural capital. Postcolonial writers who often write in English, engage in a dialectical relationship with the language itself; as Ashcroft summarizes,

> this dialectical relationship is most potently revealed in the use of the English language itself. The relationship between the colonizer and colonized becomes dialogic when the master tongue is appropriated. This is the insistent message of postcolonial writing and the principle of interpolation in general: that the colonized can enter into dialogue only when they acquire the cultural capital of imperial culture to make themselves heard. (*Post-Colonial Transformation* 147)

The prior statement explores the dialectic the colonized can enter into meaningful dialogue when they appropriate the master tongue, acquiring the cultural capital of imperial culture to make their voices heard. Another avenue explored in postcolonial studies is the dispersion and movement of diasporic populations who adopt English as a means of cultural articulation. This form of articulation rejects the process that grants 'authenticity' to specific categories of experience favored by the colonial center, often at the expense of marginalized voices (Ashcroft, "Transnation" 74)

The term 'appropriation' encapsulates how postcolonial societies assimilate aspects of imperial culture, such as language, writing forms, film, and even modes of thought (Ashcroft et al. 15). These appropriations are essential for postcolonial communities in articulating their unique social and cultural identities, thereby offering a means of resistance against the prevailing Orientalist narratives. The concept of authenticity, particularly concerning culture, has been a significant aspect of contemporary debates in postcolonial cultural production. These appropriated tools serve as instruments for postcolonial communities to assert their unique social and cultural identities. Within postcolonial literature, a significant form of resistance emerges as authors challenge the process of conferring "authenticity" upon specific experiential categories, often marginalizing particular perspectives. Consequently, the discourse of postcolonial literature often witnesses effective resistance through transformative appropriation and the redefinition of the colonizing language by

postcolonial writers (Ashcroft, "Unlocking the Future: Utopia and Postcolonial Literatures" 45).

Another defining characteristic of Asian Literature is its critical examination of Orientalism, whether the literary works are authored by Asians in English, translated into English, or written by Western authors focusing on Asian topics. Here, Orientalism, redefined by Edward Said, denotes a pervasive Western tradition encompassing academia and the arts. The development and preservation of any culture require an alternative and rival counterpart. The formation of identity, whether for the East or the West, involves creating opposing "others" whose nature is continually defined through the ongoing interpretation of their distinctions from "us" (Said, *Orientalism* 332). This tradition is marked by prejudiced outsider interpretations of the Eastern world, significantly influenced by the cultural attitudes of European imperialism during the 18th and 19th centuries. Said's critique extends to contemporary scholars who perpetuated the tradition of outsider interpretation, notably Bernard Lewis and Fouad Ajami (Said, "The World, the Text, and the Critic" 78-80). He argues that Western depictions of the East are fraught with false prejudices, leading readers and viewers to develop a distorted image of the East. Furthermore, Orientalism highlights the West's tendency to essentialize Eastern societies as static and undeveloped, resulting in the fabrication of a view of Oriental culture that can be systematically studied, depicted, and reproduced (Moore-Gilbert 10), Asian literature often presents unique cases where authors, consciously or unconsciously, confirm the discourse of Orientalism in their works. This phenomenon, known as self-Orientalism, represents an extension and reconfiguration of Orientalism. Self-Orientalism challenges Said's critique by asserting that the Orient actively participates in constructing, reinforcing, and disseminating the stereotypes created by the West (Yan and Santos 297). This active engagement is closely linked to how Asian societies, or the Orient, frequently engage in self-Orientalization for various reasons, often driven by the desire to capture Western attention. In this context, self-Orientalism takes on various forms, and one illustrative example can be found in the case of Arab-Americans attempting to market their cuisine to Americans. Employing Arabian Nights-style imagery, although anachronistic and disconnected from the reality of Arab American life, they strategically engage in self-Orientalization to appeal to Western sensibilities (Stiffler 119).

Self-Orientalism introduces contradictions in postcolonial societies' aspirations—they aim to voice perspectives from the margins yet find themselves assimilated into the mainstream. They seek to deconstruct the binary of a European

Self and its designated Others but often inadvertently contribute to the creation of cultural Otherness. As Huggan asserts, they aim to voice marginalized perspectives but often become assimilated into the mainstream. It can be observed how in the attempt to deconstruct the European Self and its designated Others, they sometimes unintentionally contribute to the creation of cultural Otherness (64). This dialectic of exoticism reveals the complex relationship postcolonial societies have with the West. Additionally, some authors strategically employ a form of self-empowering exoticism that plays to an international audience, serving as a mechanism of cultural translation to the Western world. Similar instances of self-Orientalism also arise in the literary works of Asian authors. Some of the works discussed in this paper exhibit signs of self-Orientalism, which may seem to reflect a belief in the superiority of Western culture over the East. However, it is crucial to critically reevaluate such instances, as authors often employ self-Orientalism as a narrative tool to satirize and depict how their societies historically perceived Westerners. The subsequent analysis in this paper identifies and examines instances of self-Orientalism within the short stories under examination.

To contribute toward the discussion of Asian Literature, this paper examines three Southeast Asian short stories with different historical and cultural backgrounds. The first is a short story written by Asian writer Consorcio Borje's, "Big Sister" from Philippines Literature. Secondly, this paper provides a reading on a short story written by an Asian writer translated into English by seeing Pramoedya Ananta Toer's "Jongos + Babu" that is translated into English as "Houseboy + Maid" by Julie Shackford-Bradley. The third and last is a short story written by a non-Asian writer about an American author, Robert Olen Butler's "Fairy Tale," in which Vietnam is the setting. By analyzing and comparing these three short stories, each representing different facets of Asian Literature, this paper aims to make valuable contributions to the ongoing discourse. It seeks to shed light on the complexities of defining Asian Literature in English, addressing questions related to authenticity, representation, and cross-cultural dialogue. By exploring these diverse narratives, the study contextualizes how constitutes Asian literature is redefined in the context of using English language.

This analysis explores the themes of authenticity, appropriation, Orientalism, and self-Orientalism in postcolonial Asian literature through the analysis of three distinct short stories: "Big Sister" by Consorcio Borje, "Jongos + Babu" by Pramoedya Ananta Toer, and "Fairy Tale" by Robert Olen Butler. These narratives unravel the intricate relationship between the colonized and the colonizer, the struggle for cultural identity, and the impact of Western influence on the East. These

short stories underline how identities and perceptions of both the colonized and the colonizer is respahed.

Examining these narratives, we delve into the struggles for authenticity in a world profoundly influenced by Western dominance. In "Big Sister" by Consorcio Borje, we witness the authentic representation of Filipino life amidst the challenges of American colonialism, exploring how economic hardship and educational aspirations intersect. Pramoedya Ananta Toer's "Jongos + Babu" focuses into the appropriation of Dutch culture by the Javanese and the resulting internalization of colonial values. Lastly, Robert Olen Butler's "Fairy Tale" contextualizes the tenous intersection between local identity and Orientalism, illuminating how Vietnamese culture is perceived through Western eyes. These stories underscore how literature is employed by postcolonial authors to navigate the historicity of colonialism and the enduring legacy of Orientalism.

Translation, Identity, and Authenticity: Reading on Selected Southeast Asian Postcolonial Stories

Southeast Asian postcolonial literature navigates the preservation of cultural authenticity and the necessity of making narratives accessible to a broader audience. In this shared endeavor, authors draw from common themes while embracing cultural specificity's nuances, highlighting the similarities and differences across their narratives. They infuse their storytelling with local dialects, place names, and historical events, grounding their narratives in specific times and locales. While this specificity enriches the stories, it may also present challenges for readers unacquainted with the cultural context.

The cultural specificity and locality in Consorcio Borje's "Big Sister," set in the 1930s Philippines, exemplify the delicate balance between preserving cultural authenticity and ensuring narrative accessibility in Southeast Asian postcolonial literature. The story immerses the reader in the lives of the Inciang family, emphasizing their rural struggles in the Philippines as they strive to secure a scholarship for Itong. The narrative introduces numerous culturally specific elements such as the naming of Vigan and *Nagpartian* city (who currently change their name into Burgos), centavos (Philippines Peso), *Tampipi* (a box-like container made from strips of bamboo or like material), often without additional explanations. This problem in transmitting information poses challenges for non-Asian and non-Filipino readers, underscoring the tension between authenticity and reader accessibility in postcolonial storytelling. This paragraph illustrates the use of some unfamiliar terminologies which is left untranslated:

> Her father had never married again, being always faithful to the memory of Inciang's mother. The farm which he tilled produced enough rice and vegetables for the family's use and such few centavos as Lacay Iban would now and then need for the cockpit he got out of Inciang's occasional sales of vegetables in the public market or a few bundles of rice in the *camarin*. Few were the times when they were hard-pressed for money. One was the time when Inciang's mother died. Another was now that Itong was going to Vigan. (Borje 3)

Translators hold a crucial position in the discourse of postcolonial literature, acting as mediators who navigate the delicate balance between preserving cultural specificity and ensuring global accessibility. Translation becomes a means of connecting cultures and narratives, fostering understanding across linguistic and cultural boundaries. As exemplified by Julie Shackford-Bradley in her translation of Pramoedya Ananta Toer's work, specific translators incorporate explanatory endnotes to elucidate cultural terms and practices. Dewi argues that this strategy allows for translating Pramoedya Ananta Toer's culturally rich work while maintaining accessibility for readers interested in mutual language and cultural learning ("Translation of Pramoedya Ananta Toers Inem: Enhancement of Local-Global Communication" 123)unique, and distinctive piece of work in the translated language so as to evoke the same feelings and responses as the source language. Examining a number of translation strategy used in the translation of Pramoedya Ananta Toers short story Inem into English, this study shows that the translation product is to be applauded for two reasons. First, transnational translation of Prams work, that is rich in local culture, can connect and define both Indonesian and English cultures better in order to enhance global-local connectedness. Secondly, thanks to the translator, the (recreated. In essence, translation becomes a conduit for connecting cultures and narratives through the transfer of cultural specificity.

The translation of Pramoedya Ananta Toer's "Jongos + Babu" underlines the intricate dynamics of Indonesian identity within the historical context of colonialism while preserving authenticity. The story revolves around a family perpetually serving different masters from the Dutch colonial era to the Japanese occupation, seeking advantages in societal positions. This pattern of servitude extends to Sodi and Imah, with Sodi already in service and Imah facing uncertainty due to the lack of a master to serve. This narrative intricately explores Indonesian identity within the context of Western colonialism and the influence of Javanese culture.

Throughout colonial history, Indonesian self-identity has been intertwined with Western concepts, with the Dutch representing the dominant "Other" concerning the indigenous identity (Schlehe 498). This complex interplay between European/Asian people and Christian/Muslim religions was shaped and formed by the colonial boundaries (Laffan 2). Nonetheless, the concept of locality and the preservation of an authentic Indonesian heterogeneous identity are expressed within the narrative, as seen in the subsequent quote:

> *Empok* Kotek was faithful to her heritage –a true servant! Loyal to the last hair. Because of this, even though she was just a maid, her *tuan* said:
> 'Tomorrow, *njonja* has to go to Kopeng to rest for a month. And *Njai* will have to stay in the house with *tuan*, okay?'
> A wooden *bale* took up half the room. Two young people sat on top of it.
> "Do you like working there, *kak?"* asked Inah with sadness in her voice. (Toer 6)

Prior utterance foregrounds profound lens to explore the complexities of postcolonial identity, appropriation, and authenticity. Within the narrative of Pramoedya Ananta Toer's "Jongos + Babu," the inclusion of culturally specific terms like "Empok," "njonja," "tuan," "njai," and "kak" draws from the vocabularies of Javanese and Betawi cultures. While integral to the story's authenticity, these terms may pose challenges for readers unfamiliar with these cultural nuances. Different with Consorcio Borje's "Big Sister," where such cultural references remain unexplained, Julie Shackford-Bradley, the translator of "Jongos + Babu" addresses this issue. She provides explanatory endnotes that elucidate the cultural elements employed by Pramoedya Ananta Toer. These endnotes reveal that "Empok" signifies "elder sister" in the Jakartan (Batavian) dialect, "tuan" and "njonja" are respectful titles for Dutch males and females, "njai" denotes the concubine-housekeeper of a Dutchman, and "kak" translates to "elder brother" or "elder sister" in the Jakarta dialect (Toer 6). Shackford-Bradley's strategic use of endnotes, not only aids readers in comprehending the narrative but also facilitates a more immersive reading experience in Javanese and Batavian cultural intricacies. In conclusion, translated postcolonial literature with supplementary information enhances readers' understanding of local identity and authenticity while ensuring global accessibility.

In contrast to the previous stories, Robert Olen Butler's "Fairy Tale" was authored by an outsider yet profoundly connected to the insider/locality which problematizes the issue of authenticity. Robert Olen Butler's intimate knowledge

of Vietnam gained during his service from 1969 to 1971 as a counter-intelligence special agent and translator influenced his writing. His experiences led to the Tu Do Chinh Kien Award from the Vietnam Veterans of America in 1987, and his short story collection "A Good Scent from a Strange Mountain," which includes "Fairy Tales," earned the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1993 (Wyman) "Fairy Tales" revolves around Miss Noi, a Vietnamese prostitute brought to the United States by American soldiers with the promise of a better life. The narration is loaded with the nuances of the Vietnamese language, such as the importance of tones in conveying meaning. Butler, a Vietnam vet writer, served as a translator during his service in the war. His work is characterized by the prominence of Vietnamese characters, imagining their voice(s) and inviting the reader to understand the transnational realities of the war (Naito 15).

"Fairy Tales" is narrated from the first-person perspective of Miss Noi, a narrative technique that allows readers to experience *qualia*, or what it is like for a particular focalizer (Indriyanto and Darmawan 67). Readers are permitted insider insight into Noi's inner thoughts, particularly about the difficulty communicating using Vietnamese. Vietnamese language is a tonal language in which the meaning of each word depends on the 'tone' in which it is pronounced (Tham). The language barriers between Miss Noi and the G.I. soldiers attempting to communicate with her results in misinterpretations of spoken words,

> He wanted to say in my language, "May Vietnam live for ten thousand years." What he said very clearly, was, "The sunburnt duck is lying down." Now, if I think this man says that Vietnam should live for ten thousand years, I think he is a certain kind of man. But when he says that a sunburnt duck is lying down—boom, my heart melts. (Butler 50)

Two Vietnamese expressions that appear the same prove vastly different in meaning: "May Vietnam live for ten thousand years" is written *Viet Nam muon nam*! and can be easily misread as *Vit nam muon nam*, or The sunburnt duck is lying down (Dam and McCarron 2). This language play, seen from the perspective of a Vietnamese character highlights the dialectical relationship with the language itself, as both Vietnamese and English are employed to convey the historical circumstances of wartime Vietnam. While the war itself is rarely the central focus, the story unfolds in Saigon, South Vietnam, providing readers with further insight into the cultural influence of Buddhism in the region:

> She leaves everything in her place. Even her Buddha shrine to her parents. Very bad. I live alone in Saigon. I have a double bed with a lovely sheet. Two pillows. A cedar closet with my clothes, which are very nice. Three ao dais, one apple red, one blue like you see in the eyes of some American man, one black like my hair. (Butler 51)

These excerpts vividly depict the cultural heritage of Vietnam, such as the Buddha shrine and *ao dai*, a traditional Vietnamese garment predominantly worn by women. Robert Olen Butler's narrative deviates from the anticipated focus on the devastation and horror of the Vietnam War, instead emphasizing the nuances of language and specific aspects of Vietnamese culture. In doing so, Butler underscores an insider's perspective of Vietnam, employing textual cues that navigate the interplay between Vietnamese and English, allowing readers to engage with the story's cultural depth and authenticity.

Critique of Representation: Orientalism and Self-Orientalism in Southeast Asian Stories

The prior section has delved into the dialectics in preserving cultural authenticity and ensuring narrative accessibility. Continuing the argumentation, we discuss another aspect of Southeast Asian postcolonial literature—the presence of orientalism and self-orientalism. Self-Orientalism entails the deliberate (re)actions of non-Western individuals and institutions in which they adopt and perform the role of "the Other," employing Western depictions of the non-West for various purposes (Kobayashi et al. 161). These themes prompt us to delve deeper into the representation and perception of Southeast Asian cultures. In this section, we will delve into the narratives to examine how Orientalism, the Western lens through which the East is often viewed, and Self-Orientalism, the internalized cultural perspective within the region, intersect with issues of authenticity and accessibility. This examination contextualizes how these stories navigate the complex terrain of identity and representation in a world shaped by historical power dynamics and cultural exchange.

Borje's short story "Big Sister," set against the backdrop of the 1935 Rice Crisis in the Philippines and American colonialism, may not initially appear to embody Orientalist tendencies. The narrative primarily revolves around the hardships faced by Inciang, an 18-year-old older sister, and her 12-year-old brother, Itong, showcasing how some impoverished families must rely on their agricultural endeavors. Upon examination, it reveals a facet of self-orientalism through the

emphasis placed on Western values and outlook, particularly the importance of English language proficiency and education. An event that illustrates this issue occurs when Itong's English proficiency sets him apart, leading to preferential treatment within the family and reinforcing the internalization of Western discourse: "When he was in the second grade and could speak more English words than Inciang, her father began to laugh at her; also, her Tia Orin and her brood had laughed at her" (Borje 3). Itong's Westernized education and English-speaking abilities garner him preferential treatment within the family, reinforcing the internalization of Western discourse. Moreover, the story delves into the pragmatic aspects of why Itong's family favors his pursuit of a legal career, an occupation associated with the accumulation of higher social and economic capital:

> Lacay Iban, on the other hand, wanted Itong to become a lawyer because lawyers were big shots and made big names and big money for themselves if they could have the courts acquit murderers, embezzlers, and other criminals despite all damning evidence of guilt. People elected them to the National Assembly. (Borje 4)

Toer's narrative offers a more profound exploration of the dialectical relationship between Orientalism and Self-Orientalism. While Pramoedya's works avoid simplistic characterizations and lack clear-cut heroes and villains, they unequivocally condemn the colonial system for its tyrannical oppression, human rights violations, and economic exploitation (Teeuw 255). In a sense, what is criticized in Pramoedya's narration is both the colonial apparatus and discourse, which the Indonesian indigene internalizes. Foulcher theorizes about the 'slave mentality,' in which generations of colonial servitude have indoctrinated the indigenous to be admitted into the rank of the master/colonizer, which they believed would automatically discard all their prior subordinate, indigenous characteristics (165). This aspect of Self-Orientalism, characterized by a superior/inferior binary, is prominently portrayed in "Jongos + Babu (Houseboy + Maid)," as exemplified by the following quotation: "Ever since the time of Jan Pieterszoon Coen, this family had servants' blood—from generation to generation, servants without reserve" (Toer 6).

The narrative in "Jongos + Babu (Houseboy + Maid)" centers on the servant mentality of Sobi and Inah; Sobi aspires to become Japanese, donning a cap and a samurai sword, while Inah desires a blue-eyed tuan. Their aspirations and desires reflect the internalized colonial ideologies that persisted even after Indonesia's independence., as servitude and subservience were all they knew their whole life.

The narration remarks how Sobi, who remained a houseboy, believed himself superior to other houseboys because he worked "for the Dutch and Japanese colonizer" (Toer 4) while the others merely worked for Chinese and *pribumi*. His perceived higher social standing is rooted in his association with non-Indonesian masters, even though he was only their houseboy. Similarly, Inah's obsession with Western beauty standards, such as white skin and blue eyes, reveals the enduring impact of colonialism on her self-image.

> Her eyes were a clear blue. Furthermore, this pleased her immensely. No Indonesian had eyes like those she possessed. Because of that, no Indonesian had the right to dictate to those eyes. And her eyes were straight and thin. Indeed, she was quite pretty. Moreover, for her, beauty was a woman's capital. And she would use this capital to control her destiny. (Toer 5)

Her distinction of the Indonesian as an outsider, hence, as the Other marks her Westernized outlook due to her half-white descent, which distances her from *pribumi*. She becomes fixated on finding a *tuan,* preferably a White one, who would give her orders as she was uncomfortable taking orders from a non-White *tuan*. Toer's short story underscores this theme of slave mentality to expose the prevalent ideology of Self-Orientalism, which indoctrinates the natives about their correct social status and standing. Moreover, the narration posits how the Self-Orientalism paradigm compels Inah to marry a White *tuan*, have a child with bluer eyes than herself, and presumably continue their family's proud history of servitude:

> For a houseboy, it is truly a blessing, *kak.* But as for me…" Inah began dejectedly, and her beautiful blue eyes clouded over. Her pretty face grew disturbed. "I haven't found a *tuan* who's right for me." She hung her head. And in a low voice, as if praying, "I want so much to have a child whose eyes are bluer than my own. (Toer 6)

Compared to other stories, Fairy Tale is the most problematic as it deals with the issue of representing the natives from the perspective of a White author. In one aspect, Butler's depiction of Vietnam considerably differs from conventional American representation of Asia and Vietnam in that it describes the city of Saigon extensively and portrays it as a harmonious society consisting of diverse individuals (Neilson 89). This contrasts with Euro-American portrayals that often reduce Asian locales to negative stereotypes, such as filthy villages waiting to be liberated by

American forces (Rambo 68). The text engages political issues of literary authority, ethnic identity, and the nature of representation within a cosmopolitan framework. Nevertheless, on the other hand, his narrative remains loaded with stereotypical depictions of Vietnam/Asian women in its representation.

Popular representations of the Occident often have gendered notions of the exotic and foreign, and the protagonist of this short story is not an exception. 'Miss' Noi, whose full name remains undisclosed, initially worked as a prostitute in Vietnam, and she continues the same profession in America. In the U.S., she dances naked at a club and later engages in sexual encounters with men at her apartment in exchange for money. The text repeatedly emphasizes how many men go out of their way to see Miss Noi again. Her inner monologue, depicting how "I am a dancer in a bar on Bourbon Street, and everybody likes me to stay a Vietnam girl" (Butler), conjures the exoticism of Asian women as Noi's primary selling point. In this aspect, Butler's story affirms Orientalist discourse by pronouncing the feminine allure of the Occident and Self-Orientalism, primarily through the first-person protagonist's voice. An event in the story where Miss Noi meets Mr. Fontenot for the first time further affirms this discourse.

> "You come often and see me dance and buy me drinks, okay?"
> "You look different," he says.
> "Miss Noi is a Vietnam girl. You never see that before."
> "I seen it," this man says. "I was in Vietnam."
> Many men say they were in my country, and they always sound funny, like they have a nasty secret or a sickness that you should be careful not to catch. Sometimes they call it "Nam," saying that word with broken glass in their voice or saying it through their noses, and their noses wrinkle up like the word smells when it comes out. (Butler 54)

This passage underscores the affirmation of Orientalist discourse, emphasizing the exotic nature attributed to Miss Noi, who does not only acknowledge but also embraces the "Vietnam girl" stereotype. Furthermore, the passage highlights the condescending notion of referring to Vietnam simply as "Nam," particularly in historical wartime circumstances. This abbreviation carries a sense of discomfort and disdain, reflecting the complicated Western relationship with Vietnam during the war (Clayton 192). To rephrase, reading "Fairy Tale" underlines how Butler affirms Western perception of the East through Orientalism and Self-Orientalism. This effect is achieved through the story's stereotypical portrayal of exoticism and

the female protagonist's Self-Orientalizing as a Vietnam girl in the United States.

Conclusion

The discourse of Southeast Asian postcolonial literature contextualizes the polemics concerning how to preserve cultural authenticity and making narratives accessible to a broader audience, especially regarding translation into English. This balance is characterized by the infusion of local dialects, place names, and historical events into the stories, enriching them with cultural depth while potentially challenging readers unacquainted with the specific context. Translators play a pivotal role in bridging cultural gaps by employing explanatory endnotes to facilitate cross-cultural understanding, thus serving as a conduit for preserving authenticity and ensuring global accessibility in postcolonial narratives. We have argued that some translations might hinder readers' immersion due to untranslated words, while other translations enhance the reading experience by providing relevant cues and contexts.

In the analysis, we discuss the themes of authenticity, appropriation, Orientalism, and self-Orientalism in postcolonial Asian literature through a comparative reading of three short stories. Self-Orientalism, as the deliberate adoption of Western depictions of the non-West by non-Western individuals and institutions, prompts a critical examination of how these narratives intersect with issues of authenticity and accessibility. Through case studies like Consorcio Borje's "Big Sister," Pramoedya Ananta Toer's "Jongos + Babu," and Robert Olen Butler's "Fairy Tale," we explore the interplay of identity and representation in a world shaped by historical power dynamics and cultural exchange. While these stories offer glimpses of cultural authenticity, they also reveal instances of self-Orientalism and Orientalist tendencies. The analysis of three Southeast Asian short stories problematizes the intricate dynamics of authenticity, appropriation, Orientalism, and self-Orientalism in postcolonial literature.

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