

A POETICS OF THE WRITERS' CONFERENCE: LITERARY RELATION IN THE COLD
WAR WORLD

Adhira Mangalagiri

Abstract:

This article offers a poetics of the writers' conference as conducted via channels of Cold War-era cultural diplomacy through a reading of the Asian Writers' Conference (New Delhi, 1956), a largely forgotten predecessor of the better-known Afro-Asian Writers' Conferences. Focusing particularly on the Chinese writers in attendance, I read the conference literarily, with an eye to its aesthetics and the particular performance of transnational literary relation that it engendered. The Conference's fortuitous confluence with the Hundred Flowers Campaign in China unexpectedly made possible an approach to transnational literary exchange that actively eschewed and rebelled against state intervention in the literary sphere. As such, the Asian Writers' Conference effected a form of transnational literary relation that thrived in its self-avowed uselessness to mandates of diplomacy. The Conference warns against the tendency in South-South studies to valorize the decentering of colonial powers as cultural mediators without a critical engagement with the nation-state's overseeing presence once it occupies that agential role in transnational literary exchange.

Keywords: Asian Writers' Conference, cultural diplomacy, Hundred Flowers, Mulk Raj Anand, Ye Junjian, Lao She, Xiao San

The international conference, particularly that in the non-aligned world, has emerged as a critical node in Global South studies.¹ In the mid-twentieth century, the international conference served as a fulcrum for mobilizing political relations, concretizing international alliances, and realizing alternative collectivities in the newly-decolonized and increasingly-polarized Cold War world. The Asian-African Conference of 1955, now better known as the Bandung Conference, gained paradigmatic status in the emergent Third World, standing as testament to the ability of a conference of its kind to carry immense historical and political heft and to perform a radical, non-aligned political agenda on the world stage. In the postwar period, a flurry of what may be termed (at times anachronistically) as "Bandung-style" conferences both preceded and followed in the wake of the Bandung Conference, facilitated in no small part by the growing accessibility

of air travel. Such conferences actualized new vectors of international solidarities between those nations kept separate and subjugated under colonial rule, and remapped the world order so as to make central those on the peripheries of power blocs. In many ways, then, the Bandung-style international conference presents a realized microcosm of precisely those political convictions and imaginaries – and a contained point of convergence of those historical networks – that guide and motivate much of present-day Global South studies.

Historians have noted how studying the Bandung Conference and its many offshoots holds the potential to impart methodological lessons, cultivating what Christopher Lee has called “Bandung historicism.” Such an approach to historiography “disrupt[s] the conformities of teleological narration defined by the nation-state”: instead of the tendency to organize history linearly and in nation-based categories, Bandung-style conferences “cultivat[e] an intercontinental sensibility,” foregrounding “intersectional convergence and multilateral outcomes.”² Beyond its historical significance, the Bandung-era also put into motion a postcolonial cultural agenda which called for horizontal literary and artistic exchange in defiance of the colonizer’s traditional role as the mediator and agent of cultural spheres. The delegates in Bandung explicitly foregrounded “cultural cooperation”: they called for the peoples of Africa and Asia “to renew their old cultural contacts” eroded during colonization and to “develop new ones in the context of the modern world.”³ This commitment to building cultural ties fueled a host of writers’ conferences, cast in the mold of Bandung, that brought writers and artists from across the Third World together to engage in dialogue and exchange. Given its prominent cultural imperative, if the Bandung-style conference can “serve as a foundation for the writing of world history,” what lessons of *literary* method can we learn from such conferences?⁴ Can writers’ conferences in the non-aligned world offer a poetics of literary exchange that intervenes

– as a matter of method – in Comparative Literature and, more specifically, in South-South literary studies? And, to pose the same question in its inverse, can we “read” the conference literarily, with an eye to the poetics of the conference itself as both an event and a performance of particular forms of literary relation? In short, what literary tools and practices of reading can the writers’ conference offer and, in turn, how can literary inquiry yield new understandings of the conference?

I take up these questions somewhat counterintuitively, through a reading not of the better-known and more exemplary activities of the Afro-Asian project but of an unlikely and forgotten writers’ conference that occurred against all odds and then promptly disappeared from the annals of Bandung’s cultural legacies. The cultural agenda laid out at Bandung would later be implemented by the Afro-Asian Writers Bureau, which hosted a series of Afro-Asian Writers’ Conferences, most famously in Tashkent (1958), Cairo (1962), Beirut (1967), and New Delhi (1970). Scholarly interest in Bandung’s cultural legacies has focused almost exclusively on the Afro-Asian Writers’ Conferences and the Bureau’s many translation and publishing activities.⁵ I break from this lineage to discuss a different, earlier occurrence: the Asian Writers’ Conference held in New Delhi in 1956. This conference does not merely stand as an overlooked event of literary significance that deserves to be written into Bandung histories, although it could certainly be approached as such in line with recent efforts to decenter the Bandung Conference from its status as a singular watershed event.⁶ More compellingly, the Asian Writers’ Conference invites investigation because it appears at once as both the progenitor of the Third World writers’ conference phenomenon – indeed, the Afro-Asian Writers’ Conference in Tashkent, commonly considered the inaugural conference of the series, was in fact conceived at and grew out of the Asian Writers’ Conference – and conversely, its very antithesis.⁷ As I go on to discuss, the Asian

Writers' Conference subverts the rubrics of consequentiality against which we evaluate the significance and success of writers' conferences and, more broadly, of the transnational literary exchange such conferences perform. In so doing, the Asian Writers' Conference questions the fate of the literary in an era during which the work of building cultural solidarities remained inextricably entangled with Cold War-era politicking. Even while it stands as an anomaly, the Asian Writer's Conference brings the more familiar Afro-Asian Conferences into view in the negative, marking presences and absences of the literary trace in contrast. As such, this article articulates a poetics of the writers' conference that takes shape as much in its instantiation as in its inverse.

An endeavor most ephemeral

In December 1956, hundreds of writers gathered in New Delhi for the Asian Writers' Conference. The conference brought together writers from eighteen nations taken to comprise Asia: India, China, Pakistan, East Pakistan, Ceylon, Nepal, Mongolia, North Korea, Japan, North Vietnam, South Vietnam, Cambodia, Burma, Indonesia, Iran, Syria, Egypt, and the Asian Republics of the U.S.S.R. Newspapers widely announced the Asian Writers' Conference as the "first ever conference of Asian writers," and, echoing the sentiments of Bandung, the organizers framed the conference as the initial meeting of Asian intellectuals and writers now able to reestablish cultural ties after centuries of separation under Western domination.⁸ The Chinese writers in attendance viewed their participation in the Conference as "新中國成立後我國作家第一次展開的國際活動，也是我們的文學走向世界所邁的第一步" (the first international activity Chinese writers carried out after the establishment of New China, and the first step

Chinese literature took towards the world).⁹ Indeed, this was the first delegation composed entirely of writers that China sent abroad after the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, marking the beginnings of an era of China's cultural diplomacy in the Third World.

Despite its unprecedented, historic occurrence, this Asian Writers' Conference has curiously remained largely forgotten, both in histories of China-India cultural diplomacy and those of Third World and Afro-Asian internationalisms. Its collective forgetting speaks to a peculiar characteristic of the Conference's legacy. Unlike the other international conferences of its time – which established organizations (such as the Afro-Asian Writers' Bureau) to ensure subsequent iterations, and published proceedings and resolutions adopted by delegates (as in the Bureau's magazine *Lotus: Afro-Asian Writings*) – the Asian Writers' Conference did not strive for permanence. Instead, on the final day of the Conference, the delegates voted to dissolve their collective. Newspapers reported on the delegates' conviction that “cultural exchange could be developed without a permanent organisation.”¹⁰ A committee of five was tasked with tying up loose ends after the Conference closed, but delegates agreed that this committee would cease to exist after six months. There was some talk of “publishing the deliberations and papers and of preparing a report on the possibility and methods of promoting cultural exchanges between countries of Asia,” but such publications either did not materialize or did not withstand the test of time.¹¹ Rather than inscribing their gathering into the archives, the Conference chose a legacy that paradoxically aspired to remain fleeting and unrecorded.

The Conference's insistence on ephemerality befuddled onlookers. Commentators in India had hoped that the Conference would take “practical” steps towards instituting “facilities for the study of Asian languages,” “translations from one Asian language into another,” or even

“a magazine in each language to foster a deeper understanding among their people of the culture of other Asian countries.”¹² Suggestions that the Conference develop a common script so that Asian writers need not communicate in English, the colonizer’s tongue, met with much excitement.¹³ But the Conference refused to produce any such tangible results; it ended not with the laying of grand plans, but with a simple promise between the writers of Asia “to keep in regular and constant touch with each other.”¹⁴ “It has been rather acidly remarked,” one journalist wrote, “that a slender volume of literary criticism on aspects of Asian writing would be more enlightening than the six-day discourses at New Delhi.”¹⁵ The Conference appeared inconsequential at best and, at worst, an outright failure.

Yet, it is precisely through its immateriality and perceived inconsequentiality that the Conference enacted a radical agenda, one that eluded the measures of consequence used to assess such conferences of international solidarity-building of the time. The utilitarian logic of Cold War cultural diplomacy required that literature be made to perform the work of international relations. Indeed, the delegates at Bandung had explicitly ranked cultural cooperation as “among the most powerful means of promoting understanding among nations”; for them, culture ultimately functioned as one among several tools for furthering their political ambitions and goals.¹⁶ Recruiting culture in service of the *realpolitik* was not a novel innovation at Bandung, even for the newly-formed nations in attendance. In the early 1950s, the recently-formed PRC and the newly-independent Republic of India had embarked upon a program of cultural diplomacy following their signing of the Panchsheel Treaty (also known as the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence or in Chinese, *heping gongchu wu xiang yuanze* 和平共處五項原則) in 1954, which set the two nascent nations on a path of cooperation and exchange. In the years preceding the Asian Writers’ Conference, Chinese and Indian writers had met (as part of larger

cultural delegations including artists, scientists, and so on) to engage in cultural dialogue and to establish diplomatic relations between the nations. Their dialogue figured at once as a means towards an end, and as the end in and of itself: real dialogue between writers facilitated metaphorical dialogue between the nations, and yet, the mere fact that the literary dialogue occurred testified to the preexistence of those diplomatic relations. The mechanisms of cultural diplomacy, thus, ensured that the act of relating culturally corresponded entirely with diplomatic agendas. The literary text proved meaningful only insofar as it fulfilled the function of a political treaty. Take, for example, the following poem, entitled “China-India Friendship,” composed by the Chinese poet Yuan Shuipai 袁水拍 and recited during an Indian cultural delegation’s visit to China in June 1955:

The Himalayas tower to reach the sky;
On either side our two great countries lie;
Good neighbours we, who travelled to and fro;
Two thousand years of friendship we can show.

To fight aggressors and dark rule we bled,
And stained the Yangtse and the Ganges red;
A web of mutual sympathy we spun,
For Chinese hearts and Indian beat as one.

No more shall shame our countries’ records stain,
The ancient trees have blossomed once again;

With confidence the Asian peoples say:
Colonialism must be swept away.

Construction is the task we both proclaim,
And none shall turn us from our common aim;
Today we strive for peace with all our might,
Five Principles our countries' guiding light.

Through two great lands, from Delhi to Peking,
Above the clouds the songs of friendship ring;
For here a thousand million people stand,
And will advance together hand in hand.¹⁷

The poem stands literally and synecdochally for the Panchsheel Treaty, explicitly named in the poem's line "Five Principles our countries' guiding light." Capturing the spirit of the treaty in poetic language, the poem boasts of the ability and commitment of literary practice to perform the treaty's function of "striving for peace" between China and India and of "advancing together" into the postcolonial world as equal, sovereign nations, "hand in hand." This collapsing of poem and treaty reveals a particular rubric of consequentiality, wherein the poem emerges as meaningful only in its capacity to at once consolidate and perform the precepts of diplomacy. As such, Yuan's poem epitomizes the epistemological regime of cultural diplomacy, which recognizes literary relation as legible and consequential only as a corollary to statecraft.

Yuan's poem presents a helpful foil for the Asian Writers' Conference, offering an example of the kind of literary practice the Conference remained resolutely uninterested in. Instead, the Conference harnessed the structure of the diplomatic conference – indeed, the Conference modeled itself closely after the Bandung Conference, complete with Western and Soviet writers and journalists invited as observers, as in Bandung – to launch, from within this familiar generic form, a markedly different experiment. This experiment sought to probe possibilities for literary relation that exceeded and remained unexhausted by the official agendas of the participating nations. Any results of such an experiment would necessarily remain illegible, and therefore unrecordable, within the idiom of cultural diplomacy. The Conference's ephemerality and perceived inconsequentiality thus speaks not to its failure but to its search for ways to relate literarily beyond and in defiance of the tenets of diplomacy.

Logistical politics of the nonpolitical

The Asian Writers' Conference was first conceived by the Indian writer Mulk Raj Anand (1905-2004) and the processes of planning the conference fell primarily under his charge. Anand was well-suited for the task of organizing an international literary conference of this scale in India. He had gained literary acclaim as a student in London in the 1920s, where he befriended members of the modernist Bloomsbury group. In the 1930s, Anand joined forces with a group of Indian writers in London to pen a manifesto that would come to found the All India Progressive Writers' Association. Anand's international presence cast him as the itinerant writer of choice to represent India at various international conferences, from the World Congress of Writers in Paris (1935) and Madrid (1937) to the later Afro-Asian Writers' Conferences of the 1950s-1970s. All

the while, Anand remained intimately involved in the Progressive Writers' Movement rapidly gaining steam in India. His expert ability to bridge transnational literary movements and concerns with those underway at home positioned him as the ideal helmsman of the 1956 Asian Writers' Conference.

In the 1950s, Anand gained a reputation in China as among India's foremost progressive writers. His novels and short stories, written as they were in English, traveled expeditiously, finding easy paths to translation into Chinese. Anand visited China in July 1956 on a mission, successfully executed, to solicit support for the Asian Writers' Conference among Chinese writers. By August, Anand had assembled a planning committee for the Conference, which included the Chinese novelist and then the PRC's Minister of Culture, Shen Yanbing 沈雁冰 (also known by his penname Mao Dun 茅盾). That summer, members of the planning committee travelled to India from across Asia to meet for preparatory meetings. Anand had already petitioned Jawaharlal Nehru, then Prime Minister of India, for financial support.¹⁸ The Conference thus grew, both in inspiration and in execution, from within state-led channels of cultural diplomacy.

As December neared, however, the Conference seemed caught in an identity crisis. For all intents and purposes, the Conference appeared to be taking shape in the image of cultural diplomacy, and yet, the planning committee announced its intention to decouple the "cultural" from "diplomacy": the committee announced that the Conference would concern itself with matters exclusively of literary bearing and that "political issues would be scrupulously kept out of the agenda of the conference."¹⁹ The Conference's "nonpolitical" agenda was announced as comprising the following five topics: the current situation of literature in Asia, the literary traditions of Asia, freedom and the writer, the writer and his craft, and cultural exchange.

The ability of such an agenda to set aside politics immediately raised questions. “It all depends on what is meant by political issues,” one Indian journalist queried, “it is difficult to see, for example, how the conference can be barred from raising its voice against colonial aggression. [...] How can the conference be prevented from discussing the issue of the writer’s freedom in all its bearings?”²⁰ The literary critic and journalist, Sham Lal “Adib,” who would later become a famed editor of the *Times of India*, published a cogent rebuttal, clarifying the Conference’s mission as concerned not with vacating literature of politics per se, but of departing from the specific Cold War performance of cultural diplomacy as a tool for building international relations. In his popular weekly literary column “Life and Letters,” Adib wrote:

Governments have their own ideas about cultural exchanges – and it is, no doubt, nice to have a visit now and then from a troupe of dancers or acrobats from a neighbouring country. But writers are bound to have other ideas on the subject. What they understand by cultural exchange is a fruitful flow of ideas [...] a more sensitive understanding of each other’s inner life as reflected in their literature.²¹

Countering critics, Adib understood the Conference’s disavowal of “politics” as neither the promotion of a certain idea of disengaged literary practice nor as an attempted censoring of the writers’ topics of conversation. Instead, the Conference ventured to locate literary relation “outside the context of the cold war which tends to destroy the very integrity of thinking by posing every question as a choice between black and white.”²² The Conference must be understood, Adib suggested, as an experiment, in itself deeply political, in practicing literary relation against the grain of Cold War-era cultural diplomacy.

Planning a non-diplomatic conference from within the logistical apparatus of cultural diplomacy proved a near-impossible task, its infeasibility only compounded by the Chinese delegation due to attend. In an effort to ensure equal representation of India's linguistic and ideological diversity, the Indian participants had been painstakingly selected by a politically-diverse group of writers in conversation with the Sahitya Akademi, India's newly-established academy of letters. The Chinese delegation, by contrast, was state-sanctioned, with members holding official posts in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Minister of Culture Mao Dun would act as head of the delegation and Zhou Yang 周揚 (then the Vice Minister of the Propaganda Department) would serve as the delegation's deputy head. The delegation also included novelists Ye Shengtao 葉聖陶, then serving as the Vice Minister of Education, and Ye Junjian 葉君健 who oversaw the translations division of the Ministry of Culture, as well as other prominent members of the China Writers Association such as Lao She 老舍, Baren 巴人 (Wang Renshu 王任叔), poets Xiao San 蕭三 and Han Beiping 韓北屏, the Manchurian woman writer Bai Lang 白朗, and head of the Xinjiang writers' association Ziya 孜亞. In India, where the concept of the writer-official remained lost in translation, the Chinese delegates appeared as state representatives thinly-veiled in literary guise. The presence of an officially vetted and sanctioned Chinese delegation at a conference that promised to "keep politics out" seemed ludicrous.

On December 18, a mere five days before the Conference's scheduled opening, controversy surrounding the Chinese delegation erupted within the planning committee. Newspapers ran articles with headlines that announced a "split" between Anand and other Indian members of the Conference planning committee. Those against Anand released a statement contending that "the conference is inspired and controlled by persons of a particular political persuasion, not all of whom are even writers."²³ The statement essentially accused Anand,

himself of leftist “political persuasion” given his close association with the Progressive Writers Association, of pandering to the Chinese delegation (to which the accusation “not all of whom are even writers” obliquely refers), and thereby furthering a communist agenda at the Conference. The signatories of the statement took particular exception to the fact that Mao Dun had vetoed the Indian members’ suggestion to invite “writers in the Chinese language who belonged to Hong Kong, Singapore and other areas outside the People’s Republic of China,” including the expatriate Chinese writer Lin Yutang.²⁴ The statement blindsided Anand; he “repeatedly denied that the conference was dominated by the Communists” and insisted that “he was not to blame if the Communist countries of Asia sent Communist writers to the conference.”²⁵

Debate over the official status of the Chinese delegation underscored the politically-charged logistical challenges of planning a self-avowedly nonpolitical conference in this age of cultural diplomacy, when the categories of “culture” and “diplomacy” remained intertwined and in flux. A conference deemed “nonpolitical” in one nation may not be treated as such in another; one nation’s “unofficial” representatives may be met by another’s “official” delegation. Navigating such murky waters, the Asian Writers’ Conference persevered in its adamant attempt to forge a resolutely literary form of relation between writers. Against the odds, on December 23, 1956, the writers of Asia gathered to embark on six days of literary dialogue.

The Hundred Flowers campaign

The planning committee could not have foreseen a critical event unfolding in China, one that fortuitously coincided with the Asian Writers’ Conference and suddenly brought into the realm

of possibility what may have otherwise remained an idealistic and even naïve aspiration for a nonpolitical writers' conference. In mid-1956, as the planning committee feuded over the ability of the Chinese delegates to set aside diplomatic agendas in their literary activities overseas, the CCP unexpectedly announced an easing of political intervention in literary production. The Party issued the slogan "let a hundred flowers bloom, let a hundred schools of thought contend" (*baihua qifang, baijia zhengming* 百花齊放, 百家爭鳴), inviting writers and intellectuals to openly debate, disagree, and experiment. "Letting a hundred flowers bloom, a hundred schools of thought contend means that we stand for freedom of independent thinking, of debate, of creative work," Lu Dingyi 陸定一, the Director of the Propaganda Department, announced in his May 1956 speech, "freedom to criticize and freedom to express, maintain and reserve one's opinion on questions of art, literature, and scientific research."²⁶ Promoting such freedom of thought, the Hundred Flowers campaign aimed to elicit criticisms of the Party and to encourage intellectual experimentation in service of self-improvement and social progress.

By the time the Chinese delegates to the Asian Writers' Conference boarded their flight to New Delhi (via Burma) on December 19, the Hundred Flowers Campaign had gained steam. After a period of initial skepticism towards the Party's promised tolerance, in the winter of 1956, writers enthusiastically took up the Hundred Flowers call to engage in constructive criticism of the Party's policies and bureaucracy, and to explore new creative possibilities beyond what many considered the prescribed and formulaic quality of much of post-1949 literary production. An air of openness and innovation wafted through the Chinese literary sphere. In September 1956, for example, the writer Qin Zhaoyang 秦兆陽 famously called for writers to depart from a "dogmatic" adherence to Soviet-style socialist realism, and instead to strive for an expansive mode of realism, capacious enough to hold experimentation and complexity within. "We should

consider each author's individual qualities," Qin wrote, "we should not demand the same thing from all authors and all literary forms. We should help develop rather than hinder each author's individual creativity. We should use fewer administrative orders that interfere with literary creation."²⁷ Such critical essays and experimental literary works invited debate: buoyed by the Party's commitment to celebrate difference, writers publicly evaluated fiction and poetry, and engaged with their colleagues' takes on a range of literary issues.

Such was the Hundred Flowers spirit that travelled along with the Chinese delegation to the Asian Writers' Conference in India. The Chinese delegates could not have known then that the Hundred Flowers period would soon come to an abrupt end. In mid-1957, the CCP began to quell the outburst of criticism of the Party and its leadership that the Hundred Flowers Campaign had unleashed. Those considered to have voiced criticisms were now labelled "Rightists," resulting in a large-scale persecution of intellectuals and writers under what came to be known as the Anti-Rightist Campaign (*fanyou yundong* 反右運動).²⁸

The Asian Writers' Conference thus overlapped with a short-lived period in which Chinese writers could openly join in debate, disagreement, difference, and dissent, and moreover, could do so with the Party's blessing. Importantly, the Hundred Flowers Campaign unfolded not only in China, but also abroad, through the concurrent programs of cultural diplomacy Chinese intellectuals and writers partook in that year. The Campaign lent these programs an openness to forms of cultural production across international lines of political alignment. And, the Campaign eased the pressure on delegates to represent a unitary party line while abroad; indeed, expressions of dissent now had the dual capacity to at once bolster the official Hundred Flowers policy and conversely undercut the Party's hold on its itinerant writers. For the Chinese delegates, the felicitous convergence of the Hundred Flowers Campaign and the

Asian Writers' Conference made possible a practice of cultural diplomacy that could momentarily disentangle literary relation from the demands of diplomacy, in line with the Conference organizers' vision. Contrary to the expectations of skeptics, who had feared that the Chinese delegation would treat the Conference as an opportunity to conduct international relations, the Hundred Flowers Campaign enabled the Chinese writers to explore different, *literary* forms of relation.

To bloom and contend

On December 21, their first full day in New Delhi, the Chinese delegation paid a visit to Pan Zili 潘自力, then the Chinese ambassador to India. Pan apprised the writers of the controversy within the planning committee over the Chinese delegation's participation and political affiliation, and warned the writers that they may meet with hostile Indian counterparts.²⁹ While a diplomat like Pan would have preferred that the Chinese writers steer clear, and even feign ignorance, of these disputes, the writers surprisingly harnessed the "split" in the planning committee as an opportunity to cast the Conference in the idiom of the Hundred Flowers. Soon after the delegation's return to China, Ye Junjian published a lengthy report (in eleven installments) entitled "Yazhou zuojia huiyi qianhou" 《亞洲作家會議前後》 ("On the Asian Writers' Conference") in *Wenhuibao* 文匯報. Such reports customarily boasted of China's cultural activities abroad in the most favorable terms possible; moments of tension and controversy would be culled out. Remarkably, instead of papering over the planning committee's disputes, Ye explicitly addresses these in his report, and is able to do so because he frames the conflict – and indeed, the entire conference – in the language of and as exemplifying the Hundred Flowers'

spirit. Ye wrote, “在許多問題上意見也不一定完全一致。因此在組織的過程中，有時也不免遇到一些波折。[...] 但是經過友好的協商，這些問題獲得了解決。儘管有些人有不同的意見，但作為亞洲的作家，大家都有許多共同點” (On several questions, it was not necessarily the case that all opinions would be identical. Therefore, during the course of the planning process, at times it was unavoidable to encounter twists and turns. [...] But through friendly consultation, all these issues achieved resolution. Although some have a difference of opinion, as writers of Asia, everyone has much in common).³⁰ Ye’s characterization of the Conference as a celebration of differences for the sake of unity evokes lines from Lu Dingyi’s Hundred Flowers speech, in which Lu had emphasized the inevitable “points of agreement and points of difference” among the people, arguing that contention would “in the end strengthen unity.”³¹ Through this Hundred Flowers rhetoric of celebrating difference for the sake of unity, the Chinese delegation could reframe the disputes surrounding their attendance not as “hostile” but in line with the literary spirit of debate flowering at home. The Hundred Flowers Campaign opened a discursive space in which the Chinese writers could embrace the Asian Writers’ Conference’s controversial agenda without sidestepping moments of debate (as the Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai was inclined to do at the Bandung Conference) and, at the other extreme, without transplanting wholesale Cold War realpolitik onto literary grounds (as the Chinese delegation was accused of at the Afro-Asian Writers’ Bureau following the Sino-Soviet split in 1966).

In Ye’s report, the Asian Writers’ Conference emerges as a transnational extension of the Hundred Flowers ethos. Ye depicts the discussion on the first item on the conference agenda, “the current situation of literature in Asia,” as follows: “各種文學都有它們特殊的歷史條件和民族特點，當它們在同一個會上先後被報告出來的時候，大家真不禁有‘百花齊放’之感”

(the various literatures all have their own particular historical conditions and national characteristics; when they were all reported on one after the other at the same conference, everyone couldn't help but sense the feeling of a 'hundred flowers blooming').³² Again, summarizing a discussion on the challenges of writing in Urdu, Punjabi and Bengali in a post-Partition Indian landscape, Ye writes, “但不管這類的問題是多麼複雜 [...] 大家都在努力使自己的語言開出燦爛的文藝花朵” (regardless of how complicated such problems are [...] all writers are striving to ensure that their languages blossom into resplendent literary flowers).³³ Such botanical imagery punctuates Ye's report, just as floral and seasonal metaphors – of “blooming,” “springtime,” “gentle breeze,” “mild rain,” and so on – permeated public discourse in the Hundred Flowers period.³⁴ Writing the Conference in the linguistic register of the Hundred Flowers, Ye extended to this meeting of writers, ostensibly gathered under the auspices of cultural diplomacy, the Hundred Flowers axiom of a literary space relatively free of state intervention.

As anticipated, the third item on the agenda, “freedom and the writers,” generated the most heated debate of all the conference sessions. The Marathi writer Gangadhar Gopal Gadgil controversially proclaimed, according to Ye's report, that “共產主義國家裡沒有自由和真正的藝術” (there is no free or genuine art in communist nations).³⁵ C. Rajagopalachari, the Tamil writer and former Chief Minister then on a literary hiatus from his political career, delivered a forty-five minute-long speech arguing that writers “must be free to write what we choose to write.”³⁶ Rajagopalachari insisted that art “should be pursued for its own sake,” and that “writers must be able to swim against the current of public opinion.” Amid cheers from several participants, he urged to “leave politics in a separate apartment.” “I do not want you to discard politics altogether,” he clarified, “by all means, have politics. But in the Writers' Conference, we

meet as writers, not politicians.”³⁷ Such comments elicited a wave of contention. Ye’s report highlights several dissenting opinions, including the Burmese writer Thein Pe Myint’s response: “yes, we demand freedom for us – but not for going against the people, but for serving them. Our intellect must be free and our thinking must be independent, but not for going against the people, but for serving them, not for putting back the wheel of history, but for pushing it forward.”³⁸ Conceptualizing the Conference within the Hundred Flowers paradigm allowed Ye to capture dissent in his official report, in which the differing imperatives for literary practice vigorously debated at the conference would likely have remained omitted in favor of flat portrayals of friendship. Thein Pe Myint’s response, at once promoting both the writer’s freedom and service to the people, offered a Marxist synthesis of the contradictory voices, thereby fittingly enacting the Hundred Flowers aim of arriving at unity through a championing of difference.

Significantly, Ye’s report does feature one omission: fellow delegate Lao She’s response to Rajagopalachari, which was recorded in Indian newspaper coverage. Lao She perhaps took too enthusiastic an interpretation of the Hundred Flowers policy for Ye’s reporting:

Mr. Lao Sheh said all the different schools of literature should be encouraged. “In this way,” he added, “our writers, irrespective of their political affiliations, the ‘schools’ they belong to, or field they specialize in, whether they are veterans versed in traditional classical literature or young writers striking out boldly on new lines, all should blossom out brilliantly. Then, we shall have a literature, brilliant and beautiful as satin, infinitely rich in treatment and subject matter.” Mr. Lao Sheh said a writer should be allowed to write what he likes. “Writers should,” he said, “encourage and criticize one another. That promotes the cause of literature. Neither criticism nor counter-criticism should be muzzled.”³⁹

Lao She's response drew from his essay, "Freedom and the Writer," published on January 1, 1957, while the Chinese delegation was still in India. The essay appeared in the English-language magazine, *People's China*, printed by the Foreign Languages Press in Beijing. The essay, directed at Chinese writers, outlines a radical program for implementing the Hundred Flowers policy in literary production, calling for the writer's complete creative autonomy. "A writer should have perfect freedom to choose what he wants to write about," Lao She wrote, "it is accepted that socialist realism is a progressive way of writing, but does that mean that all other creative methods are no good? To my mind, no. [...] We should give our literary works an infinite variety, not cast it all in the same mold."⁴⁰ In quoting directly from this manifesto-of-sorts as he addressed the writers of Asia, Lao She widened the scale of the Hundred Flowers vision from a narrow national policy in the Chinese literary sphere, to a normative ethos for literary practice in a politically-prescribed world. The Asian Writers' Conference and the Hundred Flowers Campaign amplified each other; their convergence reclaimed a space for the literary in a circumscribed world and made possible an ethics of literary relation "irrespective of political affiliation," as Lao She put it.

The Hundred Flowers policy allowed the Chinese writers to partake in the Conference's radical experiment in carving out a literary space from within the structural confines of cultural diplomacy. Casting debates at the Conference as an extension of the Hundred Flowers spirit enabled the writers to participate in a form of literary dialogue that confounded the logic of diplomacy. On the final day of the Conference, the delegates approved statements declaring jointly-held views on each of the agenda items. The statement on the topic of "freedom and the writer" noted that "there was no unanimity of opinion among the delegates [...] and that they

expressed different, and at times, completely divergent views.”⁴¹ While this lack of consensus may be deemed a diplomatic failure, the Conference’s open declaration of its dissension bears the mark of a different achievement: the formation of literary relation that takes as its basis not proclamations of friendship or solidarity, but a commitment to together bloom and contend.

On literary relation

The work of relating literarily at the Asian Writers’ Conference exceeded the formal structure of the Conference, extending beyond the panels and roundtables into informal evenings spent reciting poetry. Prior to the Conference, the various delegations had received a missive from Anand requesting that the poets carry with them a few selections of their writings, to be recited at informal gatherings of the poets of Asia.⁴² The poet Xiao San wrote of such gatherings, capturing those intimate moments elided in Ye’s report and in media coverage of the Conference. In a two-part memoir published in the poetry journal *Shikan* 詩刊 (established as part of the Hundred Flowers Campaign) in March and April 1957, Xiao San describes the experience of meeting as poets through the medium of poetry, during recitation sessions held after the Conference proceedings, meals that inevitably broke into poetry readings, and evenings hosted at the Indian poets’ homes. Unlike Ye’s report, which includes lengthy transcripts and summaries of the delegates’ speeches and discussions, Xiao San’s memoir does not endeavor to represent the gatherings by reproducing the lines of poetry shared. Instead, Xiao San foregrounds the embodied experience of listening together, of opening oneself to the affective force of poetic evocation. He writes, “使我深深感動而羨慕的是，在詩人讀詩的當中，人們注視傾聽 [...] 聽到妙的詩句的時候，會場里 [...] 發出嘖嘖稱讚的聲音， [...] 他們的頭和上身都在搖，左

一擺，右一擺……看得出[...]他們的整個身心都被詩歌融化了”(What profoundly moved me was that as the poets recited their poetry, everyone watched and listened intently. [...] When they heard exquisite lines of poetry, the hall would fill with sounds of appreciation [...], their heads and bodies would sway, now to the left, now to the right, as though poetry fused together body and heart/mind).⁴³ In this setting that recalls the responsive interplay between poet and audience typical of the Urdu *mushaira* tradition of poetry recitation, the act of relating literarily proves as visceral a task as it is intellectual, the “fusing together” of body and mind.⁴⁴

Xiao San’s memoirs suggest that what the Asian Writers’ Conference achieved – the meeting of poets as poets and not diplomats, the experience of poetry as poetry and not treaty – necessarily defies being recorded (for instance, in that “slender volume of literary criticism on aspects of Asian writing” the journalist quoted earlier had sought) and thereby resists becoming instrumentalized in the construction of political alliance. Abjuring such criteria of durability and consequentiality, the Asian Writers’ Conference insisted on locating literary relation temporally in the present, in that moment of dialogic bond between writers and readers (or audiences) formed during the act of reading or recitation. Xiao San’s memoirs of the Conference are precisely that, not a reproduction of the literary exchange performed but “only a spur to memory, an encouragement of memory to become present,” to use Peggy Phelan’s words from a different context.⁴⁵ Read as the performance, in Phelan’s sense, of transnational literary relation, the Asian Writers’ Conference “plunges into visibility – in a maniacally charged present – and disappears into memory, into the realm of invisibility and the unconscious where it eludes regulation and control.”⁴⁶ The Conference’s emphasis on the ephemeral present, thus, fulfils a dual function of self-preservation and disruption. By coming alive only as memory and not as record, the Conference could “elude regulation and control” of the kind its continued existence in the

official archives of cultural diplomacy would surely have elicited. At the same time, by insisting on the presentness of literary relation, the Conference interrupted the smooth workings of Cold War-era cultural utilitarianism, which infiltrated activities of non-alignment as much as those of both blocs. The Conference proposed, instead, a poetics and ethics of literary relation that rejected the demands of the Cold War realpolitik and refused the system of “cultural cooperation” fundamental to it.

The Conference evokes what Édouard Glissant has called “the Poetics of Relation,” a multiple, dynamic, explosive “network” “in which each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other.”⁴⁷ Infinitely open to “everything possible,” the network opposes any totalitarian intent – any attempt to define, categorize, or reign in – and eschews “ideological stability.”⁴⁸ In a sense, Glissant’s poetics rebel against precisely the totalizing gestures of cultural diplomacy, which seek to endow to culture a singular, national identity and to delineate the narrow trajectories along which that nationally-packaged culture can travel the world. And yet, the very project of cultural diplomacy holds its own paradoxical effacement within, for culture inevitably escapes the conditions of its confinement, open as it is “onto unpredictable and unheard of things” and the untamable contingencies of *chaos-monde*, “the impassioned illustration and refutation” of all “preestablished norms” (82, 94). Just as Glissant’s poetics of relation manifest as “succulencies... at work in an underground manner” (what Glissant conceives as the “rhizomatic” quality of relation, borrowing from Deleuze and Guattari), so does the Conference challenge culture’s total rootedness to the state, exploring, instead, the potentialities of multiple relationships with others sparked under the cover of cultural diplomacy and yet entirely illegible within its mechanisms (21). Calling for a distinction between culture and the state, Glissant writes, “the limits – the frontiers – of a State can be grasped, but a

culture’s cannot”; the Conference at once reveals and revels in those limits that mark the play of culture in the face of and yet beyond the state’s reach (165).

The poetic scene Xiao San’s memoir captures brings momentarily into view the ephemeral poetics of relation extended at the Conference – the “fleeting, delicate shivers” of the “world’s poetic force” – further underscoring the necessary ephemerality of the work the Asian Writers’ Conference accomplished (159). Delivering his closing remarks at the Conference, the Urdu poet Faiz Ahmad Faiz recited lines from a poem he had composed during his visit to China earlier that year:

ملے کچھ ایسے ، جدا یوں ہوئے کہ فیض اب کہ
جو دل پہ نقش بنے گا وہ گل ہے داغ نہیں⁴⁹

(We met in such a way, we separated so, Faiz, that now

The mark that will be left on the heart is a flower, not a scar.)⁵⁰

The couplet, quoted in Ye’s report, serendipitously portrays the Conference as one among a hundred flowers, an association Ye furthered by adding, “的確，大家雖然在開會期間有時爭得面紅耳赤，但現在心裡所留下的卻是‘一朵花’” (indeed, over the course of the conference, although at times we argued until red in the face, that which is now left in our hearts is ‘a flower’).⁵¹ Beyond its fitting imagery, the couplet captures precisely the “mark” (*dāgh*) of the Asian Writers’ Conference as not the impress of permanence but the delicate transience of a flower, momentarily caught in bloom.

A poetics of the writers’ conference

Springtime, a ubiquitous metaphor for the Hundred Flowers period, soon came to an end. In January 1958, now in the throes of the Anti-Rightist Campaign, Xiao San published a very different account of his time in India, this time positioning the Asian Writers' Conference squarely within the realpolitik Cold War world. The opening stanza of his poem, "Cong yindu guilai" 《從印度歸來》 (On Returning from India), reads:

德里的冬天也不缺太陽。
這天的會場照常地明亮。
尼赫魯總理來和作家們見面。
大家感謝他的講話，對他鼓掌……

(The Delhi winter is not without sunshine,
Today, the conference hall is bright, as usual.
Prime Minister Nehru comes to meet the writers.
Everyone expresses gratitude and applauds his speech.)⁵²

Notably, Nehru's brief visit to the delegates at the end of the conference, which does not feature centrally in either Ye Junjian's report or Xiao San's memoir, now becomes the defining feature of the Conference. As the writers "express gratitude and applaud" Nehru's speech, Xiao San casts the politician, who stands here for the nation-state, as the agential force to whom the writers merely respond, effectively reversing the writers' adamant attempt to set their own agenda at the Conference. Indeed, as the poem continues, the already-marginal writers disappear entirely from view:

突然天上佈滿了陰雲。

印度上空的太陽，

人人個個的心上

都蒙上了一層黑影：

“艾森豪威爾主義”恰在這時問世，

使得一些人笑也不是，哭也不是

[...]

我雖然未能如願去開羅和埃及朋友握手，

但怎麼也不能相信，中近東是個“真空”。

唾棄吧，令人窒息的“艾克——杜勒斯主義”！

讀吧，毛澤東的詩篇照得東方通紅！

(Suddenly, a dark cloud spreads across the sky.

The sun over India,

And the hearts of the people,

All are covered in shadow:

At this very moment, “Eisenhower-ism” encroaches,

Some know not whether to laugh or to cry.

[...]

Although I could not fulfil my wish to travel to Cairo and shake hands with our Egyptian friends,⁵³

I just cannot believe that the Middle East is a “vacuum.”

Let’s cast off this “Ike-Dulles-ism” that suffocates the people!

Let's read, instead, Mao Zedong's poems that illuminate the East red!)⁵⁴

Absorbed into the jargon of international relations (“Eisenhower-ism,” “Ike-Dulles-ism,” “the Middle East is a ‘vacuum’” and so on), the radical form of literary relation that had once flickered at the Asian Writers’ Conference died out, its impermanence further heightened by that of the short-lived Hundred Flowers Campaign. And yet, in its very effacing, the Conference fulfilled its desire to remain fleeting and unrecorded. Its significance lies not in the recovery of a lost fragment of history that can be slotted into existing narratives of Third World cultural internationalism or Asian solidarity. Rather, the Asian Writers’ Conference asks to be apprehended as that which must remain uninscribed in the official records and incomprehensible under the logics of cultural diplomacy in the Cold War world.

Borne as much of accident (its confluence with the Hundred Flowers Campaign) as of design (Anand’s idealistic vision), the Asian Writers’ Conference makes visible – through its invisibility in sanctioned records of cultural diplomacy – a poetics of the international writers’ conference. Reading the conference literarily foregrounds its entwinement with the aesthetics of the Hundred Flowers Campaign, aesthetics that evince a commitment to contention and dissension, an acute sense of transience, and an intense and constant negotiation of what can and cannot be uttered and recorded, all conveyed in every iteration of the Hundred Flowers’ signature imagery that underlies Ye’s depiction of the conference. At the same time, the Conference calls attention to that which must remain absent from records like Ye’s report, namely, a form of literary relation that rebels against top-down demands placed by national agendas upon literary practice and experience. Such literary relation, captured elliptically in Xiao San’s memoirs, calls into question the tendency of diplomacy to presume literature’s utility in

the work of international relations and to treat literature as a readily available and pliant resource that can be put toward predetermined ends. In opposition, the Asian Writers' Conference throws into sharp relief a dissonance between form and content, of the generic demands of a conference held in the image of cultural diplomacy rubbing against the fundamental irreducibility of poetic practice. Dwelling in this dissonance does not undercut or make less meaningful the sanctioned forms of contact and exchange that activities of cultural diplomacy made possible; instead, the Asian Writers' Conference conjures an imagination of a different kind of transnational literary relation, exhausted in the very moment of its experience, that thrives in its self-avowed uselessness to mandates of diplomacy.

Attempts to recuperate the activities of Cold War cultural diplomacy from their disrepute as fronts of bloc-based politicking can risk going too far in the opposite direction, by romanticizing the forms of cultural exchange diplomacy enables. Undoubtedly, cultural diplomacy in the Third World disrupted colonial networks of literary production and circulation by making accessible new corpuses of literatures previously unavailable to readers. Beyond the pragmatics of translation and dissemination, state-sanctioned literary exchange in the Third World also engendered immaterial forms of literary relation: new maps of world literature, radical visions of universalisms, and humanist alliances that dismantled colonial epistemologies. At the same time, however, activities of cultural diplomacy also inevitably bolster the power of the nation-state, which ultimately determines the definitions and forms "culture" must take in order to be appropriate for transnational exchange and sets the parameters within which such exchange must occur so as to best serve its own interests. Valorizing the desire to decenter colonial powers as cultural arbiters and mediators in South-South cultural diplomacy risks erasing the nation-state's oversight as it comes to occupy that agential role.

An exception to the norm of mid-century international writers' conferences, the Asian Writers' Conference invites us to cultivate a criticality when dealing with products of cultural diplomacy. The more prototypical Afro-Asian Writers' Conferences and its legacies in present-day state-sponsored cultural activities offer a wealth of literary materials ripe for the picking by those of us interested in the journeys of literary texts across national and linguistic borders. The Asian Writers' Conference disrupts the ease with which we have become accustomed to treating transnational literary relation and international relations as cognates, and warns against bracketing away the state's deterministic presence in those forms of transnational literary practice that often garner the most attention. As horizons of insularity descend upon our current academic moment, it seems all the more urgent and necessary for literary scholarship to cultivate transnational sensibilities. The Asian Writers' Conference reminds us to do so by exposing – not perpetuating – the state's long-standing interest in circumscribing literary practice, and by championing those indeterminant acts of transnational reading and interpretation that literature can make possible, even if only momentarily so.

Queen Mary University of London

Notes

¹ In addition to the well-known Bandung Conference of 1955, which occupies center-stage in much of present-day Global South thought, other prominent conferences include: the 1947 Asian Relations' Conference, the conferences of the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organization (AAPSO), and the 1966 Tricontinental Conference. For a selection of scholarship on these conferences, see: Anne Garland Mahler, *From the Tricontinental to the Global South: Race, Radicalism, and Transnational Solidarity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018); Vineet Thakur, "An Asian Drama: The Asian Relations Conference, 1947," *The International History Review* 41, no. 3 (2018): 673-95; Duncan M. Yoon, "The Global South and Cultural Struggles: On the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organization," *Journal of Contemporary Thought* 35 (2012): 40-46.

² Christopher J. Lee, "Return of the Event: Bandung and the Concept of the Conference," in *Making a World After Empire: The Bandung Movement and its Political Afterlives* ed. Christopher J. Lee (2nd edition) (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2019), xxiii-xxiv.

³ "Final Communiqué of the Asian-African Conference of Bandung (24 April 1955)," in *Asia-Africa Speak from Bandung*, ed. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia (Jakarta: 1955), 163-64.

⁴ Lee, "Return of the Event," xxiii.

⁵ See, for example: Rossen Djagalov, "The Afro-Asian Writers Association (1958-1991) and Its Literary Field," in *From Internationalism to Postcolonialism: Literature and Cinema Between the Second and Third Worlds* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2020), 65-110; Hala Halim, "Lotus, the Afro-Asian Nexus, and Global South Comparatism," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 32, no. 3 (2012): 563-83; Pieter Vanhove, "'A World to Win': China, the Afro-Asian Writers' Bureau, and the Reinvention of World Literature," *Critical Asian Studies* 51, no. 2 (2018): 144-65; Duncan M. Yoon, "'Our Forces Have Redoubled': World Literature, Postcolonialism, and the Afro-Asian Writers' Bureau," *Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry* 2, no. 2 (2015): 233-52.

⁶ See, for example, Su Lin Lewis and Carolien Stolte, "Other Bandungs: Afro-Asian Internationalisms in the Early Cold War," *Journal of World History* 30, no. 1-2 (2019): 1-19.

⁷ On the final day of the Conference, the delegates accepted an invitation from Zulfiya, the Uzbek poetess, to hold the next Writers' Conference in Tashkent. This subsequent conference was held in 1958 as the first Afro-Asian Writers' Conference. See "Cultural Co-operation Among Asian Nations: End of Writers' Conference," *The Times of India*, 29 December 1956, 3.

⁸ "Asian Writers' Talks Begin Tomorrow: Preparations in New Delhi," *The Times of India*, 22 December 1956, 7; "Asian Writers' Conference: India's Contribution to Asian Culture," *The Times of India*, 24 December 1956, 8.

⁹ Ye Junjian 葉君健, "Liang Zhang Heying 兩張合影 (Two Group Photographs)," *Xin wenxue shiliao* 新文學史料 3 (1986): 173. Unless stated otherwise, all translations are mine. For consistency, I have provided all Chinese quotations in traditional characters.

¹⁰ "Cultural Co-operation Among Asian Nations," 3.

¹¹ M.V. Desai, "The Asian Writers' Conference, December 1956: New Delhi," *Books Abroad* 31, no. 3 (1957): 245.

¹² "The Asian Mind," *The Times of India*, 6 August 1956, 6.

- ¹³ “The Asian Mind,” 6; “Spread Message of Peace: Call to Asian Writers,” *The Times of India*, 24 December 1956, 8.
- ¹⁴ “Cultural Co-operation Among Asian Nations,” 3.
- ¹⁵ Desai, “The Asian Writers’ Conference,” 245.
- ¹⁶ “Final Communiqué,” 163.
- ¹⁷ The poem is printed in English (translation uncredited) in *The Indian Cultural Delegation in China* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1955), 71.
- ¹⁸ Mulk Raj Anand, “Mulk Raj Anand Remembers,” *Indian Literature* 36, no. 2 (154) (1993): 183.
- ¹⁹ “Current Topics,” *The Times of India*, 28 November 1956, 6.
- ²⁰ “Current Topics,” 6.
- ²¹ Adib, “Life and Letters: After the Handshakes,” *The Times of India* 15 December 1956, 6.
- ²² Adib, “Life and Letters,” 6.
- ²³ “Renewed Split Emerges Among Organisers: Asian Writers’ Conference,” *The Times of India*, 21 December 1956, 9. The planning committee members who opposed Anand included poet Ramdhari Singh “Dinkar” and writers Jainendra Kumar and S.H. Vatsyayan “Agyeya.”
- ²⁴ “Renewed Split Emerges,” 9.
- ²⁵ “Renewed Split Emerges,” 9.
- ²⁶ Hualing Nieh, ed., *Literature of the Hundred Flowers Volume I: Criticism and Polemics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 23. All quotations cited from this volume are Nieh’s English translations.
- ²⁷ Nieh, *Literature of the Hundred Flowers*, 131.
- ²⁸ For a study of the Anti-Rightist Campaign viewed through the lens of China-India cultural diplomacy, see: Adhira Mangalagiri, “Ellipses of Cultural Diplomacy: The 1957 Chinese Literary Sphere in Hindi,” *Journal of World Literature* 4, no. 4 (2019): 507-28.
- ²⁹ Ye Shengtao 葉聖陶, *Lvtu riji wuzhong 旅途日記五種 (Five Travelogues)* (Beijing: Shenghuo dushu xinzhi sanlian shudian, 2002), 188.
- ³⁰ Ye Junjian 葉君健, “Yazhou Zuojia Huiyi Qianhou 亞洲作家會議前後 (On the Asian Writers’ Conference),” *Wenhuibao 文匯報*, 10 February-15 March 1957, 10 February 1957, 4.
- ³¹ Nieh, *Literature of the Hundred Flowers*, 24, 30.
- ³² Ye Junjian, “Yazhou Zuojia,” 25 February 1957, 4.
- ³³ Ye Junjian, “Yazhou Zuojia,” 26 February 1957, 4.
- ³⁴ On the use of figurative language during the Hundred Flowers Campaign, see Dayton Lekner, “A Chill in Spring: Literary Exchange and Political Struggle in the Hundred Flowers and Anti-Rightist Campaigns of 1956-1958,” *Modern China* 45, no. 1 (2019): 37-63.
- ³⁵ Ye Junjian, “Yazhou Zuojia,” 5 March 1957, 4.
- ³⁶ “Writer Must be Free to Write What He Feels,” *The Times of India*, 25 December 1956, 8.
- ³⁷ “Writer Must be Free,” 8.
- ³⁸ “No One Should Come Between Writer and Reader: Accent on Freedom at Delhi Conference,” *The Times of India*, 26 December 1956, 11.
- ³⁹ “No One Should,” 11.
- ⁴⁰ Nieh, *Literature of the Hundred Flowers*, 48.
- ⁴¹ “Extent of Curbs Put By Society on Writers: Keen Controversy in Asian Conference Commission,” *The Times of India*, 28 December 1956, 5.

- ⁴² Xiao San 蕭三, “Ji Yazhou shiren de huijian 記亞洲詩人的會見 (Remembering the Asian Poets’ Meeting),” *Shikan* 詩刊 3 (1957): 82.
- ⁴³ Xiao San, “Ji Yazhou shiren de huijian,” 84.
- ⁴⁴ The Urdu *mushaira* tradition of courtly poetry recitation and contest involved an intimate interplay between poet and audience, with vocal responses and instant feedback from the audience. In the twentieth century, the Urdu *mushaira* informed the development of the Hindi *kavi sammelan* (poets’ meet). On the latter, see: Francesca Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere 1920–1940: Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), 80-90. Xiao San’s formulation here is also reminiscent of the Chinese concept of *ganying* 感應, translated variously as “sympathetic resonance” or “stimulus-response.” See: Robert H. Sharf, *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism: A Reading of the Treasure Store Treatise* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2002), 77-133.
- ⁴⁵ Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (Oxon: Routledge, 1996 [1993]), 146-47.
- ⁴⁶ Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, 148.
- ⁴⁷ Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997), 11.
- ⁴⁸ Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 32. Hereafter cited by page number.
- ⁴⁹ Faiz, “Ghazal (Song),” in *Poems by Faiz*, ed. Victor G. Kiernan (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1971), 222.
- ⁵⁰ Translation is Kiernan’s with minor changes. Ye Junjian translated Faiz’s couplet as follows: 留在心里的不是傷痕而是一朵花. Ye Junjian, “Yazhou Zuojia,” 13 March 1957, 4.
- ⁵¹ Ye Junjian, “Yazhou Zuojia,” 13 March 1957, 4.
- ⁵² Xiao San 蕭三, “Cong Yindu guilai 從印度歸來 (Upon returning from India),” *Shikan* 詩刊 1 (1958): 18.
- ⁵³ Xiao San is referring to the Afro-Asian Solidarity meeting in Cairo in late 1957, which he was unable to attend.
- ⁵⁴ Xiao San, “Cong Yindu guilai,” 18.