



Lesson 1

ASIAN LITERATURE



Learning Targets

- To identify representative texts and authors from asia
- To situate the texts in the context of the region, the nation, and the world
- To appreciate the cultural and aesthetic diversity of the literature of the world
- To compare and contrast 21st century literary works with earlier texts by citing their elements, structures, and traditions
- To explain the literary and sociocultural contexts and discuss how they enhance the meaning of the text and enrich the reader's understanding
- To explain the relationship between the text and its context



Did you know?

Literature in the Eastern hemisphere chronicles the history of civilizations spanning thousands of years. As religion, war, and politics shaped Asian societies, literature prospered to mirror these developments. As children of this continent, we need to appreciate the literary outputs of our Asian neighbors.



How the Growth Occurred

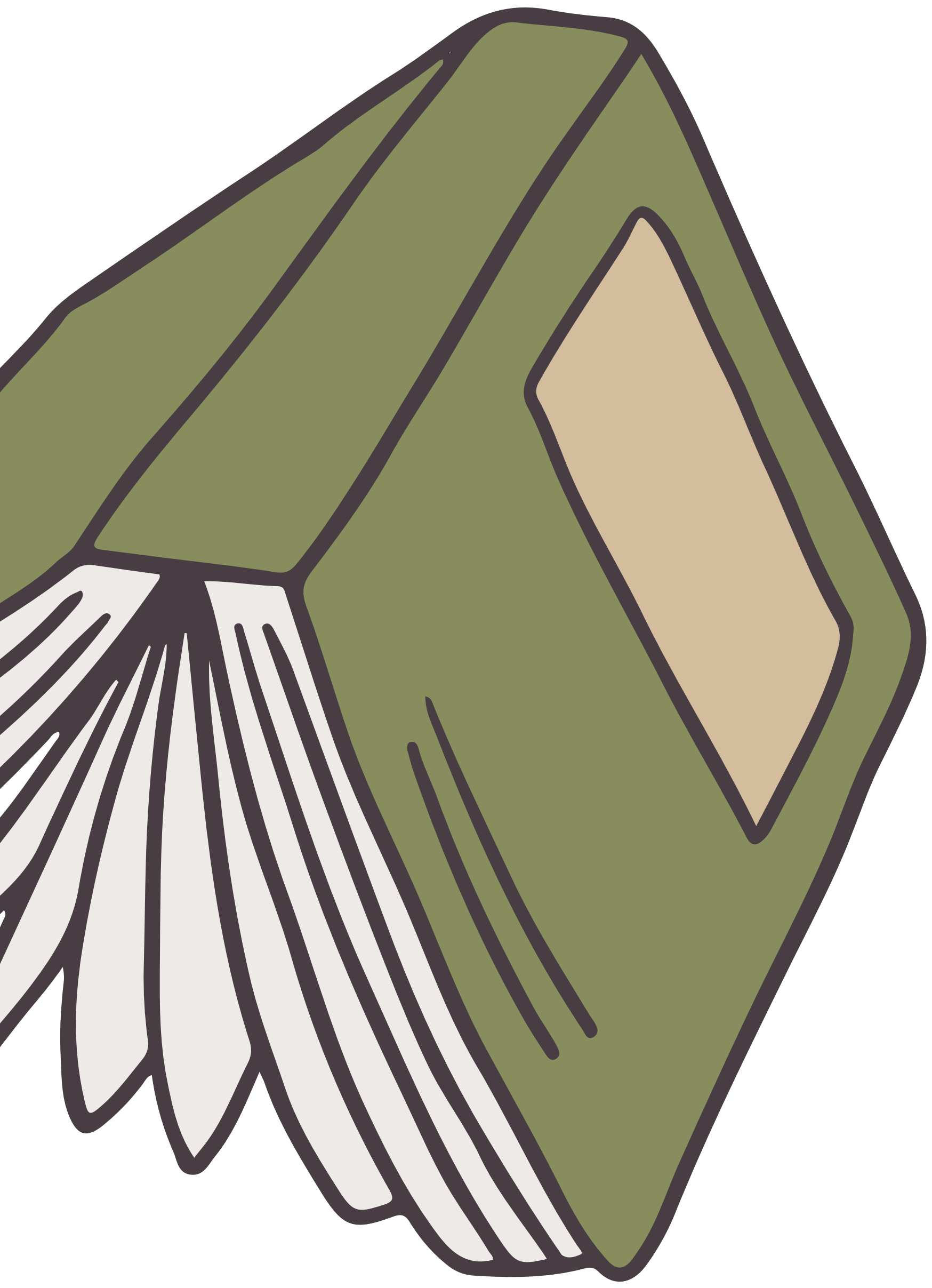


The literary traditions of Asia, the largest continent on the planet, are colossal in terms of scope and length of existence. It is wise to study Asian literature by geographical region.

East Asia has a rich and long-standing literary tradition, best studied by region.



How the Growth Occurred



CHINA

- One of the world's oldest literary traditions, dating back to the 14th century BCE.
- Unbroken cultural and literary history, supported by the preservation of language.
- The ***Tang Dynasty (618-907)*** is considered the golden age, with famous poets like Tu Fu, Li Po, and Wang Wei.

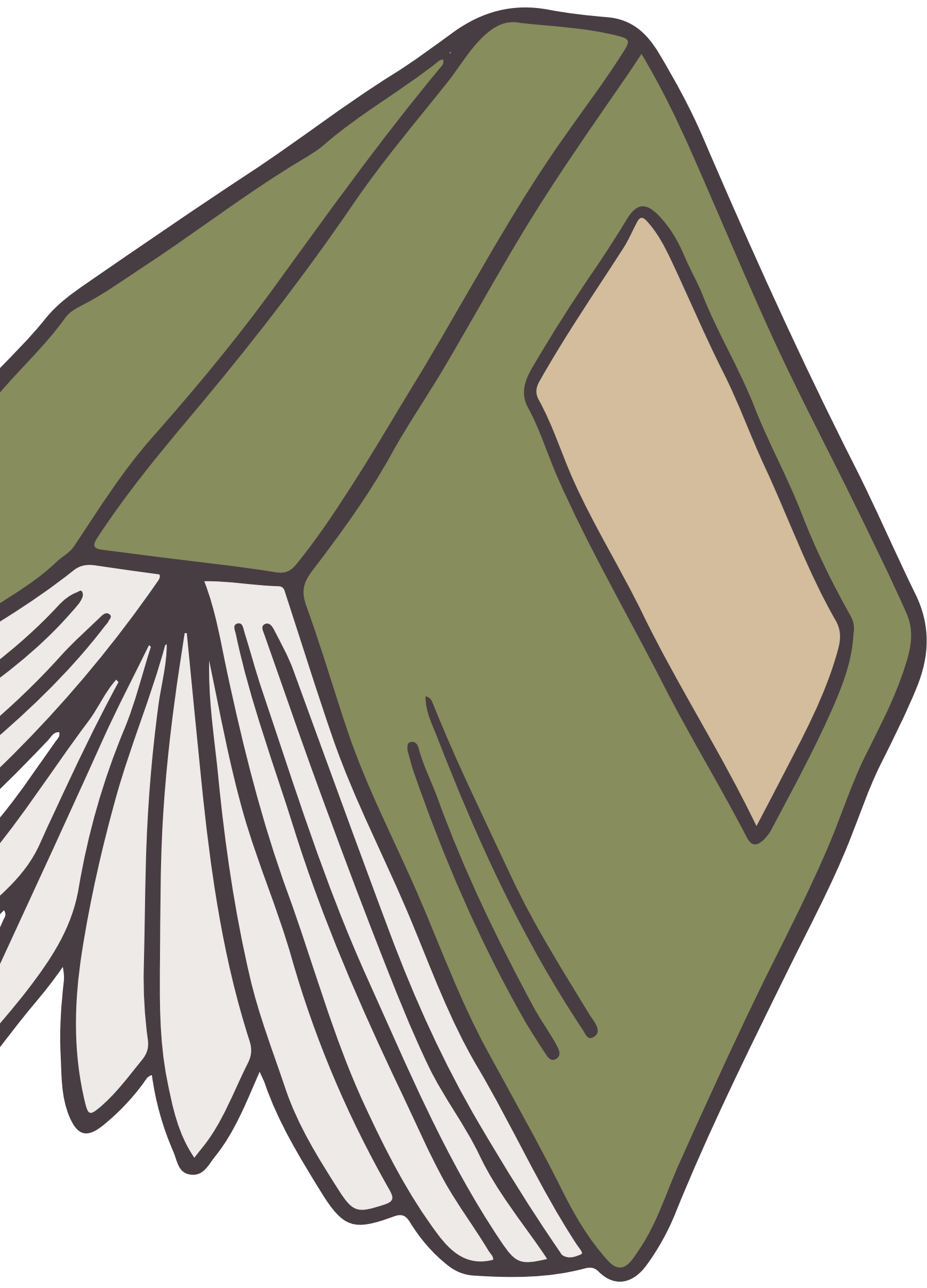
How the Growth Occurred



CHINA

- Four sections of Chinese literature
 - ✓ Masters of Literature
 - ✓ Popular Literature Classics
 - ✓ Textbooks of Literature and Papers
 - ✓ Journals of Literature
- Culture, philosophy and history
- **Literature is important to exhibit country's civilization and charm.**

How the Growth Occurred



- ***Pre-classical period*** – influenced by oral traditions of different social and professional provenance
- ***Classical period*** – Confucius or Kung Fu-Tzu became prominent, writer, philosopher, and a teacher
- ***Modern literature*** – late Qing was a period of intellectual ferment sparked by sense of national crisis

How the Growth Occurred



JAPAN

- Influenced by Chinese literature but developed its unique style.
- Known for the **haiku** (17-syllable poetic form) and traditional theater forms like **Noh** and **Kabuki**.
- Reflects Japan's cultural identity: simple, yet complex and beautiful.

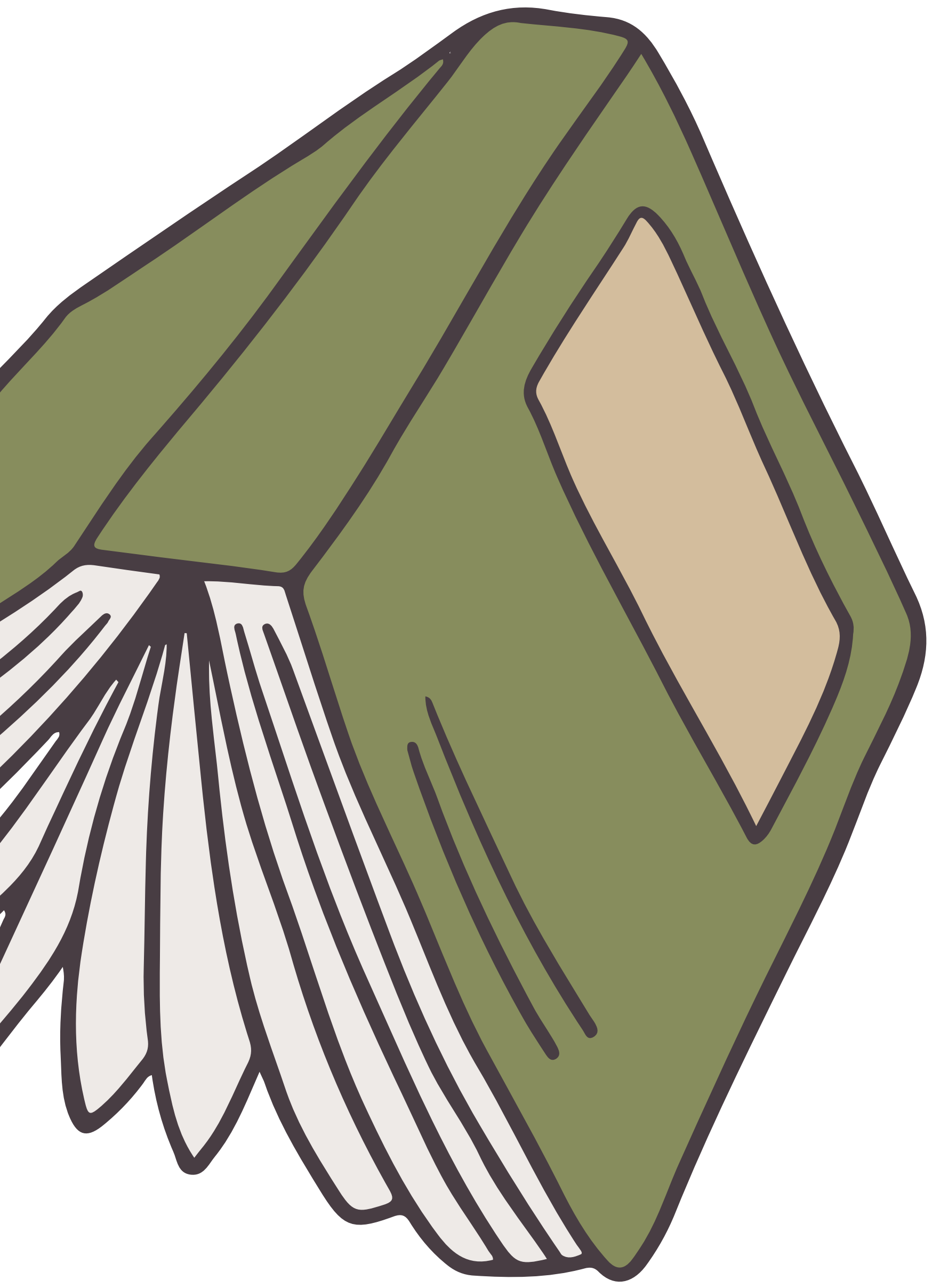
How the Growth Occurred



JAPAN

- *Haiku* has a syllabic unit pattern of 5-7-5 in which words are kept simple that deals with themes about nature.
- *Tanka* has five syllabic units consisting of 5-7-5-7-7 pattern.

How the Growth Occurred



Haiku

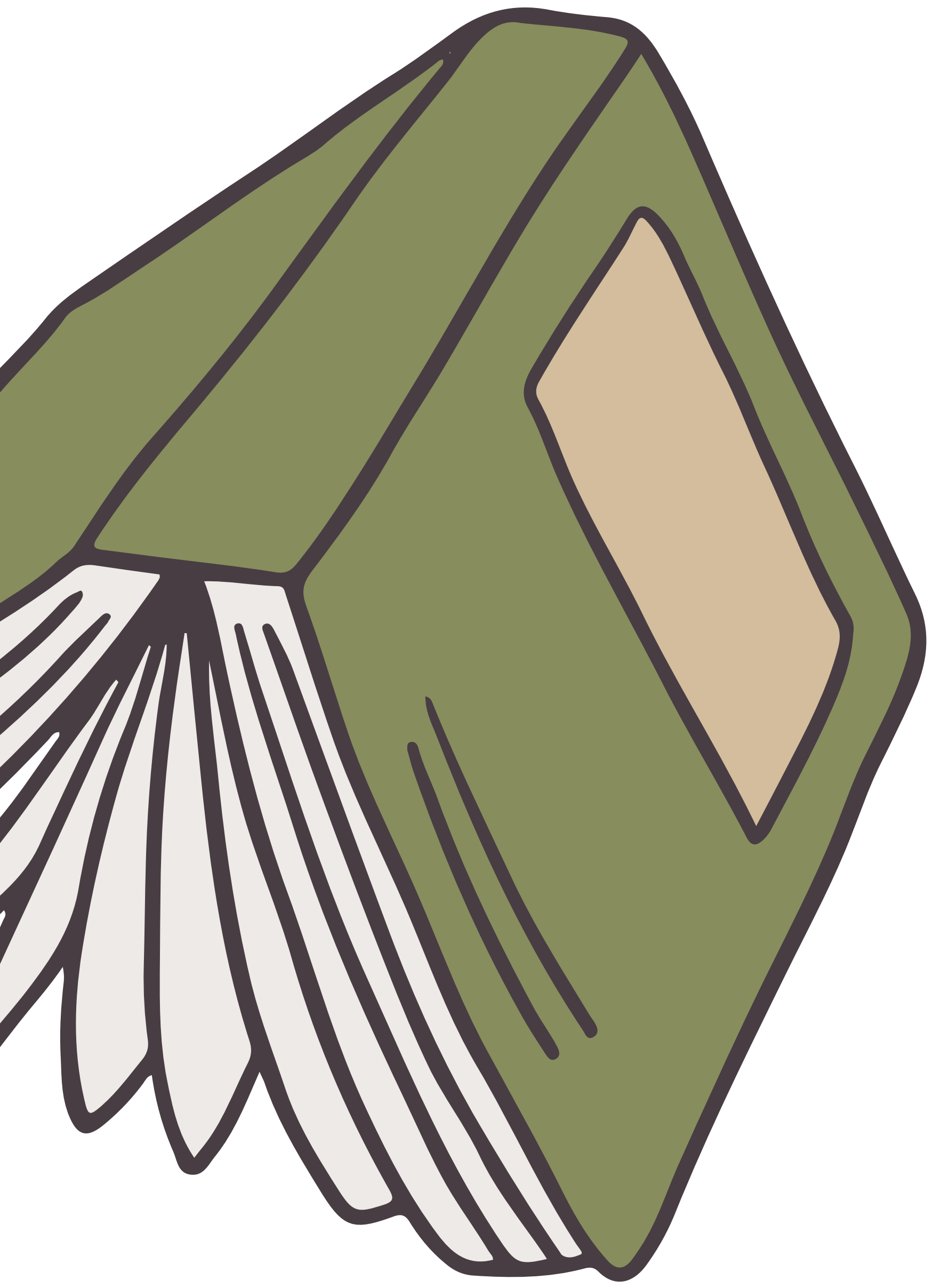
Leaves falling so fast

Floating across the cool air

Dissolve its beauty.



How the Growth Occurred



Tanka

*Autumn evening falls,
crows gather on lonely branch,
wind stirs fallen leaves;
I remember distant voice,
the warmth I once knew and loved*

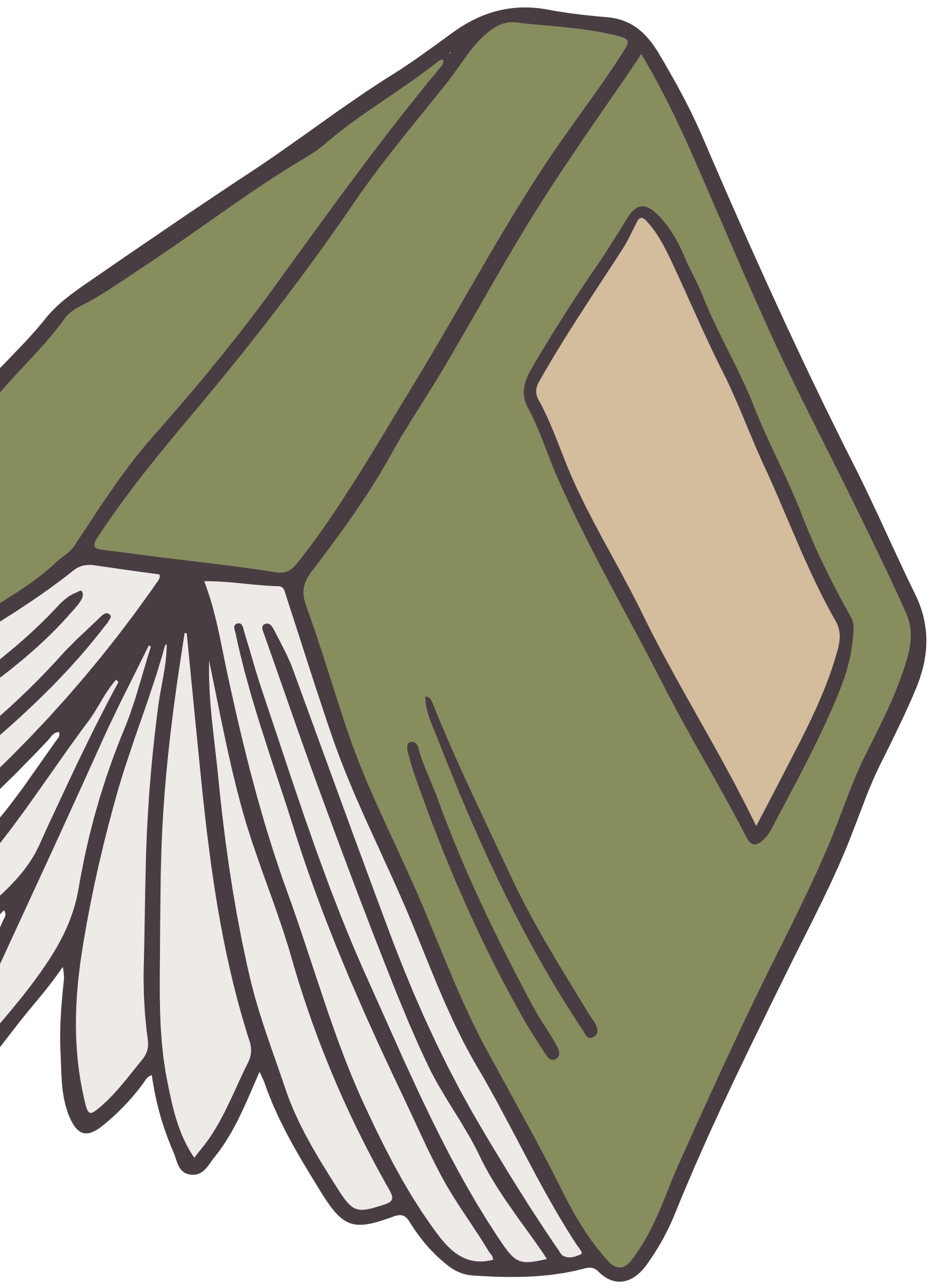


How the Growth Occurred



- *Chikamatsu Monzaemon—Japan's Shakespeare*
- *Jippenshaalkku—Japan's Mark Twain*

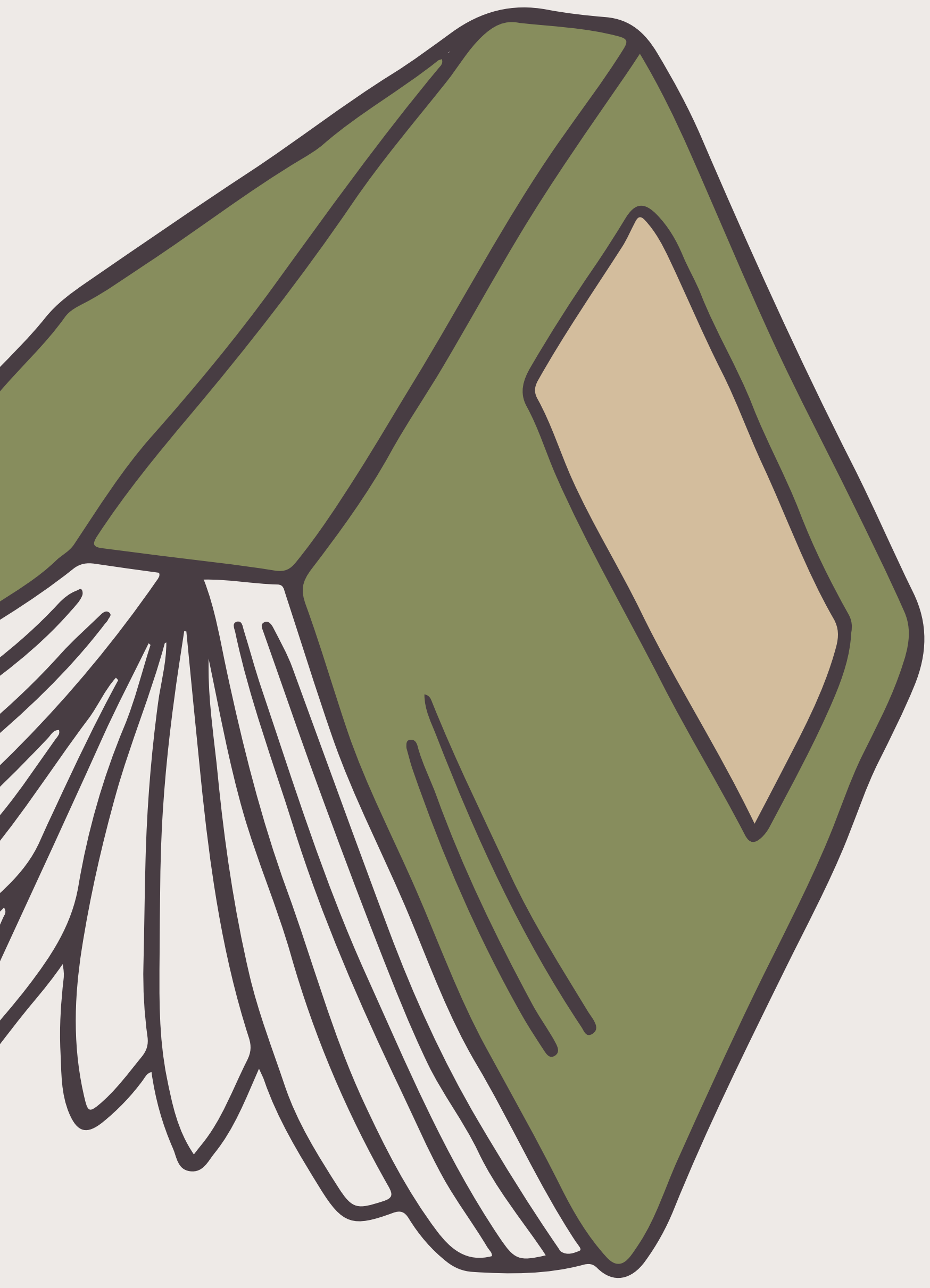
How the Growth Occurred



KOREA

- Influenced by China; early Korean poets wrote in Classical Chinese from the 4th century CE
- By the 15th century, **Hangul**, a unique Korean writing system, emerged, giving rise to Korean literature.

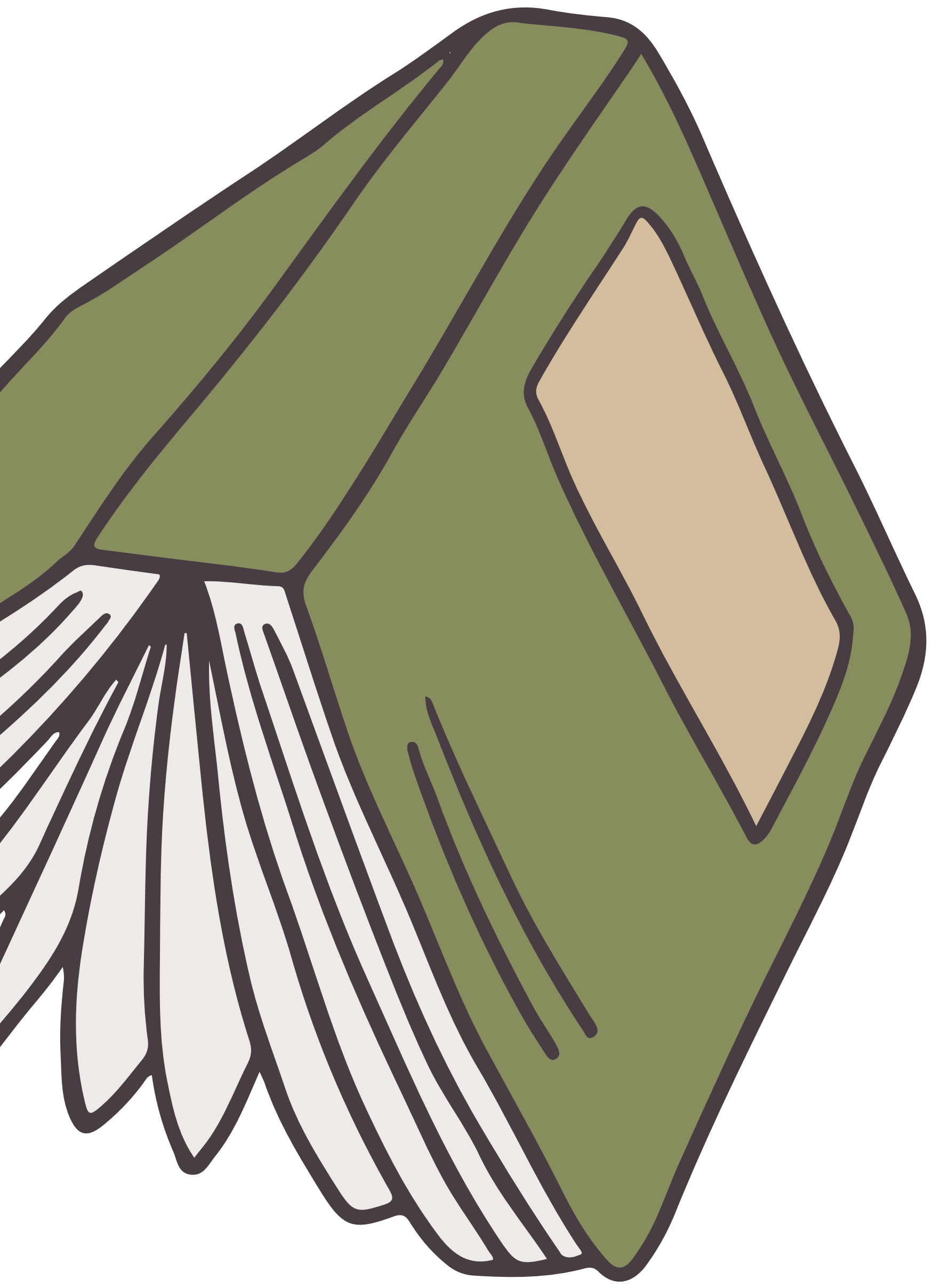
How the Growth Occurred



SOUTH ASIAN LITERATURE

- Rooted in Hindu texts like the Vedas, Brahmanas, and Upanishads, written in Sanskrit as early as 1500 BCE.
- Oral tradition was dominant, but written literature emerged around the 16th century.
- British colonization introduced English literature, still influential today

How the Growth Occurred



CENTRAL ASIAN LITERATURE

- Diverse region including Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Mongolia, Tibet, and Nepal.
- Political themes were influenced by Tsarist and Soviet regimes.

How the Growth Occurred



MIDDLE EAST/ARABIC LITERATURE

- Flourished under *Islam*, with deep cultural exchange between the Arabic, Persian, Byzantine, and Andalusian traditions.
- In the Middle Ages, Arabic literature influenced European civilizations.

How the Growth Occurred



SOUTHEAST ASIAN LITERATURE

- Burma's literature is shaped by Buddhism, Thai, and English cultures.
- Thailand had two golden ages of literature, during the reigns of King Narai (1657–1688) and King Rama II (1809–1824).
- Malaysia and Indonesia: influenced by Sanskrit and Islam cultures.

Contemporary Times: A Snapshot

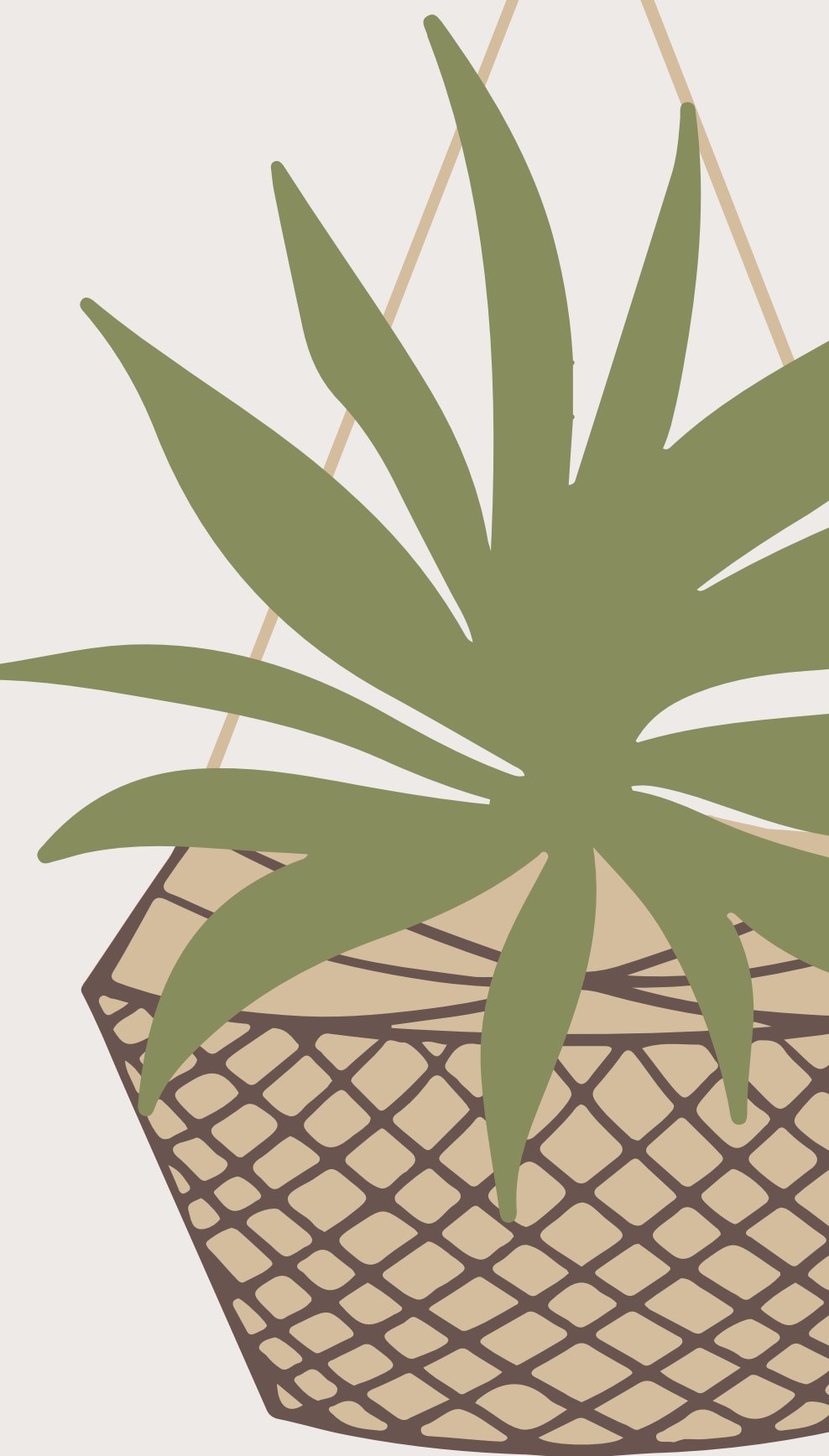
CHINA

Modern Chinese Literature remains prosperous despite less monumental social impact.

Notable Modern Writers:

- **MO YAN:** won the 2012 Nobel Prize for Literature
- **YU HUA:** Renowned for his novels
- **WANG SHUO:** known for his novels and stories
- **SHI TIESHENG:** significant contributions to modern literature
- **GAO XIAOSHENG, WANG ZENGQI, ZHANG CHENZHI:** noted for their short stories

Modern Chinese writers continue to shape and enrich the global literary landscape.



Contemporary Times: A Snapshot

JAPAN

Western influences permeated Japanese literature after the Meiji Restoration (19th century).

Modern Japanese novels, translations of Western poetry, and reinventions of traditional forms (like *tanka* and *haiku*) emerged.

Playwrights like **Abe Kobo** and **Mishima Yukio** became internationally renowned.



Contemporary Times: A Snapshot

KOREA

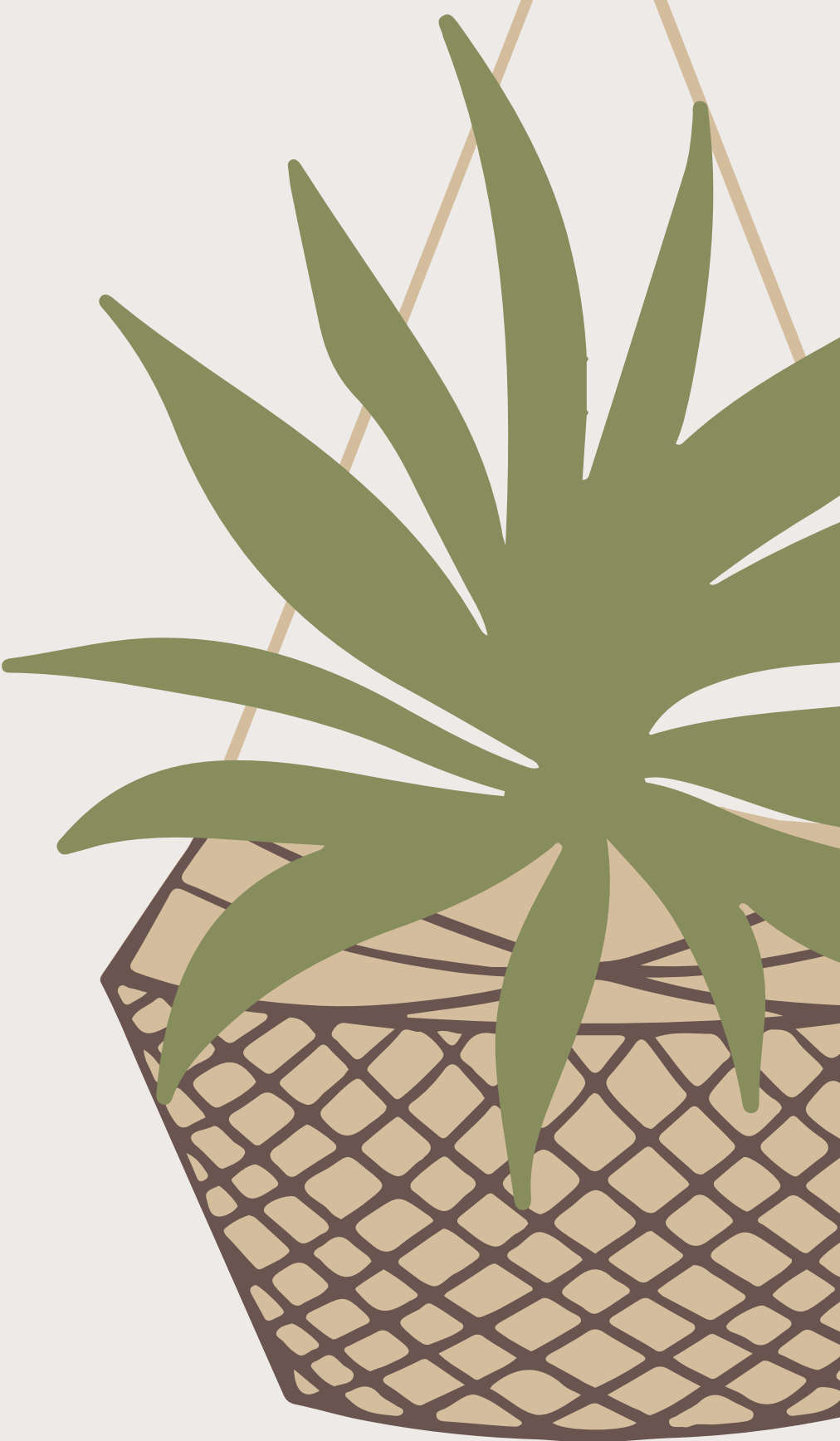
The Korean War (1950s) created lasting themes of alienation, conscience, and disintegration in literature.

Self-identity became a central theme in Korean works, including poems, novels, and plays.

INDIA

Post-independence Indian literature continued to be influenced by colonial rule and the *English language*.

Prominent writers: Rabindranath Tagore (Nobel Prize), Prem Chand, Raja Rao, and R.K. Narayan.



Contemporary Times: A Snapshot

CENTRAL ASIA

Russian influence remained strong in Central Asian literature during the Soviet era.

Notable Modern Writers:

- **Abdullah Qadiri** (Uzbek), **Mukhtar Auez-uli** (Kazakh), and **Chingiz Aytmatov** (Russian-language writer).

ARABIC TRADITION

Freedom of expression has become a significant issue for Arabic writers in the 21st century.

Tension between **religious and secular** movements affects the creation and themes of Arabic literature.



Contemporary Times: A Snapshot

SOUTHEAST ASIA

BURMESE Literature

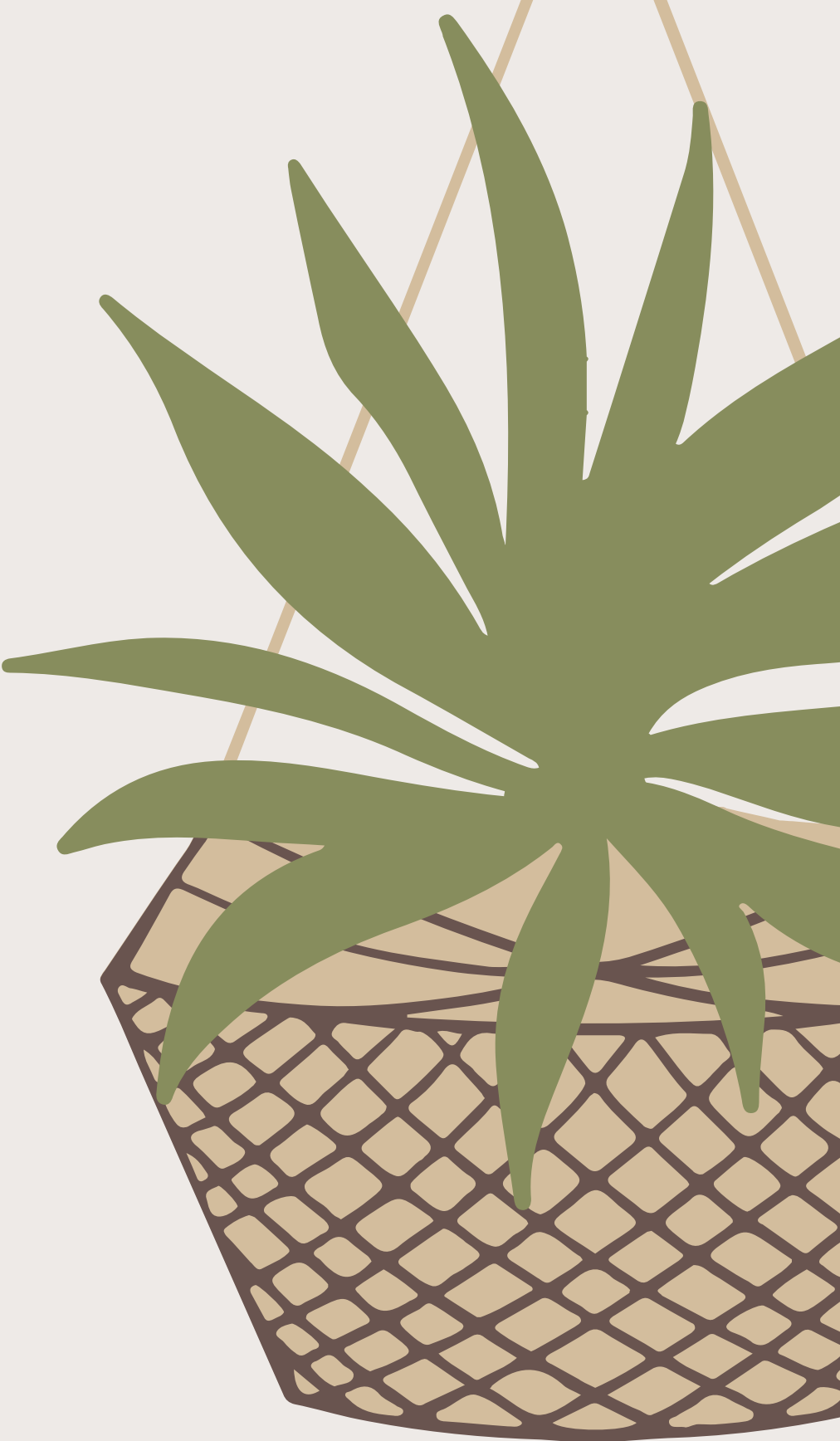
Themes of colonial and postcolonial experiences dominate in 20th-century works and continue to be influential.

Thailand

Western literature's influence became more pronounced after contact during **World War II**

Malaysia and Indonesia

Writers developed unique voices with the emergence of new **Malay** and **Indonesian** languages.





BATTLE – By Chu'ü Yüan

"We grasp our battle-spears: we don our breast-plates of hide.
The axles of our chariots touch: our short swords meet.
Standards obscure the sun: the foe rolls up like clouds.
Arrows fall thick: the warriors press forward.
They menace our ranks: they break our line.
The left-hand trace-horse is dead: the one on the right is smitten.
The fallen horses block our wheels: they impede the yoke-horses!"

They grasp their jade drum-sticks: they beat the sounding drums.

Heaven decrees their fall: the dread Powers are angry.

The warriors are all dead: they lie on the moorfield.

They issued, but shall not enter: they went, but shall not return.

The plains are flat and wide: the way home is long.

Their swords lie beside them: their black bows, in their hand.

Though their limbs were torn, their hearts could not be repressed.

They were more than brave: they were inspired with the spirit of "Wu."

Steadfast to the end, they could not be daunted.

Their bodies were stricken, but their souls have taken Immortality-----

Captains among the ghosts, heroes among the dead.

Thank You!

