

# Cultural Enlightenment and Construction of Subjectivity: The Topographical Writings of Hsu Yun-Tsiao

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**Abstract** Hsu Yun-Tsiao (许云樵, 1905-1981), or Hsu Yu, was born in Jiangshu Province of China. He left for South East Asia in 1931 to involve himself in historical research as well as editorial and education activities. Hsu devoted all his energy to Southeast Asia Studies, and gained great reputation with significant research outcomes, especially in the research area of Southeast Asia studies. This paper looks into Hsu Yun-Tsiao's massive travel genre and topographical writings, examines the literature traits influenced by his living and travelling experiences from his homeland to Southeast Asia as well as his conscious and unconscious sense of history in the text and his life, all of which are in fact a way of identity construction. To a certain extent, travelogues which emphasized on rational narration and transmission of information represented by Hsu, restoring and testifying some collective experiences of Chinese migrants in Southeast Asia after World War II.

**Key words** Hsu Yun-Tsiao; topographical; travel literature; cultural enlightenment; construction of subjectivity

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## Introduction

In recent years, topographical writings in Malaysian Chinese literature has attracted the attention of some scholars. For example, Chen Da Wei's (陈大为 Chan Tah Wei) analysis on Lin Chun Mei's (林春美 Lim Choon Bee) prose and Xin Jin

Shun's (辛金顺 Sen Kim Sun) poems from the topographical perspective (2006); Zhong Yi Wen's (钟怡雯 Choong Yee-Voon) review on Du Zhong Quan's (杜忠全 Toh Teong Chuan) "The Old Penang Series" (2010); Lim Choon Bee and Chen Qing Fei's 陈庆妃 discussion on the rise of contemporary Malaysian Chinese topographical literature in publication supplements etc.<sup>1</sup> Their main concern is on the existence and development of contemporary Malaysian Chinese topographical prose. However, the existence of Malaysian Chinese topographical prose can actually be traced back to years ago, which is the two decades between the outbreak of Malayan Emergency and the separation of Singapore from Malaysia. There are a number of famous travelogues during that period of time, including *Tropical View* 热带三友 (1952) by Wu Jin 吴进, *The Impression towards India* 印度印象 (1960) by Lu Bai Ye 鲁白野, *Cross-straits of Senna* 塞纳河两岸, *The Mediterranean Coast* 地中海之滨, *A Corner of Atlantic* 大西洋一角, *Sailing in the Mid of Indian Ocean* 印度洋舟中, *Scenic Mountains and Rivers* 名山胜水 by Shi Sheng Lian 连士升 (Lien Shih Sheng), *Travel Notes of Indonesia* 印尼散记 (1960) by Leo Suryadinata 廖建裕, *Travel Notes of Siam* 暹罗散记 (1960) by Ye Zhong Ling 叶钟玲 (Yeap Chong Leng), *Trip to India* 印度之行 (1955) by Mo Li Guang 莫理光 (Mok Lee Kwang) and etc. These famous topographical writings are different from contemporary Malaysian Chinese topographical literatures in many aspects.

Choong Yee-Voon (2010) thinks that the history of Malaysian Chinese topographical literature is "a kind of 'record' in the early period of time, as its historical value is higher than its literary value," it "first emerged as part of 'geography', rather than human geography that is closely related to life experiences or written works with topographical concept"(147). Taking Wu Jin, Lu Bai Ye and other writers' works as examples, she pointed out that the traits of writing in Malaysian Chinese topographical prose during the early period of time emphasized

1 Research outcomes can be seen in Chan Tah Wei, "Discussion on the Description of Name of Places and Sense of Tastes in Topographical Writings of Lim Choon Bee," *Nanyang Siang Pau. Nanyang Literature and Arts*, 2001.09.10; this article was then included in the discussion of Zhong Ke Si and Toh Teong Chuan, with its length expanded and written as an academic thesis "An Interpretation of Space and the Anchoring of Gustation: The Topographical Writings in Malaysian-Chinese Prose," *Journal of Humanities*, Issue 2 (2004/06); Chan Tah Wei, "Topography of Imagination and Memory: Poems about Homeland of Sen Kim Sun," *Modern Chinese Literature*, Issue 9 (2006/06). Both articles were then included in Chan Tah Wei's *PI of thinking: Writings of Tectonic Plates and Spaces in Malaysian Chinese Literature* (Kuala Lumpur: Mentor Publishing, 2006). Choong Yee-Voon, "From Theory to Practice: Topographical Writing in Malaysian Chinese Literature," *Journal of Chinese Literature of National Cheng Kung University*, 29(2010): 148-158. Lim Choon Bee, "The Rise of Literature Supplements and Malaysian Chinese Topography Prose," *Jinan Journal*, 6(2010): 79-86; Chen Qing Fei, "The Rise of Malaysian Chinese Topographical and Cultural Prose in 1990s," *Jinan Journal*, 11(2014): 104-110.

more on knowledge and history. She therefore agreed on these important texts that in between literature and references for its special significance at the pre-history stage of Malaysian Chinese prose (Choong, 2014: 173). However, there are a lot of topographical prose with the same traits emerged before and after the period of World War II and national independence movement. The inner spirit appeals in the prose are yet to be further explored and discussed. In this paper, the focus will be on the works written by a scholar, Hsu Yun-Tsiao 许云樵, which looks into the values and significance that might arise in this kind of topographical travelogues, in a specific historical era and background.

Hsu Yun-Tsiao (1905-1981), whose real name was Yu 钰, also known as Meng Fei 梦飞, and with Xi Yi 希夷 as his alias, was born in Wuxi, Jiangsu Province of China. He studied at Soochow University in Suzhou and University of Shanghai Public School in the 1920s. He then dropped out of school due to poverty, but still managed to study on his own diligently and headed south to Nanyang 南洋 (Southeast Asia) in 1931, having since stayed in Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia. He first worked as a teacher at Foon Yew High School in Johor, Malaysia, Jingfang Teachers' College for Women in Singapore, Pattani Jong Fa Foundation School and Bangkok Business College in Thailand. After 1938, he worked as an editor for Singapore's *Sin Chew Daily Supplement* 星洲日报副刊 and in the year 1940, he became the editor-in-chief of the *Journal of the South Seas Society* 南洋学报, as well as one of the founders of the South Seas Society 南洋学会 (Singapore).<sup>1</sup> After World War II, he was invited by the owner of Nanyang Bookstore, Chen Yu Song 陈育崧 (Tan Yeok Seong) to be the editor of *Journal of the South Sea Society* and the *Malaya Youth*. After leaving Nanyang Bookstore, Hsu Yun-Tsiao worked for a short stint with his friend in a tinplate printing and can manufacturing business. He was soon hired by the newly established Nanyang University as the associate professor of History Department and concurrently served as the director of Southeast Asian Studies Department (Nanyang Studies Department). Hsu committed the rest of his lifetime to the research work of Nanyang and published a number of great works. However, his later life was dreary and distressful. He only managed to be in the spotlight after his death. In 1981, after the news of Hsu Yun-Tsiao's death was published through both Chinese and Western newspapers, his former colleagues

1 The South Seas Society is a cultural association established in response to the movement against the Japanese invasion in the late 1930s, with Yao Nan as the executive director, and Liu Shih Mo, Li Zhang Fu, Guan Chu Pu, Chang Lee Chien, Yu Dafu and Hsu Yun-Tsiao as members of the board of directors (Refer to Choi Kwai Keong "Hsu Yun-Tsiao: A Knowledgeable Historian," in Hou Kok Chung ed., *Inherited and Choices: History and Characters of Chinese Culture in Malaysia*, Taipei: Academia Sinica, 2001, 151-152).

and friends mourned his death with articles about him, while two of Xu Su Wu 许苏吾 (Koh Soh Goh)'s articles stood out among all. The first article is "The Contribution of Hsu Yun-Tsiao to Academic Research: In Commemoration of the Third Anniversary of the Death of Professor Hsu Yun-Tsiao" (1984), and the second one is "Literature and Art Productions by Hsu Yun-Tsiao" (1986). These two articles recorded the academic and literary writings of the late Hsu respectively.<sup>1</sup>

Hsu Yun-Tsiao's contribution to Southeast Asian Studies (Nanyang Studies) is uncountable. He wrote a wide range of articles and was well-known for his historical achievement of Nanyang Studies. This is the reason why his achievements in literary arts received less attention from people. In this article, research will be conducted based on the topographical travelogue written by Hsu Yun-Tsiao. Discussion will be mainly on how his travelogues affected by his experiences in both his native land and Nanyang, which provide an insight on the historical awareness behind his writings.

### **Topography: Paradigm of Hsu Yun-Tsiao's Travelogues**

Generally, a travelogue refers to "a type of prose with its main content written based on travel sceneries," which can be further divided into two writing styles: landscapes and humanities.<sup>2</sup> Hsu Yun-Tsiao's travelogues were written with strong topographical features, which include a table of contents, narrative structure and language style of both traditional and modern topographical writing. A scholar, Ye 叶叶 defined "topographical literature 地志文学" as below:

"Topographical literature" consists of folk poetry, chronicle poetry, poetry

1 For more information about the life and commentary research of Hsu Yun-Tsiao, please refer to Lew Bon Hoi's *Hsu Yun-Tsiao* (Singapore: Ba Fang Wenhua, 2014), who also cooperated with Chou Wen Loong in the compiling of *Collections of Letters by Hsu Yun-Tsiao* (Kajang: New Era College, 2006). Other important research outcomes include: "Hsu Yun-Tsiao: A Knowledgeable Historian" by Choi Kwai Keong (Hou Kok Chung, 2001), also a series of commemoration of Hsu Yun-Tsiao in *Journal of the South Seas Society*, Volume 37, Issue 2. *Collection of Books by Hsu Yun-Tsiao* published by Singapore Federation of Chinese Clan Associations, which recorded the compilation of articles written by Hsu Yun-Tsiao.

2 Zheng Ming Li, *Types of Modern Prose*, Taipei: Da'an, 1987/2001, 220-236. In her book, Zheng Ming Li reviewed the traditional Chinese travelogues and noticed the diversity of travelogues. For example, some travelogues were written in a form of combination with memoirs, sketches and so on, in terms of language, both lyrical and rational writing style were used. However, she emphasized that a travelogue must meet the following requirements: they must be based on a real experience, with the author's inspiration and understanding during his/her travel as the aim, and the record of travel experiences as the ultimate purpose. They should be able to present the spiritual activities and so on while travelogues written by Hsu Yun-Tsiao are more to writings that "possessed reporting function" (224).

about local customs, names of places, cities etc. It also includes literary works that emphasize on regional folks and historical contents. In another words, it is said to be literary works that use public geographical spaces as the object of writing and have a clear self-consciousness on the purpose of topographical writing. (2013: 97)

In 1929, Hsu Yun-Tsiao published his first travelogue *Gusu* 姑胥, which is about his return to his homeland “Gusu District” from other province. Since then, for fifty-one long years until 1980, he never stopped writing topographical articles. His persistence in writing travelogues was precious in the history of Malaysian Chinese topographical literature, making him and his works an important research subject in tracing the development of this kind of genre. In 1964, books entitled *A Visit to Afro-Eurasia* 欧非胜览 and *A Journey to India* 天竺散记 published by World Book Co. and Youth Book Co. respectively, both compiled massive topographical works written by Hsu. In 1979, *Literary Collection of Xiyi* 希夷室诗文集 was published by the Department of Southeast Asian Studies, Nanyang University, Singapore, in which hundreds of classical forms of travel poems were included. More travelogues by Hsu were also published in various magazines and newspapers since 1929. It is worth mentioning that, whether it is in the genre of prose or classical poetry, the topographical features throughout all his travelogue writings have remained unchanged.

Topographical literature in China has a long history. The number of topographical books in each dynasty is uncountable. The study of topography (fang zhi 方志) appeared to be more systematic and comprehensive after the Song Dynasty, and became an important academic activity since then. The content of topographical writing can be highly comprehensive and integrated. Topography in the Song Dynasty basically included the following aspects: territory, evolution, mountains and rivers, constructions, towns, villages, property, taxes, residences, military affairs, public sentiment, customs, people, literary art, famous places, historical sites and so on. The contents of topographical books in modern society are even richer, as they cover chapters regarding the record of geography, history, government and politics, economy, military affairs, education, culture, health, sport, technology, society, religion, dialect, local literature, historical sites, people and appendix etc. Each chapter is then further divided into different categories, such as political issues (including political parties), authorities, administrative agencies, public organizations, social organizations, united fronts, civil affairs, labour affairs, public security and justice etc. (Zhao Xiang Ba, 2004:14-15). All three well-known

travelogues written by Hsu used the Chinese traditional structure of topographical writing in their narration. There is no exception even for travel journals written by Hsu that were published in different magazines and newspapers, although they do not contain tables of contents like in a book, similar frameworks and structures can still be seen from the subheadings in the articles.

Let's take a look at the tables of contents of the three collections of travel prose written by Hsu. Hsu wrote his first travelogue, *Gusu* with his identity as a local. He was born in Suzhou and was requested by the villagers to write a book about this place after he left. To this end, he returned to his homeland and travelled around all the famous places, ancient temples and historical sites, at the same time collected anecdotes about regional history, folklore and celebrities in Suzhou. With a sense of mission, he wrote down the details of his travelling in Suzhou. His table of content is as follows: (1) history, (2) geography, (3) cities and townships, (4) natural resources, (5) defensive walls, (6) landscapes, (7) parks, (8) historical sites, (9) customs, (10) languages, (11) unofficial history, (12) common notes.

*A Journey to India* describes a trip where Hsu Yun-Hsiao brought his students to India for a cultural tour when he was teaching at Nanyang University. The table of contents of this book is as follows: (1) precious friendship, (2) Madras, a city with everything, (3) a visit to Kanchipuram in misty rain, (4) Pengalo, South India Industrial Center, (5) amazing fountain at Mysore, the city of flowers, (6) Mumbai, an Europeanized Indian city, (7) wandering at historical sites in Aurangabad, (8) Erol, the finest craft of grottoes, (9) Ajanta, cliff climbing to worship the wall painting, (10) New and Old Delhi, a tale of two cities, (11) Taj Mahal, the beauty of marble stones, (12) Bhakhra, the highest dam in the world, (13) Chandigarh, missing city on the map, (14) Poona the Holy Land and Ganga the Holy Water, (15) explore the trail of Buddha at Sarnath, (16) Pataliputra, the homeland of Asoka, (17) a tour to Bodhi Mandapa, (18) a visit to Gádhrakúta at Rajgir, (19) Nalanda Temple, the highest educational institution in India in the seventh century, (20) the steel city of India and Tata Steel, (21) Darjeeling, the snowy peak, (22) Do'gyaling, the political climate in Tibet, (23) International University and Chinese College, (24) Kolkata and QilaBala, and his record of perceptions towards India as appendix.

As for *A Visit to Afro-Eurasia*, he was invited to attend a meeting in Europe and he took it as a chance to travel around. The table of contents is as follows: (1) Day of Flight, (2) Meeting in Paris, (3) Tyre and Atomic Energy Studies, (4) A Visit to the Heart of France, (5) Into the Woods and Look for the Castle, (6) Old Castle in Ruwa City, (7) Visiting Historical Sites at Ruhwa River, (8) Stories Behind the Ancient Castle, (9) The Impression of The City of Flowers, (10) London, the



Cultural Capital, (11) All about London, (12) Hampton, the Grand View Garden in United Kingdom, (13) Amsterdam, a City Built on Water, (14) How Dutch do the Reclamation, (15) Visit and Ponder on the Hometown of Dutch Boy, (16) Rotterdam, the Second Largest Port in world, (17) Hague, a Paradoxical Capital, (18) Milan, the Heart of Economy of Italy, (19) Rome, the World's Capital of Arts, (20) The Idyllic Naples, (21) Pompeii, an Ancient City with Two Thousand Years of History, (22) A Flight to The Country of Desert, (23) Camel-riding on the Quicksand, (24) A Visit to the Pyramids, (25) Sphinx, (26) Islamic Fortress and The Dead City, (27) The Treasures of Cairo, (28) The City of Museums and Mosques, (29) Ancient City and Tomb with Five Thousand Years of History, (30) The Underground Palace, (31) The Beliefs of Ancient Egyptians. This book is filled with a total number of 106 illustrations.

The tables of contents of these travelogues show that the classic features of topographical writing were reflected in the descriptions of travel experiences as well as the thinking patterns of Hsu when he constructed his idea of writing. Therefore, regardless the type of places that he visited, whether it is a country or a city, he must introduce the history, geographical location, landscape and climate, races and languages, important settings, economic and political profiles etc. of all places.

As for the *Literary Collection of Xiyi*, it recorded more than 100 classical poems in different genres, such as folk poetry 竹枝词, chronicle poetry 纪事诗, poetry about local customs, names of places, cities etc.

In volume one, *The Collection of Yan Jiao* 炎徽集, contains “Ten Poems of Nanyang's Famous Fruits” 南洋名果十咏, which consists of ten poems that describe the characteristics of ten tropical fruits, including durian, mango, areca nut, mangosteen, rambutan, banana, pineapple, jackfruit, coconut and papaya. “Poems about the Hot and Deserted Place” 炎荒杂咏 describes the hot climate, geographical environment, local fruits and ethnic characteristics in the Nanyang region. “Twelve Old Folk Poems of Selat” 石叻话旧竹枝词十二首 describes many featured local streets and attractions in Singapore (formerly known as “Selat/Shile 石叻,” the common name of Singapore) such as Chinatown, Club Street, Cross Street, Big Town and Small Town of Singapore, Rochor Canal, the Sun Yat-Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall, Dhoby Ghaut, Ponggol and so on. It also includes writings about his travels to other Southeast Asian countries. For volume two, *The collection of Xue Ni* 雪泥集, all 53 poems recorded in it were written almost synchronously with his travel writings in *A Visit to Afro-Eurasia* and *A Journey to India*, a series of vernacular travelogues which recorded the impressions and experiences of travelling around Europe, America, India and Asia Pacific countries. There is one common

feature of these ancient poems, which is that all of them contain a considerable number of footnotes describing the origin of the names of places, or some related historical event, names of personages, special local products or slangs etc.

Basically, the main forms and structures of travelogues written by Hsu Yun-Tsiao are based on topographical writing styles.

### **Cultural Enlightenment: The Writing Purpose of Hsu Yun-Tsiao's Travelogues**

Hsu Yun-Tsiao began his topographical writing in late 1920s. His travel experiences were recorded in details, and all this implied his identity changes in different stages. If these were to reflect on his works, they can be categorized into three stages: (1) before leaving for Southeast Asia (1929): taking *Gusu* as his representative work in this stage, it reflects his aspiration for history preservation and the recognition of his identity as a Suzhou people; (2) after leaving for Southeast Asia (1931-1947): taking "A Tour to Riau Island," "A Tour to Bangkok" etc. as a representative, his aspiration for writing these travelogues is on the research of history as well as solely on travel. This also shows Hsu's living experiences with and affection towards Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand; (3) before and after the independence of Singapore and Malaysia (1962-1979): taking *A Visit to Afro-Eurasia* and *A Journey to India* as a representative, this is the period when Singapore and Malaysia fought for independence, as well as the separation of Singapore from the Federation of Malaya. This is also another important period for the Chinese in Southeast Asia in terms of political and ethnic cultural recognition after the World War II. Just like most Chinese immigrants, Hsu had completed his identity recognition from an overseas Chinese or Chinese immigrant to a local Chinese after he spent half a century living in Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand. Therefore, he tended to contribute to the betterment of the adopted country by researching and preserving its history through his later works. After reviewing the travelogues written by Hsu Yun-Tsiao throughout his life, the following points can be summarized as his main objective and purposes of writing. These three objectives are always connected to one another, namely, historical research (preservation of history), dissemination of education and contribute to the betterment of the country or ethnicity.

### **Historical Research**

Hsu Yun-Tsiao dedicated his whole life to the research of history and published a large number of books and academic articles. His representative works include *The History of Pattani*, *History of Nanyang*, *History of Malaya*, *History of Malaya in the Modern Age* and so on. He also worked hard to create an academic platform



in order to promote Southeast Asian Studies /Nanyang Studies. He said that at the time, the research activities “were mainly conducted by the Western or Japanese scholars and experts,” “while we ourselves become the research target of others” (Hsu, 1945/1979: 4) (Preface, “*Collection of East Asian Chinese*” and “*East Asian Chinese and Culture*,” 1947/1979: 5). In many of his articles, he called on the local intellectuals to participate in the research of the Nanyang region actively. The establishment and republication of the *Journal of the South Seas Society* served the purpose of “promoting the ethos of specialized academic research of Nanyang among the people, hence avoiding the problem of plagiarism and complacency” (the Preface of *Channel of Research of the Eastern and Western*, 1946/1979: 32).

In this way, he was very concerned about the history and culture of ethnics in Southeast Asian countries. For example, he published *The History of Pattani* (1946) and described this ancient country that was once prosperous and glorious as “a country that has lost its specialty, its history having been forgotten by the people. Its lands were desolated and the vicissitudes of the country are depressing” (Preface of *The History of Pattani*, 1946/1979: 26). As for the information about ethnic groups, languages, geographical environment and history of the border areas of China, Myanmar, Thailand and India, it was said to be “less well-known among the people” , “people are unable to point out the number of ethnic groups living in these areas correctly” (Preface of *An Ethnography about Ethnics at the boundaries of China, Myanmar, Thailand and Indochina*, 1961/1979: 49-50); and again, the “geological research of Borneo and Sarawak is only half-done so far, what was hidden in the mainland is still an unknown” (Preface of *A Hundred Year History of Sarawak*, 1956/1979: 53).

The enthusiasm for historical research of Hsu Yun-Tsiao is not limited to academic performance only, but also shown in his travelogues. Every character, place, products and other things he mentioned in his articles were examined, while the changes between past and present were described in details and explained with long commentaries. This is where we can see the strong sense of history of the author. For example, the commentary of the poem “The Anecdote of Kuala Lumpur” 吉隆坡掌故 describes how this swampy area had been developed into a lively city by a Chinese, Kapitan Yap Ah Loy and how this place became the capital of the Federation of Malaya (Hsu, 1979: 21-23). This kind of official and unofficial historical information can be found in all his travelogues. It is quite common for readers to think that the stories are boring and lengthy for they cannot understand them from Hsu’s topographical perspective and intention.

### Knowledge Dissemination

Other than his strong historical awareness, knowledge dissemination is another intention of Hsu Yun-Tsiao in his writing of historical and topographical articles. Hsu was born in the late Qing Dynasty. He went through the collapse of the old regime and the rise of May Fourth cultural revolution. In an environment where national salvation was going on, Hsu was influenced by concepts promoting the importance of open-mindedness<sup>1</sup> and education. Even after his arrival in Nanyang, he still actively engaged himself in education and cultural activities for the purposes as below: (1) to increase the knowledge of people who had no opportunity to travel overseas, understanding the condition of countries such as Europe, India, United States, Japan, and other countries of Southeast Asia, hence expanding their worldviews; (2) to increase the understanding of local citizens on the origins of local history and culture, as well as the history and culture of neighbouring countries, which are, for Hsu Yun-Tsiao, the Nanyang studies; (3) to ensure the understanding of Chinese culture among Chinese immigrants or their later generations of citizens, at the same time cultivating a sense of national identity; (4) to ensure the understanding of foreigners of the culture and history of Southeast Asia. As such, he also edited *Nanyang Chinese Dictionary of Vulgar Words* (1960) and the *Nanyang Pocketbooks Series* (1959) for the readers' reference.

Taking his poem "Remembrance of Pattani" as an example, he first examined the translation of the names of places in commentary one, then introduced the rise and fall of Pattani in commentaries two to four. While in commentary five, he showed his concern over the fact that the local Chinese were unfamiliar with the Chinese language. "In 1933, I was invited by Mr. Wu Xue Lian to travel there and work as a teacher. I was worried when I realized that most of the local Chinese there were unfamiliar with the Chinese language. I stayed alone for seven years in that country, thinking that my hard work could save the fading Chinese culture. Unfortunately, the pressure imposed by the Siam government prompted me to leave with overwhelming sadness and worries" (Hsu, 1979: 36).

Besides that, we can also see how Hsu gives a detailed account of his travel journey in his travelogues. For example, in terms of transportation, he provided a detailed description on the appearances, structures and models, schedules, fares, meals etc. of every modes of transport that he had taken, including airplanes, trains, coaches, boats, taxis, as well as pack animals such as elephants and camels. In *A Visit to Afro-Eurasia*, the detailed descriptions from the purchase of ticket until

1 One of the important parts in open-mindedness of people is to change the narrow worldview of Chinese by understanding the knowledge of different places other than China.

boarding are very impressive. The descriptions included the model of the aircraft, length of the aircraft, fuel consumption, flying speed, flight altitude, temperature and pressure, length of flight transfer waiting time, situation and procedures during transit, services by flight attendants and so on. Other examples are the descriptions of the travel itinerary and arrangement of schedule. They were written in an extremely detailed way so that people can use them as references: “I write it down for the reference of those who are travelling to London.”(Hsu, 1964a: 68) Moreover, as Hsu made self-guided travels to most of the attractions mentioned in his book, he would also explain the problems and solutions that he encountered during his journey. For example, in his book, Hsu recorded the locations of tourist information centre and places where tourists can purchase a map, useful addresses and contact numbers, ticket fees, opening hours etc., just like those written in modern travel manual or guide.

### **Betterment of Country**

Other than historical research, preservation of history and dissemination of education, Hsu Yun-Tsiao’s topographical writings reflected a strong sense of contribution to the betterment of the country. In his topographical writings, Hsu often shows his great concern for the development of the country and people, especially those who are in the intense relationship such as Eastern versus Western countries, and the colonial versus the colonized. Therefore, a strong sense of urgency caused him to work harder in the preservation of history and dissemination of education. He was hoping that the enlightenment and diffusion of culture could eliminate the misunderstandings and barriers between countries and ethnics. He also hoped that he could contribute to the betterment of the country by understanding and learning of the cultural strengths and weaknesses of other countries and ethnics (the “country/nation” stated here including Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia), as well as contribute to ethnic harmony, development of industry and commerce, thereby improving the economic strength and international status of Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand. Therefore, we can see Hsu’s concerns and worries over the local needs, environmental pollution, and transportation problems in India. We can also see his opinion on the industrial development, financial commerce, libraries, research institutions etc. in India, United States, Japan and other countries.

In the volume 3 *Poem Collection of Xueni*, recorded “Three Things that overwhelmed India: Sandstorm, Beggars and Crows” 天竺三多——风沙乞丐与乌鸦, which referred to the issue of poverty of a country:

An empire covered in yellow dust can be seen in a distance, beggars in the Buddha shelter worshipping the Sangha, hungry crows hovering above the house to announce the arrival of disaster, sacred cow walks freely on the road. (Hsu, 1979: 12)

Again, in the poem entitled “The Empire State Building in New York” 纽约登帝国大厦, he showed his desperation for modernization. He wrote as below:

It was the first time I step into the world’s tallest building, looking at the distant scenery and thinking of my homeland, how can I just think of my homeland without doing anything, I lean on the rail and feel ashamed of worrying. (Hsu, 1979: 31)

It is obvious that Hsu was aware of his usage of topographical genre and purpose as the subject of his travelogues. His travelogues reflected a strong sense of historical preservation, education dissemination and political improvement purpose. His topographical concept can be confirmed from the following text:

My travel notes are different from others’: I focus less on the record of travel details, but more on the footnotes. I see the record of travel details as something personal, and there is no point in making it lengthy; but footnotes are something that others could learn from, so there is a need for me to put some effort on it. Therefore, every time I visit historical sites, I will trace their origins; once I arrived to a modern city, I will describe its characteristics; when I visit a company, I will collect its statistic; when it involves language, I will attach its original text. Even though my observations and understandings of certain things might be narrow, even though they are just something read by the scholar, but the traces and records of the past are similar to a person who is very familiar with the place. (Hsu, 1964b: Preface)

Although the main purpose of Hsu’s topographical writings is on the record of information, he also included his personal opinions and expressions in his book.

For example, the Preface of *A Visit to Afro-Eurasia* reflected a deeper level of personal feeling as Hsu was bedridden during that time. The article starts with his personal travel experience, then one by one he commented on the human touches of the people in the United Kingdom, France, Holland, Italy, Egypt and other countries, as well as some complaints and dissatisfaction of his European trip. In

terms of narrative techniques, as usual, he sticks with the topographical writing style. However, the sensibility in the content of this book is slightly higher than *A Journey to India*. This may be due to the reason that his travel to Europe was different from India where he travelled with a group of people. The main reason of his travel to Europe was to attend a meeting and then travel alone, without having the responsibility as a leader and teacher. He expressed his excitement with a long classical poem “Fly to the Sky” 天外飞航行 at the beginning of his book:

The wheels are rolling, taking me out of this world, in a flash I jetted off powerfully into the sky.

Big birds flying over the top, dragons rolling in the sky, I feel like I am close to the Palace of Gods, again and again I try to touch the stars.

Clouds are falling with the wind, the sky looks like sea without boundary, and the universe is all blue, just like Heaven and Earth have never been divided.

I am travelling in nihility, forget about the world and the people, all secular thoughts and feelings are washed away by themselves, there is neither love nor hate right now.

Rain is seen before it falls onto the ground, spreading all over the sky like jewellery, as if the weavers are weaving, drilling their needles over the jades.

Through the clouds I look down, I can see how deep the sea is, the rivers are like the vein of the leaf, and the mountains look just like anthills.

Looking at the sea horizon, only then I can feel my presence, travel 30 thousand miles in a day and night, it is impossible as said by the elders.

Travel freely beyond the sky, I almost get carried away. To record the extraordinary view of the space, I wrote this poem instead of taking a photo.

(Hsu, 1964a: 7)

Other than that, his perceptual description of sceneries can be seen in “Amsterdam, the City Built on Water” 水都阿姆斯特丹: “Today is a sunny day. Looking down from the plane, the town that looks like a sunken city can be clearly seen. The clouds are like masses of snow or cottons that scattered in the air. The world turned upside down when I was flying over the surface of the sea, the sky is below me. When I was mind-wandering, I saw countless burs appeared in the sky and were shot down at a very high speed. Reflecting the sunlight, they shone a beautiful light. It was breathtaking. Take a closer look, it was actually the rain in the air. And this drizzle disappeared in a flash.” (Hsu, 1964a: 77)

Also, in “Rome, the World’s Capital of Arts” 世界艺术之都——罗马, he was touched by the night view of the city of Rome on the night before his trip ended. Forgetting the grievances he received during the day, he knew that the city of Rome would to be his hardest goodbye. Hence, he expressed his feeling of unwillingness to leave through a masterpiece of Roman music:

Naples, no matter how unclean it is during the daytime, all ugliness and badness disappeared as the night fall. Lamps shining the pearly light, scattered on the hill, scattered at the harbor. Just like a charming girl who wearing a glittery evening gown and makes an appearance in the garden. Seeing this, I can’t help but start singing “L’AD DIA A NAPOLI.” (Hsu, 1964a: 124-125)

In terms of archaic text, it reflected the emotional and romantic feelings of Hsu, just like this “Night in Naples” 拿坡里之夜<sup>1</sup> that echoes the content of the vernacular travelogue above:

Thousands of shining stars embellish the houses, chords are played under the moonlight, stop the boat and enjoy the night by sitting at the jetty, singing an unforgettable song named “Santa Lucia.”<sup>2</sup> (Hsu, 1979: 13)

Another example is “Hot Spring Bathing at Yangming Mountain at the Noon of Autumn” 丁未秋阳明山浴温泉,

Steaming springs and streams are everywhere, fogs rising up like the clouds that protecting the Gods, bathe into the hot spring and warm both body and mind, stay up late at the night and linger with my crutch in my hand. (1979: 41)

Also see “The Scenery of West Lake” 西湖即景,

Mountains are vaguely seen from a distance, sticking to the sky, jackdaws are just like tiny black dots beside the clouds, water crinkled with sunlight, but not

1 Naples is a famous city of Italy, surrounded by mountains and seas. People tends to express through songs their feelings for its breathtaking views (Original footnote attached to the poem).

2 Santa Lucia is the name of a jetty in Naples, which is also the title of a song named “I stopped my boat to wait for you.” I used to sing this song when I was young, and I feel nothing special about it. Now that I was listening to this song in where it was born, it was soul-stirring (Original footnote attached to the poem).



because of the wind, I can hear the sound of panpipes and bassoon from the ferry. (1979: 50)

This is the reason why we cannot simply categorize all of Hsu's travelogues as pure topographical writings. However, it is undeniable that Hsu's travelogues still adhere to the Chinese classical topographical structure as a whole.

### **Construction of Subjectivity: Inner Intention of Hsu Yun-Tsiao's Travelogues**

Hsu Yun-Tsiao is one of the authors of topographical prose during the Cold War and experienced a period of political instability. His purpose of writing is on the emphasis of open-mindedness of people to strengthen their recognition of local identity, and to educate the masses to develop international perspectives by using historical literature. This kind of topographical travelogues had become a trend during that period of time. These fruitful publications did bring certain impacts to society. A historical scholar, Liao Wen Hui (廖文辉 Lew Bon Hui) categorized this kind of works as "historical narrative style" (2014: 166). From the literary point of view, this kind of topographical travelogues represented by Hsu Yun-Tsiao is having an ambiguous position because of their dual attributes of history and literature. Just like what was questioned by Ye Ye during his examination of the traditional evolution of Chinese topographical literature: is it a topographical phenomenon of literature or a literary phenomenon of topography?

Firstly, we look into the strong historical awareness that runs through the topographical travelogues written by Hsu Yun-Tsiao. As a historian, Hsu's observations and experiences on peoples and things throughout his travels are having an extremely strong sense of historical consciousness. This was shown in: (1) always associate and compare his experiences in different time and space, especially the past and present status of history, system, economy, education, technology development etc. of his observing object. Different spaces here included the comparison of experience among China and Southeast Asia countries, such as the comparison between his homeland Suzhou, second homeland Bangkok and the place where he settled down, Singapore; it also included the comparison between these spaces and Western countries or other emerging countries and developing countries. (2) Reflect and criticize on the first point, and express his own point of view, including denial and affirmation, resistance / acceptance or adjustment of attitude. Generally, in the process of observing and comparing related objects in a particular space, the traveller will induce different levels of the internal dialogue and dialogues between traveller and object. Hsu Yun-Tsiao, having a strong historical

awareness, was more capable of grasping the subjectivity of mankind in historical activities. With his professional archeological knowledge and evidence awareness, he could understand the object of observation better, or even sum up his experiences to look for solutions to existing problems. So what are the existing problems that Hsu Yun-Tsiao was concerned with?

If “the core of historical awareness is the establishment of subjectivity”(Xu Zhaoren, 1(2010): 110), this may explain what are the existing problems that Hsu Yun-Tsiao was concerned with. As an intellectual with both experiences from his homeland and Nanyang, it is unavoidable for Hsu Yun-Tsiao to be confronted with multiple identities as an individual (including his complicated identity as a native of Suzhou, who then married a Thai woman and lastly became a Singapore citizen). In terms of the recognition of national identity as a group (especially before and after the independence of Malaya/Malaysia), he too faced the anxiety and embarrassment as the colonized.

### **Construction of Multiple Identities on Individual Level**

Hsu’s identity and recognition on the individual level is closely connected with his attachment to Suzhou, Bangkok and Singapore. He revealed his strong sense of sensibility and attachment in many of his travelogues. Hsu Yun-Tsiao left his homeland, Suzhou at the age of 26 and went to Singapore alone. He first served at Foon Yew High School in Johor, Malaysia, and Jingfang Teachers’ College for Women in Singapore. Two years later, he went to Siam and worked as a teacher at Pattani Jong Fa Foundation School, and married his colleague, Ms. Liu Jing Xiang. At that period of time, he collected a large amount of historical material which he, and wrote and translated many books such as *The History of Pattani*, *Biography of Taskin*, *The King of Siam* and so on, which earned him a certain reputation. However, in 1930s, Thai Cultural Restoration as a result of constitutional revolution of the Thai government, caused Hsu Yun-Tsiao to leave Thailand with anger.<sup>1</sup> He then continued to work in the cultural industry in Singapore, and established the

<sup>1</sup> Siam (Thailand) experienced a military revolution in June 1932 and formed a new governing cabinet. They implemented rules that were unfavorable to overseas Chinese, such as revoking the right to business operations of the Chinese in various industries, including rice, tin mining, rubber and so on, forcibly shutdown all the Chinese schools, banned the Chinese-language newspapers, and expelled Chinese who were against Thai culture. All this gave rise to unemployment among the Chinese. This is also the reason why Hsu Yun-Tsiao resigned from Pattani Jong Fa Foundation School and worked as an English teacher at Bangkok Business College. However, in the end, due to the assimilation policy that Plaek Phibunsongkhram imposed on overseas Chinese, Hsu again resigned and returned to Singapore. (For more information, refer to “Chapter 13: The Development of Chinese Society in Siam (Thailand)” by Lee En Han, *History of Southeast Asia Chinese* (Taipei: Wu-Nan, 2003: 377-427); Lew Bon Hui, *Biography of Hsu Yun-Tsiao* (Singapore: Global Publishing, 2014.4: 11), etc.

South Seas Society with Yao Nan 姚楠, Liu Shih Mo 刘士木, Li Chang Fu 李长傅, Guan Chu Pu 关楚璞, Chang Lee Chien 张礼千, Yu Da Fu 郁达夫 etc. They published the *Journal of the South Seas Society* that specialized in Nanyang/Southeast Asia Studies. Finally, historical research had become his lifelong career.

Hsu Yun-Tsiao lived in Thailand from 1933 to 1938. Although it was only 5 years, his feelings for this country were strong and complicated, as he loved and hated it at the same time. He loved that land because of the similarities between Bangkok and Suzhou, as well as his affection towards his Thai wife, relatives and friends; meanwhile his hatred was caused by the failure and frustration that he encountered when it came to his identity and recognition as an overseas Chinese or a Thai. From Hsu Yun-Tsiao's self-description in his text, we can see his feeling of grief and self-pity on his life, as he left his homeland and stayed in Southeast Asia for good. The only thing that cheered him up was the sense of accomplishment that he generated from his historical research and study as it could make him recall and realize who he was and where he was.

Especially the first two years after his arrival in Nanyang, the unfamiliarity that he was experiencing towards the local culture had made him miss Suzhou even more. Therefore, by collecting the bits and pieces of Suzhou, Hsu Yun-Tsiao gained a certain sense of existence. In many of his works, we can still see his pride as a native Suzhou. Especially when he was going through hardships, the recognition of his native identity seemed to give him a certain level of spiritual comfort. This is also the first part of Hsu Yun-Tsiao's recognition and construction activity of his multiple identities.

In his first Thailand travelogue after he left Thailand, "A Tour to Bangkok" 曼谷巡礼 (1940), he described the beauty of Thailand with a lyrical and aesthetic writing style and filled his article with passion and romance, which was rarely seen in his vernacular travel writings. The opening paragraph in Hsu Yun-Tsiao's travelogue probably best reflected his complicated feelings towards Thailand:

A place that is gentle and soft like a girl, that is beautiful like a piece of painting, it is the city of Menam, the jungle of Wat, a place named Krung Thep by the Siamese, a well-known city named Bangkok among the foreigners. Although I hate her intention and betrayal, but it is hard for me to forget the beautiful sceneries and warm temperament of hers. I missed her just like I missed the Xizi Lake in Gusu. Maybe it is because Thailand is the place where my wife and my children were born and grew up, so I am still bonded to it in some way. Although I am now 805 miles away from her in Singapore,

recalling my traces of travel, but my family members and my relatives are still there enjoying the warm temperament in the country. It is kind of an awkward situation for me. Therefore to her, I can't help but having nostalgia, despite my hatred towards her! (Hsu, 1940.8.1, 16)

In his later series of works such as “Bangkok, Suzhou in Southeast Asia” 曼谷—东南亚的苏州, “Travel Experiences of Thailand” 泰游观感录, “The Harvest of My Thailand Trip” 泰国之行的收获, “A Tour to Malaysia and Siam” 马暹纪行 etc., he again compared the streets, interior designs of houses, languages and tone between Bangkok and Suzhou. He also mentioned his interactions with his wife and children, as well as with his relatives, showing his nostalgia for Bangkok, Thailand.

One of his experiences that made him feel frustrated was when his and his wife's status of Thai citizens was not recognized by the local staff (refer to “Samut Prakan Crocodile Farm” 北榄鳄鱼场). Obviously, Hsu Yun-Tsiao's sense of recognition towards his second homeland, Thailand was bounded with a layer of blood relationship compared to Singapore, a country where he lived for the rest of his life. It is this kinship that makes him more concerned with the legal status of himself as well as all the mixed-ethnic of Chinese and Thai, be it political or cultural identity.

With this we can see that even after Hsu left Thailand, he never stopped caring about the local historical and archaeological activities, the development of Chinese newspaper and Chinese education, as well as the influence of political changes regarding Thai Chinese. However, the assimilation policy implemented by Plaek Phibunsongkhram in regard to Chinese education and overseas Chinese made him feel even more aggrieved and indignant. Therefore, his writing of his living experiences in Thailand is not limited to the expression of nostalgia and love, but at the same time examined and verified the historical connections and origins of the Sino-Siamese in the areas of transportation, politics, economy, history and culture through an enormous amount of historical research. Besides that, he took this as a chance to affirm the contribution of overseas Chinese and the superiority of Chinese culture. On the other hand, he criticized the ethnic conflict in Thailand at that time as “narrow nationalism,” and at the same time looked forward to a better relationship between China and Thailand in the future (Hsu, “A Tour to Malaysia and Siam,” 1947: 107).

If we refer to Hsu Yun-Tsiao's travel experiences in Thailand, the frustration and failure that he faced were the exploitation and humiliation as a result of the denial of citizenship, as well as the lack of the rights to education and subsistence

of the Chinese community. At this point of time, the identity of Hsu Yun-Tsiao as a historian was seen as an individual, and at the same time beyond this. The historical awareness brought by this identity of Hsu has been used to solve the existing problems and construction of subjectivity in his travelogues. The poem below shows Hsu's intention to "contribute to the betterment of the country" through historical research activities. For him, Thailand has long been his second homeland, and this reflected another layer of his identity and recognition other than his identity as a native Suzhou.

Reunited after 30 years and we gathered to talk about every little things we have been through. There are only few of our old friends here, with their hair greyed, with their prestige and enlightenment faded. Although revolution is not the responsibility of scholars, but we need it for the betterment of country. Till when shall we live in this aimless life? A life without proper direction is just hopeless! (1979: 23)

### **National Identity on Group-level**

The identity of Hsu Yun-Tsiao as a historian can be seen as an individual, and at the same time beyond this. The historical awareness brought by this identity of Hsu has been used to solve the existing problems and construction subjectivity in his travelogues. Hsu Yun-Tsiao rarely recorded his personal opinions towards Singapore in his topographical prose, in fact he recorded his travel experiences of few attractions of Singapore in many of his archaic poems, and most of them are filled with the feelings of admiration. This is probably because during the period of time from post-war until before and after the independence movement of Malaya/Malaysia, or even after the independence of Singapore in 1965, the ruling party of Singapore had protected the common interests of different ethnic groups when they fought for the citizenship of the Chinese in Singapore. Hsu Yun-Tsiao started his subjectivity construction activities smoothly in this emerging country which consisted of 70% of Chinese population. He did not have to face the frustration and embarrassment caused by the denial of ethnic rights, like what he had been through in Thailand. From his travelogues, we can see that he always compared the local customs and culture of Singapore with countries such as Europe, America, Japan, India and so on, which also showed his concern for the overall development of Singapore and Malaysia. This kind of concern is more likely belongs to group-level of group identity, which refers to Chinese ethnic in Southeast Asia and Singaporean

sense of nationalism, in comparison with his feelings towards his homeland, Suzhou and his second hometown, Bangkok.

Other than his five-year stay in Thailand, Hsu Yun-Tsiao spent the rest of his life in Singapore since his arrival in year 1931. Before that, he experienced the private-schooling system and new educational style in the late Qing Dynasty to the Republic of China. He left his homeland and headed to the South Seas when the country was flooded with the thoughts of preserving the local culture and resisting the foreign ideas. He went through the historical and political changes in Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand, which included the period when the exclusion of Chinese population and the implementation of policy of conciliation in Thailand, the outbreak of war when the people of Singapore and Malaysia were massacred during the fall of Singapore, postwar national independence movements that happened in different part of Southeast Asia, the ruling strategy imposed by the British colonial ruler on the people of Singapore and Malaysia, until the independence of Malaya and the separation of Singapore from Malaysia. For more than fifty years of his life that he lived in Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand, Hsu Yun-Tsiao never stopped worrying about the development of all these countries, as he regarded it as responsibility of an intellectual.

From the topographical travelogues written by Hsu Yun-Hsiao, we can see his concern on the documentation, inheritance, recognition and dissemination of Chinese culture and history. It was just that the process of his identity and recognition changed from being an overseas Chinese of China / Nanyang to a Singaporean Chinese / Southeast Asian Chinese. In the works of historical research by Hsu Yun-Tsiao, we can see changes in his use of words from “Nanyang” to “Southeast Asia” as well as from “overseas Chinese” to “local Chinese.” This also reflected his changing and strengthening of local identity and recognition. In the later period of his life, his publications mainly showed his strong sense of social concern as a Singapore citizen.

As Singapore was relatively poorer in terms of resources (compared to Malaysia which was rich in land and resources), Hsu showed a great concern on the national and political development of Singapore. This was first reflected in the advocacy of contribution of science and industry to a country. After he witnessed the technological development of France and Japan when he visited Eiffel Tower in Paris and the Tokyo Tower respectively, he said “this remarkable success should be attributed to the scientific progress. This is why the dissemination of scientific knowledge is very important” (Hsu, “Tokyo Tower and Paris Eiffel Tower” 东京铁塔与巴黎埃菲尔, *Nanyang Siang Pau*, 1968.2.16, 8). He was even more impressed



by how India's national industry, Tata Group, contributed to the development of industry, agriculture, charity, medical and educational field of India after the independence of the country. He was hoping that a similar situation could happen in Malaysia, which was an emerging country during that time. The Preface of *A Journey to India* states three purposes of writing and significances of his book: (1) visit the ancient attractions; (2) to "know more about modern India, and how they struggled to change their status from a colony to an independent country, how to restore the dying ancient culture, as well as how to harmonize different customs, languages and ethnics in the country so that the people can unite and contribute to the betterment of the country together. Lastly, also to know about the implementation of the five-year plan to save the economy of the country and resolve poverty issue of people"; (3) to enhance his own research on India.

He deeply regretted when he found that the Library of the Congress, New York Public Library and Japan Toyo Bunko lacked a collection of Southeast Asian Studies. Therefore, he volunteered to donate the related books to the authorities (refer to "Library of Congress" 美国国会图书馆, "New York Public Library" 纽约公众图书馆, "A Tour to Toyo Bunko" 东洋文库巡礼). This shows how Hsu Yun-Tsiao established the connection between Singapore and Malaysia with the world through his topographical travelogues. Especially during the period after war, in the 50s and 60s when there was a lack of material supplies, having fair development in education, and also experiencing political tensions, most of the people did not have the opportunity to broaden their mind by travelling overseas. They were still in the stage of exploring this emerging country, as well as the future development and position of their national identity. Topographical travelogues written by Hsu Yun-Tsiao at that period of time were playing the role of enlightenment, providing the people with onsite information of the neighbouring countries and great powers as well as enhancing their knowledge.

### Conclusion

As discussed above, Hsu Yun-Tsiao's travelogues were written based on the topographical genre structure, and the relationship of which was inseparable from his involvement in long-term research of literature and history. In terms of narration, Hsu Yun-Tsiao tended to express his sentimental travel experiences through the genre of classical poetry, on the other hand, the main themes of his travelogues were expressed by way of rational narration and critique, with a lesser emphasis on lyricism. Therefore, the travelogues written by Hsu are said to be lacking in aesthetical sense if we define the literary or artistic nature of his works simply from

a specific aesthetic perspective. However, the conscious use of the topographical genre has resulted in restoring and testifying collective experiences in a specific era. It was an era when the people were struggling on free themselves from the colonial ruling and pursuing the right to independence for their country and nation. At that period of time, Hsu's travelogues which emphasized on rational narration and transmission of information met the needs of an emerging country/nation, which were the needs for open-mindedness and innovation. Topographical prose during that period of time was no longer a focus on nostalgia, like what was written by southward scholars from China in the early period. In fact, they focused more on the recognition of local politics and history. By the 1990s or later, Malaysian Chinese topographical prose seemed to recall the theme of nostalgia. Most of the famous works at that time contained the elements of nostalgia and local identity and recognition, which were actually related to the personal experience, place of birth and growth of the author. Therefore, this kind of unique topographical writings represented by Hsu has become an important material in assisting us to sort out and outline the development of Malaysian Chinese topographical literature.

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