

Ellipses of Cultural Diplomacy

The 1957 Chinese Literary Sphere in Hindi

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Abstract

This article studies China-India cultural diplomacy in the context of the socialist Chinese literary sphere. Decentering “dialogue” as an easy metaphor for transnationalism, I propose ellipses – the mark of silences, tensions, the unsaid – as a conceptual frame that makes visible those literary ties that frustrate the logic and aims of cultural diplomacy. I offer as a case study the Hindi poet Dinkar’s travelogue recording his visit to China in 1957. The travelogue brings together two concurrent Cold War phenomena that have so far been studied as separate: the Chinese political campaigns of 1957, and the 1950s era of China-India cultural diplomacy. Recording the Anti-Rightist Campaign in a Hindi idiom, Dinkar’s literary practice crafts the realm of ellipses as generating new China-India literary ties, obscured by the official banner of cultural diplomacy.

Keywords

Chinese socialist literature – cultural diplomacy – Anti-Rightist – China-India – Dinkar

1 Introduction

If the 1950s signal an age of world literature in China, as recent scholarship suggests, this world literary moment is uniquely marked by a paradox. The 1950s Chinese literary sphere energetically engaged with literatures from an unprecedented range of nations and a variety of languages, its literary gaze extending far beyond the East/West dualism of Cold War blocs to texts from across the nascent Third World.¹ Much of this literary activity resulted from the newly-

¹ On discussions of socialist Chinese literature as/and world literature, see Iovene and Volland.

established People's Republic of China's programs of cultural diplomacy, which facilitated visits of prominent figures to China and of Chinese artists abroad, funded extensive translation projects, and encouraged the growth of readerly interest in and demand for literatures of the world. Yet, this literary openness remained riddled with restrictions. China's fluctuating political alliances determined which nations and writers gained entry into the Chinese literary sphere. Translations were often published with guides for interpretation that echoed China's official stance on the translated writer's nation of origin or political orientation.² Chinese cultural diplomacy comprised a well-oiled machine that carefully choreographed images of New China for foreign consumption and that predetermined exactly how Chinese writers were to interact with their foreign counterparts.³ At the heart of such worldly engagement, therefore, rests a paradox between an openness to the texts of the world on one hand, and, on the other, a concerted effort to restrict literary contingency by containing and prescribing the production, circulation, and interpretation of literature.

In addressing this open/restrictive paradox of socialist Chinese world literature, studies tend to treat each side of the paradox as undercutting the other. We understand Chinese cultural diplomacy, for example, either as worldly initiatives that facilitated transnational cultural dialogue and engendered solidarity,⁴ or as the subordination of a cultural sphere harnessed in exclusive service of political ends.⁵ This dualistic logic characterizes commonplace understandings of China-India cultural diplomacy in the 1950s, either as the heyday of China-India friendship, mutual understanding (in line with the principles of

2 See, for example, translations of foreign literature published in the foremost Chinese translation journal, *Yiwen* 译文 (*Translation*), renamed in 1959 to *Shijie wenxue* 世界文学 (*World Literature*).

3 Julia Lovell has written about what she terms "China's international hospitality machine" (Lovell 154). Her analysis of Chinese archival materials on the practice of inviting "foreign guests" (*waibin* 外宾) between 1949 and 1976 reveals an elaborate system of state control in producing "officially micromanaged foreign visits to Maoist China" (144).

4 Recent examples include Wilcox and Yoon. Wilcox argues, in her study of China's dance diplomacy with India, Indonesia, and Burma during the 1950s and early 1960s, that China's dance diplomacy with other Asian countries "emphasized equality and exchange, employing a structure of interaction that foregrounded mutual learning over self-presentation ... This approach harnessed the affective power of embodied aesthetic culture to literally 'perform' Bandung ideals, namely, cooperation and mutual respect among Asian nations" (519). Yoon studies the conference of the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organization in Cairo (1957) and the Afro-Asian Writers' Bureau conference in Tashkent (1957–58) as a "horizontal vector between Africa and China," with the Bureau representing "an alternative conceptualization of postcolonialism based on transnational solidarities of a Cold War global South" (234).

5 For example, see Liu Siyuan's discussion of the "appropriation of the theatre in the service of state diplomacy" through the case of the *Princess Baihua* play in the 1950s and 1960s (10).

the 1954 Panchsheel Treaty), and literary exchange, or as a farce and failure given the 1962 Sino-Indian War (the very conflict the Panchsheel Treaty was meant to preempt).⁶

This article proposes a new approach to the study of Chinese cultural diplomacy, and more broadly, to the paradox of socialist Chinese world literature. Instead of taking cross-cultural dialogue or transnational literary exchange as an instantiation of worldliness in and of itself, I suggest an attention to the silences, tensions, and omissions inherent in the journeys of foreign literary figures in China and of Chinese texts abroad, what I collectively term the ellipses of cultural diplomacy. The ellipses, I find, open a conceptual space that is invisible in the pages of socialist Chinese world literature or official records of cultural diplomacy, but that nonetheless forms a constituent component of world literary practice during this period, a space in which transnational literary ties run against the grain of officially-sanctioned literary activity.

I offer as a case-study the writings of the prominent Hindi poet, Ramdhari Singh “Dinkar” (1908–1974), who travelled to China in 1957 during a particularly fraught historical juncture when China-India cultural diplomacy rubbed up against the literary persecutions of the Anti-Rightist Campaign in China. Dinkar’s China travelogue foregrounds the ellipses of Chinese cultural diplomacy conducted against the backdrop of the Anti-Rightist Campaign – the silences, fissures, and literary tensions that brewed beneath the surface of politically-proclaimed “friendship.” Attention to the ellipses in Dinkar’s travelogue enables a reframing of China-India cultural diplomacy as no longer reproducing the silences of state intervention in the literary sphere, but rather, as revealing new world-literary relations that keep open literary contingency, the unpredictable and unruly movements of literature in the world.

2 The Chinese Literary Sphere in 1957

In October 1957, Dinkar travelled to China at the invitation of the Chinese Writers’ Association, the literary organ of the Chinese Communist Party.⁷ He arrived

6 For recent studies on 1950s China-India cultural diplomacy, see Ghosh, Jiang, Sen, Van Fleit Hang, and Wang Chunjing.

7 Dinkar did not visit China as an Indian governmental representative or as part of an official delegation. In his travelogue, he writes about receiving an invitation to visit China from the Chinese Writers’ Association (Dinkar *Meri* 85). As a guest of the Association, he would have received the Party’s sanction for his visit to China. His trip was organized by both the Chinese Writers’ Association and the Indian embassy in Beijing. As his travelogue indicates, while in China, he was treated and introduced as a national representative of India and Indian culture.

in Kunming on October 26 for what would be a twenty-four-day tour with stops in Beijing, Tianjin, Nanjing, Shanghai, Hangzhou, and Guangzhou. Dinkar was one among a wave of Indian writers who travelled to China in the 1950s, as part of the frenzy of contact and collaboration between literary organizations and figures in China and India. This spirit of literary exchange accompanied the diplomatic agendas of the PRC and independent Republic of India, as each navigated its political standing on the emergent Cold War global stage. In this new era of cultural diplomacy, Chinese and Indian cultural delegations shuttled back and forth, writers met at international literary conferences, and translation projects found state-sponsorship. Official and journalistic records of this period commonly feature crowds brandishing slogans of China-India brotherhood to welcome the writers, poetry recitations and dialogues between writers from both nations, ceremonial exchanges of books, conversations with students and dignitaries, and so on – all characteristic features of Cold War-era cultural diplomacy.

The Chinese literary sphere Dinkar entered in late 1957, however, was not the hospitable, open space of exchange the Party projected it to be. In June 1957, Mao Zedong's famous "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People" appeared for the first time in print.⁸ The speech formally articulated a policy that had been in effect since late 1956: the "Hundred Flowers" (baihua 百花) policy, named for the Party-issued slogan "let a hundred flowers bloom, let a hundred schools of thought contend." That directive invited writers and intellectuals to air criticisms of the Party and to experiment with new modes of literary practice. In mid-1957, this period of tolerance came to an end, signaled by Mao's distinction between "fragrant flowers" and "poisonous weeds" in his speech, the latter label condemning writings deemed detrimental to the Party's leadership. The publication of Mao's speech, therefore, at once retrospectively clarified the Hundred Flowers moment and marked its end, inaugurating what came to be known as the Anti-Rightist Campaign (fanyou yundong 反右运动). Those considered to have voiced dissent under the Hundred Flowers banner were now labelled "Rightists," leading to a large-scale persecution of intellectu-

8 Mao had originally delivered the speech on 27 February 1957 to some 1,800 officials at a Supreme State Conference (MacFarquhar 184). In its original iteration, the speech underpinned the Hundred Flowers policy by encouraging contradictions "to be brought out into the open and resolved by 'democratic methods' of discussion, criticism, reasoning, and education" (Goldman 250). However, the version of the speech published in *Renmin Ribao* 人民日报 (People's Daily) on 19 June had undergone significant changes: "it was revised to add a retroactive set of criteria for judging criticisms made during the Hundred Flowers" (Kraus 254).

als. It was this restrictive literary atmosphere – one of heightened censorship, insecurity, and paranoia – that Dinkar entered in China.

Dinkar's case highlights the importance of revisiting 1957 in the study of socialist Chinese literature and cultural diplomacy for three main reasons. First, 1957 presents a heightened example of the open/restrictive paradox discussed above, given the abrupt shift that year from the openness of the Hundred Flowers banner to the clamp down on those deemed "Rightists." How did this literary upheaval affect China's ongoing cultural diplomacy and the image of literary openness and stability it sought to project? Dinkar's travelogue provides insights into this overlooked issue, cautioning against the tendency to bracket cultural diplomacy away from the literary grounds upon which it unfolded.

Second, Dinkar's travelogue presents a view of the early days of the Anti-Rightist Campaign refracted through an Indian lens and a Hindi medium. In so doing, the travelogue introduces a transnational dimension to a literary moment that, like much of Maoist-era Chinese literature, has been studied exclusively within a national context and through Chinese-language texts and translations. A cross-archival approach proves necessary if we are to avoid reproducing in our scholarship the silences of censorship and persecution. Given the high volume of literary travel during the time, of visitors to China and of Chinese writers abroad, the study of socialist Chinese literature must be supplemented by attention to itinerant writers and their navigation of transnational literary spaces. The paradoxical terrain of world literature in socialist China was shaped both by Chinese literary actors and by non-Chinese visitors participating in Chinese literary spaces, by Chinese translations of foreign texts and by the visions of China and versions of Chinese literature circulating in non-Chinese language texts. Dinkar's Hindi travelogue offers one opportunity for such comparative inquiry.

Third, a focus on 1957 enables a decentering, however momentarily, of the two-bloc rhetoric in the study of socialist Chinese literature. That year, China's cultural diplomacy with India (and the non-aligned Third World) gained new significance in light of the events of 1956–57 that deteriorated both the Sino-Soviet partnership and Sino-U.S. relations, including Khrushchev's secret speech denouncing Stalin, political upheavals in Poland and Hungary, Mao's vacillating stance on de-Stalinization, and mounting tensions with the U.S. over Taiwan (Lüthi 46–79). 1957, thus, marks a historical moment when a dualistic, two-bloc logic does not overdetermine and exhaust China's literary engagement with the Third World. As Xiaojue Wang has aptly critiqued, Cold War studies tends to reproduce the exclusionary logic of Cold War ideological constructs. For Wang, applying dualistic paradigms in the study of mid-century

Chinese literature can perform a “type of criticism [that] still lingers within the constraints of Cold War rhetoric, which favors conceptualization in terms of binary oppositions and often privileges one over the other” (Wang *Modernity* 17). Still, the study of socialist Chinese literature has tended to reproduce the two-bloc logic, with China shuttling its literary gaze between the Eastern and Western blocs in beat to the rhythm of fluctuating political alliances.⁹ Shedding new light on the 1957 Chinese literary sphere through Dinkar’s travelogue, this article destabilizes the Soviet Union as the center of gravity in orienting socialist Chinese literature and resists perpetuating the two-bloc logical fallacy of Cold War rhetoric.

3 The Poet at Home

As a visitor from non-aligned India and given his own vexed relationship with socialist literary practice, Dinkar was uniquely positioned to question literary policies coming into fruition in late-1957 China. Dinkar had emerged as a prominent poet in the 1930s after his early poems *Renuka* (1935) and *Kuruksetr* (1943),¹⁰ the latter an adaptation of the *Mahabharata*, earned him literary prizes and national recognition. Although his oeuvre consists predominantly of poetry, he was also a prolific essayist and prose writer. Most famously, his *Four Chapters of Culture* (Samskrti ke car adhyay), a sweeping history of the development of Indian culture over the course of a millennium, received the 1956 Sahitya Akademi Award, the foremost Indian literary accolade. By the 1960s, Dinkar came to be known as a “national poet” (rastrakavi) in recognition of his ability to harness older genres of epic and lyric poetry in service of the nation.¹¹

Like many of his contemporaries, Dinkar practiced poetry as an extension of his political convictions. In the 1950s, Dinkar was centrally involved in the promotion of Hindi as a national language through his participation in the Society for the Propagation of Nagari (nagari prakarini sabha) and the Hindi Literary Conference (Hindi sahitya sammelan). Such organizations had historical roots in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century language politics of

9 See Volland, for example, who foregrounds a “Manichean,” “dualistic” two-bloc dynamic of the “Cold War constellation,” in his study of socialist Chinese literature (6).

10 I use McGregor’s transliteration system for Hindi words, with diacritical marks omitted. All translations from Hindi and Chinese are mine unless noted otherwise.

11 On the title of “national poet,” see Sarad. The title has also been bestowed on Hindi poet Maithilisanan Gupta (1886–1964), a major influence on Dinkar.

anticolonial nationalism in the Indian subcontinent.¹² Following the adoption of Hindi as an official language of India in 1949, the members of such organizations, including Dinkar, set about developing dictionaries and compiling histories of Hindi literature (among other activities). The promotion of Hindi (over English) as a national language remained at the forefront of Dinkar's speeches and priorities during his travels in China.¹³

In the mid-century decades, innovations in poetic language and competing ideas of modernity gave rise to various schools of Hindi poetry and an attendant field of lively literary criticism. Dinkar's oeuvre illuminates intersections among different poetic camps that contemporary critical debates often cast as more distinct than they actually were in practice. Dinkar's early works share formal characteristics with Chayavad (or shadow-ist) poetry, a movement known for its romanticism and mysticism, and characterized by a high Sanskritic linguistic register, a generic interest in the epic, and a turn away from earlier (braj) metrical conventions towards newer (khari boli) meters.¹⁴ Thematically, however, Dinkar's poetry, often described as revolutionary in tone and imagery, veered closer to the progressive writers' vision of purposeful art. Yet, his artistic sensibilities did not align easily with the agenda of the Progressive Writers Association, which Dinkar found overly prescriptive in its leftist political commitment.¹⁵ In the 1940s, Dinkar welcomed the emergence of experimentalist (prayogvadi) writing, championed by poets who eschewed the strict social realism of the progressive writers in favour of modernist experimentation with poetic form.¹⁶ Dinkar shared with the experimentalists their desire to critique the status quo, but opposed what he viewed as the overly Westernized nature of the resultant "New Poetry" (nayi kavita).¹⁷ Dinkar's position in the interstices

12 For an overview, see Trivedi.

13 For example, Dinkar interpreted Zhou Enlai's decision not to use his (limited) English during their conversation as follows: "The Premier was saying that, if I knew Hindi, then I would certainly speak with you in Hindi. Even though I know English, I will not speak with you in English. I wish those Indians could learn this lesson, who despite knowing Hindi, consider speaking in Hindi below them" (Dinkar *Meri* 118).

14 On Chayavad poetry, see Schomer and Singh.

15 Initially a member of the All India Progressive Writers' Association, Dinkar later withdrew his membership (Coppola 52).

16 For an overview of the experimentalists and "New Poetry," see Rosenstein.

17 Dinkar viewed "New Poetry" as incompatible with the Hindi language. For him, Hindi developed linguistically as a poetic medium for romantic Chayavadi writing and so would struggle to achieve the "scientific" or "intellectual" aims of "New Poetry": "It is not possible for the soul to easily speak in a language made to express the body; a language made for romance and Chayavad, how could this language, without shedding a drop of sweat, bear the weight of intellectual poetry?" (Dinkar *Sipi* iii). In an essay entitled "When Will You

of several schools of poetry rather than at the helm of a single movement, coupled with his involvement in Hindi language politics, cast him as a politically-conscious yet relatively uncontroversial nominee to serve as a national cultural representative, particularly during this tumultuous time in China.¹⁸

4 The Quest for Ai Qing

Dinkar's China travelogue appears in a collection of his travel writings entitled *Meriyatraem* (My Travels) published in 1970, and provides a detailed account in Hindi of his time in China, a view of cultural diplomacy in practice.¹⁹ Distilling the travelogue down to a timeline of Dinkar's daily activities in China reveals a generic itinerary, likely similar to that undertaken by most Indian cultural delegates visiting China in the 1950s. Dinkar toured the popular attractions in each of the cities he visited. He dined with his hosts: members of the Writers' Association, including Lao She 老舍 and Li Ji 李季, and officials from the Indian embassy. He visited Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai.²⁰ He recorded radio broadcasts, which aired in Beijing and Shanghai, delivered speeches on "Indian culture, literature, art, and politics" to university students, and participated in roundtable discussions with Chinese writers (Fulfagar 179). He attended cultural events showcasing Chinese opera, music, dance, and stage adaptations of Lao She's *Rickshaw Boy* (1937) and Kalidasa's *Sakuntala*. He visited the sites of "New China" (nayi cin) – public parks, mills, factories – that foreign visitors

Return Home, Poet?" Dinkar urges the "new poets" to cast off their Western garb, write the language of Indian villages, and heed the cries of the Indian soil (Dinkar *Mitti* 203).

18 It is difficult to assign a static political label to Dinkar's views and literary practice. In current parlance he is considered a "nationalist." He certainly did not fall within the same camp as the other more avowedly Leftist Indian visitors to China in the 1950s, such as the writer Mulk Raj Anand.

19 Dinkar published several versions of his China travelogue, all compiled from the diary he maintained during his visit, letters he wrote to friends and family while in China, and writings he retrospectively appended to the travelogue. Immediately following his return from China, a brief version of the travelogue appeared in the magazine *Dharmayug* in November 1958 and was later amended and included in a six-volume collection of Dinkar's correspondence (see Diwakar). The most complete version appeared in the 1970 volume I refer to in this article, which also contains accounts of Dinkar's travels to Europe (London and Poland, 1955), Mauritius and Kenya (1967), and Germany (1968). The China travelogue comprises the longest section in the volume.

20 Dinkar met Zhou along with Sushila Nayar, an Indian doctor-activist then in Beijing at the invitation of the All-China Women's Federation. An announcement of the meeting appears in the 4 Nov. 1957 issue of *Renmin ribao*.

were often taken to. At first glance, therefore, Dinkar's itinerary appears consistent with the narrative of state-sponsored cultural exchange.

Beyond a record of Dinkar's daily activities, however, the travelogue also contains lengthy sections of commentary and reflection written after Dinkar's return as he prepared the travelogue for publication. Most notable among these sections is a chapter entitled "The Rectification Campaign" (sudhar andolan), which outlines Dinkar's understanding of the Hundred Flowers and Anti-Rightist Campaigns. The mixture of diaristic and essayistic writing endows the travelogue with a dual cadence of immediacy and retrospect. Reading the travelogue with an eye to these shifting temporalities suggests an alternative narrative, one in which the timeline of Dinkar's visit to China extends beyond the dates of his arrival and departure, and the visit centers not on the rituals of cultural diplomacy, but on Dinkar's quest for the Chinese poet Ai Qing 艾青 (1910–1996).

Such an alternative narrative would begin earlier in 1957, with the publication of a volume, *Sipi aur sankh* (Shell and Conch), containing Dinkar's Hindi translations of foreign poetry (from English translations).²¹ In the introduction, Dinkar frames the volume as an experiment in translation using a Chayavadi idiom to demonstrate the compatibility of Chayavadi Hindi (as opposed to what he considered a Westernized, "scientific" use of Hindi in "new poetry") with contemporary poems from around the world (Dinkar *Sipi* iv). The volume includes seven Chinese poems, which Dinkar accessed through Robert Payne's translated volume *Contemporary Chinese Poetry* (1947), including two poems by Ai Qing, who Payne introduces as "one of the greatest – perhaps the greatest – of living Chinese poets" (Payne 117).²² Dinkar repeats this designation in his travelogue, repeatedly referring to Ai Qing as "China's greatest poet."²³

Dinkar hoped to meet Ai Qing in China. On his second day in Beijing, during a banquet thrown by the Writers' Association in his honor, Dinkar asked Lao She and others about Ai Qing. Dinkar narrates:

Ai Qing is a communist and is perhaps China's greatest poet ... But when I was in China, Ai Qing was not in Beijing. He had criticized commu-

21 The volume contains Dinkar's translations of poems originally written in Portuguese, Spanish, German, French, Russian, Polish, and Malayalam (all via English translation, with the exception of the Malayalam poem, which Dinkar translated in conversation with the poet) (Dinkar *Sipi* i).

22 Dinkar also translates poems by He Qifang 何其芳, Feng Zhi 冯至, Zang Kejia 臧克家, and Wen Yiduo 闻一多, all from Payne's volume.

23 For studies on Ai Qing, see Eoyang, Palandri, Huang, and translated criticism in Nieh.

nism as flawed (*kharab*) in its practical form. As punishment, he was sent to the countryside to perform manual labor and live among the masses, through which he could re-examine his thinking. Seeing the shocked look on my face [upon hearing this], the others began to talk among themselves. I then said that there was nothing surprising about this. In India, too, Vinobaji [referring to Indian activist Vinoba Bhave] was now leading a labor movement.

DINKAR *Meri* 66–67

This uncomfortable interaction marks Dinkar's first glimpse of the disjuncture between the image of literary openness the Party attempted to outwardly project, and the anxiety and insecurity that permeated the Chinese literary sphere during these early months of the Anti-Rightist Campaign. This disjuncture manifests here through the uncomfortable murmurs elicited by Dinkar's reaction to news of Ai Qing's persecution. Dinkar's hasty attempt to fill that silence, by quickly glossing forced labor reform as commensurable with Vinoba Bhave's very different land-donation (*bhudan*) movement,²⁴ highlights a strategic use of comparison as a means to perform cultural diplomacy. Although deployed as a strategy to assert sameness and smooth over tensions, the comparative rhetoric reveals here, and repeatedly in the travelogue, the silences and fissures that rend the grounds of political "friendship."

Despite the efforts of the Writers' Association members, the Anti-Rightist Campaign proved too pervasive to be easily covered up. Beginning in June 1957, the Party issued attacks on all those associated with the Hundred Flowers movement, including intellectuals, editors of journals and newspapers, and student activists. Many were publicly denounced and expelled to rural areas and factories for labor reform. Estimates suggest that some 400,000 to 700,000 intellectuals were purged during the Anti-Rightist Campaign, a figure much greater than in previous campaigns (Goldman 257).²⁵

In addition to those who voiced anti-Party criticism during the Hundred Flowers debates, the Anti-Rightist Campaign also targeted literary figures apparently deemed dangerous for their influence on younger generations. Writer Ding Ling 丁玲, for example, became a central target despite having stayed out of the Hundred Flowers debates (Kraus 255). Due in part to Ding Ling's

24 For an introduction to Vinoba Bhave, see Mehta.

25 Another statistic claims that "10 percent of China's 5 million intellectuals were labelled as 'rightist elements'" (Kraus 255). Mao apparently cited around 700,000 as "the number of people who had been executed in the campaigns against counter-revolutionaries" in the original (unpublished) version of the "Contradictions" speech (MacFarquhar 268).

earlier propensity to challenge the Party line, and in (larger) part to her long-standing clashes with CCP cultural official Zhou Yang 周扬, the Party levied charges against Ding Ling and her associates, including Ai Qing.²⁶ One public denunciation stated, “influenced by Ding Ling and her kind, a number of youth have taken the wrong path. They have refused Party leadership and supervision and have opposed the power of the Party group” (quoted in Goldman 255). Like Ding Ling, Ai Qing had remained cautious during this period, with the exception of a series of allegorical fables published in 1956, which came under attack during the Anti-Rightist Campaign (Nieh xxxv). Still, his persecution resulted largely from his association with Ding Ling and an older generation of left-wing writers, many of whom were labelled as “Rightists” for views expressed in the 1940s, and exiled to remote areas in northeast and western China (Kraus 255).²⁷

In this tense atmosphere, thick with heightened surveillance, Dinkar’s request to meet Ai Qing would have precipitated discomfort, even crisis, in the Writers’ Association. In the travelogue, Dinkar reflects on such moments explicitly in the context of the Anti-Rightist Campaign. He speculates, for example, on the reasons behind Ai Qing’s persecution. In a statement that proves more indicative of Dinkar’s impressions of China than of Ai Qing’s views, Dinkar writes, “perhaps the great poet (mahakavi) Ai Qing also voiced his dissent. Perhaps he said: this communism foisted upon us, this is not what we had made sacrifices for. If this is communism, then we have no interest in this communism” (Dinkar *Meri* 107). Throughout the travelogue, Dinkar voices support for the Hundred Flowers spirit, crediting Mao Zedong with the implementation of this policy of openness, while also criticizing the Party for the unfounded attacks against “Rightists.”

As a national representative of India visiting China under the banner of friendly cultural exchange, Dinkar soon realized his unique position in the Chinese literary sphere. India’s non-aligned status afforded him the freedom to take an independent stance and to voice his personal opinions on the Anti-Rightist Campaign, a privilege unavailable to visitors from the Soviet Union or the Eastern bloc. Further, as a visitor during a period of proclaimed friendly political relations between China and India, Dinkar occupied a relatively secure position from which to raise provocative questions. And, given the

26 On the persecution of Ding Ling and her associates, see Hong 166–187.

27 Ai Qing later wrote that he was sent to a “state farm in the northeast to ‘observe and learn from real life.’ [He] was deputy head of a tree farm and spent a year and a half there living together with lumberjacks ... In the winter of 1959, [he] went to Xinjiang where [he] spent sixteen years in a reclamation area with a production and construction corps” (Ai Qing 11–12).

officially-sanctioned nature of his trip, Dinkar found himself with easy access to high-ranking Chinese literary officials of whom he could ask such discomfoting questions.

Throughout his visit, Dinkar ruffled feathers by openly pursuing his quest to meet Ai Qing, later coupled with requests to also meet Ding Ling. “While in Beijing,” he writes, “I repeatedly expressed my wish to meet with poet Ai Qing and Madam Ding Ling, by whatever means necessary. But I never got a straightforward response to this query” (Dinkar *Meri* 112–113).²⁸ Dinkar records several oblique responses he received:

Mr. Li Ji, a poet who often accompanied me, said that Ai Qing perhaps did not make any such statement [against communism]. His offence was not making such statements. In reality, after the revolution [of 1949], he had become soft. He had begun to fill his poems with anti-communist sentiment and he repeatedly proved that he did not maintain his belief in communism.

107

Dinkar also inquired after Ai Qing during conversations with Zang Kejia 臧克家 and He Qifang 何其芳 (whose poems Dinkar had also translated). On the topic of Ai Qing, Zang apparently only said that “Ai Qing was in the wrong” and that the writers “supported whatever actions were taken against him” (99).²⁹ He Qifang had a more convoluted response:

When the Director of the Institute of Literature, Mr. He Qifang, came to meet me, I asked him about Ai Qing and Ding Ling. Mr. Fang [sic] said,

28 Dinkar also asked the Indians he met in China about Ai Qing. He recorded one such conversation with P.C. Joshi, the former General Secretary of the Communist Party of India, with whom Dinkar crossed paths in China: “I asked Joshiji who China’s greatest poet is, Ai Qing or Guo Moruo. He responded that Guo Moruo occupied the same position in the Chinese literary sphere as that of Nirala in the Hindi literary sphere. Joshiji declined to discuss Ai Qing” (Dinkar *Meri* 100).

29 In early 1957, Zang served as the editor of *Shikan* 诗刊 (Poetry Journal), which emerged at the forefront of the Hundred Flowers debates. The journal carried writings critiquing the Party by both Zang and Ai Qing during the Hundred Flowers period. By the time of Dinkar’s visit, however, the journal had shifted its tone in line with the policy (McDougall 290). The brevity of Zang’s remarks to Dinkar stand in stark opposition to the lengthy article he had published the previous month publicly denouncing Ai Qing’s recent works. See the translated excerpt of Zang’s “What has been Expressed in Ai Qing’s Recent Work?” in Nieh.

“Ai Qing pursues relations with married women. He also wanted to be the Director of the Art Academy. But the Party did not like this. This is why Ai Qing became upset.” About Madam Ding Ling, he said only that “right now, you should not try to meet her. She is very unhappy”.³⁰

113

He Qifang was not alone in citing Ai Qing’s supposed depravity as justification for his disappearance. One writer in Tianjin claimed that Ai Qing and Ding Ling “treat life as the domain of pleasure and do not concern themselves with our present struggle. This is why they are rightists” (122).³¹ For his part, Dinkar took these comments with a grain of salt. He recognized that “in order to oppose Ai Qing and Ding Ling, people would say whatever it took to denounce them and to show that the Party had taken appropriate measures to deal with them” (122). Thus, Dinkar warns his reader against the veracity of these comments, a caution further underscored by the fact that Dinkar’s record of these conversations underwent processes of multilingual mediation – from Chinese into English (via Dinkar’s translator) and subsequently into Hindi.

Dinkar’s quest for Ai Qing ultimately reveals itself not as a search for the poet himself – indeed Dinkar understood the futility of such a task – but as a marker of Dinkar’s disruptive presence in the Chinese literary sphere of late 1957. Records of terse conversations about and critical reflections on the Anti-Rightist Campaign punctuate the travelogue, disrupting happier accounts of sightseeing and witnessing life in “New China” that comprise the majority of the text.³² The quest for Ai Qing, which may have begun with Dinkar’s personal interest in the poet, grew over the course of his visit into the pursuit of a larger

30 Dinkar had his own theory about Ding Ling’s fate. Although Mao had earlier praised Ding Ling as “the brightest ray of communism,” Dinkar writes, this same Ding Ling “is understood today as opposing communism and is made to work in the offices of the Writers’ Association as a mere custodian” (Dinkar *Meri* 113).

31 Such allegations of promiscuity are consistent with contemporaneous published denunciations. The poet Feng Zhi 冯至, for example, attacked poems Ai Qing wrote in the 1930s about his time in France. Feng Zhi accused Ai Qing of identifying with “the decadent youth” of Paris, whose “actual goal was to embrace and enjoy Paris as they would a tawdry, promiscuous girl” (Nieh 83).

32 The happier accounts include Dinkar’s visits to the main tourist attractions and museums in each of the cities he travelled to, visits to villages to glimpse agricultural and rural life, conversations with students at Peking University in Beijing and Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou, and so on. Dinkar’s itinerary reads very much like the visits of foreign visitors to Maoist China discussed by Lovell.

aim: to articulate, and thereby make visible, the silences and absences of literary persecution. Dinkar's insistence on repeatedly evoking Ai Qing and Ding Ling despite the palpable discomfort this caused, discursively made the persecuted writers visible during a moment when the state functioned to remove them (and their writings) from public view.

In this sense, Dinkar's China travelogue inscribes the ellipses of cultural diplomacy. Rather than echoing slogans of China-India friendship, the travelogue reveals the erasures of cultural diplomacy and the fractures in the Chinese literary sphere of the time. Such fractures do not function to sever China-India literary ties. Instead, by articulating in Hindi that which could not be uttered in Chinese, the travelogue binds Chinese and Indian literary spheres through moments of friction, giving rise to a mode of world-literary relation that runs counter to political intentions and directives. Dinkar's travelogue is testament to the inability of the state to contain and limit the contingencies of a literary sphere oriented towards the world. Some twenty years later, in the late-1970s, Ai Qing, Ding Ling and others exiled during the Anti-Rightist Campaign re-entered the Chinese literary stage during the "Second Hundred Flowers" period following Mao's death. Dinkar's travelogue holds echoes of those twenty years of enforced silence.

5 The Story of a Poem

Dinkar ends his China travelogue with a chapter entitled "Ek kavita ki katha" (The Story of a Poem), breaking structurally from the diaristic narrative of the preceding pages and shifting to a different story, that of a poem and its fate in the 1957 Chinese literary sphere. Dinkar centers Liu Shahe's 流沙河 "Caomupian 草木篇" (On Plants, 1957), which he translates more literally as "Grass and Trees" (ghas aur per). This final chapter provides a fitting telos for Dinkar's quest to record the silences of the Anti-Rightist Campaign.

Dinkar introduces Liu's poems as having "set off a storm in the [Chinese] literary world" (Dinkar *Meri* 162). In January 1957, Liu's series of prose poems had appeared in the poetry journal *Xingxing* 星星 (Star). The poems harnessed the Hundred Flowers trend of writing satirically in botanical and seasonal metaphors; images of "blooming," "springtime," "gentle breeze," "mild rain," among a host of others took on political resonance in the critical idiom of the time, stemming from Mao's propensity to draw on such metaphorical language in his speeches (Li). The series consists of five short poems – "Baiyang 白杨" (Poplar), "Teng 藤" (Vine), "Xianrenzhang 仙人掌" (Cactus), "Mei 梅" (Plum), and "Dujun 毒菌" (Poisonous Mushroom) – each critiquing the political cli-

mate of the time through the image of the plant in its title.³³ The following lines from “Plum,” for example, depict the plum tree’s refusal to bloom despite the arrival of spring: “In the springtime / when a hundred flowers lured the butterflies / by the charm of their bewitching smiles, / she was quietly married to the white / snow of winter” (Nieh 102).³⁴ The image, with its explicit reference to the Hundred Flowers Campaign, evokes the skepticism writers initially felt towards the Hundred Flowers policy, with the plum tree signifying the writer’s hesitation to voice anti-Party criticism despite the directive to “bloom and contend.” In the early months of 1957, the poems set off a profusion of criticism, both praise and opposition. By mid-1957, Liu became the subject of scathing denunciation and reproval of the poems appeared in print.³⁵

Dinkar first learned of the poems in Beijing: “after much scrutiny,” he writes, “it was decided that the poem was very flawed indeed, so flawed that it should not have been published” (Dinkar *Meri* 162). Dinkar narrates his efforts to procure an English translation of the poems. Much like the persecuted writers removed from public view, the poems had become difficult to access in Chinese, let alone in English translation – the first published English translation appeared much later, in 1981 (Nieh 102). Dinkar’s persistence eventually paid off; he obtained an English translation covertly prepared for him by an unnamed Indian diplomat. Based on this English version, Dinkar translated the poems into Hindi. The final chapter of his travelogue contains Liu’s censored poems in this Hindi iteration.

For the most part, Dinkar’s translation conveys the content of Liu’s poems. Although aware that the poem’s meaning far exceeds the words on the page, Dinkar does not provide guidelines for interpretation. The allusion to the Hundred Flowers Campaign and the political undertones of the plum tree’s refusal to bloom, for example, would have been lost on Dinkar’s Hindi readership. In this sense, Dinkar’s translation risks being viewed as unsuccessful; it fails to capture precisely that which makes Liu’s poems meaningful.

However, by delinking the poem from its predetermined interpretation, Dinkar’s translation keeps open in Hindi interpretive possibilities that were foreclosed in Chinese. What the poems leave unsaid through the indetermi-

33 Dinkar translates these titles as follows: 1. Pahari pipal, 2. Marballi lata, 3. Nagphani, 4. Alubukhara, 5. Zahrila kukurmutta (Dinkar *Meri* 163–4).

34 Translation from the Chinese is Nieh’s. A literal English translation of Dinkar’s Hindi rendition reads: In the spring season when a hundred flowers / were laughing their enticing laugh / and luring butterflies, / she devoted herself to the winter’s snow (164).

35 For one such denunciation, see Sha Ou’s 沙鸥 essay translated in Nieh.

nacy of Liu's elusive symbolism, had become in China the only thing that the poems could say. Dinkar's decontextualized translation brackets away the singular reading of the poems as voicing political commentary on the Hundred Flowers Campaign. In so doing, the translation restores to the poems precisely those inherent characteristics of literature that the Party's directives aimed to reign-in: the openness of a literary text to multiple interpretations and acts of reading as it journeys through the hands of readers, across time and space.

In lieu of a guide for interpretation, and as though critiquing that essential paratext that inevitably accompanied the publication of translations in Chinese journals of the time, Dinkar supplements his translation not with an explanation of what the poems mean, but with an invitation to engage in debate over poetic meaning. He does so by reproducing his own futile attempts to understand why the poems had proven so controversial:

I discussed the poem in every city I visited, and I realized that all Chinese writers and poets stood against this poem. And everyone seemed to make the same argument against it. I would ask the same question, and every writer would give me the same staid response.

DINKAR *Meri* 164

Dinkar goes on to outline a hypothetical conversation as representative of the one he repeatedly had with Chinese writers:

"What is your opinion of the poem entitled 'Caomu pian'?"

"The ideas expressed in that poem are different from my own."

"So what? It seems only right that a poet would write a poem expressing ideas different than your own. I want to know whether this poem is good or bad."

"It is bad."

"Why so? I have read an English translation of the poem. Stylistically, the poem seems quite interesting."

"But a poem is not all style. It should also contain within it healthy sentiments. 'Caomu pian' is bad because it does not contain a vision for a hopeful future"

"So if a poet feels hopeless, what is he to do? Should only hopeful poems be written?"

"If a poet feels hopeless, then he should work. He should see present life up close and try to understand it. Today, life in China is full of hope. This poet has purposely forgotten to see this life."

“But what if a poet feels hopeless in love, what is the principle regarding this?”

“We are not against such poems, but this poem is not even about that”.

166

The conversation continues on the issue of hopefulness, with Dinkar arguing that poets are not obliged to write only of hope; they also write of despair. Significantly, here, the questions raised do not focus on how Chinese readers interpret the poems or on whether Liu was rightly persecuted. Instead, Dinkar's concerns take on a universal bent: the criteria for judging poetry, the relationship between form and content, and the poet's thematic imperatives. In this way, the poems enter a new semantic field of interpretation as they journey beyond the discursive and linguistic scales of the nation.

Dinkar's reconstructed conversation with his Chinese interlocutors, understandably cautious during this fraught Anti-Rightist moment, captures the tensions and frustrations of a dialogue that leaves much unsaid. This elliptical dialogue, conducted through omissions and silences, articulates an ethical commitment to keeping open literary debate and an insistence on literature's capacity to be read multiply. A poem taken out of circulation in Chinese thus finds new world-literary routes in Hindi, linking together the Chinese and Hindi literary spheres in an exercise of reading, writing, translation, and interpretation unsanctioned by the nation-state.

“Why should despair not be written of?” Dinkar asks by way of conclusion. The travelogue ends with his response: “Because the state wants to encircle and contain all minds so as to lead society towards a single aim. These are chains with no chinks. The state ensures that individuality can never pierce through. For if a hole appears, water may flow through it in unwanted directions” (166). In these concluding lines, Dinkar challenges his reader to rethink the premise of China-India cultural diplomacy as now holding within its operations, the threat of running against its own logic and aims. The travelogue functions to pierce through and expose those “holes” (*chidra*) foreclosed in the Chinese literary sphere of the time. In Hindi, “Caomu pian” accrues new layers of meaning and generates new terms of debate as it journeys into a different linguistic medium. Enacting a mode of literary dialogue that thrives inversely in ellipses, the travelogue offers disruption and friction as methods of forging continuities between the Chinese and Hindi literary spheres.

6 Towards a Single Aim

Despite critiquing the Party for predetermining the course of Chinese literature at the cost of individual creativity, Dinkar's travelogue also records moments of admiration towards what he viewed as a unified Chinese people working together in service of the nation. "In China, it appeared as though the entire nation was marching towards an ideal," he writes, "but in India, such an ideal is not clear" (Dinkar *Meri* 100). Echoing this sentiment in a letter to his son, Dinkar reflects: "most importantly, I saw in China a reflection of India's weaknesses ... How long can we continue in this convoluted manner? Our ideology must be clarified and the country must know the goal for which it is asked to work" (Fulfagar 179).

Dinkar's critique of the Congress Party's domestic policies under Nehru's leadership sharpened following his visit to China. In 1962, the decade-long period of bilateral diplomacy ended with the outbreak of war between China and India. In reaction to the war, Dinkar wrote a lengthy epic poem, "Parasuram ki Pratiksa" (Awaiting Parasuram, 1963), accusing the Congress-led government of luring Indians into a slumber resulting in India's defeat in the war. The poem issues a clarion call, for people to take up arms in defense of the nation and for poetry to serve the national cause:

Our leaders immersed day and night in peace talks,
Our poets flying high in the heavens above,³⁶ [...]
O unfortunate blind ones, you wretched,
Now is the time to open your eyes, awake from your slumber [...]
He whose flame has dampened, sins.

DINKAR *Parasuram* 4

"Parasuram," for which Dinkar is best known today, earned him a reputation as a "poet of the blood," as one critic puts it, "blood, which boils for revolution" (Datta 1050). Hindi scholarship on "Parasuram" tends to classify the poem as a nationalistic call for violence in an age when many saw India weakened by leftist policies of non-violence.³⁷ Dinkar's visit to China remains forgotten in such studies. Reading "Parasuram" in the context of Dinkar's China travelogue (a task beyond the scope of this article) could reveal transnational sources of Dinkar's nationalism and the comparative modes of thought that helped form his stance

36 Here, Dinkar targets the experimentalists, critiquing their penchant for abstraction.

37 For Hindi scholarship on Dinkar's "Parasuram," see Pandey and Sharma among others.

on the relationship between literature, politics, and the nation. After all, Dinkar once wrote, “I cannot say whether my visit [to China] was good or not ... But I feel it has left a great impression on my mind, as a result of which my views are sure to change” (Fulfagar 179). Attending to this change proves particularly urgent now as Dinkar becomes increasingly popularized by politicians across the contemporary Indian political spectrum who champion Dinkar’s poetry as exemplary of various nationalist ideals.³⁸

7 Conclusion: Beyond Dialogue

In conclusion, Dinkar’s presence in China during the Anti-Rightist Campaign suggests that even at its most restrictive, the program and practice of socialist Chinese literature involved an outward-oriented worldview. But much is overlooked if the study of world literary dynamics in socialist Chinese literature begins and ends with the mechanisms of cultural diplomacy taken at face value: the mere fact of Dinkar and others’ visits to China, the translations of Indian texts into Chinese, the establishment of friendship associations, and so on. Instead of taking cultural “dialogue” as worldly in and of itself, this article inverts the logic of dialogue and engages instead with ellipses. Doing so reveals the unruly side of socialist Chinese world literature, one that exceeds and rubs up against the officially sanctioned movements of texts and writers in the Cold War world.

Dinkar’s China travelogue suggests that dwelling in the open/restrictive paradox of socialist Chinese world literature, without resolving it away, can give rise to new axes of China-India literary relation, beyond the rhetoric of cultural diplomacy. The travelogue inscribes the literary tensions of late 1957, making present in Hindi those texts and writers rendered absent in Chinese. Dinkar’s translation of Liu’s poems reopens in Hindi the potentialities and contingencies of reading the poems anew, in a different context and language. Here, ellipses indicate the censure of the poems in China and anticipate unpre-

38 In 2015, members of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) celebrated the 50th anniversary of “Parashuram,” calling for the conferral of posthumous prizes on Dinkar and the establishment of Hindi language institutes in his honor. In preparation for upcoming elections that year, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi quoted Dinkar’s writings during campaign speeches. See Indian newspaper coverage from May-Sep. 2015, including “PM Sounds,” Bhardwaj, and Tiwary. Dinkar is also quoted in anti-BJP speeches, most recently by Member of Parliament Mahua Moitra of the Trinamool Congress Party (TMC), whose maiden speech on 25 Jun. 2019 gained widespread media attention for its criticism of the Modi government. See “How TMC,” Bhagat, and Geeta Pandey.

dictable routes of circulation and surfaces of meaning in India. Eschewing the paradigm of politically-proclaimed “friendship,” the travelogue binds Chinese and Hindi literary spheres in a mode of connection much like that of the ellipsis – a typographical mark that connects clauses precisely in moments of disconnection, suspension, anticipation.

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